THE PEACOCKS AND THE BOURGEOISIE

IRONIC VISION IN PATRICK WHITE'S SHORTER PROSE FICTION

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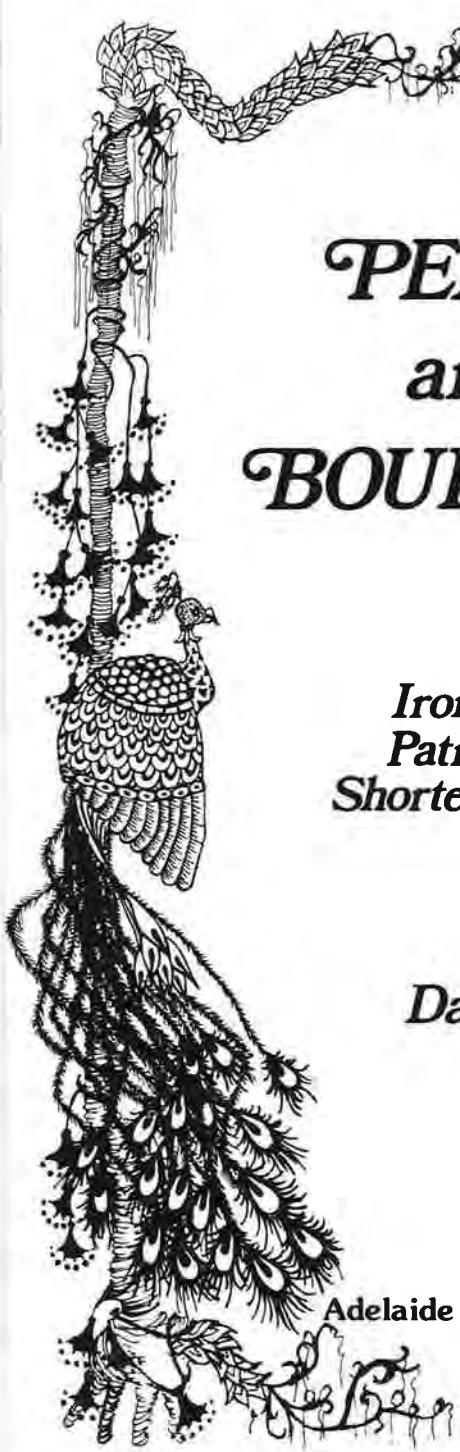

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SUMMARY

Critics have devoted much attention to White's novels and also to his plays, but his stories, with the exception of a large number of favourable but comparatively brief reviews at the time of publication of The Burnt Ones in 1964 and The Cockatoos in 1974, have been on the whole neglected. Although White himself has stated that he prefers to work on the cumulative effects of his novels, there is no aesthetic justification for regarding his best novellas as artistically inferior to his novels. Indeed they often surpass the novels in sheer intensity of effect, achieving complex and detailed characterisation by concise flashbacks and interior monologue. Structurally they tend to work towards a climax featuring a sexual or a religious epiphany. The stories are particularly rich in variation of mood and tone, ranging, often in the one story, from ribald farce to tragic pathos, and are knit together by a network of images and leitmotifs that are of imaginative originality and of great lyric force.

White's style in these stories is a virtuoso display, almost Joycean, in which he seems able to create a different stylistic tone for each mood that he evokes. At one end of the spectrum of stylistic shades and hues are the deadly wit, the vulgar farce, and the devastating mimicry of Australian colloquialisms with which he achieves his satire. At the other end of the spectrum are his tragic representations of his incoherent protago-

nists' ambivalent rise to a feverish religious mysticism and coextensive plunge to insanity or death. This tragedy is linguistically achieved with bursts of powerful surrealism, strange contortions of syntactical structure and startling imagery.

White tends to see our civilisation, as Freud did in Civilisation and its Discontents, as only seemingly stable on the conscious surface but gnawed hollow by neuroticism stemming from our ignored and repressed irrational subconsciousness. Time and again, White shows the inadequacy and vulnerability of our conventional notions of happiness, founded as these notions are on material acquisitiveness. White exposes the euphemism and the hypocrisy of our social code of "eiderdowniness", which he suggests is partially rooted in a timid communal fear of the libido. He shows us as hiding from genuine communication and true relationships behind a smoke-screen of garrulous and insincere social intercourse. White is shamelessly didactic in his social satire. He is equally unapologetic in using his fiction to propagate his view that the only true meaning of life is to be found in isolated, brief moments of ecstatic epiphany that are given only to the courageous few who search in isolation and torment for the deeper springs of being within themselves or in contemplation of the otherness of nature's infinity.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except as acknowledged in the references.

David ~~A.~~ Myers

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

It is now widely accepted among Patrick White critics that it is useful to explore his fiction as the representation of a "duality,"[1] and to discuss "the separation in his vision, the divorce of grace and horror".[2] As yet there exists no full-length study discussing the achievement of this dual vision in White's shorter prose fiction. Indeed, William Walsh opines that White's stories differ from the novels:

> But whereas in the novels the deprivation, or wretchedness, or imperfection becomes a means towards another and deeper reality, in most of the short stories the malady or calamity is part of a self-enclosed system. Neither in *Clay* nor *Dead Roses*, nor *The Letters*, nor *A Cheery Soul* do we have that drama of dialectic we find in the novels. The effect in most of these is, however complex, essentially single in its impact, and the only value released appears to be a quality of intensity for its own sake.[3]

Although it is true to say that the stories in *The Burnt Ones* incline more towards pessimism and untranscended suffering than the stories in *The Cockatoos*, it is misleading to see them as single in their impact. White's irony is such that he rarely depicts suffering which does not lead to an epiphany of some kind, and that he equally rarely presents a moment of transcendence which is not modified by a deflating anti-climax. The impact of irony is dualistic.

In the title of this monograph I am suggesting that the dualism to be explored in Patrick White's stories is not only the tragic irreconcilability of such antitheses as grace and horror, epiphany and sanity, caritative love and bourgeois conventions etc. There is also the dual vision of his irony which incessantly modifies both the bitterness and the bliss of his protagonists. White's ironic vision is expressed in complex variations in his point of view towards his

characters. These variations range from ironic sympathy for his few questing seers, who yearn for the redeeming peacocks or the cockatoos of grace in the magnolia tree, and who are rewarded with only wry, ambivalent success, to the militant irony of his satire on the bourgeoisie who refuse to admit there is any spiritual need for a quest. In this satire on the bourgeoisie *en bloc* White's irony tends to become strident sarcasm and there is little hint of the shades of ambivalence and reserve with which he represents his main characters.

In White's stories there are very few and very brief moments when he drops this ironic guard and offers a purely positive vision of a character, such as of Felicity Bannister at the end of *The Night the Prowler* or Daise Morrow in *Down at the Dump*. Conversely there are very few major bourgeois characters in the stories for whom White does not at some stage milden his patrician distaste with moments of commiseration for their suffering, as he does for Anthea Scudamore in *Dead Roses*, for Evelyn Fazackerley in *A Woman's Hand* and for Olive Davoren in *The Cockatoos*. Fluctuating incessantly between the un-ironic extremes of admiration and contempt lie the infinite gradations of White's ironic approaches to his characters.

It is the aim of this monograph to carry out a close textual analysis of all of Patrick White's shorter prose fiction with specific reference to the above-mentioned dualism of his ironic vision. Patrick White's stories are contained for the most part in the collections *The Burnt Ones* and *The Cockatoos* (both now available in Penguin). Two very early stories, *The Twitching Colonel* and *Cocotte* are considered as is also the recently published story, *Fete Galante*. I intend to offer an interpretation and a critical appreciation of each story independently, and also to consider the various themes and forms they have in common. In my analytic method I shall follow a conservative tradition in literary criticism that holds that every work of art is a separate entity explicable to a large extent from within itself, and inviting us to appreciate it in terms of the goals it has set itself.

Critics have devoted much attention to White's novels and also to his plays, but his stories, with the exception of a large number of favourable but comparatively brief reviews at the time of

publication[4] of *The Burnt Ones* in 1964 and *The Cockatoos* in 1974, have been on the whole neglected. Although White himself has stated that he prefers to work on the cumulative effects of his novels, there is no aesthetic justification for regarding his best novellas as artistically inferior to his novels.[5] Indeed they often surpass the novels in sheer intensity of effect, achieving complex and detailed characterisation by concise flashbacks and interior monologue. Structurally they tend to work towards a climax featuring a sexual or a religious epiphany. The stories are particularly rich in variation of mood and tone, ranging, often in the one story, from ribald farce to tragic pathos, and are knit together by a network of images and leitmotifs that are of imaginative originality and of great lyric force.

My interpretation of White's shorter prose fiction is structured around a series of compact but detailed essays on each of his twenty stories. I have adopted this approach so that students of White's stories can always find specific help on whatever story they are considering. At the same time my analyses draw each story into an integrating framework in which recurring images, themes, character-types, settings and satiric targets are compared so that a general view of White's stories emerges naturally from the basis of the particular analyses.

The ambivalence of White's resentful need for Australian soil, Australian landscape, and the unique speech patterns of Australian society as the nurturing sources of his creative talent is analysed. Also analysed is White's fierce satire on Sarsaparilla, that mythical Sydney suburb which he compulsively evokes as a compendium of middle-class snobbery, affectations, vicious niceness, sexual repression, and deluded search for security in the amassing of property and possessions. These Sarsaparilla stories are compared and contrasted with the many stories that White continues to set in Greece and Alexandria, partly to establish whether or not he is more charitable in his representation of Greece than he is in his trenchant criticism of the Australian way of life.

White's style in these stories is a virtuoso display, almost Joycean, in which he seems able to create a different stylistic tone for each mood that he evokes. At one end of the spectrum of stylistic shades and hues are the deadly wit, the vulgar farce, and the

devastating mimicry of Australian colloquialisms with which he achieves his satire. At the other end of the spectrum are his tragic representations of his incoherent protagonists' ambivalent rise to a feverish religious mysticism and coextensive plunge to insanity or death. This tragedy is linguistically achieved with bursts of powerful surrealism, strange contortions of syntactical structure and startling imagery.

White tends to see our civilisation, as Freud did in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, as only seemingly stable on the conscious surface but gnawed hollow by neuroticism stemming from our ignored and repressed irrational subconsciousness. Time and again White shows the inadequacy and vulnerability of our conventional notions of happiness, founded as these notions are on material acquisitiveness. White exposes the euphemism and the hypocrisy of our social code of "eiderdowniness,"[6] which he suggests is partially rooted in a timid communal fear of the libido. He shows us as hiding from genuine communication and true relationships behind a smoke-screen of garrulous and insincere social intercourse. White is shamelessly didactic in his social satire. He is equally unapologetic in using his fiction to propagate his view that the only true meaning of life is to be found in isolated, brief moments of ecstatic epiphany that are given only to the courageous few who search in isolation and torment for the deeper springs of being within themselves or in contemplation of the otherness of nature's infinity.

In my analysis of Patrick White's stories I try to answer the following questions: is White, like Joyce, a stylistic master of many and varied forms of rhetoric, or is he guilty of indulging in "fine writing at its worst," in "painfully wrought labyrinths of images" as Burrows opines in his review of *The Burnt Ones*?[7] Is White, as Orville Prescott thinks, "a poet in prose . . . casting a spell of almost radiant intensity,"[8] or is A.D. Hope justified in complaining that it is "very tedious to have to read a prose lyric of five hundred pages, in which the sharp edge of poetic phrase, the flicker of verbal fancy demands our constant and exquisite awareness"?[9] In this case, is White's lyric style more suited to short story writing which has often been said to be closely related to the genre of lyric poetry? Are his stories static and plotless, and as Burrows again puts it, "rambling and portentous," or do these stories replace the superficial

entertainment of plot manipulation with the profound and sensitive exploration of individual characters' minds? Is White's imagery rich in meaning and of exciting originality or is he guilty as Burrows accuses him, of a "shallow schematic" use of Freudian symbols and of reducing the subtle range of human behaviour to "heavy-handed" representation of "stereotyped gestures"? Is he a witty social satirist and probing iconoclast or is Burrows correct in claiming that he is "the mere slave of his loathing for Sarsaparilla,"[10] which allegedly prevents him from giving a sympathetic or detached picture of the conventional majority? Are White's stories, *The Cockatoos*, as referred to in *The Times*, "stories and shorter stories?" In fact, are they short stories at all, or rather fragmentary, impressionist novellas?[11] Has White created live, memorable human beings wrestling with real problems, or do his didacticism and his hobby-horses impinge so much on his representation of reality that he becomes guilty of reducing his characters to marionettes which are manipulated in artificial plot-structures in order to illustrate his preconceived theories? Is White's fictional world, as Kramer claims, "without either immanence or transcendence," or is Mclaren right when he contends that White represents "a world both through and beyond the immediate"?[12] If Mclaren is right, is White's expression of the mystic experience artistically persuasive and of general religious significance?

White says of his fiction in his essay *The Prodigal Son*:[13]

> I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and poetry, which alone could make bearable the lives of such (ordinary) people.

To accomplish this purpose he shows his elect protagonists questing for religious meaning for their lives in strange and frightening ways. So important do I consider White's religious intentions in his fiction that I have added a concluding section to my work entitled "Journey into the Interior: The Religious Sense in Patrick White and Franz Kafka."

These are clearly many and contentious issues to be treated definitively in one comparatively brief monograph. But I am hopeful that tentative answers at least will emerge naturally from my detailed analysis of each story. This entails of course that my

analyses will be evaluative and that it will be an essential task of this work to decide which of White's stories are successful and which not with appropriate argumentation in either case. Any conclusions that this work reaches about Patrick White's art must in the first instance be restricted to his shorter prose fiction, unless one believes, as I do, that his best stories are usually his longer stories and that these are little different in technique and effect from his novels.[14]

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COCOTTE

This is one of White's earliest published stories, appearing in *Horizon* in 1940. It is a slight character sketch and mood study of a lonely woman who empties out the melancholy secrets of her life unwittingly in an uninterruptable gush of very exterior monologue. Insofar as this monologue has structure, it is based on White's method of keeping his readers in suspense as to whether this woman is a promiscuous pick-up or whether she is simply very frustrated and ultimately inhibited. This suspense is exemplified in a vulgar comic vein in her unintentional double-entendres, as for example, "I am always interested in the intercourse of nation" (p. 364), but more characteristically with a mixture of comedy and pathos, as in "But it is difficult sometimes for the bitch-dogs. And Papa ne veut pas de petits, petits enfants" (p. 364). This last sentence provides the key to the art of *Cocotte*, which consists of the woman unknowingly projecting the ambiguity of her sexual yearnings onto her dog. Her sexual problem, which comes to preoccupy White in many of his later stories, where he explains the phenomenon in more penetrating psychological detail, is that of a woman whose sensual appetite and whose longing for fulfilment in maternity are both cruelly frustrated. The strictures of our puritan bourgeois society – another of White's later hobby-horses – have so confused this poor woman that she no longer recognizes her own sensual desires, but projects them instead onto her hapless dog. She refuses to admit to herself that she is using her dog as a cheap pick-up ploy, and she has been so successfully indoctrinated by society that when she does lure a male of the species to her web, she is horrified and frightened instead of pleased. And so she is left exclaiming "Embrasse-moi, embrasse!" (p. 366) to her dog, symbolically named Cocotte, instead of to her "boxeur" or her English naval officer. Like the German Romantics' longing for the blue flower of infinity, she yearns for "the sail-ships with their blue sails" (p. 366), a sad and trivial substitute for her unsatisfied vitality.

In this sketch White makes quite adept use of French idiom in sentence structure and phraseology – certainly a far more genuine use of French than Hemingway makes of Spanish in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* – but he ends by overdoing it and creating *schmalz* in the last three sentences, just as he also tends to overstress the pathos engendered by the woman's confused ignorance of her own desires.

THE TWITCHING COLONEL

If *Cocotte* anticipates much of White's later female sexual psychology, *The Twitching Colonel*, published in the *London Mercury* in 1937, anticipates his frequent representations in the later stories of physical decay and impending death in an elderly, isolated human being, and the determined quest of this protagonist to overcome human fear of death by erasing space and time in mystic "search of the absolute."[1] Following the dictates of Maya, the Indian philosophy that teaches that all empirical reality and all physical individuation comprise a prison, and only a metaphysical illusion into the bargain, Colonel Trevellick seeks salvation in the dissolution of selfhood. This is reminiscent of the doctrine that intoxicated the philosophic imagination of Arthur Schopenhauer to postulate spiritual salvation through the disinterested negation of the will to life as practised by the saint and the artist in their self-disciplining attainment of metaphysical knowledge. As White read German literature at Cambridge, it may well be that he came to his fascination with Maya through Schopenhauer. Certainly, in any case, Colonel Trevellick is deliberately engaged in a very Schopenhauerian, self-consuming quest for the other, true reality:

> 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. (p. 606)

In this mystic quest Colonel Trevellick is the forerunner of such unorthodox saints as Daise in *Down at the Dump*, of such mock-heroic questers for irrational, fear-defying truth as Tim Goodenough in *The Cockatoos*, and especially Felicity Bannister in *The Night the Prowler*, and most of all the forerunner of the tormented and ironically successful seers, Clem Dowson and Harold Fazackerley in *A Woman's Hand*. What these protagonists of White all have in common is their starting point, namely their realisation

that "throwing a hawser around empirical reality" (p. 607), as Maud does, and as the conventional herd of Western society does, offers no protection from the inevitability of decay, death, and the eventual obliteration of individuated consciousness. From this starting point, which for their spirit is metaphysical, and which tends to estrange them from society, either satirically or in an austere remoteness that is well-nigh solipsistic, they set out on a journey whose goal is to divest themselves of self and to seek otherness. Colonel Trevellick achieves this in old-age by meditating upon "the blue echo of recaptured thought that is India" (p. 603), and by self-immolation, dancing his death in the fire and smoke that rise as a sacrifice to the heavens. In *The Twitching Colonel* White is more unguarded and explanatory of his characters' mystic quest than he is in the later, more sophisticated stories. In this sense the following lines from this early story function as a key to the more idiosyncratic, very private religious revelations of these later stories:

> But sleep confirms the importance of decay that is renewal and the relative unimportance of breast or thighs which Maud refuses to see, throwing a hawser round empirical reality and headaches and cups of tea so that she is attached to herself beyond escaping. Only in dissolution is salvation from illusion, in dream perhaps that is shadow of death, or decomposition of substance, the frail symbol of reality which man clutches, holding himself by the throat, strangling himself through fear while denying suicide, this is man, this is also Maya, this imperfection that is man denying his shadow as day lengthens, as mind is restless with striving yet afraid of sleep. (p. 607)

The logic underlying this dithyramb to death and nirvana is that our fear of death constricts our freedom to be ourselves and to know tranquillity of soul. Therefore, instead of fighting decay and death as enemies, we must embrace them as saviours liberating us from the petty prison of our fear and releasing our spiritual essence for ecstatic union with the rhythm of the cosmos. Only in the self-denial of our individuality lies the self-realisation that can be attained in sleep and death. There is a morbidly seductive, Romantic ring to this interior monologue of Colonel Trevellick as he celebrates "Vishnu opening the door to renewal" (p. 607) or Dionysos liberating the

libido. This Dionysian tendency to find a higher truth in self-abandon and the moment of glorious revelation that almost inevitably brings death and chaos in its wake is also present in many of White's later stories, though usually in more ironic and subtle fashion. In *The Twitching Colonel* it is expressed in this way:

> but look at the fire, but look at the sparks better than Crystal Palace fireworks becaused uncontrolled, and this is what we have lived for, to lose control, secretly longing to toss a match into our desires. (p. 608)

The emphasis in this passage on Colonel Trevellick's self-destructive ecstasy triumphing over Apollonian self-control and moderation is reminiscent not so much of Schopenhauer as of Nietzsche with his doctrines of Dionysian tragedy, the despising of conventional mediocrity, democracy, and materialism, and the aristocratic self-isolation chosen by the Superman who seeks truth through suffering and who finds the justification of all life in the great vision for which he has trained himself.[2] We may conclude that White's intention is to liberate his characters' anarchistic, irrational urges, often including their sexual libido, from the constraining framework of their middle-class ego and super-ego. In the later stories White's central characters seek and ironically shy back from the self-destructive ecstasy of the irrational, the mysterious revelations emanating from peacocks and cockatoos that drive them insane, the unbearable mystic visions of another world beyond the empirical.

Very few of the mystic seers of White are able to pass on, or are interested in passing on, their very private visions to their fellow human beings. With the obvious exceptions of Daise Morrow in *Down at the Dump* and Felicity Bannister in *The Night the Prowler*, very little tangible good comes from their brief moments of elevation. They remain either mysteriously aloof, as does Colonel Trevellick, or are trapped by their own inadequacy, an inadequacy that may be expressed as incoherence, fear, or shame.

The Twitching Colonel is constructed on the basis of both contrast and development. The contrast is a common enough, even platitudinous one between the belligerent pretentiousness of British militarism and the passivity, mystery and wisdom of India with its

sacred mythologies and its "face of silence and sculptured asiatic stone" (p. 605). The development is Colonel Trevellick's inexorable development towards a personal epiphany, which is White's habitual substitute for a plot. Colonel Trevellick changes from loyal British soldier after the death of his uncomprehending wife Maud to a disciple of Hindu religion, worshipping at "the groves of cinnamon and Siva dancing in a scarlet flame" (p. 605). Finally returned to England, he can re-create the Indian mood in his memory increasingly only with the aid of "the golden spirals of whisky that eat the outline of chair or table till cane is substanceless as mind" (p. 604). His aim becomes the dissolution of all material reality including his own body, and the universal return to renewal in world spirit.

Colonel Trevellick's spiritual aims give rise to a further contrast, namely that between his sodden, self-destroying quest and the banal incomprehension but maternal solicitude of Mrs. Whale. This also provides a welcome relief both in style and point of view, as White captures Mrs. Whale's outlook on the Colonel with immediacy by having her speak with her own lower class phraseology and intonation. So Mrs. Whale reproaches the cruel children who persecute Colonel Trevellick in the streets of Pimlico with such phrases as "we're all sinners," "he takes a drop," and "he kept those niggers in order" (p. 603), and later she uses expressions such as "sharp as needles" and "like winking" (p. 606). Unfortunately, White is so intent on showing the towering superiority and uniqueness of Colonel Trevellick that, particularly in the conclusion, he overdoes the contrast and creates melodrama. Colonel Trevellick has just achieved the release of self-immolation, which is his equivalent to the Indian rope-trick. White would have done well to end his story here in prose which has a lyric brilliance and some sonorous rhythms. For here in a few lines White captures for a last climactic time many of the significant Indian leitmotifs of the story which together indicate the nature of the Colonel's triumph – he has penetrated into the heart of the Indian mystery. But instead of leaving it at that, White adds the following clumsy appendix:

> He is gone, he has disappeared, the poor gentleman, the Twitching Colonel. We are afraid. We go into our houses. We close our doors. The fire is exhausted. We creep away. It is something we do not understand. We are afraid. (p. 609)

This is laying it on altogether too thickly. With these melodramatic short sentences, the breathless hush of the present tense, and the irritating repetition, White is trying to convince us that the worthy inhabitants of Pimlico are not just frightened but religiously awe-struck by the Colonel's fiery demise. One remains unconvinced of this character psychology.

Otherwise, *The Twitching Colonel* must be rated a success or a failure depending on our assessment of the experimental lyric style in which the greater part of the story is composed. At its worst, this style seems merely smart and glib, e.g. "stocking drawn towards thigh with sigh" or "razor that erases last night's regrets" (p. 602). Sometimes the syntax seems unnecessarily mannered and disembodied, as for example in the opening sentence of the story. But this opening sentence, difficult though it may be, does reward the careful reader in the end with an intense experience of mood and scene-setting in Pimlico. The big stylistic challenge to White in this story is somehow to give new life to the clichéd contrast between England and the mysterious East. It is presumably in order to capture the monotonous timelessness and irrationality of Eastern religion that White uses such insistent repetitions and destroys Western sentence structure. He tends to leave the reader floating on a sea of present participles that are deliberately detached from any precise subject or doer of action. For example,

> the parrot voices that break with a sawing through the trees, now stopped or released by an intervening wind, the unintelligible blur of sound, of syllables confused and clinging beyond the envelope of mist. Yet raising the eyes one sees now with clarity, penetrating towards the core, the nerve that prompts the gesture or the word, the naked quivering of motives beneath the lens, and one lowers the eyes, for no amoeba startles the conscience as these. (p. 605)

Here Colonel Trevellick's descent into the ~~hell of sodden~~, incipient insanity is presented. He drifts away from his immediate environment into the mists of the past and is rewarded by rising again through his resurrected memories of India, penetrating to the heart of the religious mystery of life and death, decay and renewal. The shifting of the narrating person is even more confusing than the

detached present participles. White varies the narrating person from the deliberately generalised "one," who is usually Colonel Trevellick, with touches of Patrick White, to occasional passages told by "I," who is another voice of the Colonel; but sometimes the Colonel is referred to more orthodoxly in the third person. Similarly, the incidental background characters of Pimlico are sometimes "they," as in "It's the Colonel, they cry" (p. 609) and a few lines later "we," as in the final paragraph. It seems that White is experimenting with switching to the first person whenever he wishes to convey a moment of deep penetration into the experience of a character, a moment of great intensity, and reverts to third person when temporarily the source of narrative interest does not lie with the "I" or "we."

All of these stylistic experiments are designed compositely to evoke "the blue echo of recaptured thought that is India" (p. 603). They place demands upon the reader that are more commonly associated with avant garde lyric poetry. Some of Eliot's early verse comes to mind, parts of *Prufrock*, for example.[3] Apart from occasional purple passages or mannerisms that seem wilfully obscure or portentous, the style in *The Twitching Colonel* successfully fulfils the daunting task of capturing from the inside a character's ambiguous simultaneous attainment of death and mystic release.

PART TWO

THE BURNT ONES

DEAD ROSES

Dead Roses and the later story, *The Night the Prowler*, are the clearest illustrations in Patrick White's shorter prose fiction of his tendency to subscribe to what Northrop Frye calls "social Freudianism." Frye defines this phenomenon in the following way:

> Here society is seen as controlled by certain anxieties, real or imaginary, which are designed to repress or sublimate human impulses towards a greater freedom. These impulses include the creative and the sexual, which are closely linked. The enemy of the poet is not the capitalist but the 'square,' or representative of repressive morality.[1]

In White's fiction those characters who overcome these anxieties and repressions are of the living, those who succumb to them are of the dead. Anthea Scudamore and her mother base their miserable lives on anxieties and repressions. Felicity Bannister in *The Night the Prowler* crusades successfully for moral and religious liberation from the sexual repression of the squares which is commonly known as niceness. In White's fiction the liberation from repressive niceness unleashes not only creative sexual energies but also an unorthodox religious energy seeking meaning and spiritual fulfilment. Daise Morrow in *Down at the Dump* and Felicity Bannister are the two most obvious examples of this dual release of creative energy.

Social Freudianism thus lies at the basis of the recurring thematic dualism on which White insists between the living and the dead. This should not be confused with the dual vision of his irony,[2] which is essentially comprised of the constantly varying degrees of sympathy and antipathy of White's overriding point of view towards both the living and the dead among his characters. Admittedly this is mainly a question of varying degrees of satiric antipathy towards the dead, and varying degrees of cool sympathy towards the living, but the fluctuations in the degrees of authorial sympathy and antipathy

are nevertheless of the greatest importance with White. One becomes so accustomed to the tension of these fluctuations of irony that the rare moments when White gives unalloyed sympathy to his characters have the illuminating force of a lighthouse beacon. Such moments occur, for example, when Felicity Bannister tends the dying alkie at the end of *The Night the Prowler*, when Daise Morrow delivers a spiritual exhortation at her own funeral, and in *Dead Roses*, interestingly enough, for one of the dead, Anthea Scudamore, when she bathes naked in the surf off Kangaroo Island:

> Exquisite skirts of foam clung to her ankles, and began to soothe her thighs. It was so gently perfect in the healing water that she closed her eyes and almost understood which direction was the right one. (p. 55)

On the whole, however, White spells out his thematic dualism between the living and the dead very explicitly in *Dead Roses.* In an unambitious, rather pessimistic way it is Dr. Barry Flegg who is of the living in this story. His liberation is limited to the sexual sphere and he has no hint of religious aspirations to soothe the discontent to which he frankly admits. In any case the narrative focus lies almost unwaveringly on what is wrong with Anthea rather than on what is right about him. After his sexual rejection by Anthea Barry marries the vulgar, pretty and gloriously fertile Cherie. In one of his rare positive representations of family life, White, with light-hearted ironic reservations, contrasts the togetherness of this family with a dark vision of Anthea's barren wealth, twisted fear of sex, and hysteric loneliness. For Anthea is of the dead,[3] together with her mother, whose provincial Adelaide snobbishness and vicious respectability barely conceal her greed. Anthea's and Mrs. Scudamore sr.'s unquestioned cult is happiness, and this false idol they equate with appearing in the bourgeois social register and material acquisitiveness. To worship their God they are willing to shrive themselves of all sexual joy, the more so, because like Freud's middle-class patients in Vienna, whom they resemble because of their neuroticism and their insistence on respectability, they regard sex as physically repulsive and a Dionysian threat to bourgeois order and decency. White epigrammatizes their deadness when he speaks through the character Gil Tulloch, "They're out to reach a state of impregnable negation" (p. 52). That is, both Anthea and her mother on whom she narcissistically models herself, attempt to dry up the

emotional flow of life, to make a secure haven of stasis out of a life-stuff which is essentially dynamic and unpredictable. So in their sick craving for security they have unwittingly locked the life-force out of their haven. Deprived by herself of regeneration from this vital life-force, Mrs. Scudamore sr. "screws herself up inside her cardigan" (p. 51) and becomes a shrivelled husk. When at the end of this story Anthea wakes from an envious nightmare about Cherie Flegg, her "grey face" "mutilated unmercifully" (p. 65) by her terror, she peers into the mirror and attains a perception of her utter emptiness and wretchedness. The breath goes "crrkk in her throat" and she dies a symbolic death from this annihilating awareness of her wasted life.

Not that Dr. Barry Flegg, Anthea's contrasting figure, attains happiness, but he does have the courage and the candour to admit this, adding, presumably with the authorial voice of White behind him, "But I reckon we're not meant to be (content)" (p. 60). Unlike Anthea who "*ordered* her life . . . kept a firm hand on any of the loose bits which might fly out and hit her in the eye" (p. 46), Barry is moved by bursts of passion, as in his youthful wrestle with Anthea on the sands of Kangaroo Island, and by spontaneous generosity, as on the later occasion when he pays too much for a bunch of crimson-purply roses and tosses them carelessly into his wife's fecund lap. This is the penultimate link in the sequence of rose images that give the story its title. In the last depressing link Anthea almost apologizes for her deathlike existence. "Flowers die on me," she says, and throws a wilted rose given to her by Cherie into the waste-paper basket. This imagery is designed to recall and contrast with the lost promise of her youth, when the housekeeper ahd called her, admittedly sarcastically, "The Queen of the Flowers" (p. 29), and she had treasured a photo of herself with "her bust brushing a bowlful of enormous roses" (p. 29). Her youth and Juno-like magnificence are irretrievably betrayed when she marries the aging Hessell Mortlock for his affluence and his elegance. Upon entering his home as his wife she finds, apart from "dental floss and the corpse of a blowfly," bowls of dead roses that had "almost turned to metal" (p. 34). On her unconsummated wedding night she has her first Freudian nightmare. She dreams that she is holding in her arms a "slack gas-balloon. And soon the gulls were lashing at the metal petals of Egyptian roses. While she was sunk in safety. The creaking

of roses, their knife-edged wings, grew silenter for distance" (pp. 35–6). All of these images are re-wordings by Anthea's subconsciousness of phrases that have already occurred in the story as experienced by her. The slackness of the gas-balloon is meant to represent the impotence of her aging spouse. The gulls are the gulls of Kangaroo Island (pp. 19–20) symbolizing the unabashed sexual aggression of Barry Flegg, from which she has sought refuge in the security of this non-marriage. The question is: Is such imagery contrived and mechanical? J.F. Burrows strongly criticizes White's Freudian symbolism with the following strictures:

> Since they need to be – and are – comprehensible to the lay reader, White's Freudian symbols are rather simple, unequivocal, and even heavy-handed. As a result, those stories where relationships between individuals *qua* individuals are of central importance tend to reduce, as Freud himself never did, the subtle range of human behaviour to a few rather stereotyped gestures. In these Freudian stories, as we have seen, manners of the socio-aesthetic kind merely provide ready-made but rather incidental settings.[4]

Although there is occasionally justification for criticisms such as this of White's sexual symbolism, I do not think it applicable to Anthea's nightmare that I have analysed above. Here the dream-symbols seem felicitously chosen, cleverly modulated to capture the jumbling of the subconsciousness, and above all poetically expressed. It is apposite that White has chosen to express his imagery predominantly in Freudian terms because he is making the same contrast that Freud himself wished to make between the conscious or rational organisation of civilization and the individual's repression of the irrational and the subconscious. White is also stressing the subsequent neurotic suffering of those individuals unable to bear the tension between the two worlds. The imagery in *Dead Roses* is typical of *The Burnt Ones* in that it is organized around this dichotomy between bourgeois respectability and neurotic secret suffering. One might term this dichotomy Patrick White's hobby-horse. But one has simply to accept the fact that White is to some extent a didactic writer with a severely critical censure to make of our middle-class civilization.

To take some further examples of this Freudian dichotomy: Anthea withdraws from what she feels to be the casual vulgarity and sexual openness of the holidayers on Kangaroo Island into "her own stone cell, in which she might flower again – a full distinct white" (p. 16). She is a solitary, and rather prickly cactus in her nun's celibate cell, and her virginal whiteness is inevitably to be contrasted with the "hissing" and "writhing" of the black swans (p. 16). Such imagery is perhaps programmatic and obtrusive, but certainly not inappropriate or lacking a sense of humour. Similarly, the casual fertility of the Island is expressed by the leitmotif of "the baby farmer" and its surf is the purifying water of youth and spiritual regeneration for those who can harmonize with its call for natural, unforced behaviour. On her second visit to the Island Anthea bathes naked in the sea, and hopes that perhaps Barry "might watch her rising from the sea" (p. 63), a pagan Venus. In another of Anthea's nightmares the surf becomes a "milky sea, sucking and troubling her ample breasts" (p. 45). This milk of her repressed yearning for motherhood becomes a leitmotif establishing a link between the spiritual landscape of Kangaroo Island and the shores of Greece:

> Lightly she touched the trunks of the pines. She frowned slightly to find that some of the white milk had oozed out onto her fingers, and probably the dirty, sticky stuff would refuse to come off. (p. 57)

In spite of Anthea's puritanical, conscious rejection of motherhood here – think by way of contrast of the "stained lap" (p. 63) of Cherie – White nevertheless allows her a measure of spiritual inspiration. Once on Kangaroo Island, many years ago, "exquisite skirts of foam" had soothed her and almost taught her "which direction was the right one (p. 55); now in Greece "the light washed her, and the sea rose up at her feet" (p. 57). But her bourgeois consciousness is too strong and she opts for wealth, spotlessness, hat and gloves, and a wasted life.

Both Anthea and her husband, Hessel Mortlock, are characterised in Freudian Oedipal terms. They are both regressive narcissists who yearn once again to be Daddy's or Mommy's spoilt little darling, and who are unable to cope in a mature way with the stresses of a normal, independent life. Hessel withdraws into the anal

miserliness of his material possessions and he and Anthea misuse their Sunday visits to church to vaunt their sham-humility and their revered but unused wealth (p. 38). Their marriage is based on parading like stuffed dummies before an awed lower middle-class audience, and they both enjoy the advantage of having no private, intimate life to upset their sexlessness.

White's brooding pity for Anthea's wasted life at the conclusion of the story contrasts strongly with the buoyant and brilliant satire with which it began. It is arguable that White's satiric style is more successful, and easier reading than the sometimes strained and mannered expressions with which he represents his characters' search for grace. The satiric pastiches in *Dead Roses* are aimed at many of the story's figures and on varied themes that are united by being all anti-bourgeois. White's satire has many tones. He is gleefully irreverent when he catches the discrepancy between Mortlock's elegance and his cocking a fox-terrier leg at the ladies, or when he is mocking Mrs. Scudamore sr.'s worship of "inherited wealth and station" (p. 5). Occasionally White shows the darker, more bitter side of his satire. When Mr. Scudamore, after years of putting up with his soulless wife, finally commits suicide, his wife shows the understanding and compassion that her years of life have taught her by writing to their only child that

> Dad, to humiliate her as never before, had taken his life one wet evening in the yard of the Black Bull. (p. 49)

What plot there is in *Dead Roses* is typical of White's habit of neglecting plot-manipulations with contempt. White is unabashed in having Hessel Mortlock conveniently die without being able to change his will or in having Anthea, after a lapse of many years, happen upon Barry Flegg on a Greek beach. Harry Heseltine complains of "arbitrariness of plotting" and of "fictional diagrams" in *The Burnt Ones*, and says in particular of *Dead Roses*:

> The concluding scene of *Dead Roses* is, in itself, very powerfully done; not quite so powerfully, however, as to blot out all doubts about the coincidental nature of the meeting. Again, one is just a little too aware of White the technician rigging his effects to suit his prejudged ends. The

> whole of *Dead Roses*, in fact, has a strangely diagrammatic structure: it is a blueprint of how Anthea Scudamore turns into her mother.[5]

White is clearly interested in characters, not in devising plausible plots. The structural division of the story into segments serves on the whole only to underline the shifting point of view of the various narrative voices, and to jump abruptly to whatever moment in Anthea's life that White now wishes to illuminate. The multiplicity of these segments, the complexity of White's portrayal of Anthea and the magnitude of the ambitious theme all serve to make *Dead Roses* less of a short story and more of an impressionist novella, or a parody of a *Bildungsroman*, in which the main character's quest does not lead to a positive integration into society or to spiritual illumination, but rather to solitariness, failure and despair.

WILLY-WAGTAILS BY MOONLIGHT

This story has been criticized for being unfocussed in its satiric perspective[1] and is commonly regarded as being a regrettable piece of work,[2] presumably because of a spirit of disheartening meanness that seems to inform it. I believe, however, that both criticisms are overly harsh, and to some extent incorrect. If one traces the movement in the story and the development of the character contrasts by closely examining the shifts in the narrative point of view, a more dispassionate assessment becomes possible.

Just as Arch Mackenzie tape-records birdsong in the bush, White has tape-recorded here human conversation from the married couples' dinner-party circuit on the North Shore of Sydney. Arch's recording is marred by incidental bush noises, human interruptions, and an accidental taping of Arch's adultery. White's recording of the dinner-party is marked by the disdain with which he exposes the resentment, hatred and contempt lurking just below the surface of the aimless dialogue. The question we must ask ourselves in interpreting this story is, I believe, are there any moments of redeeming love, of transcending purity in the story that rise naturally out of the darkness to eclipse the malice and the boredom?

There are so many delicate shifts in the narrative point of view that it is often difficult to decide at many points of the story whether the more sardonic passages are fragmented parts of the interior monologue of Jum and Eileen Wheeler. In any case it is clear that White is laconically varying the point of view between these two possibilities, and that one of his techniques for characterising Jum and Eileen and of satirizing their shallow smartness and their vulgarity, is to show them judging Arch and Nora Mackenzie under their breath. This accentuates the contrast between the glib insincerity of what they say socially and what they are thinking to themselves. Like many of the North Shore socialites for whom White seems to reserve his most mordant satire, they are manipulators of

people, concealing their true thoughts and emotions and relying on their smart quips to fill the emptiness of the dialogue.

The following two excerpts illustrate the difference between a limited point of view and an overriding authorial point of view:

> Eileen Wheeler yawned. She must remember to show sympathy, because Nora Mackenzie was going through a particularly difficult one. (p. 67)

> Nora did not exactly frown, but pleated her forehead the way she did when other people's virtues were assailed. Such attacks seemed to affect her personally, causing her almost physical pain. (p. 68)

The first quotation shows Eileen thinking to herself, preparing to force herself to display polite emotions that she does not feel. Here White is using her interior monologue to let her condemn herself in our eyes. Her quick, sharp manner is reflected in her laconic sentence structure and in her oblique reference to Nora Mackenzie's change of life. The second quotation shows White trying to indicate, with equal economy, the emotional centre of Nora's being. There is really little question of satire in the authorial point of view here; a touch of irony may be detectable occasionally in White's attitude towards Nora, but on the whole she is characterised, as in this quotation, with sympathy. She is therefore offered by White as a stark contrast to the other characters, all of whom enjoy malice, gossip and deceit. Nora, whose nervous ineffectuality and lack of social graces irritate Jum and Eileen so much, and irritate the reader too at first, is presented by White as a saint and a seer. White uses two leitmotifs to characterise her. The first leitmotif is the pleating of her forehead to indicate her suffering at most people's lack of charity and positive vision. The second leitmotif is Nora twisting her "long, entreating, sensitive hands" (p. 70) to indicate her anguished inability to handle the brutal facts of life, whether these be social or sexual.

Where the point of view becomes unsubtly contemptuous of Arch and Nora Mackenzie, we may be sure that it is the Wheelers ruminating to themselves in their conceited way, e.g. "So fortunate

for them to have discovered each other. Nora Leadbeatter and Arch Mackenzie. Two such bores" (p. 69), and "Arch Mackenzie had launched out, started the import-export business. Funny the way a man will suddenly hit on the idea to which his particular brand of stupidity can respond" (p. 72). It is clear that the scornfulness of the tone here and the uninventiveness of the insults stem from Eileen and Jum respectively.

The structural irony of the story resides in the fact that at the end the tables are turned on the Wheelers. Just before the twist in the story's tail, Eileen Wheeler had reflected that "people were horribly pathetic" (p. 75), but in the end it is not others, but she and Jum who are revealed as pathetic. The external cause of this reversal of fortunes is the accidental tape-recording of Arch's rather vulgar infidelity with his secretary Mis Cullen. When they hear this intercourse recorded on tape, "The Wheeler spirits soared as surely as plummets dragged the notes of the wagtail down" (p. 77); that is, they are incapable of responding to the other-worldly purity of the recorded birdsongs, but they experience glee at the accidental recording of smut. Their glee, however, is short-lived, for there follow two passages of obvious interior monologue in which both Eileen and Jum are forced by the sounds on the tape-recorder to recall some of their own pitiful sexual memories, symbolized perhaps by the laconic reference to "pockets and pockets of putrefying trash" (p. 78). In these memories they at last cease to be superior and bored. They suffer, as much as they are capable of allowing themselves to suffer, and they thereby become a little less trivial than before, even if only for the moment. They experience a negative epiphany in which for a brief moment they pierce the glamorous veil of superiority they have tried to cast over their lives. But it is not this negative epiphany that justifies *Willy-wagtails by Moonlight*. For at the conclusion there is a moment of positive revelation for Nora. Nora's other-worldliness rises here to a climax. She is simply unable to hear Arch's infidelity on the tape, hearing only "the notes of birdsong falling like mountain water, when they were not chiselled in moonlight" (p. 78). Here White indicates stylistically how greatly his sympathies lie with Nora and have lain with her throughout the story. But the reader may well have been led astray by the deceptively hidden point of view for the first part of the story and have agreed with the Wheelers that Nora Mackenzie

was just an ineffectual bore. If the reader has made this transformation of his attitudes, as I did, then there is additional irony in the story's structure and point of view. It may just be an accident of timing that Nora hears only the willy-wagtail, but it is nevertheless a fact that this is the world to which her spiritual ears are attuned and it is her own purity that causes her to respond so ecstatically to the purity of the birdsong: " 'There is nothing purer,' Nora said, 'than the song of the wagtail. Excepting Schubert,' she added, 'some of Schubert' " (p. 78). The irony of this perception is that a few pages earlier when Arch had spilt his blood all over the carpet after an accident in the kitchen, White had reported "How the willy-wagtails chortled" (p. 76). That is to say, the wagtails are not in themselves pure, but like most manifestations of nature in their attitude towards man, ambiguous. Human beings see in nature a reflection of their own selves. Nora is pure and therefore she perceives purity. Her love for her husband Arch triumphs over the sordidness of his infidelity and her humility in being "grateful even for her loneliness" (p. 78) provide the story with a spiritual beauty that more than atones for its earlier manifestations of ugliness and malice.

A GLASS OF TEA

A Glass of Tea begins with the introductory exposition of a leisurely framework that is almost pallid in its stasis. We are acquainted with a cultured Greek by the name of Malliakas who is travelling in Switzerland. As a character he is not calculated to arouse interest in the reader, for he is indecisive, nervous in his pampered wealth, and lacking in colour. White is so detached from Malliakas that he is able to present him with an understated irony as is exemplified in such phrases as "Malliakas was moved in general by impulse and his liver" (p. 81). One has the feeling that White is putting his style on display here. Of course one often has this feeling in reading White's stories and we first noted this tendency in the early story *The Twitching Colonel*. But if the style in *The Twitching Colonel* could be characterised as extravagantly romantic, the prose in *A Glass of Tea* shows a classical sense of control and balance in the rhythms of the periods, and a dry wit in such phrases as "mottled acres of Swiss flesh" (p. 81). All in all, the impression created by the opening pages is that they might have been written by Henry James in his late period.

The introductory character-study of Malliakas is only a framework for the real story that is to come. This is an old-fashioned technique favoured in nineteenth century Germany by the writers of framework-novellas, but one would have thought that in today's more sophisticated narrative modes it was a little archaic. The last sentence in particular of this opening framework has an olde worlde elegance and a self-concious aestheticism about it:

> He (Malliakas) felt drowsily, willingly enchanted, listening, scenting the past, and the omnipresent smell of mildew, as he sipped tea from a bluish cup. (p. 84)

The second part of the framework is equally unwilling to come to the point and derives what tension it has from the contrast

between the babbling of the senile Philippides and the interspersed witticisms and ironies of Malliakas. One feels that this framework is too protracted and not of vital relevance to the story proper, which is about the marriage of Philippides and Constantia. In fact there is an abrupt change when this story begins, insofar as the coquettish dialogue in Geneva ceases and most pretence that Philippides is narrating the story from an old man's point of view is lost, because the events are recreated as they were when he was experiencing them. The practical result is that the same detached third person narrator who had first introduced us to Malliakas, resumes control of this story too. The framework breaks in again later (p. 91), and seems designed to destroy any sense of mounting drama at the rescue of Philippides and Constantia from Smyrna by returning the reader to the banality of the conversation in Geneva. Finally, this framework returns to serve as a neat conclusion, tying up the loose narrative ends by revealing the surprise identity of Philippides' second wife and by rising unexpectedly to a tragic description of Constantia's death.

The emphasis in the framework on the efficiency of the Swiss transport system is intended as a contrast to the romantic exoticism of Philippides' life in the Levant. The settings of the story proper in Konya, Smyrna, Chios and Athens, the names of the characters and the casual strewing of Greek and French terms all heighten the mood of the exotic Near East by which White is so clearly enchanted. His characters in these Alexandrain and Greek stories read "the poems of Heredia and Leconte de Lisle" (p. 93), in fact they are almost invariably cultured, polyglot, eccentric and rich, or at least with haunting memories of lost riches. But unlike many of Australia's nouveaux riches executives and matrons on the North Shore of Sydney, the Alexandrian rich are in White's view alive from the neck up, passionately intellectual in conversation, emotionally volatile and unembarrassed to show it. They are fond of the objets d'art with which they create their luxurious environments, but unlike the Australian upper middle classes are not reliant for their self-esteem and security on the indiscriminate amassing of material possessions as status symbols. Not that White's view of Greece is entirely idealised. For him Athens too has its nouveaux riches who are not socially acceptable to the Philippides (p. 94), but about these people White chooses not to write. Perhaps many of his representations of

Australians would be a little less jaundiced if he chose as carefully about whom to write in Australia as he evidently does in Greece and Alexandria.

To return to the structure of *A Glass of Tea*: even in the story proper there is no attempt made at a continuous plot. Instead there are isolated incidents loosely strung together on the connecting thread of the gypsy's prophecy that Philippides would live only as long as the last Russian glass of the original twelve survived breakage. Not that White really takes this arch-Romantic device of fate-tragedy seriously. Rather he uses the superstition occasionally to provoke displays of passionate loyalty and jealousy from Constantia, and thus add new dimensions to her character portrait. Probably the most dramatic and revealing of these isolated scenes occurs at the sack of Smyrna (pp. 89–91). It is rewarding to analyze this scene in detail, as it tells us a lot that is characteristic of White's narrative and stylistic techniques. White begins the scene by omitting any simple, clear chronological or historical explanations. He deliberately leaves out the connecting thread of what had happened and how it had come to pass. Instead he plunges straight into a sophisticated and sometimes even obscure representation of the chaos in which the rich refugees find themselves. There is no hint of White exploiting the historical sack of Smyrna to arouse dramatic excitement in the reader. Instead there is a fastidious toying with deliberately twisted sentence structure and mannered phrases. Consider for example the following passage, which consists of the two opening sentences of this isolated scene:

> At first it was impossible to believe their personal lives could be reduced by a shuffle of history, which is what happened, momentarily at least, on the deck of the destroyer, after the sack of their city. Because it had been personally theirs, which was now burning by bursts, and in long, funnelling socks of smoke, and reflections of slow, oily light. (pp. 89–90).

White is not narrating here, he is evoking. Evoking the scene and mood with wry or distanced images that eschew any false grandeur, e.g. "a shuffle of history" and "long funnelling socks of smoke." His observations border on the precious and the arty-tarty, e.g. "light

from the burning town struck the colour of verdigris out of her helmet" (p. 90). His imagery expresses cynicism rather than drama, e.g. "that vessel of doubtful mercy" (p. 90). He contrasts Constantia's hysteria about the temporarily lost glasses with the casual mayhem of her environment, e.g. "A corpse floating face down was nuzzling peacefully at the water" (p. 91). The bewilderment of Philippides and Constantia seems to be captured by straight away concentrating the perspective on them in the above-quoted two opening sentences rather than on Smyrna as a panorama. Their panic also seems evoked by the rhythmically awkward way in which the commas separate the staccato phrases that follow, with each phrase seeming a hasty afterthought striving for greater explanatory precision but attaining breathless confusion. Both of the relative clauses ("which is what happened" and "which was now burning by bursts") in the above-quoted two sentences are awkwardly placed so that each sentence can begin with the personal perspective on Philippides and Constantia, while the historic conflagration is relegated to a subordinate position. This perspective is maintained for the entire incident of their escape from Smyrna, allowing White to revive our interest in the story's almost forgotten connecting thread of the twelve Russian glasses.

A Glass of Tea attempts to encompass all of Constantia's adult life and marriage to Philippides by creating with concentrated detail a few characteristic scenes illustrating her temperament and the joy and the agony of her devotion to her husband. Like so many of White's stories, it tends to resemble more an impressionist novella than a short story. In any case the source of chief interest for the reader lies with the virtuosity of White's style as he reveals Constantia's passion to us, at first from a cool distance, but with gathering intensity of sympathy for her suffering love until the story reaches its tragic climax in her death. One should contrast White's characterisation of Malliakas with that of Constantia. There is a relaxed detachment, a mildly amused air in White's attitude to Malliakas. It is as though White, ironically liberated from undue sympathy or antipathy for Malliakas, can devote himself instead to a studied elegance of diction, and to the art of summing up with remarkable economy and unruffled calm a forty year old man's nagging awareness of his failure in life. This feeling of Malliakas' emptiness, of his resignation to his failure acts as a foil to the

richness and fullness of Constantia's life, because her self-fulfilment, even in tragic despair, stems precisely from what Malliakas lacks, passion and commitment.

CLAY

This work offers considerable difficulties to interpreters, partly because of White's avant-garde experimentation with style, particularly towards the conclusion, partly because of his complex and often obscure imagery and leitmotifs, and partly because of his ambivalent evaluation of Clay's co-extensive fall into insanity and rise to visionary transfiguration of himself as artist and dream-lover.

White's characterisation in this story is as usual built around the contrast between the common herd and the mad outsider. This has been so from as early as *The Twitching Colonel*, where in the concluding lines the gaping crowd becomes frightened by the mystery of the colonel's dancing self-immolation. Similarly in *Clay*, Clay's fellow school-pupils beat him up because "they were afraid that he was different" (p. 106), and the secretaries at the Customs office tried to giggle away their uneasiness at Clay's different behaviour but ended up getting "the shivers for something they did not understand" (p. 116). This theme has an early pre-climax when Mrs. Skerritt has Clay's hair shorn off to protect him from being queer. The word queer has the peculiarly derisive meaning in Australian society of someone who prefers to wear his hair stylishly and to moon around the garden day-dreaming rather than participate with the short-shorn mongolian hordes in the religious community ritual of football. The Australian masses feel that such inexplicable behaviour can be accounted for only by the presumption of homosexuality. Ironically, having his hair completely shorn off does not guarantee Clay acceptance by the herd, because now his hair is merely stubble and he gets bashed up for being "sort of different different" (p. 109). But these are merely light skirmishes in comparison with the suffering that is to come.

Clay is contrasted with his mother, Mrs. Skerritt. She, like Mrs. Polkinghorn in *The Letters*, is one of White's Oedipal matrons who

suffocate their sons with love, strangling their development towards independence. Mrs. Skerritt emerges from White's vitriolic pen as an appallingly stupid bigot who is so terrified of her son's imagination and eccentricity of the mind that she revenges herself for her terror by brutalising him. She disguises this brutalisation as her duty to the sacred demands of social conformism. White parodies her flood of trivial garrulity by simply omitting the punctuation stops in her monologues. This encourages the reader to translate the all too recognizable clichés from the printed page into the familiar intonation-patterns of Australian speech. White underlines this parody with correspondingly satiric imagery. For example, the deceased Mr. Skerritt had been obsessed with his fretwork hobby, and now Mrs. Skerritt keeps up the good work as his widow, except that instead of a saw it is her "voice boring additional holes in the fretwork" (p. 105). Her speeches, marked by banality, clichés and grammatical errors, gradually become more concentrated, almost surreal, as connecting links are left out and clichés and words are left half finished. Indeed her torrent of words becomes so frenetic that it begins to resemble the exhausting monologue of Lucky in *Waiting for Godot*.

White's linguistic parodies in *Clay* are not limited to Mrs. Skerritt. He captures the children's barbaric jargon as well with such sentences as, " 'Old Broad Arrer!' they shouted" (p. 109). He inserts deft touches of incidental Australian manners and dialect for local colour with such phrases as "long-haired nong" (p. 121) and with such passages as the following:

> The lady said from alongside her cigarette: 'I'll leave you to it, Marj. I'm gunna make tracks for home and whip me shoes off. My feet are hurting like hell.' (p. 113)

White's best linguistic parodies in *Clay* are of the pompous bureaucratese of the civil service. The letter of Mr. Stutchbury, who is "something . . . in the Department of Education" (p. 111) is a paragon of letters of recommendation. It is a hilarious mixture of false joviality (e.g. "under your wing" and the mad salutation "Salaams!"), and ill-judged essays at sober dutifulness which only reveal Mr. Stutchbury's futile struggle to express his sense of his own self-importance. Hence he uses such archaic and mock-elevated circumlocutions as "my duty and wish," "above-mentioned boy,"

"esteem it a favour" and "expatiate further" (p. 111). These parodies provide the light relief in a story in which the stylistic mood, as we shall see later, is on the whole of a lyric and surreal intensity.

To return to Mrs. Skerritt: as she ages, she becomes maudlin and self-pitying and White's view of her becomes less satirical and more farcical. She tries to arouse pathos at her constantly anticipated death, and poses as a humble, helpless woman of good intentions. White blocks any possibility of a reader lapsing mistakenly into pity for her by juxtaposing an irrelevant and ludicrously incongruous detail with her fear of death:

> 'When I am gone Clay,' she said – it was the evening the sink got blocked up . . . (p. 112)

Mrs. Skerritt's trivial meditations on her death, then her actual death, and also the death of the hairdresser Mr. McGillivray, evoke one of the story's main themes, namely Clay's fear of death and of change and his need for a "continuum" (p. 115), for a "core of permanence" (p. 114). This is why Clay marries Marj, because she, being "the colour of masonite," and Mrs. Skerritt being "so terribly grey" (p. 114), are thought by him to resemble one another, and thus provide him with a reliable, protective continuity. Mrs. Skerritt also suffers from this need for permanence. It seems likely that she dies from metaphysical shock when she sees Marj because she is forced to realise that she is about to be replaced and that "there is no such thing as permanence" (p. 115). Clay himself reaches the final crisis in his insanity after he has tried in vain to seek refuge in the comforting permanence of a table (p. 117). He realises in terror that apparently very solid substances like houses and asphalt paving, substances which claim permanence in our eyes, will also decay and dissolve. His world, which had once seemed as reliable as a habit, has become a nightmare of metamorphosis where objects declare their independence and tyrannize his oversensitive soul.

Mrs. Skerritt is connected with Marj by colour symbolism. Mrs. Skerritt's colour as a personality is grey (p. 113), which seems to express her dull solidity. Marj's masonite colour expresses her flat drabness, as does her petit bourgeois obsession with domestic routine, to which she is grateful because it gives her a ritual behind

which she can hide from the void. Marj is also connected with Mrs. Skerritt by the unlikely leitmotif of a blocked drain (cf. p. 112 & p. 114) and by the fact that both are said "to create," that is to make an hysterical fuss in moments of crisis (cf. p. 108 & p. 125). But White's satire on Marj is nowhere near as sharp as that on Mrs. Skerritt. In a tone of matter-of-fact disdain he conveys to us that this girl is one of the living dead. Through deft juxtaposition and character contrast he eliminates the need for authorial comment:

> He (Clay) bought her a Java sparrow in a cage. It was a kind of love poem.
> To which Marj replied: 'I wonder if it's gunna scatter its seed on the wall-to-wall. We can always spread a newspaper, though.' (p. 115)

The deceased Mr. Skerritt's colour is the yellow of his cancerous disease and death (p. 110). When Mr. Stutchbury chews on a piece of "yellow fat" from a tough old steak at Mrs. Skerritt's, we immediately make the connection through the colour symbolism that he too is of the living dead. Clay himself has a "greenish skin" which can be connected with the "green peacefulness' of the harbour and the ferny garden, where he spends his time mooning. The word mooning is repeated three times (pp. 105–6) and is perhaps to be connected with the enchanted "silvery light" (p. 108) that Clay experiences beneath the sea in his early dream. Clay's dream-maiden, Lova, has a "greenish-yellow (colour), of certain fruits, and plant-flesh" (p. 118), and this combined with the fact that her eyes are "a ferny brown" like the ferns in Clay's garden, establishes her spiritual or erotic affinity with that part of Clay's personality that has been ruthlessly repressed since he related his eccentric dream to his mother in his childhood. When the wind blows "black across the grey water" (p. 112), it seems to threaten Clay's need for permanence, and so he seeks comfort by taking out yet again the picture of his mother's wedding-group, where:

> the figures appeared to announce a truth of which he alone could be the arbiter, just as the great white shoe would still put out, into the distance, for destinations of his choice. (p. 113)

The truth of these figures is their assertion of permanence, that they

are "so solidly alive" (p. 112), and this truth hinges on the shoe to which Clay clings so desperately in his moment of suicide. The whiteness of this "dreamy bridal shoe" (p. 107) is the invitation to the pristine purity of dream and spirit which compensate Clay for his downtrodden existence in the real world. It seems incidentally to be a truism of White's characterisation of his simpletons and saints that they are rewarded in proportion to their incompetence in the outside world with "inward-looking eyes" (p. 112) that make them at home in the spiritual world. Clay almost achieves spiritual release into the "green peacefulness" of nirvana in his childhood dream beneath the sea, but it is spoilt when the goal of the voyage turns out to be a dead cloud. It is a lifetime before Clay can achieve the requisite state to be responsive to another dream of perfection that can make up for this marred one.[1] And even then, it seems, he can achieve this state only in insanity and suicide. This vision is expressed in terms of water imagery which Heseltine points out is used by Patrick White to indicate "moments when two lives seem to flow together into a single stream of being."[2] Here Clay fuses in libidinous union with Lova:

> Then she came towards him, and he saw that she herself might sink in the waters of time she spread before him cunningly the nets of water smelling of nutmeg over junket the steamy mornings and the rather shivery afternoons.
> If he did not resist.
> *She* was just about as resistant as water not the tidal kind but a glad upward plume of water rising and falling back as he put his hands gently lapping lapping. She was so gentle.
> (pp. 124–5)

It is unfortunately typical of White that he refuses to grant Clay this vision of beauty and simply leave it at that. Instead he feels compelled to contrast Clay's vision grotesquely and at length with the tedious mundanity of Marj. The last four lines of the story in particular seem quite unnecessary and in the silly flatness of their farce reflect back on the vision, taking away almost all of its magic. The two details in this last page that rise above this silly anticlimactic farce are the blood spurting from the leg of the table and the revelation that Clay "lay holding a white shoe" (p. 125). These are significant details because at the beginning of his insanity Clay had celebrated the inanimate table as containing "mysterious

life" (p. 117) and had pondered its permanency. The table, however, is a prefiguration of his own suicide at the end, because it is threatened by the violence of an axe. In this first surreal monologue Clay had also referred to

> the frozen wave of wooden water no boat whether wood or iron when you come to think satin either ever sails from A to B except in the mind of the passenger so the table standing standing . . . (p. 117)

His feverish prose style here is, ironically enough, a metaphysical equivalent of his mother's equally elided garrulity, related to one another of course as a plus sign to a minus. We note that the water here in this first monologue of his insanity is still frozen, and it only becomes a gentle fountain in the steamy tropics in his final vision. The voyage, to which he is repeatedly invited during his life, and for which he is never quite ready, is not a physical voyage because here the whole reality of motion in the empirical world is denied in favour of the higher reality of the spirit dreaming of this voyage. The satin is not an accidental reference but refers us back to "the torrential satin of the lap" (p. 106) of Mrs. Skerritt whose passions and rages are equally illusory and irrelevant to spiritual reality. Clay's need to cling to the illusion of permanence created by the standing table is overcome in his final vision when he gives up resisting and postponing and takes the trip to the spiritual permanence of nirvana, a passenger on the ship of the dreamy bridal shoe that marries him to death. Seen psychologically, this trip is admittedly a grotesque childhood reversion to dependence on his mother. But seen lyrically and spiritually, the white shoe is the antithesis to the "woman's old cast-off shoe" (p 107) with which the children had once chased him and bashed him up so that "the heel of their old shoe bored for ever in his mind." It is also the antithesis to Lova's "pointed heel" (p. 121) which destroys the illusion of permanence in the asphalt (p. 122) and which reduces him to tormented erotic masochism. So, after Clay's own creation, his own wish-fulfilment, Lova, has, in the way that inanimate and unreal objects do in this story, declared her independence and teased him into a state of desperation, she gives herself to him in a moment of dream-perfection which is also of necessity the appropriate time for him to make the only real decision of his life, namely to die.

THE EVENING AT SISSY KAMARA'S

This story tends to form a loosely knit cycle together with White's other Greek stories, such as *A Glass of Tea* and *Being Kind to Titina*, which are haunted by the horror of the Turkish sack of Smyrna. White refers to this ugly massacre with curious irony as the Catastrophe in two of the stories (cf. p. 135 & p. 190). He cannot use this irony of distance in *A Glass of Tea* because in this story the massacre is not referred to in conversation by people who were safely remote from it in time or space; instead it is evoked on the spot from the limited, private view of Constantia and Philippides. The death of Smyrna is evoked by White not just as a dramatic backdrop to the trivial foreground of the present, but as a way of giving essential depth to Poppy Pantzopoulos in *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's*, of illustrating Constantia's passionate loyalty to her husband in *A Glass of Tea*, and of correcting our early impression in *Being Kind to Titina* that Aunt Ourania is only a class conscious snob by showing her stern, self-denying charity to the refugees from Anatolia. We shall have more to say later about the structural significance of White placing the climactic sack of Smyrna near the end of *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's*, sandwiched unpromisingly between two apparently trivial sections of the story's framework.

Structurally, *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* bears a peculiar but unmistakable resemblance to *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight*. In both stories the accent lies predominantly on a dry satire of married couples at excruciatingly boring dinner parties. On the surface, the rendering of the conversation at these dinner-parties seems clever enough in a very low-key way but it also seems depressingly static and aimless. But all the while hints are being thrown out that there is more to these occasions than at first meets the ear. These hints are largely centred around White's undertones of intimated sympathy for those humble, down-trodden innocents, Nora and Sotos. Nora and Sotos are contrasted with the other characters, who are all relatively self-assured and in their own ways socially adept. As in

each story the evening wears on, and the reader's patience with this glum occasion wears out, White springs a structural and a moral surprise on us. In *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight* he does this by showing how Nora's innocence effortlessly transcends the sexual opportunism and smutty glee of the others, who are stunned because they had been preparing to condescend to her with embarrassed pity. In *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* White achieves a similar effect by intimating that the humiliated Sotos, who has suffered through their obscene gale of laughter and mockery of him, has emerged nevertheless from "the end of the tunnel" (p. 131 & p. 140). That is, he has emerged from his torment of insecurity, purged by his suffering, and with a silent, self-contained knowledge in his eyes that puzzles the more superficial Poppy. So Nora and Sotos both emerge paradoxically triumphant, one with the innocence of the white swan, the other with the secret vision of the seer. White seems to accomplish this structural surprise by gently leading us up the garden path for the first two-thirds of the story. What we had taken to be the overriding authorial point of view turns out on closer examination to be the limited satirised point of view of the most talkative, confident characters. We had risen to the lure and joined in their mildly derisive pity for the "poor unfortunate" Sotos and Nora. Then, by the most delicate shift of the narrative focus, by the image of the tunnel with Sotos, or by a single line from Nora about purity, the whole foundation on which we had been standing in order to condescend to these two outsiders dissolves beneath us and we are left floundering, or morally embarrassed.

The parallels in White's ironic treatment of structure, setting and characterisation in *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* and *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight* would seem to imply that it is more reasonable to compare the Sarsaparilla stories with the cycle of Greek stories than critics have so far appreciated. The consensus among White scholars at the moment seems to be that whilst White is creatively limited by his vituperative hatred of the Sarsaparillans, he is liberated when imaginatively on Greek soil and therefore more generous, or at least more impartial.[1] But if we continue our detailed comparison of White's Australian and Greek characters, this allegation is not entirely borne out. Basil Pantzopoulos, for example, the epigrammatically stylish, scornful bank manager with the perfect profile, who exploits women in general and Poppy in particular, finally falls victim to the minor vanity of his own beauty (cf. p.

139). He is as elegantly and as coldly dispatched by White's satiric rapier as that over-confident parvenu financier, Jum Wheeler, is in his story. And Eileen Wheeler's artificial savoir-faire in the parochial suburbs is no more distasteful than Sissy Kamara's pomposity in passing herself off as an artist. In fact Sissy's cultural pretentiousness in chattering about the alleged sado-masochism of the Greeks (cf. p. 133 and p. 136) is even more unbearable. The farcical put-down that Sissy Kamara must endure at White's hands is far more explicit than White's more indirect and gradual exposure of the inadequacy of Eileen Wheeler's hard, fashionable smartness.[2] The put-down of Sissy is worth quoting in detail:

> It was afterwards, when they had gone inside, and Sotos was doing things for the dinner, that Sissy Kamara, who had sat down, began to talk about the sado-masochism of the Greeks, and Poppy, without looking at Basil, wished that Sissy would not.
> 'We are a brutal, detestable race,' said Sissy Kamara, and some of the sauce shot into her lap as she helped herself to the veal Sotos had brought. 'If we care to admit, we are little better than Turks turned back to front. By the way,' she added gravely, 'there is no first course, because I forgot about it, and we are such old friends I knew nobody would mind.' (p. 136)

Sissy's pretentious chatter is abruptly deflated by juxtaposition with the perhaps unnecessarily vulgar accident with the sauce; not overly subtle, but welcome relief from the intensity of White's incessant exposure of the suffering nerve. It is more subtle that the contrast between Sissy and Sotos is here achieved without comment by the author. Sissy unwittingly parodies her own high falutin speeches by descending with startling abruptness from her glib generalisations about Greeks and Turks to a banal discussion of the menu. She evidently considers the graver note she now puts on more appropriate to the woeful inadequacy of the menu than to the suffering of the Greek nation. Actually she is incapable of being grave about anything, and is decidedly jaunty about her hopelessness as a hostess. At least Nora had the taste to be embarrassed about her menu! And yet this is what after all makes White's Greek characters more likable than his Australians. Some of them, like Sissy, are so bumptious that they are lovable. Colourful and irrepressible, Sissy

makes the Sarsaparillans seem painfully dull and torpid. Sissy can always bounce back against the odds. For example, her most pompous remark ("I have just that saving faith in my own integrity" p. 138) is interrupted by the unseemly laughter of Poppy and Basil at Sotos' accident with the *dolmades*. Sissy, instead of lapsing into sullen silence or embarrassed resentment – an attitude which would be typical of White's Australians – begins also to screech with laughter, admittedly at the expense of her hapless husband. White describes the scene in this way:

> Sissy Kamara's fever had broken. Dew lay amongst the dust. Water gushed from the corners of her eyes. Her face, screwed up in normal circumstances with the ideas she worried, was cracking open.
> 'Almost my last possession of importance,' Sissy laughed, 'when one had hoped with age to grow less attached when age itself if the arch-disappointer a final orgy of possessiveness of of of a gathering of minor vanities.'
> (p. 139)

Sissy's silly generalisations are thus seen as a sickness, a dusty dryness which is overwhelmed by the therapeutic flood of refreshing water. She has found release from the aridity of intellectual vanity by laughing at herself. By way of contrast, Basil, who has sneered at Sissy repeatedly, is in the end discomfited because he cannot attain release from his imprisoning vanity. Both characters experience what could be called an ironic reversal of fortunes.

The characterisation of Sotos is based on a similar kind of ironic reversal. At first his agony is evoked by stressing certain details of his physical appearance. He is seen as having "plaited hands," "twisted legs" and a "puzzle of veins." Finally he is seen "stooping stooped" in a posture in which "the bones of . . . (his) behind were carving his trousers cruelly as he bent" (p. 137). His suffering has caused him to shed the useless, deceptive upholstery of the flesh and to see the essence of bared truth. He emerges from his humiliation with the broken plate of *dolmades* carried in "a nest out of hands" (p. 138), a gesture which stands symbolically for the humble care he has shown his wife all evening. His inscrutable silence and modesty are triumphant at the end of the tunnel.

But the most important of the ironic reversals in the revelation of character is reserved for Poppy Pantzopoulos. Her mind is described by the narrator as "the victim of her plumpy body" (p. 129) and as "the Anatolian *loukoumia*" (p. 141) she stands in physical and mental contrast to Sotos' bare bones. Poppy is plump, jolly, forgiving and ironic against herself. She is maternally solicitudinous in her longing to protect both Sotos and Sissy from Basil's "savage blows of truth" (cf. p. 130, p. 133, p. 136, p. 137). Not that Patrick White will allow us the facile comfort of finding Basil the villain and scapegoat. Instead he tells us that "Basil was not so much uncharitable as the victim of his own fastidiousness" (p. 132).

Characters in this story are rarely complete contrasts to one another; rather these contrasts are modulated, and affinities found, so that the network becomes more complex and paradoxical. For example, Poppy wants to protect Sotos, and yet she cannot contain her almost hysterical laughter at his misfortune with the broken plate. The orgy of guffawing and screeching laughter which she sets off in Basil, then Sissy, is her self-protective reaction against her unbearable misery at Sotos' suffering. This explanation is suggested by the following lines:

> The bones of Sotos' behind were carving his trousers cruelly as he bent.
> It was so sad, her throat was a gulf in which she might soon drown. Her eyes were threatening. It was so excruciating.
> Poppy Pantzopoulos had begun to laugh. Or grunt. Or hiss.
> (p. 137)

But although the orgy of laughter that the three of them share unites them by disrupting their acrimonious debate about the Greeks, it also separates them because they laugh in different ways. The physical differences in their laughing are used by White to point out their emotional differences. Poppy's laughter is "churned, rather like a sackful of little sucking-pigs let fall on deck by a peasant" (p. 138). "From heaving she began to wobble, gobbling, she felt, most uglily" (p. 139). The first image expresses the playful life in her; the second image expresses her self-scrutiny, worried that her natural behaviour will somehow offend Basil by seeming vulgar. Basil's laughter, on the other hand, although it may be "in better taste," is also said to be

"drier" like "the twisting of dead palm-leaves on their stems" (p. 138). Poppy's laughter is explosive, but from Basil we hear only "a dry titter twist at its moorings in that cruel wind" (p. 138). Basil is so sterile that not even this orgy of laughter can liberate him from dogmatic self-assurance. He never realizes that this is his prison. Sissy's laughter releases her from her hankering to sound more learned than she is. Thus her face which is normally "screwed up" in tension at her intellectual charlatanism is cracked open by her flowing tears of mirth. And so the three of them are differentiated at precisely the moment of their greatest unity.

Poppy is differentiated from Sissy when she dreads Sissy launching off on another of her pseudo-clever chatterings about the Greeks. And yet, in the framework of this story it is Poppy who indulges in mock-grandiose generalisations about the mythical courage of the Greeks. When she is alone with her dentist, she feels the need to "test her capacity for suffering" (p. 127) as a Greek. Here again, the resemblances and differences between characters are never absolute, but ironically modulated.

To return to Poppy's ironic reversal: for the greater part of the story she is the underdog, rather silly, rather superficial, far too self-conscious. It is not until the final flashback (pp. 141–2) to the death throes of Smyrna that she reveals the horrifying experience that is the key to her character, helping us to understand why she is as she is, giving her characterisation the depth it so badly lacks up until then, and most important of all, providing the reader with the missing clue to the integrating theme of the story. It is this theme which makes sense in hindsight of all the preceding idle chatter.

How does White represent this scène-à-faire, the death throes of Smyrna? As in *A Glass of Tea* he makes no attempt to render a panorama. The narrative perspective is deliberately limited and private, focussing on both the trivialities and the barely suppressed panic of his few chosen characters. The only concession to a panoramic view in both stories is the brief reference to the smoke rising over burning Smyrna. In *A Glass of Tea* this is expressed as "long, funnelling socks of smoke" (p. 90) and in *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* "a playful chiffon of smoke choked" (p. 141). In both stories White's initial view is that of the detached aesthete. He further emphasizes his narrative remoteness from the scene and from

the characters, when he says: "Ahhhh, they were crying, or laughing, lowering their heads to run at a distance" (p. 142). When he finally does represent the horror of the scene, it is as witnessed by Poppy and her companions as they run to the rescue ship. There is a decided refusal to move in traditional narrative fashion towards a well prepared climax. Instead, the emphasis is that of the lyricist, intent on representing fragmentary moods, and deliberately counterpointing grotesque horror with trivia. The horror is accentuated in the following paragraph:

> Miss Pesmazoglou ran because the panicky darkness groped at stationary, isolated figures. All was running fire and glass. A horse's wet bowels flopped out through the traces and over the paving. A hand hung from the doorway of a tram. (p. 142)

Because things have become independent doers, the darkness is personified by transferred epithet. There is a disjointedness in the piecemeal vision because it comes while the viewer is running. The details about the horse's guts and the detached hand would have made even Hemingway and Mailer jealous. But in the next paragraph I feel that White falls victim to his precious style. He simply tries too hard for original metaphors and they stand out like sore thumbs:

> The whole darkness heaving with men's tufted bodies. Men's nipples winking at the sweat which blinded them. She stripped the streets as never before running in pursuit of a ball. She trod on a face which accepted pressure. Ran. (p. 142)

One particularly objects to the words "tufted," "winking" and "stripped." They do not contribute to the dramatic atmosphere. They detract from it by stopping the urgent flow of our reading, arresting our attention by their very peculiarity. They are certainly not successful in presenting what Poppy might have seen as she fled.

And finally we come to the story's climax and the moment which Poppy will never eradicate from her memory. The voluntary self-sacrifice of the loyal old Vangelio to the insanely vengeful Turk is brilliantly achieved by White:

> And Vangelio, the old nurse, Sissy's uncle's wet-nurse. Vangelio kneeling on the cobbles offered her expression of resigned faith and goodness to the Turk. Her sweet gift of a face wrapped in its white kerchief. To the Turk's amazing knife. (p. 142)

It is this silent visual image of Vangelio at the moment of her unhesitating self-sacrifice which contrasts so painfully with all the idle chatter years later at Sissy Kamara's about sado-masochistic Greeks baring their bosoms to the knife. Vangelio's self-sacrifice also refutes Basil's cynical definition of the Greeks as nothing more elevated than peasants scratching a bare living from the stony earth. It is a memory that is evidently seared into Poppy's sub-consciousness, and the explanation as to why, ironically, she feels compelled to test her courage at the dentist's, and why her security is so threatened that she has to make jokes about paying the dentist immediately in case she should be killed when she goes out on the street. Her silly chatter is her only protection from her annihilating memory. She knows she is inadequate, and that her present existence is unworthy of the nurse's sacrifice, but this is the best she can do.

Thus the few lines which describe Vangelio's self-sacrifice unify and deepen the meaning of *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* in retrospect. Details that would otherwise have been trivial or disconnected here receive their meaning and their justification. The irony of this late revelation about Poppy's experience in Smyrna is the irony of the story's structure: we are forced to re-evaluate our attitude both to Poppy and to the merit of the story. White has succeeded in playing a rather grim joke on us at the expense of our impatient expectations of instant entertainment.

A CHEERY SOUL

The intriguing aspect of this story is not so much that White has written a moral satire attacking a Christian do-gooder, though this itself is irony enough, but that in tracing Miss Docker's expert persecution of her fellow mortals, White has varied the inclinations of his austere sympathies so often that the reader is not at all sure with whom he is meant to feel empathy, if with anyone at all. His authorial stance towards Miss Docker tends to be delicately balanced between sympathy for her loneliness, awe of her indestructability, and the preservation of ironic distance from her lack of taste, her tactlessness and her destructive energy. White preserves this balance by showing us Miss Docker through her victims' eyes and at the same time suggesting flaws in these victims that make them easy prey for Miss Docker's malicious truth-mongering and shrewd power-ploys. In fact White subjects Miss Docker's victims to a greater annihilating farce than that with which he ridicules her. And this is a cruel irony on his part, because he also accords all of Miss Docker's victims moments of very moving pathos. If it weren't for these moments of pathos, the farce would be hilarious and superficial; but alternating with the pathos as it does, the farce is puzzling and painful for the reader. It seems so coolly remote, almost inhuman of White that, for example, the deaths of Tom Lillie and the reverend Mr. Wakeman should be represented with such zany, unfeeling farce. But perhaps it is this puzzling and yet deliberate inconsistency in White's point of view that prepares the reader for the equally puzzling religious parody of the story's conclusion. For, deprived of a secure moral vantage point during the story from which we can comfortably sit in judgement on Miss Docker, in the conclusion we are deprived of a secure theological vantage point from which to judge the divine, or diabolic, retribution visited upon this murderess through charity. A more detailed analysis of the story may help to clarify these general points.

Structurally the story can be divided into a cycle of three

separate stories united by chronological sequence, by Miss Docker's constant awefulness, and by the sense of rushing towards a religious climax in the third part that forms the zenith in farce, in pathos and in surreal imagery. In the first section of the story Miss Docker torments the Custances, in the second section the inmates of Sundown House, Sarsaparilla, and in the third section the reverend Mr. Wakeman.

Mr. and Mrs. Custance resemble the many other childless, aging couples that White has represented in his stories. He even evokes a plant image to describe their marital union which is strikingly reminiscent of the glasshouse plant metaphor which he used to depict the Hajistavri in *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats*:

> They were both splotched with patches of green, both cool people. Not that this precluded passion. It meant, rather, that each needed identical, cool, greenish flesh to twine around. Their leaves opened only to silence. (p. 155)

White is much more generous here to the Custances than to the Hajistavri. Their sexual inhibitions and Mrs. Custance's timidity do not arouse White's ire because unlike Sarsaparilla's more affluent suburbanites, they have no social pretensions and Mrs. Custance is in particular humble and undemanding of life. But rather like a tragic heroine, Mrs. Custance has one slight flaw that lays her low, one slight flaw that makes her an easy catch for Miss Docker, until White decides that she has suffered sufficiently and allows her to squirm free of the hook. This flaw, ironically enough, is "her secret wish to justify herself in the eyes of God" (p. 146). That is, she commits, albeit here comically of course, the sin of *harmartia* – she wishes to "equal Miss Docker at doing good" (p. 146). And it is only when with farcical hyperbole she transforms herself into "the serpent. Or Lady Macbeth" (p. 156) that she is able to protect herself and her husband against Miss Docker's intrusion.

Miss Docker's intrusion has little to do with doing good. There is ironic discrepancy between her rhetorical use of Christian moral precepts and the truth of her behaviour. She says she will roll up her sleeves (p. 148) but in fact merely watches while the outwitted Mrs. Custance incurs a hernia while dragging her guest's furniture inside.

Similarly, when Miss Docker is clumsily arranging her intimidating furniture in their house, she breaks something. Mrs. Custance responds by falling on her knees, saying it "is nothing. Nothing of importance. A little bookshelf" (p. 149). But we know what the bookshelf meant to Mrs. Custance: it was her husband's silent gesture of support to her in her Christian wish to offer Miss Docker a home. White captures Miss Docker's slovenliness with amusing economy when he omits the scene in which she makes tea, and instead focuses on the following scene when Ted Custance returns home from work and is obliged to crunch his way across a floor of tea and sugar (p. 151).

Miss Docker is not cheery at all; she is rude, boastful, bossy, depressed and depressing beneath her thin, cracking veneer of bonhomie. Her normal mode of utterance is to shriek, and this leitmotif, in conjunction with her falsely jaunty clichés like "Yours Truly" and "Little Me," her grating, bad grammar, and her vulgar slang ("Waddayaknow!" p. 159), renders her a James Thurber woman: a "Who's sitting in the catseat" tub-thumper of especial virulence. With economy, farce, wit and understatement, White captures the essence of her method, which is to lay exclusive claim to the Christian virtues to which most of us pay lip service, and then to shame her victims into putting up with her. Revolting without her teeth at the Custance's dinner table, Miss Docker "masticated bread in virtuous lumps." "munching, breathing . . . as though to resist death by drowning" (p. 152). She then covets Mr. Custance's rumpsteak by trying to make him embarrassed that he has meat while she only has macaroni. She does this with brilliant tactics by drawing everybody's attention to the fact that she is practising the Christian virtue of resisting gluttony and asking him whether his steak is tender. And all the while Ted Custance's rage at her invasion is indicated by his total silence. And so it continues. Under the ethically unassailable guise of pouring out Christian love "on those who are unwilling to accept it" (p. 153) she destroys privacy and bullies those with too much Christian humility and meekness to defend themselves.

In section two of the story Miss Docker overwhelms the inmates of Sundown House with her mountainous collection of photos of herself and with her "avalanche of kindness" (p. 162). The old ladies are shown in a miserable huddle in a room grotesquely

known as the cement millionaire's "Chinese Tomb" because this room "was closest to the telephone, and even though it seldom rang, closeness inspired arthritic limbs with hope" (p. 170). Thus does White express with dry wit the despair of these old ladies. Miss Docker, undaunted, singles out an old acquaintance, Mrs. Lillie, to torment. By flashback to the death bed and then the funeral of Mr. Lillie, White shows the kind of role Miss Docker has been playing in Sarsaparilla. There is delicious irony when Miss Docker, who desanctifies all the mysteries of life with her grating garrulity, says of the paralysed dying man: "His speech was gone by then. But does speech make all that difference?" (p. 160). White uses the same irony when he has Miss Docker accuse a church choir conductor of being "a ball of ego" (p. 171). Miss Docker reaches a premature apogee of zany, gay brutality when she lays Mr. Lillie low in his death bed, swatting him on the nose with the Herald under the pretext of keeping off "a norrible fly" (sic) (p. 163), boasting all the while of how useful she is to him. The mad farce of the scene is weirdly poised against the pathos of Mrs. Lillie's suffering. Indeed there are several fragmentary scenes in this section where White shows with considerable pathos Mrs. Lillie recalling her vanished youthful beauty as "a cool statue, impeccable marble" (p. 164), her day dreams of her dead husband "set on a sea of amethyst music" (p. 162) as she remembers "the infinite kindness of her young, her beautiful husband, before he had grown rude to people who wanted to plan their own gardens, and the knife which stabbed her side was so agonizingly painful, her smile grew demonstrative" (p. 166). These melancholy memories constitute an effective foil to Miss Docher's buffoonery and give the story a human dimension where it would otherwise have been only an attenuated farce.

White evokes the funeral scene with wit and an unerring eye for the telling detail. Miss Docker's "advent as usual shook the fibro" (p. 165), the elderly ladies were "tottering with grief and brandy," and Mrs. Lillie's once elegant beige lips have been painted by Miss Docker into "a bow of scarlet patent leather" (p. 164). Most brilliant of all is the contrast between these two ladies in the funeral car:

> Anticipating friction with Miss Docker's steamy trunk, Mrs. Lillie's tremulous fragility quailed. Miss Docker was holding Mrs. Lillie's hands as though she feared they might fly away. (p. 165)

There comes a moment of delicious poetic revenge for the reader who has suffered in company with Miss Docker's fellow-characters, when she is left standing in the suburban scrub while the funeral cortege slides off without her. This scene very much resembles the zany, fast motion of a silent film farce, e.g. "When, just as suddenly as she had jumped out, the two men jumped back, in" (p. 167).

In section three of the story it is the self-effacing reverend Mr. Wakeman who seems to cry in anguish at Miss Docker's torture, "Are truth and goodness the knouts from which we suffer most?" (p. 161). But Miss Docker's truth is malicious and diabolic, and her overt charity, such as in mowing the vicar's lawn or knitting him balaclavas are as chaff in the scales when balanced against her bullying. Nevertheless the rector's sanctimonious, ineffectual religious sobriety is so unnatural that at times Miss Docker's aggressive stirring seems almost preferable by contrast. Certainly the rector is a farcical figure as he stands stunned, "holding his buttocks" (p. 173) or gaping horrified at Miss Docker's present, "the balaclava twitching on the cannas" out of reach (p. 175), and most of all in his inability to preach with fervour and rhetoric:

> The service in the church was quickly over. The spirit was not absent from Mr. Wakeman, but lack of words made him favour works. (p. 165)

But if the rector and his wife, who is "an upright young woman of earnest calves" (p. 172) hope to justify themselves with good deeds, like Mrs. Custance in the first section of the story, they are hopelessly defeated by the "amateur" (p. 172) Miss Docker. In any case the rector's dilemma is insoluble and his farcical pain unbearable so that it is a relief for the reader when he at one and the same time achieves an epiphany of sorts, an insight into Miss Docker's "sin of goodness" (p. 177) and "illuminated at last, . . . fell forward in a blaze of pumpkins" (p. 178). In this climactic scene, White passes from obscure religious farce and from a comparison of the dead rector with "uncooked rolls of marzipan" to a disturbing depiction of Mrs. Wakeman's quiet despair:

> The parson's wife looked out from under her only hat. She spoke very quiet and straight. She said: 'Miss Docker, you have killed my saint. Only time will show whether you have

killed my God as well.' (p. 178)

This utter lack of understanding by Miss Docker of human relationships seems to lead her through hermetic isolation to a religious self-exaltation. In what must be the best religious farce that White has ever written,[1] Miss Docker takes over the rector's faltering sermon, insisting that "I am God if I think I am" (p. 178) and inanities such as "Spray and pray! It is prayer that saves pumpkins, as every clergyman should know and preach" (p. 177). It is unclear whether or not White means us to unravel any theological sense from Miss Docker's ravings. The rector's religious attitudes seem to be that Miss Docker's "sin of goodness" is as the mildew and the blight on the pumpkin leaves, and we must accept with resignation and humility this divine testing of our faith. But Miss Docker's religious attitude is one of aggressive self-help, "spray and pray." By implication she accusingly identifies the rector's defeatism about pumpkin-blight with the sin of despair against the Holy Ghost, whereas she, Miss Docker, is protected by the ebullient faith of her prayer, as symbolized by the warm jackets that she knits (p. 178). With ludicrous theological certainty Miss Docker shouts "failure is not failure if it is sent to humble. The only failure is not to know."[2] But the hapless rector was humble enough before she pointed out his failure as a preacher, and she herself never attains true humility but only the glib imitation of expressions of this humility. Arguably, the character who does get to "know" at the moment of his death is the rector who perceives "the sin of goodness."

Perhaps the religious dispute between Mr. Wakeman and Miss Docker is solved by the latter's meeting with the "pumpkin-coloured eyes" of Bluey the dog in the final scene of the story (pp. 179–180). White's ironic distance from her is evident in the description of her as she rushes out of the church "exhaling the love she still had it in her to give," a love which has proven fatal to anyone on whom it was inflicted. White's irony is even more pronounced in her plea to the dog for "a communion of minds," when she has been totally unable to achieve this communion with any mere human. But this just raises the equally farcical and insoluble question, when the dog pees on her and she realizes that dog "is God turned round:" is this the judgement of God upon her, or just the indifference of a coincidental dog? Are his "shallow, yellow (pumpkin-coloured) eyes" the punishment of

non-communication of souls to which she is finally condemned by her brazen insensitivity? In any case it is undoubtedly poetic justice and perhaps also religious justice, that the theologically "incalculable purpose" of the wind, although it cannot lay her low because she is indestructible, can at least make her feel that her "sentence had been written by a dog" and then sweep her off the symbolically empty street.

Neither the pumpkin, nor the wind, nor the dog, nor even the very best intentions of good works, proves to be a reliable path to salvation. White has constructed an unrelenting religious farce in which no one achieves either mystic illumination or self-justification in the eyes of God, and the balance of the evidence seems to suggest that in fact we are not here by the grace of God. Or if we are, it is a God who closely resembles the lord of Kafka's castle.

BEING KIND TO TITINA

In earlier sections on *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight* and *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* we found that these stories shared a common structural movement of ironic reversal, whereby a character who until this turning point near the conclusion had seemed ineffectual or in some way a failure in life, suddenly gained new dimensions. These new dimensions convert our previous impatience with or neglect of that character to a new-found sympathy or admiration. By contrast, other characters who had until then seemed poised and in control, are now seen to lack these other dimensions, this depth, and their success in life is seen to be superficial and unimportant. This moment of ironic reversal could be interpreted as an epiphany for the reader because he is forced by it to re-examine his moral appraisal of characters. *Being Kind to Titina* is also based on this structural irony of character reversal: Titina Stavridi completely turns the tables on Dionysios, both in terms of a power struggle and also morally in demonstrating how a superior should show kindness to an inferior.

In childhood Titina had seemed to the narrator Dionysios, ugly, ludicrously overdressed, stupid, primitively superstitious, and disadvantaged in terms of class snobbism by her drunken shopkeeper father and her vulgar, crawling mother. In fact Titina was so nervous and insecure that she involuntarily piddled on her hostess' carpet. She was therefore tormented viciously by Dionysios and his upper class brothers and sisters with a logic of childhood persecution that is very similar to the ostracism and torment suffered by Clay in his Australian suburban environment. Children can be revoltingly cruel in Alexandria as well as in Sydney.[1] Another fascinating similarity between *Clay* and *Being Kind to Titina* is that Dionysios has his hair cropped to stubble just as Clay had had this imposed on him by his mother. Aunt Ourania had Dionysios' hair shorn as part of her regimen of monastic discipline, so that he and his brothers and sisters would not give themselves airs and graces to

lower class children. Mrs. Skerritt had Clay's hair cut so that he would not turn out queer, to use her phrase. Despite these similarities it is clear in White's evocations of childhood in Alexandria and Sydney why he loathes the Australian environment for being anti-cultural, xenophobic, materialistic, and unimaginative. By way of contrast, Dionysios, Aleko, Phrosso et alia, in spite of their cruelty to Titina, have the chaotic charm of children who are precociously individualistic, are casually international in their family's cultural and artistic interests, and who are blessed with an exotic background of date-palms, camels and servant-girls from Lesbos. Aleko and Phrosso in particular are as charmingly zany, eccentric and over-confident as Truman Capote's child-figures, or Jerome Salinger's equally precocious child-figures in their lighter moments. Aleko's decision to be a film-star, followed closely by his fascination with hypnotism, and Phrosso's pubescent yearning for high heels, an Italian athlete, and then a Rumanian, are the representative sparse details with which White represents the light-headed charm of growing up in Alexandria. Although the children are virtually orphaned when their mother and father casually abandon them, they are nurtured with verve and pronounced eccentricity by their rich maiden aunts. It is a mark of the sadness of passing time and the inevitability of sober disappointment in adulthood that Aleko becomes a businessman and Phrosso hunts after marriage prospects. This perhaps is the ironic reversal of fortune inflicted on them by time, but the reversal suffered by Dionysios is far greater.

We are not told much directly about Dionysios, except for the repetition of the detail that from his Aunt Ourania's point of view he is "the sensible one," "the steadiest, the kindest" (p. 187). This is ironic because he is no kinder to Titina than his more high spirited elder brother and sister. Otherwise, the only direct information we have about Dionysios is that he keeps a personally acquired insect collection (p. 187), presumably indicating that he is a loner and studious, and that he responds with love and gratitude to their family garden in Alexandria, a garden which is later to acquire structural significance as an enchanted setting contrasted with Dionysios' suffering adolescence in dusty Athens. The garden in Alexandria is also seen as a kind of Garden of Eden, protected from the outside world in all of its exotic beauty by "unbroken time" (p. 184), that is, by a smooth flowing of time that is almost equivalent

to blessed timelessness, because it is not interrupted by unforeseen, jarring events that normally jolt us into an unpleasant awareness of temporality and change. Dionysios needs no further direct characterisation, because as the narrator of the story in the first person he tells us about himself by the way he sees things. For example, he must certainly be possessed of a precocious maturity to be able to note with such irony how his father pulled out the rugs from beneath their feet before he abandoned them. Sometimes the naivity of the child-narrator emerges with happy farce in the perspectives we are offered on such characters as Aunt Ourania and Kyria Stavridi. Of Aunt Ourania, for example, we hear, "She was herself such a very good person. She read Goethe every morning, for a quarter of an hour, before her coffee" (p. 183). To take another example: our picture of Kyria Stavridi is governed by Dionysios' childhood fascination with all the gold flashing in her ingratiating smiles (p. 184), or in Dionysios' intuition of the social meaning of Aunt Ourania "holding out her hand from a distance" (p. 185) to the undesirable parvenue Kyria Stavridi. Dionysios captures the latter's agitation in the vulgar vernacular of the child by claiming that she was beginning to "steam more than ever" and that she was "bringing it out by the yard." Dionysios puts the final touches to his portrait of Kyria Stavridi by noting that she was "exceptionally broad in her behind," and that she was subsequently butted there by a goat as symbolic evidence of her lack of savoir-faire.

It is a mark of his having been driven out of the Garden of Eden, of having grown into an insecure, awkward adolescent that he becomes obsessed by the thinness of his moustache and by the fact that unlike his peers in dusty, hot Athens, he does not visit brothels, but instead as a sentimental adolescent yearns for love and moons around (p. 190), like his Australian equivalent, Clay. His descent into the tribulations of self-obsessed, apathetic adolescence is marked by a corresponding change in his narrative stance to his fellow characters. He now condescends to his two aunts as "dear" but "stuffy" and is altogether uninterested in their quarrels on "any boring political issue" such as "the Catastrophe" (p. 197). There is one hilarious incident about the Catastrophe which renders very well this difference between children and adults, and the uncomfortable inbetween position of the adolescent. In this incident Aunt Ourania is sternly philanthropic to the refugees from Anatolia, and thus redeems herself in our eyes for her earlier snobbism, but the narrator

represents the situation with these words:

> Give, give, ordained Aunt Ourania, standing with her arms full of cast-off clothes. My youngest sister Myrto burst into tears. She broke open her money-box with a hammer, and began to spend the money on ices. (p. 190)

There is an archness here in the way the narrator mock-elevates Aunt Ourania's directions to the pseudo-religious word "ordained," and also in the way he keeps us thinking until the last clause that Myrto's tears and coins are intended for refugees. Such narrative ability tends to give the lie to Aunt Ourania's belief that "Dionysios was an unexceptional but reliable boy" who should be and is sent to work as a bank clerk (p. 191). The calm with which Dionysios accepts it as "a huge joke" to do trivial tasks at the bank hints at a character who accepts the directions of life passively and with equanimity, but who keeps a good deal in reserve, as of course befits a budding narrator.

It is only the sexual pressures of adolescence and the fears of inadequacy which destroy Dionysios' calm and which bring him in the last part of the story clumsiness, then ecstasy and finally agony. His meeting with Titina is the epitome of ironic reversal. As a child he had dreaded in his snobbism to be seen with her and she had longed for him. Now he is confronted with "this cool, glittering girl" (p. 191), who, when she takes him swimming with the daring panache she has acquired as a demi-mondaine in Paris, "radiated splendour in godlike armour of nacreous scales" (p. 194). Dionysios, by contrast, feels himself to be impoverished, provincial, and ordinary. He has the honesty to admit the ironic reversal: "*I* had become the awkward thing of flesh Titina Stavridi used to be" (p. 192). But Titina does not misuse her new power, as Dionysios had done when he had tormented her as a child. In her generosity she chooses to remember falsely that he had been kind to her then. Now, in a parody of the story's title, she is kind to him with her sexual favour for which he is lusting. And in a line which quietly expresses the sadness of her wasted life, that she could not have Dionysios when she so badly needed him as a child, but only now when it is too late, she invites him to make love to her on the beach: " 'Poor Dionysaki,' she said, 'at least it is unnecessary to be afraid' " (p. 196). She is the education that Dionysios needed to make the difficult transition from adolescent to man. Glowing with new

confidence that she has given him, he can say ironically of himself,

> My head, set firmly on my neck, had surveyed oceans and continents. I had grown suave, compact, my glistening moustache had thickened, if not to the human eye. (p. 194)

He even learns enough savoir-faire from her not to make an ass of himself when she bids him farewell (p. 196). But he is nevertheless downcast indeed at this farewell, and his humiliation is complete when upon returning to his family home his newly arrived Aunt Calliope greets him all unawares with the dramatic irony of a phrase that we the readers know is behind the times: " 'Our Dionysi!' cried Aunt Calliope. 'Almost a man!' " (p. 196).

Structurally, this line from Aunt Calliope would almost certainly have provided the sharp, poignant ending that has come to be regarded as characteristic of a short story. But White follows the line up with a heated political debate on the Catastrophe which is irrelevant to this particular story, though if we are considering the Greek stories as a cycle, is perhaps relevant as farcical footnote to his various depictions of the fall of Smyrna. In *Being Kind to Titina* it is probably the function of the coda, which describes Aunt Calliope's arrival, to provide the luckless Dionysios – but not us, the readers, who already understand Titina's profession all too well – with the explicit information that Titina is a little whore in Paris (p. 197). With one last unintended irony on the title Aunt Calliope recalls how kind they had been to Titina in the old days at Alexandria. Dionysios, who has the integrity to remember more accurately, is pursued in his shame and his humiliation by these two statements as he drags himself down the corridor to his room. He is also pursued by the "sweet and sticky" music of Schumann played by his other-worldly Aunt Thalia. Such music torments him further because of its incongruous inappositeness to his double cup of bitterness. This leads to a remarkable concluding paragraph which I shall quote in full:

> Outside, the lilac-bushes were turned solid in the moonlight. The white music of that dusty night was frozen in the parks and gardens. As I leaned out of the window, and held up my throat to receive the knife, nothing happened. Only my Aunt Thalia continued playing Schumann, and I realised that my extended throat was itself a stiff sword. (p. 198)

Dionysios' emotional state is rendered here by landscape, by the Schumann, and by his paradoxical gesture with his throat. The significance of the landscape should be understood in the context of the function of landscape in the whole story. The exotic beauty and refreshment of the garden in Alexandria was evoked at the beginning of the story by the repeated motifs of "dates plopping in the damp garden below," by the "dark-green thicket of leaves" (p. 181) and by the giggling girls from Lesbos. The security of the home is expressed in the following passage:

> I believe we were at our happiest in the evenings of those days. Though somebody might open a door, threatening to dash the light from the candles on our aunt's piano, the flames soon recovered their shape. Silences were silenter. In those days, it was not uncommon to hear the sound of a camel, treading past, through the dust. There was the smell of camel on the evening air. (p. 182)

Perhaps the humour of the narrator's romance with the smell of camel is intended by White and simply draws attention to the fact that he is after all a child. The constancy of the flame of the candle is his guarantee that the security he lost when his parents walked out on them will this time be retained. Certainly the child-narrator is quite explicit at various stages of his story in telling us whether he and his family were "melancholy" (p. 181), or "at our happiest" as here, or later when the family is going its various ways in Athens, "sad" (p. 190), mainly because Dionysios is filled with an "intolerable longing for damp gardens and ficus leaves" (p. 190). He externalises his changing emotions and also his attitudes towards the different characters and to the difference between Alexandria and Athens with colour symbolism and constant references to the nature of time. In his childhood in Alexandria, his bliss is expressed in terms of a child's timeless world:

> the days continued more or less unbroken; the sun working at the street wall; the sea-water salting our skins; (p. 184)

This timelessness is destroyed by the move to Athens, of which we hear, "Time was passing, moustaches growing" (p. 190), and he is filled with a listless awareness of an unfulfilling seasonal cycle,

"Summer had come round again: the eternal, powdery, white Athenian summer" (p. 191). Dionysios is released from this apathy by the arrival of Titina, who complains that there "is always so little time" (p. 193), but who takes her leave of Dionysios a day earlier than she need have done, perhaps because the poignancy of their sexual union in contrast to her professional duties in Paris is too much for her. Nevertheless she gives Dionysios such a delight that he is able temporarily to conquer his foe, time, when he says, "at once time was our private toy" (p. 193). We see his subsequent despair in the final paragraph when he has learnt the illusory nature of his short-lived victory.

Dionysios' emotional ups and downs are also evoked through landscapes and colours. The "dark-green thicket of leaves" (p. 181) that represents Alexandria for him is lost to the "dry white merciless light" of Athens (p. 190). He is incapable of realising the different kind of beauty in the Athenian landscape until he swims with Titina "in long sweeps of silvery-blue" (p. 194); here colour is used to project his joy. He is able in his joy to persuade Titina that although the Attic pines are "stunted," "they are not stunted" (p. 195) because they constitute a landscape of "perfectly fulfilled austerity" (p. 194). His exaltation provokes White to further examples of the pathetic fallacy when he perceives that "the evening had begun to purple" (p. 195). His observations on colour are not restricted to landscape, but extended to his fellow characters. In Titina's case, these colours correspond to the ironic reversal of her new-found superiority to Dionysios. In childhood her eyes seemed to him "a shamefully stupid blue" (p. 185) and he says insultingly that "her freckly skin shone like a fish's" (p. 187); but when he sees her in later years, she has become a "goddess" with eyes "blue as only the Saronic Gulf" (p. 193), "shimmering in her gorgeous scales" (p. 194).

All of these observations on time, landscape and colour lead us back to the final paragraph. We are now accustomed to the idea of regarding these phenomena as externalisations of Dionysios' mood. The words "solid" and "frozen" in this final passage indicate despair because the flowing movement of nature and music has become static. The whiteness and the dust we have come to associate with Dionysios' dislike of the Athenian climate. In her misery he offers himself up for sacrifice because his recently attained manhood has

been so humiliated by Titina's early departure and especially by his Aunt Calliope's public statement about Titina. In the final line he realizes that the torment of life does not reach a satisfying melodramatic climax and then cease, but rather continues as his Aunt Thalia's performance of Schumann continues, and that in any case his newly acquired manhood is in spite of all an achievement and a future weapon in conflicts to come.

MISS SLATTERY AND HER DEMON LOVER

This story dispenses with all introduction and exposition and instead has a dynamic opening in the form of a comic dialogue. It is comic because of the incongruous discrepancy between what is said and what is secretly thought, and because of the phonetically exaggerated reproduction of Tibby's fractured Hungarian-Australian. It is not just Tibby's accent that is funny, but his vehemence, his incoherence and his vigorous refusal to give in to any of the polite Australianisms or any of the taboos about what is fit for conversation in a first meeting with a young lady and what is not.

The point of view in the reflections dividing up the dialogue varies from that of omniscient narrator observing ironically from a great remoteness to the more personal and urgent tone of Miss Slattery as she tries to get a foot in the door to do her farcical market research, all the while fearing that she may be murdered by this Hungarian oddity. Later, White also adds a reflection or two from Tibby Szabo's point of view, e.g. "An Australian girl, he saw. Another Australian girl" (p. 201).

The arrogance and decisiveness of Tibby in his speech contrast amusingly with Miss Slattery's private reflections on his physical appearance. Conversely, Miss Slattery's diffidence in the dialogue, her cultural ignorance and her comparative poverty contrast with the natural superiority of her youth and stature over him, who is to her mind "some old teddy bear in suède" (p. 201). And so their battle for supremacy see-saws through the lightning-swift education. Her Australian clichés count against her, but occasionally she becomes ironically superior, as in "you're a whale for knowing," and once she even parodies his European arrogance, when she says, "Oh yes, I understand all right. I am nossing" (p. 202).

Although the stylistic tone of the story is overwhelmingly farcical, White still insists on showing off his lyric sensitivity in often

irrelevant details, e.g. "evening had drenched the good address with the mellower lights of ripened pears" (p. 204) and "tne twangling of guitars broke the light into splinters. The slurp of claret stained the jokes" (p. 210). In the context of a sexual farce about a short, fat, hairy man, such aesthetic observations are uncomfortably out of place. The mood and depth with which White conveys the affair between Tibby and Miss Slattery are similarly uneven. While on the one hand, at the level of light farce, Tibby is tossing legs of offensive "lemb" into the harbour and devouring paprika-everything (p. 205), on the other hand White seems unable to resist his urge to mystify sexual love:

> Again he was fixing his eyes on her, extinct by now, but even in their dormancy they made her want to die. Or give. Or was it possible to give and live? (p. 204)

This, in the context of tubby Tibby insisting that "Austrahlian girls are visout *Temperament* ... all gickle and talk" (p. 203), is affectation. Nevertheless, there are some fine comic images in the story. For example, Tibby in his matter-of-fact ardour takes Miss Slattery's arm "as if it were, say, a cob of corn," and during intercourse she sees herself as "the trampoline queen" (p. 203). The comedy occasionally rises to epigrammatic wit. After Tibby has complained that Australians have no Witz, Miss Slattery confounds him with the following epigram:

> 'My mind,' she said, recrossing her legs, 'turned to fudge at puberty.' (p. 202)

The character contrast between Tibby and Miss Slattery, shallow though it may be, never falters, just as the insane pace of the one-lining dialogue and the satiric farce never lets up. It is not so much a question of calculating who is objectively more presentable and of balancing out their relative physiques, ages and cultural backgrounds, as it is of trying to decipher just what kind of love it is that they feel for one another, and how it develops. Confronted with Tibby's unabashed implication that he is buying her sexual favours, Miss Slattery soars awkwardly but determinedly above such crudity on her limited poetic wings:

> 'When you love someone, I mean. I mean it's sort of difficult

> to put. When you could put your head in the gas oven, and damn who's gunna pay the bill.' (p. 208)

The satire in *Miss Slattery and her Demon Lover* is not at all dictated by the bitterness which we sometimes sense when White writes of bourgeois Sarsaparilla, because here he is writing about the bohemian fringe. At their party he may satirize their intellectual pretentiousness by having them proudly call one of their sculptures "*Hypotenuse of Angst*" (p. 209), and he is more amused by their ludicrous sexual antics than impressed by their liberated behaviour, but nevertheless he seems light-heartedly generous towards them. One feels that it is their zest for life, their refusal to be inhibited by bourgeois manners that makes White sympathetic. Take for example the sentence with which the party ends:

> Everybody shoved and poured, there was a singing, a crumbling of music on the stairs. There was a hugging and a kissing in the street. Somebody had lost his pants. It was raining finely. (p. 213)

The mood here is almost that of a nostalgic memory. Even Tibby's perverted sexual masochism, and his crudity in attempting to regain Miss Slattery's sexual favours by offering her "a finenshul arrangement. Pretty substenshul" are so exuberantly presented that they evoke not distaste in the reader, but rather laughter, then sadness.

For the devoted reader of Patrick White, perhaps the chief delight of *Miss Slattery and her Demon Lover* is that it is unique among his stories for its zany farce and light-hearted satire. There is also character development in the story, however, in the sense that Miss Slattery, who is at first overwhelmed by the bumptious Tibby, gradually wins the upper hand and becomes bored by him and his inability to love "viz ze sahoul." She differentiates herself from Tibby and from her dumb, gossipy girlfriend Phyllis, by her acid wit and by her willingness to turn this wit against herself. She yearns for love, commitment, and a conventional Australian marriage but expresses this yearning with wry irony: " 'I am gunna get married,' Miss Slattery said, 'and have a washing-machine' " (p. 215). Her need to return from bohemian eccentricities to conventionality is probably prompted by the stockwhip that thus serves a

double purpose. For it is the whip that probes the masochistic chink in Tibby's armour and strips him of his bullying superiority, making him repulsive to Miss Slattery. And it is again the whip that reminds Miss Slattery of her Australian country past: "It flicked a corner of her memory, unrolling a sheet of blazing blue, carpets of dust, cattle rubbing and straining past" (p. 211). Reminded in this way of her past, she yearns to recreate the world of sexual conventionalities that she had been taught as a child. This interpretation, however, stresses the undertone of seriousness and suffering in the story, whereas the main accent lies palpably on the farce. For example, when Tibby Szabo cannot get enough of the whip and cries out "from the bottom of the pit: 'Vhy em I condemned to soffer?' " (p. 215), we laugh at his self-pitying melodramatics, especially since he has been so arrogant up until this point. Similarly, we laugh happily at everyone in this story, whether it be "the prawn-coloured people ... squelching past" on Manly Beach, the grazier dancing in his "Lesbian hat," or the "Large Person" "like a scone" so pompously and self-righteously upholding what she takes to be the Apollonian rather than the Dionysian Muse (pp. 212–13). For the axiom of this story is, as Miss Slattery tolerantly realizes towards the end of it, that "everyone is always queer" (p. 210).

THE LETTERS

Like *Clay*, this story offers a detailed description of a widowed Sarsaparilla matron seducing and rejecting her hapless son. Her bullying ways have long since rendered him unfit for the slightest challenge in life. The first third of the story is a farcical satire on Mrs. Ursula Polkinghorn taking us in time to a few days before her son Charles' fiftieth birthday. The second third of the story presents through flashback selected incidents from Charles' childhood, youth, and middle-age, again taking us up to the fiftieth birthday. The final third of the story rises through Charles' rapidly increasing terror and despair to a brief instant of tragic illumination. He then lapses into pitiful Oedipal insanity in the story's vulgar and satiric anticlimax. Let us examine each third of the story in turn.

White achieves his satire on Mrs. Ursula Polkinghorn partly through his own urbane commentary, but mainly through her dialogue with Charles and her interior monologue as she sits composing her letter to Maud. Even the name of her house, "Wishfort," is given parodying significance as White implies that she regards the house not only as her fortress ensuring her social prestige but also as her protection against time and change, aging and death. Unlike the quiet, dignified honesty with which Maud faces her impending death, Mrs. Polkinghorn is so narcissistically self-obsessed that she is merely irritated by the news of Maud's stroke. Grotesquely looking forward to outliving her own son (p. 218), she calmly accepts the fact of her husband's death and that "almost everyone had forgotten" him (p. 221). Thoughts of her own possible mortality, however, make her breath catch (p. 217). Like Evelyn Fazackerly in *A Woman's Hand*, she is not capable of spontaneity and love in her relationships, but only of artifice and childish vanity. Her interior monologue alternates ironically with the paragraph of the letter she is writing to Maud. Secretly she finds "dowdy, simple Maud" (p. 219) "so loyal, if so colourless" (p. 217), but she gushes with a sympathy born of fluent insincerity in her letter. Moreover

her letter is devoted to naive boasting about her flowers in what she so modestly terms "the Great Eastern shrubbery" (p. 223) and even more to boasting about the ingenious ways she has devised to torment Charles under the guise of helping him. Mrs. Polkinghorn is determined to control her environment totally:

> She was glad of Norman's lawn-mower. With only a little collaboration from her mind, the blast from the machine could destroy almost all other noises, sensations, presences. (p. 220)

What doesn't accord with her dogmatic view of things is rooted out of her consciousness, rendering her secure from all change and influence, impervious to the spontaneity and chaos of living life. Mrs. Polkinghorn has the same narrow-mindedness, energy and fear of life with which Mrs. Mortlock in *Dead Roses* "*ordered* her life – dared it perhaps, in any case kept a firm hand on any of the loose bits which might fly out and hit her in the eye" (p. 46). These "loose bits" are in White's implied view the essence of life, events which come to the Mrs. Polkinghorns of his stories unexpectedly only because their comprehension is so pitifully limited. When, for example, Charles surprises his mother by seeming to act out of character, White comments satirically with mock-elevation of language:

> She always experienced a little pang to discover afresh that the wells of human nature were deeper than she was able to plumb. (p. 221)

White underlines Mrs. Polkinghorn's lack of comprehension in the final sentence of the first third of the story. She discovers that Charles has been shoving letters unopened into a box, and there is mystery and tension as well as satire on her limitedness when White comments, "At that point she began to dread something she might not be capable of understanding" (p. 223). Apart from this concluding sentence, however, the mood of the first section is farcical and satirical. White gleefully lets Mrs. Polkinghorn make an ass of herself with her own words. Her life is based on the lie she repeats to herself that she "did, did love darling Dickie" (p. 221 & p. 222), when of course she has only ever loved herself. But White achieves the happiest moments of his farce in such strokes as "Oh,

but Mrs. Polkinghorn had *prayed* for humility" (p. 219). An unsuccessful prayer judging by the way she practises faces in the mirror as she writes! As is common with White, some of the best farce is also the most vulgar. For example, Mrs. Polkinghorn writes of Charles, "There is nothing one can *put one's finger on* . . ." and then wonders "whether that looked vulgar. She was sorry she had underlined it" (p. 218). With the tension here between her absurd letter style and her interior monologue, White parodies her style and pokes fun at her puritanical inhibitions.

As is customary with White's characterisation, *The Letters* features stark contrast. In the third and final section of the story, the contrast between Mrs. Polkinghorn and Aunt Maud becomes the focal point for Charles' epiphany. He has a tragic insight into the inevitability of the suffering of all three of them which brings about his final breakdown. White is also able to suggest and summarize the contrast between mother and son by attaching symbolic value to the details of their physical appearance. Charles is seen through the eyes of his mother, in *style indirect libre*, thus:

> Was this her son? This bunch of twigs she held in her hands? She could almost have snapped the brittle stuff. (p. 231)

This echoes the earlier characterisation of Charles' step as that of "brittle bones, so unlike his father, whose movements had always been attended by a squelch" (p. 222). Charles is too fragile for the battle of life, whereas the deceased Dickie's "squelch" suggests a complacent, corpulent presence, probably one of the "many congested, jolly, tweedy men" (p. 222) who flirted with Ursula Polkinghorn. Her frigidity is expressed by her cheek, which "had the taste of icy water" (p. 228), and when White refers to the "blue blaze" of her eyes, he is of course not being complimentary at all. On the contrary. For in White's essay, *The Prodigal Son*, we read of White's loathing of the "Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, . . . in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes . . ."[1] Domineering, vain, insincere and frigid, Mrs. Polkinghorn is insensitive and stupid as well.

In the flashbacks to childhood and youth that are used to

characterise Charles, it is inescapable that Charles' schooling and university education (pp. 224–25) bear close resemblance to White's own academic studies at Cranbrook and Cambridge. Similarly, when Mrs. Polkinghorn pushes Charles into an apprenticeship as a junior director at the family factory, we are reminded of White being pushed by his family into an equally inappropriate apprenticeship as a jackaroo on sheep stations in the Snowy Mountains and Walgett. These parallels may in turn suggest an autobiographical reason why White has created a whole series of loathsome mothers in his stories. Mrs. Scudamore in *Dead Roses*, Mrs. Skerritt in *Clay*, Mrs. Hogben in *Down at the Dump*, Mrs. Bannister in *The Night the Prowler*, Mrs. Goodenough in *The Cockatoos*, and Mrs. Polkinghorn in *The Letters*, all bully their children unmercifully into submission, and prevent them from attaining any independence or initiative. Felicity Bannister is really the only child who successfully fights this domination.

Like so many of White's central figures in these stories, Charles is pitiful, irritating and boring, rather than likable. Because the reader is given little chance to identify with many of these main characters, White makes his artistic task of retaining our interest that much more difficult for himself. But this is an intentional part of White's artistic credo. As he puts it in *The Prodigal Son*, "Even the boredom and frustration presented avenues for endless exploration" and "I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and poetry, which alone could make bearable the lives of such people."[2] The mystery of Charles' life is not uncovered until the third part of the story, and then it is not solacing but tragic and leads to his collapse into infantile regression. Until then, we see Charles as a nervous narcissist: oversensitive, a failure everywhere except academia and ultimately a mediocrity even there. His loathing of his mother is presented farcically through his monosyllabic retorts to her incessant interfering. Seeing that he is hen-pecked, it is equally farcical that he reads "Rearing of Fowls on the Free Range System" (p. 219). Structurally, White holds these isolated incidents in the flashback together with recurrent leitmotifs. These leitmotifs also function as foreshadowing devices. For example, in the story's present, Charles tries to make polite conversation with the gardener by asking whether the lawn-mower's breakdown is due to a faulty "cog" (p. 223).We do not realise until a later flashback to Charles' workdays at the family factory that the

word "cog" represents a trauma for Charles. In his insanity and paranoia (e.g. "He began, worse, to suspect the machinery" p. 227) he is easily crushed by an overheard joke at his own expense which expresses his usefulness to the firm as that of an unnecessary "extra cog" (p. 227). In another flashback we see him as a child at a circus with Auntie Maud. He is so terrified of the clowns' horseplay that he hides his face in her breasts (p. 224). This seems harmless enough at the time, but it is a foreshadowing of Charles' tragic fall into insanity at the end of the story when as a fifty year old man he nuzzles compulsively at his horrified mother's breasts. This grotesque ending is also prepared for by a single line that Charles remembers from his Romance studies at Cambridge: "*De l'amour j'ai toutes les fureurs*" (p. 227), a quotation from the anguished Phèdre in the play of the same name by Racine. Charles has seemed so sexually dead to us that this line by its startling contrast brings home to us the intensity of his sexual suffering and the tenuousness of his sexual repression.

Before this grotesque ending, the story rises from the farcical-satirical beginning to a brief moment of tragic insight. This moment is achieved, as befits the title, by the contrasts between various letters: The two absurd letters of his mother, the two brief extracts from Charles' business mail, Charles' flashback to his childhood and his mother's traumatic reprimand of him for having opened her private mail, and finally the spiritual beauty of Aunt Maud's letter to him on his fiftieth birthday. Mrs. Polkinghorn's epistolary style, upon which much of the story's farce depends, shows how she masks her malice and her interfering bossiness with insincere clichés such as "we must bear our crosses" (p. 218), "towers of strength," "always the Firm to consider" (p. 225). Charles finally opens his business mail and the letter from Aunt Maud on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday. On this day Mrs. Polkinghorn's will to life is symbolised by her descending to the garden "to sever the heads of roses" (p. 228). This is contrasted with Charles' excessive fear of life which under the tension of his fiftieth birthday explodes into delusions of persecution and a nervous collapse into full paranoia. Charles' terror of some nameless external threat causes him to close the windows to shut it out, but just as in Kafka's *The Burrow*, the menacing "thumping" and pulsating which he fears is in ironic fact his own heartbeat (p. 228), which of course he "could not shut out" (p. 231). His *angst* comes from within himself, not without. Charles' collapse is depicted by White with

humour, with tragic intensity, with horror, and finally with a grotesque twist to the classical myth of Oedipus. The onset of the collapse is caused by Charles' need to escape, to liberate himself from his mother. Instead he manages only a feeble substitute, "to liberate" "the sealed letters (which) might breed the dangers he sought to escape, secrets stirring, gases expanding, poisons maturing" (pp. 228–29). In this context of Charles' fomenting terror, a quite ordinary brochure for a rotary mower assumes demonic proportions, threatening to become the reaper whose name is death. This is a very astute use of montage by White and he enriches it by describing Charles' reaction to the brochure with the surrealism of comic hyperbole:

> Charles Polkinghorn recoiled. Almost mown by the wind the machine made in passing, he kept his balance with difficulty. Once, he remembered to have read, a blade had become detached, and embedded itself in a human eye. (p. 229)

This is both funny, and with the aid of Charles' interior monologue, horrifying. White continues his parody of the myth of Pandora's box by having Charles open another letter. Once again, by delivering a letter into a context of wild-eyed terror, White transforms a pedestrian business communication ("*your supply may be disconnected without further warning*" p. 229) into a hilarious death threat. But White has no intention of allowing us to view Charles' breakdown with the comfort of comic detachment, for he then quotes Aunt Maud's letter in full. This letter constitutes the tragic climax of the story. It expresses Aunt Maud's self-effacing kindness, her humility and altruism in the face of her own death, and an appeal to the consolation of a spiritual community. Charles' reaction to this letter is to achieve a brief moment of understanding, a tragic epiphany which White, typically, constructs on the basis of a pun. Aunt Maud's surname is Bles, and Charles cries out "Blessés! The two – or was it the three of them?" (p. 230). Charles has a flash of insight here into the inevitability of suffering, and with the generosity born of religious understanding he includes his hated mother in his vision. All three are wounded, and in a way perceptible only to those who lean to mysticism, blessed in these wounds because they have brought understanding. But this anguished cry *de profundis*, this moment of clarity, yields quickly to a rising crescendo of comic *angst* and horrifying paranoia, culminating in

this image:

> As for Charles Polkinghorn, the walls had started screeching. When she (Mrs. Polkinghorn) bore down on him, her face had become a circular saw, teeth whirling, eyes blurred into the steel disk. (p. 231)

The image of the gardener's lawnmower at the beginning of the story has risen through the advertising brochure for an industrial rotary mower to this surreal nightmare of terror. Now in his breakdown a repressed memory escapes from its guarded cell deep in his subconsciousness: it is the psychological key to his obsession with letters and to his ineffectual love-hatred for his mother. Word perfectly he can recall his mother scolding him as a child for opening her letters and his aching love for her is confirmed by a Freudian slip where he renders instead of her reprimand to remember, "remumber" (p. 231). From this delayed revelation that explains the whole story in retrospect, it seems only a short step to White's farcical parody of the Oedipus myth in the concluding lines ("She was holding his head against her brooch. Sapphires were threatening to gouge his eye" p. 232). In this parody the domineering mother is grotesquely fulfilled when she finally succeeds in reducing her son to a dependent baby nuzzling at her breasts, searching in vain for the dark security of the womb. But it is poetic justice that her conventional sense of niceness makes her horrified, not at her grim triumph over her son in having finally bullied him into a cretinous suckling, but at the physical fact of his sucking. White's language for this concluding farce is deliberately vulgar ("If Charles had been less involved, he might have heard the pennies drop" p. 232) and it is the story's ultimate irony that Mrs. Polkinghorn never becomes aware of her own unnatural behaviour, but instead, trapped in her blindness, laments with plaintive righteousness, "How did she deserve? Ever! Her beastly, her unnatural child!" (p. 232).

THE WOMAN WHO WASN'T ALLOWED TO KEEP CATS

This lengthy story affords a complex analysis of two marriages and two cultures, contrasting the American and the Greek life-styles. Rather than expanding into a full-scale novel, it remained a novella because White concentrates on a crucial confrontation between the two couples in which their differences emerge in intense form. The work is constructed around the simple contrast between the first and second visits of the Hajistravi to Greece, and around the vital turning-point in the lives of the Alexious that transpires in between these two visits. Further thematic integration is achieved by the fact that the characters work through conflict towards definition of two overriding issues: what is the essential meaning of being a Greek, and of being a cat, and how are the two issues related to each other and to the efforts of the Alexious to develop their individual and their combined selves to full potential?

White's depiction of the American qualities of the Hajistravi, and in particular of Maro, does not differ significantly from his depiction of Australian middle-class suburbanites. Maro's deficiencies emerge by contrast with the essentially Greek and feline Kikitsa. As with Poppy and Sissy in *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's*, as also with Evelyn and Nesta in *A Woman's Hand*, there is more than a hint of these women having tendencies towards lesbian love for one another in childhood. It is a mark of Poppy's, Evelyn's, and Maro's inhibitions and fears of sexual arousal that they resist the memory of this sexual affection, although unsuccessfully, and that Poppy and Maro still feel attraction to and awe of their more assertive, more theatrical, more talented friends. Maro's repression of her love for the dominating Kikitsa is expressed through the leitmotif of the peak Hymettus (pp. 237, 241, 244–45, 259, 265, 274). We learn in progressive references that the "sharp edge of Hymettus" is "a wound somewhere in Mrs. Hajistavri's mind" (p. 238), that it is "unavoidable," containing something of her. Then we learn that Hymettus was the scene of Kikitsa kissing Maro with

quick feline passion in the heather (p. 266). In this flashback White evokes this feline passion of Kikitsa "as a scurry of bronze, of furred light, and the crackle of dried heather twigs" (p. 266). It is the scent of the heather on Mt. Hymettus that has tormented Maro's repressed memory ever since. She had subsequently married Spiro in America, not for reasons of sexual attraction, but because he offered her financial security and protection from life: in his very first meeting with her he symbolically feeds her like a dependent baby, spoonful by spoonful. White goes further with his exploration of lesbian love. By deliberately confusing the time levels in the flashback to that scene on Mt. Hymettus, he implies that Kikitsa has revived her youthful love for Maro, has kissed her again in middle age, and that Maro has surprisingly responded by biting Kikitsa in her ardour. This fact in itself is not so important as the following sentence: "Mrs. Hajistavrou had never been so horrified. While drawn to the beads of crimson blood in the golden down of Kyria Alexiou's arm" (p. 266). While fearing her instincts, she is even more afraid her desire "might flow out of her frightened eyes in identifiably sensuous waves" (p. 268), proclaiming her forbidden passion aloud for all and sundry to hear and chatter about.

From then on the two women do not see each other. Kikitsa knows that she and Maro "have given each other all we had to give" (p. 268). Kikitsa herself has been rejuvenated. Although she had failed in her attempt to possess her cats, she now achieves self-fulfilment in her erotic overtures to Maro by demonstrating that she has incorporated feline qualities of passion within herself. She is then able to find bliss by inspiring tomcatlike aggression in her formerly lazy, comically tired husband. In a farcical modulation of an earlier leitmotif, she becomes one of those who "find the cat that suits them" (p. 273). But poor Maro is unable to find such a tomcat; her husband is her protector whose lower class lack of savoir-faire embarrasses her, and unlike Kikitsa she is unable to metamorphose into a feline prowler because of her inhibitions and her hostility to spontaneous animality. So she is unable to respond to the divine revelation of "Hymettus" at "the hour of gold" (p. 274). "Only the goddess was absent" from the Parthenon because Maro had locked herself up tightly against the aura of Greece. She fears that its ecstasy could "disintegrate" (p. 274) the precarious neurotic security she has constructed for herself in the U.S.A. As Anthea Scudamore learns in *Dead Roses*, her riches and her impeccable

clothing are inadequate defences against the seductive sensuality that White identifies with Greece. Like Anthea, Maro runs away in hysteria, "panting like a stringy fowl" (p. 267).

Maro's husband, Spiro Hajistavros, is altogether a lesser figure in the story. He is satirized by White as a simple, masculine man who is satisfied with his toys, his Hasselblad camera and his second Cadillac. He is seen mainly through the eyes of Maro and his function in the story is to illustrate aspects of her character. She feels snobbish shame at having married "a common Peloponnesian *restaurateur*" (p. 235) and White attributes a similar motivation to her marriage as he accorded to Anthea Scudamore in marrying Mr. Mortlock, namely an undignified regression from responsible adulthood into "childlike trust" (p. 237). In a most brilliant image White epigrammatizes their marriage as being one of hothouse security from the elements:

> In their progress through a series of increasingly desirable apartments the Hajistavri had grown together like two luxurious indoor plants. Different in habit and variety, they relied upon each other for support; he for the thorny traditions of her class which she brought to bear on daily life, she for the succulence on which her parasitic nature fed. (p. 234)

Neither Maro nor Spiro are allowed any development in the story. White's authorial sympathies tend more towards the Greek couple, a development towards an ideal of humorously tinged bliss. Actually, the confines of the novella are such that this development amounts to abrupt, miraculous transformations. From the beginning Aleko's relationship with Kikitsa is presented as light-hearted farce. Aleko is a "crumbly genius" (p. 258) who is the comic epitome of amiable laziness disguised as weariness. Even more farcical is Kikitsa's slavish religious ritual of deference to Aleko's pretence of thinking when he is in fact sleeping (pp. 241–42). None of the four characters escapes White's urbane ironies and dry witticisms. Of Aleko we hear, "For naturally Alexiou was a member of the Party. How, otherwise, could he have claimed to be an intellectual?" (p. 246). White extends his irony here to imperial Russian communism – Aleko's indoctrination in Russia is referred to as "the Official Visit" from which he returns complete with fountain pen and astrakhan cap (p. 247)! – and to Greek political euphemisms which

term Aleko's imprisonment "his forced absence on the Island" and which refer to communist revolution "comfortingly" as a "metamorphosis" (p. 247). White torpedoes the hapless Aleko's pretensions with a devastating salvo: when Aleko feels so much at home in Spiro's second Cadillac, White comments with ironic pretence of sympathy, "After all, he had been born to ease, even if greatness, poverty, and the Party had ended by taking possession of him" (p. 252). By this stage of the story we have been led to believe by the author that Aleko is just as much a static caricature as Spiro. But there is one dynamic factor we have overlooked, and that is the depths of Aleko's embarrassed exasperation with the crazy antics of his garrulous wife. White captures this exasperation with a startlingly original simile drawn from physical experience: "Then Alexious drew in his breath from so far it sounded like an aluminium tape-measure" (p. 257).

On the occasion when Aleko's rage reaches its peak, we are treated by White to a climactic representation of all four characters in a cacaphony of multilogue and ignored poses. Kikitsa is gabbling about her cats like a maniac. Spiro is trying desperately to gain confidence against these intellectual Alexious by impressing them with his Hasselblad. Maro is worshipping her husband as foolishly as Kikitsa had earlier worshipped Aleko's tiredness (" 'All his work is in Ektachrome,' Maro whispered" p. 256). And Aleko is posing grandiosely:

> Aleko Alexiou was staring out to sea. He had allowed wind and sunlight to prepare his head for sacrifice.
> 'Take nature,' Alexiou said.
> His hand was helping him extract, or mould, a painfully refractory object.
> 'Nature is so – so – *un*co-*op*erative, ultimately so *unreal*!'
> Then his hand fell, and with it his failure . . . (p. 256)

One would have thought that White's comic deflation of such portentous nonsense proved Alexiou's intellectual failure once and for all. But here the irony of the story's structure begins to operate.

The Hajistavri come back to Greece for a second visit two years later. By now they feel happily superior in their wealth to their memories of Aleko the intellectual whom they had both feared. But

pride goes before a fall, and the Hajistavri are overwhelmed by a series of metamorphoses in Aleko and Kikitsa that soon have them scuttling back to the security of America in cowed defeat. Aleko has aroused himself from his lethargy by becoming a commercially successful author. He has forbidden Kikitsa her cats. Kikitsa is grown svelte and catlike herself; she no longer chatters and shrieks. Together they have a luxurious new apartment. The title of Aleko's work unleashes a series of ironies: it is *Sacrifices to Independence*. It becomes clear that Aleko has sacrificed his communist ideals in order to write popular pot-boilers and thus attain elegant affluence. Kikitsa has sacrificed her cat-worship and her rollicking ease to this elegance. But with the irony of the unforeseen, Kikitsa develops through the suffering of her loss; in an explicit reference to the title of this cycle of stories she becomes a "poor burnt one" (p. 263). When White becomes over explicit in terming a white cat being serviced by an orange tom as "the poor burnt one" (p. 264), Kikitsa assumes a feline identity. It is difficult for the reader to accept such pathos in connection with Kikitsa because she has been presented as such a plump buffoon until now.

Altogether the characterisation of Kikitsa is complex and uneven. We are introduced to her by her letters to Maro which White parodies as those of an amusing but precious aesthete (p. 256); her physical appearance is either sordid, e.g. "a fat woman, in middle age, and a mackintosh with a grease mark on it" (p. 254), or farcical, e.g. "Marble had powdered her broad behind" (p. 257), and is redeemed only paradoxically by her "golden," "reckless" eyes. The "complete beatitude" (p. 242) that she finds in her subservience to Aleko's bogus intellectuality and her maniac love of life and cats make us feel that we are not meant to take her seriously, but just to enjoy her vivacity. Certainly White's farcical view of her in the first half of the story is much more tolerant than the malice and bitterness one tends to sense in his satire of Maro. There is nevertheless potential for pathos in Kikitsa when she so consistently fails to possess either her cats or her husband who, when he falls asleep, "would extricate himself from the cat's cradle of anatomy to which he had been subjected" (p. 248). Occasionally Kikitsa makes passionate declamations about Greece, e.g. "our rundown, dilapidated, little, cosmic mess!" (p. 252) which remind us of Sissy Kamara in full tasteless swing, or mysterious epigrams which may or may not mean something, e.g. "To *love* is unimportant in itself.

Understanding is what really matters" (p. 245) and "you must experiment ... until you have found the cat that suits you" (p. 251). This last epigram is given specific meaning in the second half of the story when Kikitsa finally achieves the miraculous metamorphosis into a cat that has been foreshadowed as her ultimate aim by the descriptions of her "prowling" and "pouncing" (p. 261). Her husband's new-found energy transforms him into a tomcat that suits her sexually (p. 273). White projects paradoxical meaning into the farce and the surreal metamorphosis of Kikitsa into a cat, as is shown in two separate but parallel episodes at the conclusion of the novella.

These two episodes are a fitting culmination to the story in that they integrate the two overriding themes of what it means to be a Greek and what it means to be feline. Let us therefore first examine the definitions of the terms Greek and feline that clutter the story. The Hajistavri are "oiled ... meticulously serviced, American machines" (p. 244), whereas the genuinely Greek Alexious are "buttered Athenian pastry-cases" (p. 244). Americans (read Australians?) try to be socially correct in their manners, are punctilious and over-organized, and are addicted to expensive gadgetry which White insists is a substitute for human involvement in personal relationships.

White's characters offer various definitions of Greek national character. In *A Glass of Tea* Malliakas sees his Greek personality in his "inner life and a certain soft elegance" (p. 82), which he opposes to Swiss (read American?) efficiency. Sissy Kamara is hysterically and unconvincingly intent on defining Greek in terms of suffering sado-masochism. Aunt Ourania in *Being Kind to Titina* continues in Sissy's vein by claiming "that when blood flows our poor Greece is regenerated" (p. 197). It is more convincing when Aunt Calliope in the same story attributes the massacre of the Greeks at Smyrna to "public apathy in one of the most backward countries in the world" (p. 197). Against such accusations, we must presumably balance Dionysios' blissful childhood as a Greek in exotic Alexandria. In *Fête Galante* it is suggested as a significant theme that if you scratch a Christian Greek, you will find a pagan. If one disregards in these claims the myth of heroism and regeneration, there are perhaps two connecting threads in these definitions, namely technological primitivity and relaxed self-gratification. These threads are taken up

and woven more intricately in *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats*. Greece has "a gentle timeless melancholy" (p. 243) that induces a sleepy benevolence. In Greece "a tormented soul" may be "temporarily blessed" (p. 244) and thus escape from the fastidiousness and efficiency demanded of the unfortunate inhabitants of advanced nations. Instead in Greece people are invited to devote themselves to their souls and to their animal senses. Kikitsa, however, feels a strong need to modify this ideal perjoratively:

> 'The trouble with Greeks,' she bemoaned, 'they are not cat-lovers. They are themselves too egotistical, quarrelsome, lazy, and gluttonous to understand the force of love. That love is something more than pouncing in the dark, or waiting to be pounced on.' (p. 257)

But Kikitsa is motivated to this diatribe by sour grapes. She has been unsuccessful in her attempts to possess her cats and her husband with her so-called understanding love. At the end of the story she is herself transformed into a cat and experiences an ecstasy in love as an exhilarating mixture of ardour and playfulness. "Even the cats are Greek" (p. 263), she says to herself in a parody of her own ecstasy. Yet Kikitsa suffers in her emotional transformation from cat-lover to cat. The transition occurs when she offers a kiss with her little cat's tongue in lesbian seduction of Maro (p. 266). Maro is unable to face up to the fact that she is drunk with passion. Shrinking back in shame, she renders herself incapable of enjoying sensual ecstasy. So she flees from Greece to her migraine pills and her dead rubber tree in America because she is fleeing from honesty with herself.

The two parallel episodes at the conclusion of the novella bring to a head the contrast between Kikitsa who becomes increasingly Greek and feline, and Maro who denies both qualities. In the first episode the Alexious are dawdling through the village countryside when they are confronted with the Hajistavri in their Cadillac. The couples have not seen each other since Maro fled in shame at her own passionate response to Kikitsa's lesbian embrace. White slants the point of view in this scene to idealise the Alexious and to satirise the Hajistavri. The Alexious are sensually drunk on the scent of the flowers and are welcomed by the caressing calls of the aged villagers. Their very aimlessness and their relaxed happiness ensure their

harmony with the timelessness of Greece. The Hajistavri on the other hand huddle in their Cadillac worrying about the delicate etiquette of the occasion. But it is precisely the inadequacy of etiquette here which is making the Alexious laugh (p. 270). The luxury car cuts the Hajistavri off from the seduction of Greece without compensating them sufficiently for their fear of their own insufficiency. Their car in its awkward, futile movements is an incongruous invasion of Greece just like the aeroplane cavorting above, writing in vapour "advertising NESCAFE for Greeks" (p. 270). The Hajistavri attempt to reject their secret admiration for the Alexious' life-style, but become bogged down in envy and self-doubt.

The episode which concludes the novella and which parallels the above episode also involves etiquette. Sandwiched between the two is the partly lyric, partly farcical transformation of the Alexious into cats mating. To recapitulate, this scene is the real climax of the story, rendering the last episode where the Hajistavri debate how to take leave of the Alexious according to the rules of etiquette, satirically anti-climactic. Spiro at least has the initiative to overcome this etiquette and ascertain that the reason that the Alexious won't answer the door-bell is that they are having sex. It is on Maro that White's anti-puritan satire focuses. Maro commits the self-contradiction of prurience. She pretends to despise the Alexious as animals with no self-control and then wonders why her husband has never behaved in spontaneous animal fashion to her. As we have noted in other stories, this mockery of puritanism is one of White's favourite themes.

Stylistically, White is typically ambitious for lyric originality in his sensitive evocation of landscape and in his varying shades of light and mood. The image of the Hajistavri as two glasshouse plants and the development of Hymettus as a leitmotif holding the key to Maro's love-hatred for Kikitsa are both very successful. Sometimes, however, White seems to become awkwardly tangled in his own metaphors. For example, when Aleko awakes on the terrace and White wants to indicate his control over Kikitsa, we read:

> Something rose, something loomed.
> At once its controlling strings whirled into action the melting masses of Kikitsa Alexiou's waxlike flesh. (p. 242)

This conjures up a peculiarly mixed visual image. The picture of Kikitsa as a marionette is appropriate enough, but then one gains an awkward notion of the strings cutting into the melting wax of her figure. If the wax is melting, how then can it also be whirling into action? The imagery is too rich. Sometimes White's images are inventive and memorable, as in "nostalgia grated . . . like a withered olive" (p. 253), or "her moist skin would lap at his" (p. 248), or "winter sunshine flowered . . . and fluttered to earth" (p. 261), or seeing the cat's tail as "lollop and twitch" (p. 240). But at other times his images seem to become just a little too clever, as in "Autumn hung a swag of gold from the poles of the horizon" (p. 253), which seems artificial and forced, or irritatingly precious, as in "mullets' heads, in death still exquisitely coralline" (p. 264) and "darkness chafed the skin with a roughness of bark" (p. 272). Such compulsive play with exquisite over-sensitivity does not really further the main goals of the novella as I have attempted to analyse them. In the final analysis it is White's sense of humour that rescues the work from both preciousness and the unsubtlety of anti-puritan polemics.

DOWN AT THE DUMP

With its linguistic emphasis on the drab flatness and ugliness of some Australian slang,[1] and with its satiric focus on the viciously conformist respectability and petty snobbism of Sarsaparilla's lower middle class, *Down at the Dump* presents a surface that is trivial and distasteful. But this story, perhaps more than any other story of White's illustrates his artistic gospel of finding the mystery and the redeeming love beneath this surface.[2]

Structurally the story is a fugal counterpoint contrasting two families and two journeys, and introducing further voices, all ultimately to give their various points of view on the story's main character who does not emerge in her own right until she is resurrected after her burial at the Sarsaparilla cemetery and adjacent dump. The fugue of conflicting points of view is enriched more and more as the story goes on by the interior monologue of the dead outcast, Ossie Coogan, and by the increasing emergence of Meg Hogben and Lummy Whalley as individual voices in revolt against the faults of their respective parents.[3]

The two counterpointed families are the Hogbens in all their loveless bigotry and petit bourgeois ambition for prestige, and the Whalleys across the road, who may be crude, slovenly, and quarrelsome, but whose rotting stumps of black teeth are redeemed by their golden-skinned freedom from petit bourgeois convention. The contrast between these families is strongly reminiscent of the theme in White's play, *Season at Sarsaparilla*, where the socially unacceptable nightsoil carter, Ernie, and his sexually indulgent wife, Nola, are differentiated from their neighbours, the Pogsons, who prefer to repress animal sexuality and substitute a yearning for a new vinyl lounge suite. *Season at Sarsaparilla* and *Down at the Dump* are also similar in that both works feature an outsider, Ron in the play, and Daise in the story, who refuses to be shackled by the suburban chains of niceness and mindless reproduction. Both works also,

incidentally, have as a sub-theme the corruption of shire councillors. The domestic settings of the Hogbens and the Whalleys are symbolically representative of their differences in way of life. The Hogbens have staked the spiritual meaning of their lives on acquiring through hard work and corruption a septic, a washing machine, and plaster pixies in the garden with plastic hoods on for the rain. The Whalleys' home looks like the Sarsaparilla dump in miniature. White evidently feels the aesthetic superiority of this miniature dump and gives it his stylistic blessing thus:

> The sunlight fell yellow on the grey masses of the unmade beds, turned the fluff in the corners of the rooms to gold. (p. 278)

The Whalleys are making a professional journey to the dump where they will mix pleasure with business by drinking some ice-cold beer; the Hogbens are making a journey of distasteful duty to the contiguous cemetery to bury Mrs. Hogben's sister. They are melancholy, not because Daise is dead, but in case their precarious social prestige is damaged by the wrong sort of person coming to the funeral service. It would seem that the Whalleys and the Hogbens have different goals for their journeys, but these goals are united, unknown to them, by the common theme of resurrection through love.

The satiric perspective on Les and Myrtle Hogben is uniform and unrelieved. Councillors Les Hogben and Horrie Last are, for example, allowed to convict themselves of real estate corruption, when Horrie rationalizes that the term "Green Belt" implies flexibility (p. 286). Beneath their public respectability they have both privately lusted after Daise. Les in particular is a resentful, rejected lover of his sister-in-law, and he doesn't even have the courage to admit to himself that he had pressed up suggestively against her in the hallway. Once again, he is allowed to convict himself with his own words, "Had he pressed? Not all that much, not intentional, anyway" (p. 285).

We are introduced to Myrtle Hogben with two sentences that are both representative in their own way of White's techniques of characterisation. They are: "Mrs. Hogben's face wore all that people expect of the bereaved" and "I bet Daise stuck in 'er fuckun' guts"

(p. 279). In the first sentence White allows himself a direct comment as author on Mrs. Hogben. With wit and elegant irony he draws our attention to Mrs. Hogben's calculating insincerity. Brief sentences such as this one are clues to White's overriding point of view. The second of the two above-quoted sentences, in Isba's crude slang, is typical of White's method of characterising figures by having other characters sit in judgement on them. This creates a complex and very realistic network of limited opinions, through which the reader must sift as in real life for a balanced truth, or if possible, for the author's overriding viewpoint. For example, Daise Morrow's character is created almost exclusively by a jigsaw of memories and interior monologue flashbacks of the other characters, all of whom are hostile to her, with the exception of Meg Hogben and Ossie Coogan.

The Whalley and the Hogben families emerge as differentiated units not just from what they say and do in the isolation of their respective homes, but from what they say about one another. Isba Whalley is as contemptuous of Myrtle Hogben as the latter is of her. Isba is derided by Myrtle for being drunk, slovenly, and vulgarly lower class. Myrtle is derided by Isba for being snobbish, pretentious, priggish and bigoted. Hence in the above first-quoted statement about Daise, Isba is speculating, correctly, that Myrtle resented her sister Daise for being sexually non-conformist and also for not maintaining the bourgeois dignity of the family name by saving up for a "liver-coloured brick home" and a "cream Holden Special" (pp. 283–84). Instead, Daise, like that other mystic seer of White's, Clem Dowson in *A Woman's Hand*, lives in a "poky little hutch" (p. 283) in ramshackle, friendly ease.

Characterisation in *Down at the Dump* abounds in the use of contrast for livelier profiles. For Myrtle Hogben it is of vital importance to distinguish Anglicans from "Methoes and Protestants" and the mere thought of a Roman Catholic makes her shudder. But her sister Daise finds the Christian sects irrelevant and implies to Ossie that her religion is "to love what we are given to love." The customary dichotomy of White's authorial stance is clear in this story. As in his other stories, he satirizes the sexually frigid, bigoted, class-climbing pursuers of respectability and of symbols of affluence. By contrast, he sympathises, although often ironically, with the alkies, the failures, the non-conformists, the carefree sensualists and the artistic. In keeping with his thematic dichotomy

White is remorselessly negative about the Hogbens. In keeping with his ironic vision he is whimsically sympathetic towards the Whalleys and "that old scabby deadbeat Ossie" (p. 285). White is wittily indulgent of Wal Whalley's need for a Customline, which "would slither with ease . . . and snooze outside the Northern Hotel" (p. 283), and is equally witty about Wal's chosen profession:

> But no one had an eye like Wal for the things a person needs: dead batteries and musical bedsteads, a carpet you wouldn't notice was stained, wire, and again wire, clocks only waiting to jump back into the race of time. Objects of commerce and mystery littered Whalley's back yard. Best of all, a rusty boiler into which the twins would climb to play at cubby. (p. 278)

Stylistically, White deliberately uses here his own mock elevation of diction together with intermixed *style indirect libre* to capture Wal's dubious rationalisations about the value of his trophies from the dump. In White's scale of moral values the Whalleys score well because, as he puts it, "their faces were lit by the certainty of life" (p. 280). That is, he is attracted to their rough and ready vulgarity and honesty about life and death, their insulting banter to one another and their mixture of uninhibited sexual gestures ("Wal tweaked her left nipple" p. 280) and tenderness ("He spoke soft for him" p. 280).

White has an even more difficult task to save Ossie Coogan from the almost universal contempt he enjoys from the other characters in the story. When Daise Morrow picks him up and wheels him home in the wheelbarrow from where he has been lying "hopeless among the shit," rubbing "snot from his snivelly nose" (p. 292), he is both unappetising and reduced to farcical proportions. Their relationship seems to be a more successful expression of the religious scene in which Felicity Bannister assists the derelict alkie to die in *The Night the Prowler*. Daise's physical compassion for Ossie is White's pan-sexual updating of the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan. Ossie is magically transfigured by her love, which is generously sexual, maternal and religiously compassionate all at the one time, into the confident mountain boy he had once been riding down towards the "strong, never-ending river" of life (p. 296). Like all of White's religious transfigurations, this one can only be for an

entranced moment and at Daise's funeral Ossie's magnificent river had dried up to one last "pothole" of "thick, yellow mud" (p. 302).

The only answer to this despair in *Down at the Dump* is the promise held out for the future by Meg's understanding love for Lummy Whalley and particularly by Meg's inheriting the spiritual and poetic mantle of Daise Morrow. It is Meg who shows her artistic affinity with White by looking into Lummy's future as a truck driver and managing to make poetry and mystery out of the truck (cf. p. 294). Meg emerges from the virginal "greenish shade" (p. 280) and with her "persistent, grey eyes" (p. 287) she sees that she must make allowances for Lummy's ignorant, fearful hostility to her writing "pomes." This insight allows her to create a vision of generous love. She overcomes the mundanity of life to which they are condemned by seeing them roaring through life in their powerful truck propagating "golden-skinned" "taffy brumbies" (cf. p. 278 & p. 298). Meg's understanding and love are partly inspired by her mentor, Daise Morrow.

Just after the funeral of Daise, Councillor Hogben says to himself with a certain hearty relief, "Well, they had dumped Daise" (p. 304), while drunken Mum Whalley wonders "how often they bury someone alive" (p. 307). In a way that is typical of Patrick White's sly puns, both of these statements about Daise's burial are true in a way the speakers are not aware of. By "dumped" Les Hogben means they have got rid of some socially embarrassing rubbish and now the suburb and their lower middle class respectability will be a lot safer. This is why immediately after the funeral he wants to crawl to his fellow councillor, Horrie Last, to see "whether he was forgiven for unorthodox behaviour in a certain individual" (p. 304). But what Councillor Hogben does not realise is the significance of the fact that only "a couple of strands of barbed wire separated Sarsaparilla dump from Sarsaparilla cemetery" (p. 289), and that cemetery and dump represent a common destination from a common road, and that he himself has unwittingly supplied the connecting link between the two with his word "dumped." And of course it is from the dump that we first receive hints of a possible resurrection from the ugly trash of everyday life:

Here and there it appeared as though trash might win. The

> onslaught of metal was pushing the scrub into the gully. But in many secret, steamy pockets, a rout was in progress: seeds had been sown in the lumps of grey, disintegrating kapok and the laps of burst chairs, the coils of springs, locked in the spirals of wirier vines, had surrendered to superior resilience. (p. 289)

The resurrection that White suggests is not a prettified one; his observation remains cold and often depressing in its relentless accuracy. But in spite of the stern integrity of his vision White is able to perceive the possibilities for rebirth in nature and in man's spirit.

Although the funeral is ostensibly a Christian one, White makes it clear that the metaphysical faith of the Christian ritual falls on deaf ears, partly because the mourners are all privately obsessed with "their rage, grief, contempt, boredom, apathy, and sense of injustice" (p. 303), but mainly because vulgar Australian materialism has no place for Christ the Redeemer and "it would have been no less incongruous if He had appeared out of the scrub to perform on altars of burning sandstone a sacrifice for which nobody had prepared them" (p. 299). Ossie Coogan, the only Catholic among the mourners, also representatively rejects the formal doctrines of Christian resurrection when he cries the truth that "nobody wanted to be delivered" from the alleged "*miseries of this sinful world*" (p. 302). Instead with convincing honesty he dreams of the great joy of Daise's love and companionship in this life when they used to "sit together by the fire on winter nights baking potatoes under the ashes" (p. 302). The modesty of his vision of love is in harmony with the language of Patrick White's protagonist, Daise Morrow, when she rises from the dead and delivers her Sermon on the Dump to update Christ's gospel of salvation.

Mum Whalley is also right in a way that she does not suspect. Daise Morrow was buried alive, but not in the physical sense of an E.A. Poe thriller, but spiritually. Her spirit now rises from the grave and stands among the mourners (p. 303). Like Christ she seeks disciples for her gospel of eternal love that is also the sole source of creativity and that alone can defeat hatred, destruction and death (p. 304). She seeks her disciples universally, like Christ, among the well-to-do as well as among the down and out:

> Listen to me, all you successful no-hopers, all of you who wake in the night, jittery because something may be escaping you, or terrified to think there may never have been anything to find. Come to me, you sour women, public servants, anxious children, and old scabby, desperate men .... (p. 303)

What she wants to overcome with her love is the smugness of materialistic success, the underlying fear of these people that their lives are impoverished in spite of their success, the resentment that the disillusionments of life have brought them, and the terror of loneliness and the void. But her very spiritual existence is dependent upon being received by these mourners and their forming a community of souls. They reject her because they have never been able to see past their conformist contempt for her sexual disrespectability, have never understood the redeeming power of her love because they themselves have been obsessed with the mere physicality of their barely admitted lust for her body. But Daise Morrow "had not altogether died" (p. 304) because she is received by her fourteen year old niece, Meg. Meg promises to write a poem about Aunt Daise and her carnations (p. 287), and is sensitively receptive in her soul to the beauty of flowers as "frozen fireworks" thawing and spinning in the morning dew (p. 287), to the awakening but frightened love of incoherent young Lummy, and in general to the "landscape (which) leaped lovingly" (p. 307). In her state of spiritual inspiration she is confident that she could even translate the pedestrian messages passing along the ugly telephone wires "into the language of peace" (p. 307).

And it is from the shy love and lowered eyes of Meg and Lummy that the story's ultimate, but still unsentimentalised image of the certainty of spiritual rebirth emerges. The promise of their harmony ends the fugal counterpoint that has dominated the story's structure and offers an unmistakably Joycean mystery and redemption to the otherwise depressing, physical, emotional, and moral squalor of the story:

> The warm core of certainty settled stiller as driving faster the wind payed out the telephone wires the fences the flattened heads of grey grass always raising themselves again again again (p. 308)

Sylvia Gzell, in analysing the relationship of Voss and Laura in *Voss*, makes a claim that is very relevant to Daise Morrow's legacy of love to Meg Hogben in *Down at the Dump*:

> In other words the mystical communion is the means, a subsidiary element, and the force and importance of the end, love, is asserted.[4]

With the notable exception of *Down at the Dump*, and the farcical exception of *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats*, however, White stresses not the ecstasy but the torment and confusion, or the distastefulness of love as physical *eros* in the stories. Admittedly White celebrates self-sacrifice from erotic passion in *A Glass of Tea*, and *caritas* in *The Night the Prowler*, but in most of his stories the epiphany, or the mystical communion with the spirit that redeems suffering, is not of the essence of love because it is solitary. The solitary communion of each character with the birds in *The Cockatoos*, for example, is incomparably more inspired than the frustrated *eros* the characters feel for one another. To take one last example: Harold Fazackerley in *A Woman's Hand* finds meaning, not in his loyal and ultimately squalid marriage with Evelyn, but in the solitary and momentary ecstasy of his mystical communion with nature. It is evidently Patrick White's intention that his stories should achieve their meaning not in confused human *eros* but in the solitary epiphany.

PART THREE

THE COCKATOOS

A WOMAN'S HAND

If one follows the suggestion given in the title of this story, one would interpret it as a social and psychological study in sexual differentiation. One would analyse exactly what difference a woman's touch, namely Evelyn's, has made to the lives of her husband Harold and his friend Clem Dowson. Evelyn is also characterized on this level of the story by the contrast of her behaviour with the three female personnages she meets: her schoolhood friend Nesta Pine; the patroness of her young adulthood in England and Egypt, Lady Burd, and the dotty acquaintance of her dotage, the bejewelled vegetable-worshipping Mrs. Haggart. Such an interpretation, although necessary as a preliminary investigation, would do justice only to one dimension of the story. This is the satiric dimension in which White expresses his usual criticisms of the bourgeoisie. He accuses them of trivializing the mystery of life through competition for prestige and conspicuous consumption; by substituting for communication a barrage of garrulity; by basing marriage on sexual coquetry; by propping up an old age hollowed out by a gnawing fear of futility and death with snobbish facade and restless wandering. This dimension of the story is marked by White's narrative stance of militant irony and the elegant remoteness of his patrician contempt.

There is, however, a concerted attempt by White in this story to represent a predominantly positive vision. Clem Dowson turns his back on petit bourgeois preoccupations and it is his lifetime spiritual goal to achieve harmony with the infinity of nature. He passes this goal on to his eager disciple Harold, who is in the end surprisingly rewarded for his search at the moment of his deepest desperation with a blazing though fleeting revelation. It is Clem's spiritual obsession that brings him into metaphysical conflict with his female counterpart, Nesta Pine. The irony of the story's title is again evident here in the tragic effect of Nesta Pine's domestic and spiritual encroachment upon Clem's secluded serenity. The conflict

between them ends in Nesta's insanity and Clem's death, possibly by suicide. Nevertheless, such is White's mastery of style and imagery that he persuades us with a minimum of direct commentary of the tragic positivity of these characters' mystic yearning, affirming that this yearning is the only guarantee against a pitiful ignorance of what human life is all about.[1]

Structurally, White goes well beyond the most elastic definition of the short story in *A Woman's Hand*. As is quite common in this collection, *The Cockatoos*, he sets his story in the old age of the main characters and then proceeds to evoke representative moments from their childhood and young adulthood to give depth to his portrayal of their present awaiting of death. There is an undisguised geometric neatness about the flashbacks of the two woman characters, Nesta Pine and Evelyn Fazackerley, to their common schooling at Mount Palmerston, and the flashbacks of the two male characters, Clem and Harold, to their common schooling. The accent as usual with White is on the misery of their growing awareness of not belonging to the common stream of conventionality, and as we have come to expect of White's portrayals of childhood, on not so latent homoeroticism and lesbian affection. There is also the hint of a suggestion that it is the characters' frightened denial or rejection of this tenderness, and their aspiration to conventional, heterosexual marriage that helps to destroy their true development. Critics have complained of a creaking of the mechanism in the propagandistic, artificial nature of such flashbacks and it is hard to deny that the structure does seem contrived.[2] Nevertheless, the point should be made that once White is within the confines of his particular flashback, his style and imagery make his sexual psychology seem quite convincing. Most successful is the lengthy flashback in which White evokes the atmosphere of the characters' early adulthood in Egypt in the heady days of England's power before the Suez crisis.

There are three other features of the story's structure which provoke comment. They are scene changing, the technique of delayed revelation and the achievement of climaxes with the associated function of the by now familiar anticlimactic coda. White has in common with film the abrupt cutting and changing of scene with no hint of a transition. This abruptness and economy is, it seems to me, almost the only short story feature that White consistently uses. Once, for example, he cuts from a newspaper

picture of Addie with her wrists bandaged after a suicide attempt to Evelyn cutting cucumber sandwiches with professional finesse. What better way to point up the strange contrast between despair and petty social pretentiousness (pp. 55–6)? In another abrupt change of scene White cuts from a typically groteseque picture of coitus with "the elderly Nesta in one of the more convulsive attitudes of love: a great jack-knife of sprung flesh, the saucered rump, breasts heaving and plopping like a pot of porridge come to boil" (p. 62) to Harold and Evelyn Fazackerley deep in a tunnel of the Snowy Mountains. The purpose of this cut seems to be that Evelyn is prevented by her sexual inhibitions from telling Harold what she was really day-dreaming about and instead tells him of the fish-pudding which Nesta had taken to her lover Clem. She thus attempts unsuccessfully to compensate herself for her own fear and loathing of sex by inviting her husband to join her in aesthetic contempt for Nesta. But Harold is not to be drawn this time to her viciousness disguised thinly as a rather brittle cuteness and superior tastefulness: "For an isolated moment Harold Fazackerley would have liked not to have been married to his wife" (p. 63). But Evelyn is only temporarily defeated by her husband's fitful honesty and increasing contempt for her manipulative ploys and she is soon able to use "the soft white ludicrous substance" of the fish pudding (p. 64) indirectly to mock Nesta's vulnerable physique and to resume manipulation of her husband.

This brings me to the second structural point on which I would like to comment – the technique of delayed revelation. Because typically White's stories are not stories but character-analyses without plot movement, White tends to replace the tension of what happens next with the mystery of what happened in the past that was so traumatic that no one can bear to mention it now. This narrative technique leads to the mystery of the delayed revelation. In this story White arouses our curiosity with the leitmotif of the mango tree (pp. 16, 22, 26, 27, 38). At first it may seem simply one of Evelyn's harmless memories, but with each new mention it gains in intensity and precision of meaning until finally in one of the story's early climaxes, in a full flashback to Egypt, we are shown Downson's clumsy body "holding on to the trunk of a young mango tree" (p. 38). Dowson is trembling with disbelief and embarrassment at Evelyn's lust for him. More importantly, we learn in a low-key phrase that is almost an afterthought, of her sterility that is the key

to her chattering insincerity (p. 39). After this very brief moment of revelation, in which she achieves through genuine suffering and a rare silence a realisation of her hopelessness, she quickly escapes from the unbearable truth back into the lies on which her life is based. Here it is the same lie in which the female lead in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* takes refuge: namely the invention of a non-existent child who died young. Evelyn thus tries to escape from the great shame of sterility into the false pathos of melodrama. There are at least three further climaxes in *A Woman's Hand*, but as all of these portray positive epiphanies, I shall deal with them separately.

Most short story writers would have felt that *A Woman's Hand* had reached its natural conclusion with the insanity of Nesta Pine and the death of Clem Dowson. White too is well aware that he has reached an ideal place for an ending when he fades out with Harold Fazackerley staring at an old snapshot of Clem and Nesta and delivering what appears to be the final and decisive comment on the story's central images. Harold says of the "soft but wise primeval animal" and the peacock which once inhabited Clem Dowson's hutch high on the cliffs of Bandana: "Fur and feather never lie together" (p. 81). But it turns out that White is not yet finished with these images. They recur in a bewildering reversal of Harold's above judgement when to our surprise Harold is granted an epiphany which is clearly the sole justification of his otherwise useless life. This epiphany occurs in the apparently irrelevant and anticlimactic tail of this impressionist novella, a tail which I think should be termed a coda. White makes similar use of the coda at the conclusion of *The Cockatoos* and *The Night the Prowler*. The former story could have ended with the death of Mick Davoren and the revelation of the cockatoos at its sharpest. The latter story could have been brought to a satisfyingly ironic conclusion with Humphrey Bannister gloating ignorantly on the rape of Harvey Makin's mausoleum of a house. But in both stories White chooses to add an extended coda in which Tim Goodenough and Felicity Bannister respectively seek courage and wisdom among the alkies and down-and-outs infesting Centennial Park in Sydney after midnight. The scenes in these codas are vital to our understanding of White's religious intentions in his fiction. Instead of seeking to escape from the loathsomeness of alcoholism, degeneracy and old age in a vision of divine splendour that somehow mystically compensates for such horrors in God's

creation, White embraces these very horrors as truthful symbols of man's solitary physical and metaphysical plight when all the bourgeois plush furniture and all the easy myths are removed. White deliberately seeks out that truth which is hardest to bear and in the midst of the squalor, of the evidence that God has forsaken us, he seeks for grace, wisdom and courage.

In the coda of *A Woman's Hand* White does not have to repair to Centennial Park to demonstrate the loathsomeness of some aspects of life. Evelyn Fazackerley's bedroom in the Currawong Palace (presumably a fictional representation of the Hydro Majestic in the Blue Mountains) is contaminated by her snobbism and her insensitivity. The harsh truth which Evelyn and Harold must now face is the failure of their marriage which on Evelyn's side has been based on a series of insincere poses and coquettry. They must accept that they have never known one another at all up until now, that they hate one another poisonously in this moment of truth, and that they have spent a lifetime killing one another's souls with their cloying togetherness and non-communicative chatter. After half-heartedly trying to kill Evelyn, Harold bursts out of the hotel in a desperate eruption that brings him to the brink of insanity. At the moment of his greatest shame and greatest truthfulness to himself, he says, "*I am an old man with the wind up looking for what*" (p. 91). At this moment he is abruptly given a pantheistic experience of dissolving into the non-human Other. He senses the *unio mystica*: hostile rocks, bushes, and cold misty winds slash the clothes and the flesh from his bones and he stumbles out onto the edge of a great gorge:

> He was freed of some inessential part of him as he blundered on, no longer troubling to tear off the cold webs of mist. . . .
>
> . . .
>
> He was the black water trickling, trickling at the bottom of it. He was the cliffside pocked with hidden caves. He was the deformed elbows of stalwart trees. (p. 91)

It is at this moment that Harold is accorded his beatific vision in which the story's irreconcilable opposites are fused in incomprehensible harmony:

> And all the time in the gorge, the mists were lying together, dreaming together, fur and feather gently touching, on which the healing moon rode. (p. 91)

Harold Fazackerley has finally been given a vision of the unity of opposites, a unity that not only eluded the mystic seers Clem and Nesta but ended up crushing them grotesquely. Truly, the anticlimactic and satiric coda has after all produced the story's spiritual climax. It is inevitable with White's grim sense of humour that the few remaining pages should be grotesque and low-key, or one might say metaphysically farcical. The Fazackerleys, reunited, "sit out" the travelogue which is their celluloid substitute for life and passively await the end of the film, the loss of the coloured illusion, and hence death. Only once, above "an aerial landscape of lashing trees" is Harold's memory stirred by the wind and he regains a frightening glimpse of his moment of epiphany. But he is too afraid to bear it alone, and he turns away swiftly, preferring the comfort and the lie of his companionship with his wife.

It is a fair critical question at this stage to ask ourselves: of what objective significance is this uniting of "fur and feather"? The only fair way to go about answering this question is to go back to the beginning of the story and trace the development of this antithetical imagery. The image of fur and feather first appears quite early in the story. Harold and Evelyn are out on one of their long walks and come across an amateurishly built weatherboard cottage perched precariously on a lonely cliff high above the Pacific Ocean. Evelyn, with her ever-ready bourgeois snobbism, scornfully terms the cottage a "hutch," doubtless contrasting it in her own mind with what we know is the false security and mass-produced ugliness of their own "neo-tudor" flat. But for us, and increasingly for Harold, this hutch is not just a way of satirising Evelyn's debased bourgeois tastefulness, it is "the house of the winds" (p. 59) that expresses symbolically our common insecurity. Clem meditates on this insecurity while Evelyn hides from it behind material possessions. The "exposed seaward balcony" (p. 14) moves Harold "with a longing for something he could never accomplish." This longing is the first blurred focus that Harold has been able to give to his restlessness in retirement. It is the beginning of his drive for peace and an understanding of individuality and death. This drive is the counterbalancing theme to the satiric theme of Evelyn providing a

woman's touch to their life.

To return to the hutch. In it Harold imagines "large soft animals turning on straw, or enormous satiny birds contemplating the ocean from behind wooden bars" (p. 14). This imagery provides a typical moment for a Patrick White story, a moment in which his painstaking recording of empirical details is abruptly pushed aside by a startlingly surreal vision or metaphor. We are helped in our interpretation of this at first strange image by the fact that Clem Dowson emerges from the hutch immediately after Harold's vision. It is no accident that Clem is clumsy, soft and sheathed in secretive silence. His refusal or inability to respond to Evelyn's chattering and bourgeois manners and his faith in communicating truly through silence (cf. pp. 23, 36, 51, 69, 73) make him other than human, in fact a large soft animal. His tranquillity in contemplating the ocean for hours, instead of rushing around on endless diverting tours as do the Fazackerleys, makes him also more than human, a seer whose mission it is to show Harold the way. As he says in his one revealing letter to Harold much later in the story:

> I have always been most influenced by what can never be contained. The sea, for instance. As for the human relationships of any importance, what is left of them after they have been sieved through words? (p. 65)

Not that Clem Dowson's solitary tranquillity has been effortlessly attained. He has paid dearly for his clumsy but heroic exploration of the unknown stretches of the human mind with his earlier nervous breakdown in Egypt and pays even more dearly for it with Nesta when for a brief, glorious and tormenting period they "blaze together ... in peacock colours" (p. 88), as the apprentice-seer Harold comes to put it. But certainly when Clem does attain *shantih*, *shantih*, it is because he has achieved affinity with the infinity of wind and sea. This is why his hutch is built where it is, so that the wind, "sweeping out all but the farthest corners of the mind" (p. 66), can bring his burning blue eyes affinity with the blazing blue of the ocean. When Harold in his torment in the story's coda exposes his flesh to the cold misty wind of the Blue Mountains, it is because he has learnt from Clem that tranquillity lies in the willingness to suffer loneliness honestly and to search for peace in the other-than-human.

The image of the peacock becomes a leitmotif in the story and the key to its meaning. When Clem is reporting Nesta's breakdown and his own torment to Evelyn, the author comments that "he was not peacock enough to have thought of slashing his wrists. He was suffering instead in some more corrosive, subterranean way" (p. 73). This brings the peacock into sinister association with Addie Woolcock who slashed her wrists on at least two occasions. This, however, brings Nesta Pine into even more sinister repute, because Nesta confesses both that "ministering to the needs of others was her profession" (pp. 53–4) and that "I irritated Addie. I maddened her" (p. 54). Is she in some way to be connected with White's earlier creation of a horrifying do-gooder in *A Cheery Soul*? Evidently not, because Clem Dowson acknowledges her as a fellow-seer. It is just that she seems to have acted as a catalyst on two human beings, Addie and Clem, forcing them to explore with her the furthermost limits of the mind's potential, beyond which lies the precipice of insanity and suicide. In her insanity Nesta complains about "the screech of peacocks"; Harold Fazackerley would "have liked to enquire into the peacocks, if only of his own mind" (p. 76). But peacocks are not only negative and a torment, for at the moment of greatest despair they can, like the peacock's tail provide a vision of sudden splendour. So at the moment when Clem Dowson on the ferry in Sydney harbour and in his despair at Nesta's insanity resumes "the wrestling match" with God as Jacob-Israel had done before him, determined to know the identity and name of God (p. 76), he is rewarded:

> And at that moment the sun struck, slashing the smudgy drifts of cloud, opening the underbelly of the waves, so that the peacock-colours rose again in shrill display out of the depths. (p. 76)

Here the peacock's display is the redemptive illumination of a mystery. It is only a glimpse of the divine perfection that is denied us and must by definition be veiled and fleeting, because rationally considered it is impossible. Nesta, in her letter to Evelyn just before her collapse into insanity, has tried to express in almost Christian terms the "redemption" offered by the peacock. She distinguishes between herself and Clem, who are in their spiritual aspirations otherwise so alike, by explaining how she yearns for redemption, whereas Clem's eyes are so perfectly clear that it is as though he

carries his mirror of the infinite around within him. And so, in her ecstasy and insanity Nesta says:

> Most people do not know the peacock also redeems.
>
> . . .
>
> Well, my poor Evelyn, you did not see the sunset! Let me tell you it mostly shrieks with the throats of peacocks – though sometimes it will open its veins, offering its blood from love rather than charity. (p. 70)

This is an evident reference to Corinthians 1, 13. The distinction is being made between professional do-gooding out of charity and the spontaneous self-sacrifice born of love. It is clear that the peacock's display, seen in the image of the sun's rays, brings terror, beauty and the overwhelming urge to shed self in altruistic otherness. Such savage splendour is to be seen in this story as a stark contrast to the satirised charity of Evelyn with her bowl of soup and her inquisitive stickybeaking at Clem's when he is sick. And so, Clem's "fur" cannot co-exist with Nesta's "feather." They burn each other up in a blaze of peacock glory, which, as Harold subsequently learns, is the sole justification for life. Ironically, it remains, as we have already seen, for apprentice-seer Harold to experience the only full vision uniting the polarities of all existence with "fur and feather gently touching" in the mists of the Blue Mountains.

Whether or not one finds oneself as a reader in sympathy or hostility with these spiritual aspirations of Patrick White's protagonists, is perhaps not so much the point as whether one appreciates aesthetically his unique use of imagery to express the inexpressible. His development of his initial images of animal and bird have been brought to a well-timed and glorious climax.

Whether White is evoking nature, making satiric generalisations about the bourgeoisie or probing into the ambivalance of ostensible marital happiness, the basis of his style is irony. The tones of the irony vary enormously from mildly undercutting his own sympathies to patrician distaste and aloof contempt. The aesthetic interest for the reader does not lie in picking the author's protagonist and tensely following his fortunes in a sequential plot. Some critics have failed to appreciate the direction of White's artistic intentions in

irony and characterisation and have as a result claimed that the stories were weakened because the central character lacked dramatic impact or charismatic appeal with which the reader could identify. But White deliberately replaces such outmoded techniques with the subtle play of shades of irony indicating his attitudes to his characters. The overriding point of view is correspondingly evasive and ironic. These generalisations can be demonstrated from close textual analysis of the opening pages of *A Woman's Head*.

In these opening pages White eschews the ease of the omniscient narrator. Even in his satire on the inhabitants of the "Lovely Homes worth breaking into," White prefers to achieve his mockery by pretending to guess at intentions which are all too clear:

> The owners ... had almost completely exposed their possessions behind unbroken plate-glass. To view the view might have been their confessable intention, but they had ended, seemingly, overwhelmed by it. Or bored. The owners of the lovely seaside homes sat in their worldly cells playing bridge, licking the chocolate off their fingers, in one case copulating, on pink chenille, on the master bed. (p. 9)

The satire here on conspicuous consumerism and on shallow, mindless self-indulgence is deliciously witty. The isolated phrase "Or bored" undercuts any pretension of these self-gratifiers to communion with the vista of nature. Hence their edifices are distastefully termed "parasite houses clinging to it (the austere landscape) as distinctly as wax on diseased orange branches" (p. 9). This satire prepares the way for the contrast with "the ganglion of plumbing in the neo-tudor wall across from their neo-Tudor flat" (p. 10) and for a further contrast with Clem Dowson's self-made hutch, which is frail and exposed almost as a religious offering to the "sun and wind (which) had made him (Clem) more transparent" (p. 15).

To take another, smaller example of structural irony: immediately after the above-quoted paragraph ending in copulation on chenille, the next paragraph beings "Evelyn Fazackerley looked away" (p. 9). Empirically of course, she is ceasing to scrutinize the facades of the expensive house, but because of the juxtaposition she seems to be averting her gaze from the copulation. This is White's typically indirect way of introducing the theme of Evelyn's prudish

niceness, leading to later revelations of her sterility and her unrequited lust for Clem Dowson.

Sometimes, inevitably, White's technique of elision and juxtaposition is not so successful. Evelyn is enviously eying off the ostentatiously rich houses:

> 'How vulgar they all are!' she said.
> And was automatically absolved. (p. 10)

White's dual mannerism of beginning the sentence with a conjunction or a relative pronoun, and of leaving a deeper religious meaning hinted at in a pretentious but cryptic fragment are exemplified here. We are irritated by both the slickness and the obscurity.

White's ironic play extends even to his evocation of nature. In the opening lines of *A Woman's Hand* where he is celebrating the power of the wind along the coastal cliffs – a wind which gains considerable spiritual power later in the story – he cannot resist an ironic anticipation of his later theme of self-sacrifice:

> The wind was tearing into the rock-plants, slashing reflections out of the leaves of the mirror-bush, torturing those professional martyrs the native trees. (p. 9)

This ironic self-correction is maintained throughout *A Woman's Hand*, and indeed in most of White's stories. Nesta Pine may have seen the redeeming peacocks, but she is also described in grotesque detail in demeaning intercourse. Clem Dowson may have achieved affinity with nature but he is killed off in very undignified fashion by being run over by a bus. Harold Fazackerley may have been granted the vision of grace of fur and feather united, but he is nevertheless doomed to spend the remainder of his uncomprehending life trivially on meaningless travel-tours. For this is the nature of White's harsh ironic balance.

Part of this ironic effect is achieved by the humorous discrepancy between what the characters say of themselves in *style indirect libre* and the truth that we know of them through their relationship with other characters and through the few authorial

remarks from White himself. For example, we learn of Evelyn that "although she . . . liked to think of herself as threatened, she was less fragile than wiry, or stringy." This is ironic deflation by direct comment from the author. A few lines later we read of Evelyn: "She was good at talking to the aged, and it was so gratifying to see in their old faces the appreciation of advice" (p. 11). Clearly the last clause at least is interior monologue, and Evelyn's claim that her do-goodism is appreciated is satirically undercut by her garrulity and her importunate attempts to manipulate other people's lives in most of the story. In fact Evelyn is like Miss Docker in *A Cheery Soul*, but of course without the manic, farcical element.

Much of the humour in the early parts of the story and much of the grotesque mood towards the end is created by stressing the discrepancy between Evelyn's unwarranted over-confidence in herself socially and the truth of her trite superficiality. For example, when Clem reveals that he spends his time sitting and watching the ocean, Harold understands this as a plausible solution for his own frightened "refuge in perpetual motion" (p. 10), but "a gust of breath rose in Evelyn's throat as though to protest against an immoral act" (p. 18). Evelyn in fact is the fall-guy; large sections of the story are narrated through her eyes and the comic inadequacy of her vision is brought out by the reader's contrasting understanding of what deeper dimensions the other characters have.

To summarize: *A Woman's Hand* is a novella featuring a complex ironic balance between the comic and the tragic moods. Sequential narrative and the fluctuating fortunes of the hero are replaced by a spiralling exploration of the fearful subconsciousness and of ordinary man's strange religious needs. White's tragic representation of this exploration is balanced by the touches of farce and grotesqueness and the satire with which he dismisses the social surfaces standing between him and the mystery of the irrational.

THE FULL BELLY

There is a relentless honesty in this story, a grim determination to tell of the German occupation of Greece as it was: without excitement or false melodrama, without heroics. But the story has little continuity and is virtually plotless, a fragmentary collection of impressionistically presented incidents, many of them in the form of flashback-memories. Too much space is devoted to introducing us to the background of too many characters. Most of these either remain minor characters, or worse, remain largely irrelevant ghosts cluttering up the background.

The characters are almost without exception repulsive. White insists on capturing the creeping corruption of the spirit from slow starvation. We shudder at this corruption and know that we ourselves would do no better. For the body and the flesh White seems to hold out little hope. Occasionally he does attempt to assure us through his struggling antihero, Costaki Iordanou, that "the spirit does survive the shit-pit" (p. 114). But the weight of his story and especially the horrifying climax, do not bear this assertion out.

One is constantly aware of a narrator in *The Full Belly* who is stern, aloof, frigid. White refuses the spark of human warmth in this story. He refuses to leave out the loathsome detail in order that one of his characters might seem likable to us. The only character to emerge with her moral stance unshaken is the coldest and the most aloof. It is not accidental that it is Miss Maro Makridis, the elderly ascetic intellectual, who finds it easiest to deny herself and to starve herself to death for the sake of the children. She doesn't love life anyway: she is "in love with God" (p. 98). White cannot even depict her self-sacrifice without ironicizing her contribution to "these unconvincing, over-idealized children" (p. 98).

White evidently feels that tears and laughter are aesthetic frauds. He is not interested in arousing such facile sentiments in us.

He is interested in forcing us to see, to see more deeply, more bitterly, and more honestly than ever before. He does this very well, but it is difficult to feel grateful to him after a story like *The Full Belly*, where the sight forced upon is so hideous that we feel encouraged only to become misanthropists.

The style of *The Full Belly* is often too delicately lyric, too self-consciously and fastidiously embroidered, to be appropriate to the grim realism of the character-psychology. For example, "Costa watched the fading light strew his aunts' crumbling cheeks with ashes of violets" (p. 96). More often White reserves his lyric aspirations to evoke his antihero's aesthetic yearnings for transcendence. Indeed the tension between his drive to find God on the one hand, and his succumbing to heterosexual and homosexual prostitution on the other, forms the main narrative interest of these barely united fragments. Costaki Iordanou's search for spiritual transcendence in Debussy and Bach and his worship of his Panayia are the only positive features of the story that White does not ironicize in some way. Consider the style in the following extracts:

> 'Play for me, Costaki, *La Cathèdrale.'*
> His aunt's voice rising slowly in sonorities of green masonry out of his tremulous belly out of the irridescent waters glowed with the light of rose-windows resurrected. (p. 100)
>
> His own love or hunger overflowed the eyes of his Panayia and he was drawn towards her like a drop of water to another into one crystal radiance. (p. 105)
>
> If he could only live for music, music would give him life in return – spirit, as old man Bach had demonstrated so sensibly. It was consoling to realize sense and not daemon led to God. (p. 106–7)
>
> On and off he tried to give thanks to his stern Virgin, but rising slowly higher on this half-deliberate, half-mystical ascent, he invoked, rather, Debussy. (p. 116)

White has decided to imbue Costaki Iordanou with aesthetic religiosity and feels justified in using loaded terms such as "resurrected" and "crystal radiance" to support Costaki's

aspirations. But these words can also be seen as an attempt by White to force a transcendence upon a dualism that he has created between the putrid world of the flesh and the aspirations of the spirit. He captures this dualism in all of its ambivalence when he shows Costaki receiving a revelation from his Panayia in the little Church of the Annunciation, "*Take, eat,* She said, *this is my body, my mess of watery black-market rice, which is given for you*" (p. 116). Even in presenting a religious vision, White shows that he is determined not to shrink from the often grotesque imperfection of the physical medium.

To accentuate this ironic discrepancy between the radiance of the spirit and the inadequacy of the physical world, White introduces an irony of plot at the conclusion. There is first an ugly climax in which Costaki wrestles with his Aunt Pronoe for the bowl of watery rice left by his self-martyring Aunt Maro. There follows an even more revolting aftermath where the victorious Costaki cuts his lips on splinters of porcelain in his frenzy to get at the rice spilt on the carpet. Only after this indelible shame does the Panayia fulfil her promise of food with the sudden gift of a lamb's head. The religious irony lies in the fact that a divine prophecy has been fulfilled, but too late to save human beings from their own evil. The spirit could have been triumphant, but it is not. This is the finishing touch to a particularly grim and depressing story and it is as though White is challenging the reader to share the stern integrity of his vision.

THE NIGHT THE PROWLER

The opening pages of this story are carried along by a satiric impulse that is joyful, energetic and impish. As usual, Patrick White begins his story much more light-heartedly than he ends it, and with the emphasis much more on a narrative that is both realistic and dynamic. His endings, by contrast, are inclined towards surrealism, frozen stasis, and sombre, grotesque representations of insanity, old age, disease, physical hideousness, and death.

Like so many of the other stories, this one too begins *in medias res*. There are no introductions to characters or scenes; these emerge in the course of the action. The story is dealing with the aftermath of some catastrophe and White is gleefully keeping the mystery of this catastrophe up his sleeve while at the same time mocking the hysteria of Mrs. Bannister over the event. It quickly becomes apparent that this woman is the representative target of White's satire. She is another of his middle-aged, North Shore matrons ensconced in her solid Home Beautiful, devoting her life to upholding WASP-mores with their emphasis on insipid niceness, puritanical, inhibited family life, and a pitiful attempt to hide both from the embarrassing failures of competitive society and from the inexorability of decay and death behind the illusory protection of the high walls of property.

The catastrophe before the beginning of the story is that Mrs. Bannister's daughter has been allegedly raped. White deliberately presents this event through the eyes of Mrs. Bannister, transforming something unpleasant to a fast-punching farce. All that the rape means to Mrs. Bannister is that it may bring social disgrace upon her. The import of the rape is that she is obliged

> to discover the limits of her own powers: when she had secretly believed that, with the exception of cancer, air disasters, and war, she had circumstances under control. (p. 120)

Here White is satirising the passion of the bourgeoisie, once they have gained control of property, to establish an absolute stasis over the dynamics of life itself. With witty economy White establishes Mrs. Bannister's relationship with the silent, suffering Mr. Bannister through one gesture: she is contemptuous of his wasting endless time at the incinerator burning things (p. 121).

The satire retains its cracking pace through the telephone conversation of Mrs. Bannister and her friend Madge. They compete with one another in garrulousness, vulgarity and superficiality. White maintains the tautness of the satire by capturing the breathless horror of their expressions and alternating them with two kinds of narrative commentary. The first kind of commentary is Mrs. Bannister reflecting, while pausing for breath, on her friend Madge. White phrases these reflections in such a way that they inevitably rebound satirically on Mrs. Bannister's own head. For example, "Of course Madge was incapable of realizing. One had to admit it: she was superficial" (p. 122). To take another example: after Mrs. Bannister has confided in Madge about how one might best go about telling her daughter's fiance of the rape, she is disappointed in Madge's lack of interest, and reflects, "Perhaps one had launched it too casually: Madge sounded distressingly remote" (p. 123). That is, Mrs. Bannister has made a tactical blunder in the martial sport of gossip and her artillery has failed to make a vital hit. White shows here that the purpose of gossip is for two emotionally starved women to goad each other on to increasing thrills, and ultimately to horror-induced paralysis of the speech-mechanism. They gulp voraciously, and with the safety of vicariousness, at intoxicating draughts of life in the raw in the great outside.

The second kind of commentary interspersed by White in the phone monologue is reflections by an omniscient author. For example, "Mrs. Bannister could afford to show sympathy: her vision of Madge Hopkirk sitting in a squalor of spilt coffee made her feel superior" (p. 123). The insincerity of this woman emerges when White shows her practising the pose of stoic courage, of a "Roman matron" and manipulating her husband with "an imitation of kindness" (p. 125). This is the kind of woman who looks forward to her best friend's funeral because she knows that she cuts a fine figure in black. White further characterises her through the manner of speaking, through her breathless clichés as she searches for the pose

that will give her the most admirable profile. Her great idols emerge through melodramatic pauses and italics, namely the career of Felicity's fiancé in the diplomatic corps, her husband's dedication to the stock exchange, and her reverence for anyone in the social hierarchy who is "high up" (pp. 124–5). Her only other "highest principles" are the virginity of unwed maidens, and the dual conviction that all sex is dirty and that every bridegroom has the ethical right to be the first man to dirty up his bride (p. 124). The climax of her monologue comes when she tittivates herself into the thrill of vicariously experiencing her daughter's alleged rape. White's representation of this event culminates in one of his wittiest metaphors:

> For one bleeding moment Mrs. Bannister almost underwent the shocking act of violation to which her daughter had been subjected. Though a fairly solid woman she tottered at the telephone, but recovered enough of her balance and voice to cough and grunt farther through the moral labyrinth in which she found herself astray. (p. 124)

Not that the pleasures of gossip are limited to Mrs. Bannister and Madge. In fact the "lustreless lives" of the whole neighbourhood are illuminated by Felicity's engagement ring (p. 137) and when she is allegedly raped they all rush out to buy the scandal newspapers and are aghast with the delight of "participating in the violation" (p. 138). White's satire assumes the dimensions of indecent farce when he says,

> while as for the elderly prostate-stricken gentlemen they drove it home as never before and certainly never after.
> So it was very terrible for everyone. (p. 138)

White has another method for commenting satirically on such gossip: he shows how the makers of the gossip can become the targets. He does this through the plot structure by ironically devising no fewer than three parallel cases where this kind of poetic justice, of turning the tables, is achieved. In the first case of poetic justice Mrs. Bannister becomes the target of her former colleague in the art of slander, Madge. Felicity brings this upon her mother by hanging out after her alleged rape with promiscuous hippies. Now it is Madge who rings up Mrs. Bannister to humiliate her with juicy details of

Felicity's promiscuity and Mrs. Bannister who tries to flee from the telephone with its pleasures that have become tortures. The pursuer has become the pursued and she seeks the consolations of the brandy bottle in a most unbourgeois way (p. 146).

In the second parallel case of poetic justice, Felicity's father, who has until then been a considerably more passive and likable figure than his wife, is satirised when he shows an unsuspected streak of gratuitous malice. Just as the neighbourhood had once gleefully preyed upon the scandal of his daughter's rape, now he just as gleefully preys upon the discomfiture of his friend, Harvey Makin, whose house has been vandalised. Mr. Bannister says,

> 'Well, good luck to 'em. I hope they got their thrill. Harvey was always a smooth, self-satisfied beggar, and his house the kind of mausoleum asking for rape.' (p. 158)

Mr. Bannister here compounds his malice with two blunders, one of which he realizes too late, the other of which he never learns about. He realizes too late that he has unconsciously made a parallel with his daughter's rape in his own house and thereby raised afresh a topic whose painfulness he had been striving to repress. The poetic justice consists in the fact that he has thus punished himself.

Mr. Bannister never learns, however, that it is his own daughter who has raped and vandalised Harvey's mausoleum. Felicity seems to have been motivated to this act as the revenge of poetic justice for her own alleged rape. She also evidently hopes that this act of violence will help her overcome her formerly passive, insipid self through the destruction of that representative symbol of the bourgeoisie, the castle-home. She is evidently enraged by the inability of the bourgeoisie to provide her with a satisfactorily masculine lover, to give her the passionate, loving freedom which she is seeking as the antidote to the secure, eiderdowny protectiveness offered by the diplomatic puppet. She perceives that the bourgeoisie express their passion, not in physical love, but in greedy acquisition of property. She thus attacks the quintessence of their being in Harvey's house.

Felicity's rape of the mausoleum is a rape of "all soft, fleshy, successful men" (p. 151). Her act of brutal vandalism is expressed by

White in overtly sexual imagery. She takes the phallic knife – and of course she had kept a phallic knife as a memento of the puny and unsuccessful attack made upon her – to the "leather pretensions of men" in the guise of the armchair,

> riding their thick thighs, still slashing, jerking with her free hand at the reins, sawing at the mouth which held the bit, she was to some extent vindicated, if guiltily racked by the terrible spasms which finally took possession of her. (p. 152)

After this coital passion she falls back exhausted, "only half credulous of what was after its fashion a consummation." Here ends the third of the three parallel cases of poetic justice upon which White has constructed the greater part of this novella.

Apart from these striking parallels, the structure of *The Night the Prowler* hinges on a decisive turning-point which occurs exactly in the middle of the story. This turning-point is Felicity's decision to break her engagement with her diplomatic puppet, John Galbraith. The background to this decision is the landscape of a park which provides its own eloquent commentary. For in the park are mounted police in orderly patterns but "uneasy in their manliness" (p. 141) and a scurrilous dog-trainer unsuccessfully bullying his Labrador into obedience, but only causing him to revolt against his master with hysteria and "torn screams." The parallels with the foreground are clear. John Galbraith's manliness is uneasy, and Felicity herself is the labrador hysterically bursting for freedom in non-comprehension of society's alleged rationality. John Galbraith himself is characterised brilliantly by two economic details, and is thus one of the few characters in White's stories to be presented in true short story fashion: he has only an "eiderdowniness," that is, a dull protectiveness, to offer Felicity, and his mouth is not given to erotic aggression because it "had been formed by tactful conversation, foreign languages, and the strategic smile, though he enjoyed doing his duty by a kiss" (p. 142). In rejecting him, Felicity decisively rejects timid engagements and respectable marriages and bursts out in a quest for passion. Fittingly, she does not break the engagement, she "shatters" it. At this stage, however, her revolt is still almost entirely negative and intuitive. She screams at her reproachful mother, "Why – WHY? If I knew the answers! But I don't! I'm not

the record you'd like to play!" (p. 144).

Structurally, the last ten pages of the story can be seen as a coda. This coda makes it clear that the story is not a short story, neither in length nor in the multiplicity and profundity of its aims. For if the opening of the story is a social satire, the ending is a mystic allegory. The story could well have ended with the symmetry of Mr. Bannister realizing that his laughter at the rape of Harvey's mausoleum has painfully rebounded on him. This ending too would have kept the story's emphasis on the social and family aspects of the alleged rape, which we the readers know with full dramatic irony never took place.

The coda is however brilliant in its own right, and if it tends to make a quest-novella with mystic overtones out of a short story, then so be it. The narrative method in the coda is to terminate the shifting narrative perspectives by taking up Felicity's point of view solely and sustaining it for ten pages until the end. The main defect of the coda is that it recalls the earlier rape scene with all of its unconvincing sexual psychology and makes Felicity's sexual characterisation even more ludicrously improbable. It was dubious enough when we were asked to believe that Felicity had punched the insect of a prowler in the mouth and that his head had dropped with a hiss on the pillow amid a general feeling of "damp plumage" (p. 153) in a presumable parody of Leda's rape by the swan-Zeus. It is unconvincing when she then tries to force the unsuccessful rapist to drink Daddy's brandy and smoke a cigar whilst at the same time feeling "her half-strangled desire . . . still squirming around inside her" (p. 155). But now in the coda she viciously boots at naked couples who are described as "mesmerized" and "languid" (p. 161); why they would be languid in Centennial Park at midnight in the middle of coitus is mildly puzzling when one thinks of the bugs, the mosquitoes, and the methoes which populate it in swarms. Of course what our heroine Felicity is about here is thematically over-obvious. She is protesting at the inadequacy of normal, insipid, unimaginative coupling. She prefers the company of methoes, who, perhaps only because they are so demonstrably non-bourgeois, are called upon by a fanciful Patrick White to provide her with a mystic "revalation" (p. 161). Felicity is also required as part of her quest to win a motor-bike chain as a trophy of her physical prowess in a gang fight, and rather like Samson pursuing the Philistines with the jawbone of

an ass, to run after a mob of cowardly leather-jackets trumpeting, "Hold on, youse! P'raps we got somethun to say to each other" (p. 162). This is indeed an eccentric psychological and linguistic descent to the vagrant lower classes in pursuit of the only true revelation.

If the coda is inadequate from the point of view of realistic characterisation maintained in the earlier stages of the story, it is also marred by an ugly pomposity in Felicity's quest for meaning. Thus she throws back "her pumpkin of a head, ejaculating, 'I fuck you, God, for holding out on me!' " (p. 164). The coda is also strongly impressionistic and fragmentary, wandering off on trajectories and digressions that are never really integrated.

Nevertheless, there is a finale in the last pages of the coda, which in its tortured alternating between nihilism and barely comprehensible mystic solace is reminiscent of Beckett and Pinter. One crosses the line from loathsome physical reality to metaphysical dialogue and to the dubious religious consolation of a grotesque Pieta. The crossing of this line is not subtle. Like Christ healing the lepers, Felicity offers to wash the diseased old man, and at the same time she triumphs over his "level of negation and squalor" (p. 166) with a somewhat forced childhood memory of a double-yoked egg, "twin perfections in gold gold" (p. 167).[1] This gold is linked with the gold of the sun's light illuminating the scabrous slum room. White's intention to transcend is obvious enough, but one wonders whether many readers will find that the imagery flows happily and organically from the story. The grotesque Pieta is achieved by a metaphor that is even more forced and for me at least unintentionally amusing in a scurrilous kind of way. That is, the old man finds the release in death of being able piss himself without discomfort, and as Felicity beholds this flood, she herself is "flooded with pity" (p. 168). Both floods are seen as a release: the old man is released from the false myth that he will never again enjoy a piss without pain. Felicity is released from the false myth of bourgeois niceness and hygienic, dispassionate marriages inside castle-homes that shut out everything unpleasant from their inmates' cowardly vision of security as the ultimate happiness. Felicity's big reward then, although it is paid for in "solitariness, in desolation" (p. 168), is that her quest has enabled her to break out of the prison of stasis, of loveless conventions, to shatter the twin false idols of property

and virginity, and to achieve the dizzy intellectual and emotional freedom of "perpetual becoming."

FIVE-TWENTY

This seems to be one of the few genuine short stories that Patrick White has written. Concentrating on the impact of a single phenomenon upon an elderly married couple, it hinges on a vital turning-point in the life of the main female character. It has compactness, dense, recurring imagery and a grotesque twist in the tail.

Structurally, the story is based on a carefully developed character contrast between husband and wife. As in many of White's studies of apparently successful marriages, he delights in contrasting the appearance of harmony ("They were such mates, everybody said" p. 170) with the ironic truth. There is tension between his sickly querulousness and her saintly patience and unquestioning servitude. In *A Woman's Hand* White also undermines the appearance of marital harmony by gradually rising to a crescendo of revelation about the death of communication between husband and wife. In *Five-Twenty* White presents an ironic perspective on both Mr. and Mrs. Natwick. For example, after Royal has scorned her "feverish" desire to have a baby, instead of feeling resentful, Ella "agreed it would be foolish" (p. 176) and lay awake watching him sleep, longing only to stroke his nose or kiss it. Or perhaps with a subterranean, Freudian resentment, to bite it off (p. 176). The authorial irony becomes particularly strong when White homes in on their relationship with these words:

> All their life together she had to try in some way to make amends to Royal . . . . . she could make amends in many little ways, though with him still in his prime, naturally he mustn't know of them. So all her acts were mostly for her own self-gratification. (pp. 176–7)

Royal Natwick is yet another of Patrick White's spoilt and querulous Mummy's boys: a narcissist afraid of sex ("in his distress he

complained about 'wet kisses' " p. 175) who seeks in his wife only an Oedipal substitute for his slaving mother. But so well sustained is the authorial irony of pretending to accept Ella Natwick's humble self-deprecation as natural that Mr. Ogburn's unvarnished assessment of Royal, though true, shocks: "A selfish, swollen-headed slob who'll chew you up and swallow you down" (p. 177).

In another sense *Five-Twenty* structurally resembles *The Cockatoos.* In the latter story the cloud of cockatoos was a catalyst dissolving the balance of several relationships and unleashing a Dionysian revelation of love, hatred. and daring. In *Five-Twenty* the divine visitation of the cockatoos is replaced by the sluggish, stinking traffic jam of Sydney's Parramatta Road. True to White's usual accentuation of the dreariness and the physical hideousness of decay in old age as symbols of man's squalor, the Natwicks sit on their verandah and stare vacantly at the traffic. In particular they come to await the driving past of an "ordinary" man in a pink two-toned Holden. The meagre plot derives from the tension of their waiting for his car to drive past at precisely five-twenty every evening. This mundane apparition is a recurring question mark punctuating our curiosity about the direction and the point of such a non-story, such a squalid environment and such a despicable main male character. And we are not disappointed. For after Royal Natwick has been casually killed off by White in a single line, the punctual knight called Five-Twenty descends from his charger, or rather from his broken-down and by now cream Holden, and wanders into Ella Natwick's house asking to ring the NRMA. It is an outrageously contrived plot. The man in the Holden arrives with the same inexplicability as the cockatoos: they are both agents from another dimension who produce suffering, worship, and epiphany in the previously static and predictable characters.

What exactly is Ella Natwick's epiphany? In a flash of irrational, sub-vocal ecstasy she transforms the focal point of her being from misdirected *caritas* to *eros.* Until Royal's death it had been the meaning of her life to subordinate herself in loving charity and almost awed worship of him. She had asked only for permission to serve him as a nun seeks God's blessing to serve Him. Suppressing her secret grief that she cannot have a baby because of Royal's infertility, she sublimated her pathetic yearning for the reproductive cycle of nature with her love for the tiny strip of green lawn and her

enormous cinerarias and ferns. Significantly, Royal wanted to replace the lawn, the only living organism in sight in the hell of Parramatta Road, with green concrete. And Ella, who is constitutionally incapable of pronouncing the place-names associated with her husband's mythic-heroic past, like Cootamundra, or his affliction, arthritis, can suddenly pronounce cinerarias with the greatest of fluency. Conversely, Royal in his sterility and smug narcissism, can never learn the name cinerarias. To take another subtle contrast: Royal desists often from yelling at his wife from his wheelchair only because in his cowardice he does not want the neighbours to think he is "a nut." But Ella finds the courage to be just a little unconventional in confessing openly her love for her plants, "whether Mrs. Dolan would think it peculiar or not" (p. 180).

Ella's whole life had been rooted in caring for husband and plants. With the advent of Mr. Five-Twenty, for the first time in her life she turns skittish, boasting of her flowers, "she was dressing in them for him, revolving on high heels and changing frilly skirts" (p. 189). She loses her spirit of *caritas* to such an extent that while expressing conventional sympathy for Mr. Five-Twenty whose wife is dying of incurable sickness, inwardly she almost bellows with laughter at the very thought, because she is in the feverish grip of *eros* and she can selfishly think of only one thing: that Mr. Five-Twenty – he never does get a name – should be entirely free for her passion. The story reaches its first climax when she becomes incapable of conventional, rational words, and her subterranean, sub-vocal passion comes pouring out through the "long palpitating funnel" of her throat "in a stream of almost formless agonized sound" (p. 190). At this moment of her agony, White elevates Ella to the redemption of suffering through love. "The wound of his mouth," a hare-lip actually by which she had been horrified and repulsed in another man (cf. p. 177), attracts her kisses with which she hopes to heal "all the wounds they had ever suffered" (p. 190). But the moment of epiphany is brief, and White cruelly follows it with a farce in which Ella tries to learn how to make coffee and buy a lipstick in order to please her lover-to-be. In these scenes White abandons Ella to her grating ordinariness (pp. 191–3). He reinforces the ugly anticlimax with the leitmotif of the deceased Royal's false teeth which Ella keeps in a tumbler on top of the medicine cabinet. There they remain as grotesque guardians of her loyalty to her dead

husband (p. 189 & p. 193). This leitmotif is given a further farcical twist by White when Ella, trying to persuade herself that she is not under the sway of sexual passion, says to herself in interior monologue, "No, it wasn't lust, not if the Royal God Almighty with bared teeth should strike her down" (p. 194). A witty but wickedly cruel pun.

After such a climax and such an anticlimax, White now faces the problem of how to conclude this startling story. Rather like a disinterested but malicious cat playing with a captive mouse before finishing it off, he toys with the narrative tension by having the reader wonder whether Mr. Five-Twenty will return to offer Ella her richly deserved consummating embrace, or whether in fact he has been killed in yet another traffic accident on Parramatta Road. When Mr. Five-Twenty finally does arrive, very late, White creates the meeting like a film director in slow motion, extending the time and space separating the two would-be lovers into the unbearable. She sacrifices her great love, the cinerarias, as she snaps off their stems in her clumsy haste to reach the object of her lust. Only to have the author treacherously kill off her only chance for sexual love. Mr. Five-Twenty dies of a heart attack in the midst of her beloved cinerarias:

> 'More air!' she cried. 'What you need is more air!' hacking at one or two cinerarias which remained erect.
> Their sap was stifling, their bristling columns callous. (p. 196)

She is willing to sacrifice the virile life of the phallic cinerarias in order to save his elderly, sick life. Earlier on, while Royal had still been alive, Ellas had had two Freudian dreams. She had dreamt that the gentleman in the Holden, Mr. Five-Twenty, had stood beside her on the side-path alongside the cinerarias (p. 182), and she had also dreamt that she had dropped an egg on the side-path and it had turned into a double-yoker (p. 183). Such imagery is suitable for comic farce and it is perhaps a mark of White's divided intentions in this story that at times he abandons the characters, and Ella in particular, to the triviality of their lower-class environment, and at other times he rises to a blood-mysticism reminiscent of D.H. Lawrence. For instance, Ella plays ridiculously with a phallic scarlet lipstick ("Mrs. Natwick blushed. What if she couldn't learn to get the

tip of her lipstick back inside its sheath?" p. 192). This is silly farce. On the other hand White effortlessly raises the level of the traffic symbolism to suggest the partly jocose partly doleful progression of all of life's organisms towards death (p. 185). The traffic imagery is modulated further to provide an environment which has ceased to be the harbinger of crashes and bloody deaths and has become instead a "river of traffic" whose constant flow has become almost mellitluous, sustaining them in their embrace. When Parramatta Road does produce another accident, White averts our attention from the pedestrian grotesqueness of the occasion and succeeds in producing an image of grace from it. Ella had rushed inside the house to get her best blankets and a pillow for the dying man:

> She had been so grateful to the victim. She could not give him enough, or receive enough of the warm blood. She had come back, she remembered, sprinkled. (p. 193)

This is the sacrament of charity sanctified by the giving and receiving of blood, and it is also possibly the sprinkling with blood of the sacrificial lamb to be, thus anticipating Ella's loss at the end of the story.

The traffic-imagery finally returns to its original state, indifferently remote and casually producing spasms of violent death. As Mr. Five-Twenty dies of a heart attack in Ella's arms, the river of traffic dries up and hangs together "only by charred silences" (p. 196). This image would have produced an apposite conclusion for the story in its air of dignified understatement. But White chooses to go on to a garrulous conclusion in which he views Ella and her lover as copulating turkeys and farcically suggests that Ella must "have killed him by loving too deep, and too adulterously" (p. 196).

SICILIAN VESPERS

This is in some ways a very clever and very ambitious long story, but it is marred perhaps by its very complexity, by lacking a clearly defined focus of plot or character-revelation, and most of all because it does not compensate us positively for its negative emphasis on the distasteful and the depressing.

White subordinates his characterisation, which is based on a series of orthodox enough contrasts, to his intricate intertwining of three main themes: a sexual, a religious, and an aesthetic theme. The sexual theme is familiar enough from White's other stories: an aging woman abandons her marital loyalty and gives herself up to an ecstatic but ugly adultery. Her sexual liberation is a false one because it is based on her misunderstanding of her deeper religious drives. What should have been for her a mystic exaltation in experiencing the presence of God in the cathedral at San Fabrizio becomes, sadly and grotesquely, a negative epiphany of distasteful sexual union. The aesthetic theme is mainly used for satiric purposes and to provide a flimsy pretext for the four aging culture-vultures to play snobbish one-upmanship. At brief though vital points in the story, however, the cultural setting of Greek temples or the Christian church at San Fabrizio is accorded religious significance or mystic life which contrasts sadly with the misguided fumblings of the characters with their guide books. Only Imelda Shacklock as "a creamy Goddess" gives us a glimpse of mystic serenity in forgiving the other characters their faults, particularly those of her promiscuous, restless husband. Ironically, and typically for White, she is totally misunderstood by the other characters and remains isolated in her peace. In fact, the main impulse behind White's characterisation is perhaps to show that this isolation is true for everyone. Perhaps it is this thematic obsession of White's that causes him so often and so mercilessly to attack bourgeois marriages that seem so apparently successful, having weathered the storms of life and being now safely anchored in insipid retirement.

The marriage of the Simpsons in *Sicilian Vespers* is like that of the Natwicks in *Five-Twenty*. In both stories there is an elderly married couple who are childless and who try to make up for this sad luck by becoming good mates. To others they radiate the appearance of harmony in retirement, but secretly, in isolation, one partner or both is fomenting with scarcely contained rage or resentment at some lifelong repressed urge. The married couple in *Sicilian Vespers* is even more like the couple in *A Woman's Hand*, because both couples stem from the educated, allegedly tasteful upper middle classes who ignore their impending deaths by clinging to each other, by striking superior poses to whatever audience will admire them and by travelling compulsively as though to remind themselves that they are indeed alive. Ivy Simpson, like Evelyn Fazackerley, and even more like Anthea Scudamore in *Dead Roses*, has been educated to hate and fear sexual passion and to substitute for it "the perfect lifetime relationship" in which "as Father's daughter" she is grateful that they are "considerate rather than sensual lovers" (p. 201).

The difference between the marriages in *Sicilian Vespers* and *A Woman's Hand* is that Dr. Charles Simpson is aware from the start of what Harold Fazackerley only discovers painfully towards the end, namely that their marriage is "a fake" in which "he was parading this impersonation of what she and others expected of him" (p. 199). But Charles' discovery of his frightening isolation inside of his tepid marriage is also prompted by pain, the pain of a toothache that hangs over the story. Indeed these marriages hang together only by shared, unjustifiably smug observation of their environment, be it lowly Parramatta Road in Sydney, the Hotel Majestic in the Blue Mountains, or a tourist hotel in Sicily.

In *Sicilian Vespers* White again attacks the problem of Western man's spiritual vacuum, and the malaise of his aimless affluence. White also attacks a related problem: Western civilization's unwise disdain for religious faith as primitive superstition and its contempt for and remoteness from the irrational intimations of its own subconsciousness. Ivy and Charles Simpson

> had agreed from the beginning to depend on their faith in each other rather than the man-concocted fallacies believers bunch together and label Faith. (p. 201)

But it is this "faith in each other," this passionless bond that seems to arouse White's ire most. He takes a satiric delight in proving that such loyalty is illusory and is inevitably betrayed by a surge of repressed sexual desire in one partner or the other. The woman yearns in almost a frenzy for adulterous sexual liberation in *Sicilian Vespers* and *Five-Twenty*, and as a minor theme, also in *A Woman's Hand.* In any case, White maintains such marriages feature the woman chattering and the man brooding. This is the case in the marriage of the Scudamores in *Dead Roses* and of the Simpsons in *Sicilian Vespers.*

White probes into Ivy Simpson's repressed irrational by revealing her sexual nightmares. As she sinks deeper into the darker regions of sleep and the subconsciousness, White alters the stylistic tone from satirized clichés and sexual farce to the deliberately confusing and obscure symbolism of the dream-state with once again a strong debt to Freudian phallic imagery. In the increasing frenzy of her secret fears and desires, grammatical structure is dissolved in a dense mesh of visual associations with sexually symbolic import. For example:

> will the red car plough the plastic lillies the biggest the acryllic already crushed you next unless you can uproot the whippet legs are pale mauve onyx nails enmeshed in a Sicilian plot the red glove will burst its buttons if Dr. Wongaburra Simpson can't prevent its evil spilling. (p. 205)

Here Ivy's subconsciousness reworks the undigested events of the day. Her superego distorts her sexual desires, making her frightened of them. She projects them on to the Sicilians, holding them responsible for her own secret urges. She feels that it is not her own instincts but the Sicilians who are plotting to seduce her into sexual intercourse. She sees herself as a whippet because her father, whom she adored, loved his pet whippet and despised her. She sees herself as a helpless lily for whom intercourse is not delight but destruction by the phallic red car. She hopes in vain that her loyal husband will save her from the climactic ejaculation ("evil spilling") of the red glove. That she conceives of her loyalty to her husband as a religious substitute is indicated by her "ejecting" a kiss to him which is an "offering." In her imagination Charles responds with equal religious imagery by offering her his rotten tooth in the style of a priest at

mass offering the symbolic guarantee of Christ's love for mankind (p. 205). This rotten tooth is serving multiple symbolic duty. It indicates Charles' incompatibility with sexy Sicily, and it is also "an affront to their relationship" (p. 201) because it is a sign of his physical decay threatening his potency. Therefore in her nightmare Ivy is dissatisfied with her husband and his sickness and she betrays the affection of her waking hours by spitting at her husband in her subconsciousness. Then with an abruptness of dream-illogicality worthy of Kafka, the tooth is drawn out and becomes a phallic symbol which so scares Ivy that she experiences the climax of her desire and horror. She ascribes the phallic symbol to the objects of her repressed sexual desire, Mr. Shacklock and her father Aubrey. Her erotic fancy disguises Mr. Shacklock as Mr. Cutlack the pirate. Her father is given an acceptable sexual identity as her "frightening husband" (p. 205). Her terror becomes so intense that she wakes up.

There is a certain amount of intentional humour in this Freudian symbolism. Allowing for these humorous overtones, I feel that this nightmare is well achieved by White. Thematically, it is representative for the whole of *Sicilian Vespers* in indicating the mixture of sexual desire, social inhibitions, and religious and aesthetic confusion that is the key to our interpretation of White's intentions.

At the end of the nightmare White returns abruptly to everyday reality. He indicates the lack of communication that exists between Ivy and Charles Simpson by the lie with which she fobs off his alarm about her nightmare. Instead she lies there and gradually drifts off into interior monologues that indicate she is continuing aspects of her nightmare as a conscious day-dream. She sees her father with "his breasts fattening in a fuzz of dirty gold" (p. 207), that is, a somewhat tarnished Olympian God issuing taunting sexual invitations to his ugly daughter. Twice here White reiterates his sexual theme. Firstly Ivy says to her husband "You've saved me," that is, saved her from the exhilarating sexual adventure of lust by surrounding her with his aura of decency and kindness. Secondly, Ivy makes it clear that she prefers kindness, because unlike her mother's precious Lalique bowl (p. 204), kindness "isn't breakable" (p. 207). Here White indicates by a modulated leitmotif that Ivy is so scared of breaking the Lalique bowl again in adulthood, that is of suffering rejection and failure if she embarked upon a "too

precious" sexual passion, that she has preferred the safety and reliability of Charles' kindness as a long-term substitute.

One of White's favourite methods of characterisations is to contrast the rational decisions of characters with the violence of their poorly repressed, irrational longings. Ivy's rational consciousness is expressed in the self-discipline implicit in her enduring marriage. This is a bargain she strikes with the social order in return for which she receives admittance to sensible, bourgeois circles where the libido is taboo. Her self-discipline is threatened by her irrational desire to see San Fabrizio. The desire is so strong that "her knees trembled." White uses the word "trembled" frequently to indicate an emotional eruption over which the character has at least momentarily lost control. At moments where his inner peace is shattered by suffering, the thickset body of Clem Dowson in *A Woman's Hand* is often said to be trembling. In *Sicilian Vespers* Ivy's trembling is associated with the visual image of an experience she had had earlier that morning. She had then seen a "bunch of tripe, the knots of intestines, no bees, but flies, sipping at the brown juices as they dripped" (p. 220 & p. 222). On this occasion she had trembled and tottered too. Why does White link the two experiences? Presumably to indicate their common origin in the irrational subconsciousness. Ivy trembles the first time because of her fear of decaying flesh, a fear which her rational consciousness had euphemised and repressed. She trembles the second time not because of her consciously expressed desire to visit San Fabrizio but because of her not yet consciously acknowledged sexual desire for Clark Shacklock. In the manner of a civilized woman she tries to repress both tremblings, and rationalizes that she and Charles had already seen the photos of San Fabrizio in the comfort of their home in Australia and that was enough. White then proceeds to show that this kind of resigned compromise does not work and that the dissatisfied irrational will revenge itself in due course.

To take another example of this hostility between the irrational and the rational in White's characterisation: when Ivy Simpson goes off alone to visit the Villa Guilia, she is gradually becoming conscious of her sexual attraction to Clark and of her determination to instigate an adulterous relationship. When she sees some children tormenting a caged lion, she bursts into passionate but ludicrous protest. White comments:

> To make things worse, Ivy herself knew that her compassion had been learnt, like her Italian, and that she was distressed, or excited, by some more personal contingency. (p. 226)

This contingency is the coincidental arrival of Clark upon the scene. Her outburst of passionate pity for the lion is only a confused and unsuccessful attempt by her rational mind to disguise from herself her mounting irrational excitement that she had just seen Clark. The narrative tension of the following pages is maintained by this psychological struggle between the rational and the irrational. For on the one hand there is the superficial level of trite snatches of dialogue about the environment or the church, and on the deeper level there is Ivy's interior monologue which tears at her in a crisis of conscience and desire. She remembers her sexual jealousy of her father's pet whippet as a child and seems determined now to recompense herself with Clark for the humiliation she had suffered then. At the same time she battles with her shame that she is about to betray her suffering husband (pp. 228–9).

As the story rises towards its sexual climax, it rises also towards a religious crisis. For White has intertwined Ivy's fear of sexual passion and her attempt to disdain religious faith. Passion and faith in her eyes are equally suspect because they are primitive, unreliable and of course irrational. So as White shows her sniggering her way to copulation with Clark, he also shows her increasing crisis of religious faith in the cathedral:

> could she destroy enough of what she loved to come to grips with what she feared? the *Godhead*: (p. 230)

That is, she has to destroy the complacency of her atheism, just as she has also to destroy her lukewarm loyalty to her husband, in order to experience the dual passion of faith in God and sexual ecstasy. White uncovers the unity of her two fearful desires with an imagery that is both clever and repugnant:

> When she had hoped to make use of a resilient, rubbery voluptuary to collaborate with her in a moral suicide more brilliant than any her mind had hitherto conceived, was he planning to lead her to safety over some frail suspension

bridge of his own? (p. 231)

The moral suicide to which she refers is her betrayal of her moral principles of atheism and marital loyalty at one and the same time. She is concerned, however, that he is avoiding her obvious invitation to blasphemous sexual intercourse in the cathedral, determined to channel her excitement away from sexual desire into the respectable outlet of admiring the architecture. But even the architecture of the *duomo* is so seen as to accentuate the series of dualisms between atheism and faith, adultery and marital loyalty, passion and decency, the rational and the irrational. For the cold Romanesque interior of San Fabrizio seems to stem more from "hoarse Arab affirmations of faith," from "Arab asceticism" than from "the rippled ecstasies of Christian mystics" (p. 230). Ivy's determination to transform this ascetic environment to correspond to her inner sensual torment is brilliantly captured by White when he says "Coupled columns elegantly twisted should have writhed with sensuous life instead of standing passively" (p. 230). The climax of *Sicilian Vespers* in the church at San Fabrizio is both a descent through sexual blasphemy into the "infernal grotto" of hell, and also the challenge of faith, of apostasy and conversion to the Roman Catholic Church via the counterpointing leitmotif of "the silken ladder" of prayer to God (pp. 238, 239, 241).

White does not disguise the fact that the congregation participating in the vespers at San Fabrizio is the usual dispiriting collection of aged ladies, cripples and the sick. But what he does suggest is that in our spirit, our souls, we are as crippled and as sick as this physical congregation. In any case, Ivy certainly is. To show this White inserts into the dialogue, which is already fugal in nature with the observations of the tourists being contrasted with the incantations of vespers, an impassioned paragraph of interior monologue from Ivy. The key word of association that sets her off is Clark's touristy reference to the Passion in the apse:

> . . . 'we'd find a very beautiful Passion.'
> (*Oh the Passion frightening word the tears of blood you have never shed stillborn is not a real one not a dead husband either in that incredible event you might bow your head along with the dust-coloured gentlewomen the cripples the male lost souls and learn from nuns how to climb a ladder of*

prayer.) (p. 239)

All these years Ivy has repressed her subterranean suffering and fears in the name of rationalism and civilized behaviour. As is quite common with White's female characters in these stories, she is suffering from childlessness and from fear of the loneliness she must face if her husband dies before her. Motivated by this suffering, Ivy is on the verge of discovering her true religiosity in humility and prayer, but instead she is seized by a different emotion from her repressed subconsciousness, namely sexual desire. And so, as Beatson puts it, she "has a negative epiphany or moment of Dionysiac communion."[1] She despises the "silken ladder of prayer." She does not ascend to God, but descends to hell to "discover her own, vulgar, fleshly self" (p. 240). The grotesque humour and the infernal horror of the situation are captured splendidly by White with three levels of language. On the first level the priest and his sad little congregation carry out their rites in inspired Italian incantations of vespers. On the second level Clark is left ludicrously far behind, still playing cultural one-upmanship with a memorised guidebook. On the third level Ivy is drowning in wave after wave of sexual desire and bitter childhood memories of her love for her father. White plays with these three levels of reality and various levels of remembered and experienced time with a series of metaphorical leitmotifs. "Mother's Lalique bowl," which Ivy had dropped in her childhood and which has become a symbol of the fragility of precious desires, metamorphoses into Ivy's handbag (p. 240). In the oldest pick-up trick in the world Ivy drops the handbag in order to bring her into physical proximity with Clark. Ivy remembers that her father had derided her as a child as an insipid "*sponge finger*" (p. 241) and now that she is on the verge of discovering sexual passion she bitterly transfers this epithet to the gentlewoman in the church congregation. "The silken ladder" of prayer is contrasted with the "brown tripe" that Ivy had seen hung in the street that morning. Ivy's horrified fascination with the tripe and the flies signifies her preverted lust for Clark and her fear of the decay of all flesh. This is why she is "sick" and "sniggering" all the time. Her seduction of Clark is seen by White as a grotesque negative parallel to Christ's crucifixion (p. 240). Like an adolescent obsessed with longing for love and faith, and dragging them through filth because he is scared of not being able to attain them, Ivy perverts her repressed religiosity into a repulsive "triple-blasphemy: against her honest

husband, their enlightenment, and most grievously, their love for each other" (p. 242). There is considerable irony in White's authorial remoteness here, because he has spent large parts of the story satirizing the shallowness and self-deception of Ivy's and Charles' atheism and marital friendship.

For more obscure reasons White expresses their adulterous copulation with an image that he repeats in *Fête Galante*. It is almost as though White's distaste for their motivations for copulation, namely on Clark's part promiscuity as confirmation of self-esteem and on Ivy's part desperate search for a physical passion to blot out her fear of Christ's Passion, has dictated this distasteful metaphor of them as landed fish. The visual image of them as fish in their death-throes, "lunging together, snout bruising snout" (p. 243) is contrasted with the all-seeing eye of God Pantocrator whose pity for them in spite of their ugly blasphemy is symbolized by White with an "enormous tear swelled to overflowing in the glass eye focused on them from the golden dome" (p. 243). One would have thought that this sexual-religious contrast was now sufficiently drawn. But White apparently cannot resist piling Ossa on Pelion. He resurrects Charles Simpson as a latterday Christ climbing wearily from his tomb, having already died once of sacrificial toothache, to offer himself for renewed martyrdom as deceived husband (p. 243). This is a gratuitous image that is not developed and which contributes nothing more to the religious theme than an ugly feeling that Ivy and Charles are trapped by their rationalism in an ugly world of martyrdom without transcendence.

The remainder of the story is a study in anticlimax and mild satire and seems boringly protracted. But there is one section in this epilogue which would have perhaps been more successful if it had been differently placed in the story. That is the flashback in which Ivy remembers a childhood visit with her atheistic father to vespers in an Australian church. This short flashback explains her tormented determination to remain rational and irreligious for the rest of her life, a determination learnt parrot-fashion from her adored father, and a determination which has prevented her in childhood as in adulthood from following her spontaneous religious inclinations. Her potential for experiencing God naturally in "the blue leaves and light" of the mountains (p. 254) is mirrored by her "exaltation" in the church. Only her father's compulsive mockery of the outcast

congregation prevents her from climbing with them through prayer, incense and incantation to God. Instead she is restricted to the negative experience of the mere flesh, her "inky wart," and her father's whisky fumes and spitting on the footpath to express his contempt for Christianity (p. 256). This flashback is perhaps somewhat contrived thematically, but no more so than is dictated by the compressed nature of a story's structure. In any case, her failure to have this religio-mystic experience in childhood through no fault of her own casts a mellow light on her stubborn, rational refusal to resort to prayer or worship in her old age. White has painted a convincing and presumably representative portrait of a human being who fails to realise her potential in life because she has been successfully indoctrinated to believe that civilization and culture require her to exorcize irrational religiosity from her being.

THE COCKATOOS

This is a story about very ordinary people's suffering from lovelessness and crippling inhibitions, and about their tormented yearning for the release of passion. It is also a story about both the brutal cruelty and the kindness of which humans are capable; about the perversion of sexual love into smothering possessiveness or into neurotic fear of intimacy and the reaction to such perversion in the quest for freedom and the courage to bear this freedom. The story vibrates with intensity of vision into the paradoxes of human misery and successfully probes the inner truths of four major characters, Mick and Olive Davoren, Busby Le Cornu and Tim Goodenough. In the scope of its characterisation, the rich development of the titular image, the unflinching representation of life's and people's loathsomeness as well as their joy, and in the integration of complex narrative methods and variations in mood, this is not a short story but a remarkably compressed novella.

Structurally, *The Cockatoos* is a non-sequence of isolated scenes, with absolutely no transition from scene to scene, each being a compressed representation of suburban life-styles within the privacy of neighbouring but unneighbourly houses. It is White's aim to reveal that beneath the conventional surface of suburban respectability there are latent lives that are intensely irrational, compulsive, frightened or zany. It is the terrifying secrets of these latent lives from which normal people hide and which the cockatoos function as catalysts to release. White shows his characters suffering from their repressed traumas with techniques ranging from cool irony to farce. Miss Le Cornu does not cry in her loneliness, she blubbers, "heaving and glugging, it sounded" (p. 273). This style is similar to the distancing devices of epic theatre. Or more farcically, when Miss Le Cornu gets up after unenjoyable coitus with Mick Davoren, she says, "Next time it will be better. I'll frizzle it up" (p. 275). She is of course referring obliquely to the steak she had cooked for him.

White does similar mining operations on the subconsciousness of Olive Davoren and Tim Goodenough. Olive Davoren's adult life has been a series of sad disillusionments. As a girl she had been Dadda's spoilt darling, but now her aspirations to be a violinist have ended in humiliating failure, and the consequence of her headstrong "craving for love or hurt" (p. 263) is a bitter non-marriage. Her resentful over-reaction to the death of her pet budgie is shown by a juxtaposed flashback of interior monologue to stem really from the death of her stillborn child. But as usual, White does not allow us the slightest opportunity to misread sentimentality into this misfortune. The passage is typical of White's technique and is worth quoting in full:

> She had told him, 'You let it die on purpose. Because I was gone. You knew I loved the bird. You was jealous – that was it!' Her grief made her forget the grammar she had always been respectful of.
> 'It was sick,' he said. 'Anyone could see. A person only had to look at its toenails.'
> 'I should have cut his claws,' she admitted. 'But was afraid. He was too frail and small.'
> (She had asked to see what they had taken from her – you couldn't have called it a child. She had even touched it. And wouldn't ever let herself remember. He certainly wouldn't be one to remind her of it.) (pp. 264–5)

Most of the words are devoted to trivial squabbling about the cause of the budgerigar's death. There is also incidental satire on her snobbish worrying about grammatical niceties. The real meaning of the passage is only hinted at in bracketed parentheses. And immediately after this the passage concludes in a farcical jest about the bird's name. The pathos of Olive Davoren's failure in life is thus sandwiched between dry satire and anticlimactic farce.

Tim Goodenough is a persecuted child-outsider like Clay in *The Burnt Ones*, but he is less a loony and more an adventurer struggling not just against his mother's domination, but against the conformist suburban dread of his satirized parents that he will become an artistic poof (p. 267). To sustain himself in his battle for independence and courage he maintains a private museum of "mystic" objects (p. 269) which have personal, supernatural

significance as talismans. This hidden museum is the externalisation of his inner terror that corresponds to the hidden suffering of the Davorens and Miss Le Cornu.

As in many of White's stories, there is in *The Cockatoos* virtually no plot. Instead, mainly through flashbacks of interior monologue, the misery of four different lives is revealed in a stasis that is paradoxically tense with frustrated emotions. Only the birds of the title can break this deadlock and re-enthuse the drooping spirits of the characters with a brief but exhilarating rebirth of ecstasy and passion. It is an essential part of White's artistic honesty that the participant must pay for this brief splendour with death, grief and a return to the dragging isolation that is worse than it was before because it is haunted by a vague memory of the vision of grace.

The cockatoos are strange symbols of this grace[1] as they move mysteriously like drunken flowers through the magnolia tree (pp. 277, 286, 290). They are unknowable, worshipped messengers of nature's visionary beauty; their phallic, knife-like crests cut through the resentments, the fears, and the twisted passivity of the four main characters and draw them into a strangely compelling dance of dynamic passion. Not that the cockatoos are misused aesthetically to represent an ethereal and remote vision. On the contrary. White has observed them with meticulous care and insight, and has made of them symbols of human potential in heightened intensity. In their different moods they express a universality of human emotions. They are like the Greek Olympian Gods who are in every respect human in their passions, their rages and their weaknesses, but somehow incomparably more magnificent and dazzling in their naive expression of these emotions. Alternatively, one could see them in a more negative light as the equivalent of the officials in Kafka's castle. As inhabitants of the other, the spiritual world, they reflect in a cruel mirror-image the contrariness of human behaviour. The only transcendence they have to offer is to act as catalysts in releasing the potential of the human irrational from its bondage to rational, social norms and the appearances of civilized intercourse. True to their mirror-image reality, the cockatoos are different things to different people at different times. They can be "striding and stamping" in anger, or quiet in wisdom (pp. 261, 264, 266, 281); heartless slashers in their vicious conformist persecution

of the outsider (p. 281) or have "kind eyes" (pp. 275, 282, 286); their crests are often threateningly phallic (pp. 261, 265, 281, 288), but on one occasion are seen affectionately as ladies' gently opening fans (p. 282); at times the cockatoos are a gaggle of gossipping adults (p. 282), at others, they provide a nightmare of overobvious Freudian symbolism for Olive Davoren when they pick with their beaks at her childless womb and the big clamshell (p. 279), and at other times again they inspire unexpected, uncontrollable passion. Sometimes their passion is healthily animal as an antidote to repression and to fear of sexual intimacy (p. 285). At other times the cockatoos provoke a grotesque competition to win their love and possess them (pp. 280, 281), but tend to transcend this grotesqueness in Busby Le Cornu's plea for freedom and sharing (p. 286). In this way the deadening habit of bourgeois marital possessiveness is gloriously broken, if only for a moment. The transcendence of ecstasy is there, but it is fleeting. Because the character must return to a world where "time passes: nothing better can be said of it" (p. 295).

In a slapstick farce that contrasts strangely with the preceding ecstasy, some of the cockatoos are murdered by that Victorian villain and Freudianly perverted nark, Figgis the undertaker. The remaining cockatoos then lose their godlike magnificence. They turn "a nastry grey colour, more like hens which have been fluffing themselves on an ash-heap" (p. 294). There follows an anti-vision of loathsomeness in the story's coda, featuring White's usual collection of "alkies and freaks and pervs and old women with stockings half down and scabs on their faces." The last cockatoo undergoes a correspondingly loathsome martyrdom. It is aged and seems to offer itself for the boy Tim Goodenough's ritual slaughter in order to provide an irrational talisman guaranteeing him courage and independence from his Oedipal mother's suffocating love. The quest for manly independence comes through brutal slaughter of one of nature's wild creatures. Man's inevitable brutality, primitivity and irrationality stand tragically exposed at the story's conclusion as the necessary correlatives of freedom, independence and even love in its true form. For Olive Davoren to rid herself of sulking resentment, for Mick Davoren to rid himself of narcissistic indifference to sexual love and falsely romantic adulation of war and death, for Busby Le Cornu to overcome her neurotic terror of intimacy and for Tim Goodenough to seek courage, the inspiration of the cockatoos in one

form or another is necessary. The cockatoos are a vehicle for externalisation of hidden, inner life, a ritual cleansing of inhibitions and perversions, a purification through catharsis and a tormenting enrichment of subsequent mundane life through memory of ecstasy.

The visit of the cockatoos to the society of human beings attains its ecstatic climax not in the release of physical passion but in their mysterious revelation in the magnolia tree. Here they are revealed in transfigured glory "like big white drunken flowers in motion" (pp. 277, cf. p. 286). It is a Dionysian revelation of the repressed irrational, of pre-civilized passion and barbarism and the magic tokens of superstition. It is a renewal of emotional vitality that has been sapped, in White's Nietzschean and Freudian terms, by the conformist mediocrity and deadening repressions of middle-class suburban mundanity.

Corresponding to their visual transfiguration in the magnolia tree is the magical ability of the cockatoos to provide transcendence through the spirit of music. Olive Davoren expresses her devotional worship of them with the "thin and angular" tones of her long disused violin. It seemed that "the composer was collaborating with her. And cockatoos" (p. 287) and thus she produces "moments of exaltation in what must otherwise have been a horrible travesty of the Partita" (p. 287). Olive has produced music under the influence of her love for the cockatoos so that while it remains empirically and sensually horrid, it is in another religious world where the intentions rather than the notes are heard, and this is an act of inspired grace. Interestingly enough, this provides a very close parallel to the situation in Grillparzer's 19th century story, *The Poor Minstrel*. The minstrel is mocked and deceived by all and seeks consolation in his violin from which he produces the most excruciating noise, off-key, off-tempo, in fact unrecognizable renderings of the classical greats which he offers up in praise to the greater glory of God. It is implied by Grillparzer that God, like White's cockatoos, accepts this devotion with inscrutable good-will and no evidence of earache. The essential difference between Grillparzer's nineteenth century tale and White's ironical study of a more zany epiphany is that Grillparzer, appropriate to his Romantic epoch, sentimentalizes his inauspicious antihero into a saint of heroism and moral self-sacrifice to coincide with his acts of musical worship, but Patrick White remains grimly naturalistic in his characterization, confronting his

very ordinary characters with an environment that is often loathsome as they sink back into the greyish morass from which they had sprung for the one epiphany of their lives. Olive Davoren, for example, becomes a puzzled widow in a sealskin coat whose "weight is a comfort – even if hot" (p. 305) because it reminds her of her husband's weight on her during sexual intercourse.

Like Olive, Busby Le Cornu experiences a similar rise to ecstasy and fall into disenchantment. Her ecstasy is also not just one of physical passion, but stems from her communing with the cockatoos via Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. She crouches over an aria of betrayed and abandoned love which is "her own lament for a real passion she had never quite experienced" (p. 287). But out of suffering she soars against reason (p. 288) and is rejoined by those symbols of grace, the cockatoos, "in vindicating spirals, white to sun-splashed" (p. 288). The sensation of being awash in light is one of White's favourite images to express grace. White concludes this experience with a puzzling sentence which is doubtless an intentionally obscure joke: "she could not have faced the moonlit statue by daylight: a pity, because the Commendatore might have appealed to cockatoos" (p. 288). In *Don Giovanni* the Commendatore is the just avenger who comes back from the grave to exact justice from the unrepentant Don. Do the cockatoos exact a somewhat more farcical and decidedly less melodramatic punishment upon the mortals who have dared to look upon them and court their favour? Figgis ends up in the insane asylum, Mick Davoren in the morgue. Mrs. Dalhunty retreats from the farcical killing to "Our Lady of the Snows, Ashfield" (p. 294). Olive Davoren alone in her bed strains her ears in vain to hear "Him bumping around in the next room" (p. 299). Busby Le Cornu cries for the one "habit" in her unstable life, Mick Davoren (p. 304). She returns to the loneliness of her house, taking all of her stimulants in an unsuccessful bid at suicide. She is not comforted by a surreal phantasy of lesbian love with Olive and prefers her isolation to the banalities of suburban chit-chat about the weather. Tim Goodenough returns guilty but triumphant from his self-inflicted initiation into manhood, but is squashed into blubbering babyhood by his mother: "any vision he may have imagined having, ever, was splodged into one, great, white blur, at the centre of it a smear of sulphur" (p. 307). That is, the vision of the liberating cockatoos is merged with and lost in his mother's suffocating apron. And as for Mick Davoren, his false romanticising

of the brutality of war is avenged by the cockatoos thus: they wheel in the sky to chase and kill an outsider and he is reminded with unspeakable terror of his own aeroplane being shot down in the mid-East in the second world war. He becomes aware of the darker side of the cockatoos, of their brutality and their stench as they bash at each other with their beaks (p. 289). He withdraws in a nightmare of waking terror "an old, frightened man" (p. 289). Shortly after, he is accidentally killed by Figgis, not so much as a noble martyr defending the cockatoos as an insignificant participant in a suburban farce.

Are all of these grim endings the stern punishments of the cockatoos on human beings or simply the grotesque coincidences of life? White's elaborate parallels between cockatoo and human behaviour suggest the more romantic, supernatural explanation. That is, human beings have shown themselves to be too morally flawed to sustain the pure vision of the cockatoos in the magnolia tree. Their experiences of joy, beauty, love and courage are correspondingly blurred and imperfect, and they must pay for their brief ecstasy with an inexorable return to the dull incomprehension of their daily routine.

FÊTE GALANTE

Typical of White's shorter prose fiction, there are in his latest story, *Fête Galante*, no gimmicks with the plot, no sense of forced pace, no concessions to the popular notion of the short story of a medium of light entertainment. *Fête Galante* is as artful as his novels and achieves an intensity of mood, both comic and tragic, which is aesthetically and emotionally very fulfilling for the reader. In fact, because of the techniques employed of delayed revelation and deliberately slow characterisation, one needs to re-read this story in order to appreciate the myriad of details which gain in significance only when one knows the ending. As usual, White begins his story *in medias res* with no explanations or introductions. The scene is a stiflingly hot, dry afternoon in Greece with three girls dressed for a party walking through the dust and heat. It is a contemporary small town in Greece ruined by electronic gadgetry and peculiar fashions of Western technology – tape cassettes, platform soles and noisy small motorbikes. This uncomfortable dualism inherent in the setting of classical Greek rural backwater invaded by contemporary urban commercialism leads in the course of the story to another, more pronounced dualism between Greek pagan sexuality and Christian mediaeval puritanism. This dualism is reflected and developed in the inter-relationships between the story's characters.

White tends to achieve his characterisation by the repetition and modulation of scarce but significant details. The elder girl, Stephania, for example, is brought to life by the swinging of her nubile hips and her precocious singing of sex-ballads. The tormenting dualism in Thekla's character is shown by her alternately needing to lean on the chaste, self-effacing child, Zoë, as a projection of her Christian conscience, and on the other hand yearning for the sexual touch of her teachers, Artemis Meliou and the headmaster Mr. Kyriakos Lagopoulos, the latter preferably when shaven. The mood in White's development of this sexual self-torment is sometimes comic and sometimes of tragic intensity. It is for example

delightfully comic when Thekla lies naked on the bed with her rather large breasts in full view and daydreams of the "mysterious . . . almost mauve shadow of Artemis' cleavage," because who should enter the room just then but Zoë. Zoë, in comically exaggerated terror at this outburst of wanton sensuality, very nearly drops her fully laden washing basket. White uses the occasion to accentuate the dualism stylistically, relying as he so often does on the sense of smell to sense "a conflict between the scent of freshly ironed linen and that of warm, naked flesh" (p. 6). Already he is preparing us for the sadly resigned ending of the story where Thekla has to make do with the bony, pre-pubescent Zoë in lieu of her sexual gods, Artemis and the headmaster. White does this by a fugal alternation between dialogue and narration, in which Thekla lies naked on the bed chatting about the party she will give for her sexual gods, while Zoë, denied a role in this dialogue, is shown in her shocked silence not to be listening at all, but rather to be both frightened and dazzled "by the patch of hair between Thekla's thighs" (p. 6). Thekla's condescending patronage of Zoë is even clearer when she calls Zoë "the next best thing to a little Moorish boy."

Here the flashback ends and we return to the girls walking in the heat to the party that Thekla has planned. The sub-theme of class-differentiation is now underlined in two ways. Firstly, with Zoë, reared in the sexually vulgar lower classes, being shocked by Stephania's singing shamelessly her very own ballad of sexual yearning and torment. Zoë is shocked because Stephania is of the upper classes and is therefore presumably born to higher things. Secondly, Aunt Marsoula, who is from "the family's less impressive side" (p. 8), feels herself admiring her niece Thekla's social graces and aesthetic taste as Thekla commands the children in the setting up of the party.

But the main focus of the story remains on Thekla's problematic adolescent sexuality. Even slight details such as the arranging of the flowers in a vase are used by White to relate to his central theme of her burgeoning sexual awareness. Thus Thekla says of the flowers, "A tight bunch, they say, means tight in other ways." Thekla wants to be generous and relaxed sensually in what she hopes will be her impending sexual relationship with her gods. It is precisely Thekla's involuntarily advertising her sexual charms that gives that sour old widow, Aunt Marsoula, the opportunity to

revenge herself on Thekla's youth by sneering that she is dressed like "some *poutana*" (p. 8). Thekla's emotional volatility and her sensitivity of conscience as to exactly what the sensual side of her is up to, make her break down with shame at her inability to control and dignify the chaos of her emerging desires. The pagan-Christian dualism is further accentuated by the crippled girl Koutsomarigo, whose physical deformity has forced her into purity and who therefore, unlike envious Aunt Marsoula, sees purity in others including Thekla.

White's narrative technique is one of delicate hints, modulated repetitions, laconic omissions, delayed revelations, a fastidiously slow pace expressing with lyric intensity the details of setting and mood, subtly representative details for characterisation and character-conflict, details of setting and description made thematically relevant by symbolism, deft ironic and satiric touches to vary the lyric mood and to give the story a social class setting, and finally a climax of surprising vehemence and tragic intensity.

So the girls await the arrival of the gods of the gymnasion; Zoë looks for the headmaster's car. And the mention of the car is used as the pivotal point for that typical White trick, the abrupt dislocation of time. It is again a flashback, but White rarely gives any tranquillizing transition in these flashbacks and the inattentive reader can find himself chronologically lost by White's unrelenting drive for the laconic omission of explanations. The flashback here begins with the words,

> 'And Zoë, my friend!' Thekla's vehemence dared the headmaster not to believe in what must have appeared, superficially at least, a most unlikely relationship. (p. 10)

It is only in retrospect that the reader is able to reconstruct that what is happening here is that Thekla is taking along her externalised conscience Zoë to protect herself from herself on an outing with the headmaster and Artemis to the church of her namesake, the Panayia at Ayia Thekla. The constant thematic tension of the story is expressed here in the fact that this outing is at least ostensibly to revere a Christian madonna, but in the company of two adults whom Thekla desires sexually.

White expresses this tension, and other grimmer aspects of life, with comic detachment. For example, he prevents the reader from feeling any sentimentality about Zoë's family situation by nonchalantly mentioning that Zoë's mother is "a widow since the father was foolish enough to stand in the way of a tractor" (p. 10). And if we think that this is perhaps facile farce, White's humour is much more subtle stylistically and psychologically when he analyses Zoë's confusing relationship with Thekla Spatharaki as an experience akin to being set adrift in "treacherous waters . . . bobbing like a cork detached from any of its practical purposes" (p. 10).

White has an ability to capture the cross-currents and under-currents of several emotional relationships at the same time. He reports barely enough of the mundane conversation being exchanged on the most superficial level to keep the diverse elements of the story integrated in a simple plot of sorts. Thus lines of banal and haphazard dialogue are interspersed with paragraphs of either penetrating psychological commentary or brilliant evocation of sensual experience. There are also frequent flashbacks which are not really of a narrative nature but more generalisations about the main characters' habits and experiences; these generalisations give depth and meaning to the narrative in the present. To illustrate the complexity of these techniques of White I shall now examine the scene (pp. 12–13) in which Artemis and Kyriakos are in the front seat, and Thekla and Zoë in the back seat of a car headed for the temple of Ayia Thekla. The insidiousness of Artemis' seduction of the headmaster is expressed by the repetition of the whiteness of her arms, "a white to taunt honest Mediterranean skins" (namely Thekla's), the way in which she slides her arm along the back of the driver's seat, and the symbolism of her laughter which eludes him and yet lures him on to the chase, e.g. "Her high tinkle climbed out of reach of his brutal snort" (p. 12). These sparse details are sufficient to establish their relationship. Thekla's ambivalent desire for and hatred of both of them is for the most part expressed comically, but also sympathetically, by White, e.g. "Her teachers had her at a disadvantage. She must not hate when love was her vocation" (p. 12), or "Thekla wished, or even prayed, that Artemis would remove her arm from the back of the driver's seat" (p. 12). Then in the middle of a banal exchange about cats, the headmaster throws in a non sequitur with a passionate intensity that reveals his need to avenge himself on Artemis' seductive taunts, " 'You're

lacking in Thekla's youthful sensuality and warmth,' said the headmaster surprisingly." With the word "surprisingly" White indicates that the headmaster has made a fool of himself; he has blundered with his ineffectual attempt at revenge into Artemis' snare. The contrast of the artificiality and insincerity of Artemis' behaviour with the adolescent suffering and agonized passion of Thekla is developed by a leitmotif emphasizing Thekla's indiscriminate, sensual appetite for food and sex: "She (Thekla) was too aware of her own physical grossness, her greed for macaroni and fried potatoes, her hot hands and thrashing thighs" (p. 13). This sensual appetite is further complicated by her contrasting and rather desperate devotion to the "blessed saints" to whom she is drawn because of their martyred chastity. But Thekla is unsuccessful in her attempt to separate the Christian and pagan elements of her personality. Her adolescent narcissism and her sexual awareness intrude obsessively even into her religiosity, e.g. "If occasionally she had dared evoke the face of Ayia Thekla, it was in her own likeness, as she withdrew ashamed from the mirror in her darkened room. Ah, God, she should have become a nun!" (p. 13). Many of these psychological complexities are presented in the flashbacks; occasionally, however, a flashback is devoted to the evocation of a specific memory from the past. In these evocations it is interesting how heavily White depends on the sense of smell to convey a mood or scene. It is the sense of smell which establishes the connecting link between the present outing in the car and a childhood experience which Thekla recalls: "In the lanes there was this same smell of herbs and dust, until on entering the village itself, it was overlaid by that of sour milk, and goat droppings, and extinguished candles" (p. 12). The mood of the village scene and its effect on the visitor are established perfectly without referring to any of the other senses.

In the space of these two pages, White's concentration is such that he still has space for casual ironies and touches of farce in his description of the pedantic attention lavished by the two high school teachers on poor little Zoë in the name of higher education. The mood too of Thekla's lust for Artemis and Mr. Lagopoulos undergoes some bewildering changes. At one stage on the journey – and this experience is also conveyed by the sense of smell – she comes into close proximity with the driver and "was so overcome by the scent of his hair, and the more general smell of a man, that she

fell back abruptly and struck Zoë with an outflung arm" (p. 13).

The story's symbolism mainly serves the purpose of underlining the dichotomy between purity and paganism. Mr. Lagopoulos asks Thekla why she is such a martyr, and that Peter Pan of high school teachers, Taki, cynically puts her problem into an historic context with this sly image: "Didn't you know, Thekla, that if you scratch a Christian, more often than not you'll draw pagan blood?" (p. 20). On the one hand Thekla worships the asexual peace of the Panayia (p. 18), who has a "mediaeval angle to the shoulder" (p. 17), and finds the church of her saint's namesake in a hollow dominated by the "Chaste Tree" (p. 13). On the other hand Thekla's imminent sexual explosion is anticipated by her desire not to be too tight with the flowers or her womanhood (p. 9). That she will inevitably overcome her Christian scruples is indicated by the fact that her saint's effigy has disappeared from the church: "Time or man has been too much for her. The church is her only memorial" (p. 15). The imagery of this dichotomy is sometimes of an extraordinary intensity and pathos, as when White evokes the contrast between land and sea at sunset: "The mainland was smouldering with orange fire, while the gulf slithered from deepest purple into ink-blue. The tragic undertow in anybody must must have responded to the sea-tones" (p. 17). The dissension here in the landscape between the cool serenity of the sea and the tormented fire of the land is a projection of Thekla's inner conflict. But White is also capable of expressing this dichotomy comically, as when he has the girls greedily devouring the mutilated cake, of which there remains only "pockets of bloody cherries and drifts of spattered cream" (p. 18).[1] The deliberate confusion here in the colour symbolism of passion and purity is the signal for the outbreak of a pagan or "dervish" dance orgy by the girls in which they are appropriately transformed into "squealing nymphs" and Taki into a "faun" (p. 19). Similarly, Artemis and Mr. Lagopoulos are earlier referred to as "the gods of the Gymnasion" (p. 17) in ironic anticipation of their later fall from honour when they are seen by a prying student in copulation that is perhaps Olympian, but nevertheless in this context degrading.

White also uses mute action and gesture as effective images in the story. For example, at one stage Artemis stumbles, clutches at Thekla for support, and they are brought together "like two sisters or lovers." Thekla for her part is thrown at the same time on that

symbol of "her insubstantial conscience," Zoë (p. 14). The orgiastic dancing too is a symbolic projection of inner torment. Thekla dances and sings "her hate for those she loved" (p. 19) and sees herself as Salome with two heads on a charger to replace that of the hapless John the Baptist. Taki for his part dances out his lovable but shallow and uncommitted personality: "he would dart in, but turn, and twist, always eluding what he saw as a threat to his freedom" (p. 19). The dance in fact becomes a witches' *Walpurgisnacht* in which the former gods are seen as a dirty dog and a sow-goddess. The adolescent dreams of purity and reverence are destroyed here in the sordidness of Mr. Lagopoulos' betrayal of his invalid wife with Artemis, in the faun-like, unsoulful caperings of Taki, in the scarlet pimples of Babis and in the frenzied contortions of the crippled Koutsomarigos which set her "little gold cross jerking quite devilishly" (p. 22). Here we see the fall of both the Christian puritan God and the Greek pagan Gods.

Although White chooses as usual to pay little attention to plot manipulation in this story, preferring to rely almost exclusively on flashbacks instead, he nevertheless manages to construct a conclusion which illuminates an earlier unsolved mystery and is symbolically satisfying in taking up a previous image and giving it new dimensions. The mystery, which has been left dangling for the last third of the story, is why Thekla blunders back into the church of Ayia Thekla, bellowing like a tormented cow (p. 16). In the conclusion it is revealed to us that she has desecrated the effigy of her saint with a pagan superstition, hoping thereby to win the love for herself of Artemis and Mr. Lagopoulos (p. 23). Thekla's sexual lust has caused her to commit the ultimate sacrilege against the Panayia; faith has been desecrated and there remains for the horrified little Zoë only the false hope of the word "America" spelt out in the moonlight on a white plastic spoon (p. 23). That is, America, once the land of idealistic promise and of religious faith is now no more than Pepsi bottles and plastic gadgetry, garbage besmirching the purity of the moonlight.

But there is nevertheless one solace in this conclusion. And that is the metamorphosis of Thekla into a giant fish. Here, a little sexual ditty sung with apparently only marginal relevance by Stephania at the beginning of the story (p. 7) is symbolically transformed. Thekla is not just the monstrous fish stranded on the beach, writhing on the

hot coals of erotic passion; she is "twisting in her shroud" (p. 24), that is, she is dying and reborn, she has felt the agonies of sin and remorse, she penitently and contritely offers her love to her conscience, Zoë, and it is a spiritual love transcending the distasteful sexual vulgarities that have been Zoë's only experience of love so far in her squalid family life. The moonlight of absolution washes Thekla white and she is at times almost transfigured into her own Panayia, "not unlike an archaic statue which time and sea had treated leniently, even respecting the anachronism of a gold cross, its chain eating into the marble neck" (p. 22). White thus retains the dichotomy of pagan Greek and Christian cross to the end, but in this last image the dichotomy is almost reconciled by his gentle irony. The same gentle irony permeates the pathos of the concluding sentence in which Zoë accepts Thekla's proffered love by taking in her fragile hand Thekla's "monstrous moonlit fin" (p. 24).

PART FOUR

JOURNEY INTO THE INTERIOR: THE RELIGIOUS SENSE IN PATRICK WHITE AND FRANZ KAFKA

"The path of mysteries leads inwards"
– *Novalis*

For many Australians a journey into the interior of their country, into the dead heart of the desert, is almost akin to a pilgrimage where Ayers Rock is the Australian religious equivalent, in a farcical touristy sense, of the holy shrine at Mecca. But of this kind of journey into the interior Patrick White is on record as saying: "I've never been very far into the Australian desert. And what's more I'm determined never to go." Instead, White prefers to satirize Australian urban society, and having revealed its smugness and triviality, to journey mysteriously and often grotesquely into the interior of the human spirit.

Franz Kafka too shows in his predilection for parable and allegory that his concern is not to represent exterior reality but to probe into man's spiritual dilemma. Erich Heller describes Kafka's agony as "the predicament of a man who, endowed with an insatiable appetite for transcendental certainty, finds himself in a world robbed of all spiritual possessions." Heller goes on to say of Kafka:

> All the time his soul is preoccupied with the power of Evil; a power so great that God has to retreat before it into purest transcendence, for ever out of reach of life. Life itself is the incarnation of Evil.[1]

Heller's characterization of Kafka's religious agony applies equally to the fiction of Patrick White.

It has emerged from my detailed analyses of individual stories by Patrick White that he is interested not so much in people interacting in a social or political environment, as in isolated souls

questing for spiritual self-fulfilment. The most obvious questers in the shorter prose fiction are Harold Fazackerley in *A Woman's Hand* and Felicity Bannister in *The Night the Prowler*. They quest or seek for spiritual peace, for oneness with nature, for a harmonious resolution of the mysterious ways of God.[2] They are driven to their quest by their malaise, by their conviction that middle-class conventions and middle-class diversions, that materialism, rationalism, and agnosticism are painfully inadequate answers to the question: how can we ethically justify our lives? This tormented search is termed a quest to differentiate it from a pilgrimage or a peregrination. A pilgrimage implies that the path to salvation is known, and that provided certain acknowledged tests are passed, salvation, meaning union with God, is assured. Peregrination implies a faith in God's providence so great that the individual can wander with apparent aimlessness as a holy fool through the world and still be assured of finding God's grace when he most needs it. Such assured faith and such certainty of salvation are foreign to Patrick White's shorter prose fiction as they are foreign to the great quester-novels of the twentieth century such as Kafka's *The Castle*. W.C. Booth claims that the reader of such a modern quest

> is forced to cast off his own moorings and travel on uncharted seas towards an unknown harbour . . . No one tells us in *The Castle* what K's goal is, or whether it is attainable, or whether it is a worthwhile goal in the first place. Our puzzlement is intended to be as great as K's. When Christian (in *Pilgrim's Progress*) begins to turn aside from the unmistakably correct path, we experience unequivocal dramatic irony: we stand on a secure promontary and watch the character stumble. But when K stumbles, we stumble with him. The ironies work against us fully as much as they do against him. In such works we do not discover until the end – and very often not even then – what the true meaning of the events has been. Regardless of the point of view in the narrowest sense, the moral and intellectual point of view of the work is deliberately confusing, disconcerting, even staggering.[3]

Patrick White's overriding point of view, unlike that of Kafka, is not always confusing, although it is staggering. In *A Woman's Hand* and *The Night the Prowler* White's point of view is clear in that he is

satirizing the conventional bourgeoisie and feeling empathy for his mystic seers in the inevitable suffering of their quest. But White still has the task of persuading his readers that the goals of Clem Dowson, Nesta Pine, Harold Fazackerley and Felicity Bannister are comprehensible, let alone spiritually laudable. As their mystic visions coincide with insanity, murderous violence or the scurrility of the last throes of a scabby old alkie's death, White makes no attempt to prettify the fate of these questers for *unio mystica*. In this respect his work forms a particularly stark contrast to the mellifluous persuasions of Hermann Hesse as the latter invites the reader to accompany him on a relatively effortless, and erotically appetising *Journey to the East*. With Patrick White, the penalty for achieving the spiritual ecstasy of even the briefest *unio mystica* is almost always the loss of what we from our limited viewpoint term the sanity of the rational individual or the loss of temporal life itself. Or, as White has Olive Schreiner put it for him in an epigraph to Part Three of *The Aunt's Story*, "When your life is most real, to me you are mad."

My frequent use of the term *unio mystica* in relation to Patrick White's shorter prose fiction raises the question of whether it is valid to interpret his work from the viewpoint of such religious mysticism. Certain critics, encouraged no doubt by White's statements in interviews about his religious unorthodoxy, have adopted this approach. Heseltine refers to White's "mysticism of objects"[4] by which he means a supernatural significance that White attaches to certain inanimate objects, so that these objects acquire not just a symbolic significance linking them with themes and the meanings of certain characters but more than that a radiance with which they could only be invested by a divinity of some description. Beatson goes further than this to interpret White's novels as deriving their narrative tension from the yearning of the mystic for *unio mystica* with God. He therefore perceives the structural movement of these novels as alternating in the psyche of the main characters from the long, dark night of the soul, in which he defines the soul's suffering in terms of its anguished individuation and its remoteness from God, to brief, climactic epiphanies in which the soul succeeds at last in finding its tortured and confused way to God. Such moments occur according to Beatson, to take just a few examples, in the re-enactment of the crucifixion in *The Riders in the Chariot*, in Dubbo's artistic rendering of the chariot with its four beatific souls,

at the end of *The Vivisector* when Hurtle Duffield paints his final vision and is "stroked" by God, and in *The Solid Mandala* when Arthur Brown dances out the four-fold spirit of the sacred mandala by the whirling flame tree, thereby expressing with his subconscious soul rather than his conscious mind the essence of his life's ethical mission to unite his closest friends in love, and in particular to save his brother from damnation.[5] Thelma Herring also interprets Patrick White's artistic intention as being the exploration of "man's potential divinity," and the revelation of "the necessity for love and humility in human relationships, ... the inadequacy of reason and the superiority of the mystic's intuition of reality."[6] And of course Patrick White himself in the various interviews he has given and in the epigraphs with which he prefaces many of his novels, has been quite explicit about what he sees as the religious mission of his art, namely to revive spirituality outside of the bounds of institutionalised religion in an age where the soul has been all but killed by materialism and rationalism. It therefore seems justifiable to view the climaxes of some of his stories and novellas as epiphanies of religious mysticism.[7]

The mystic visions of many of White's characters must, however, be differentiated from Christian mysticism, of which Denis de Rougemont says:

> But by Christian mystics, on the contrary, the reality of the mystical state is subjected to the test of the deeds and works that issue from it.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> St. Teresa deemed good only those visions that impelled her to act better and love more.[8]

Very few of the seers in White's stories are able to withstand the terror of their visions, let alone derive any moral benefit either for themselves or for others. As we have already seen, Daise Morrow and Felicity Bannister are the two exceptions who translate their visions into good works. De Rougemont goes on to distinguish between "*unitive mysticism*, which aims at a complete *fusion* of the soul with the divine" and "*epithalamian mysticism*, which aims at the *marriage* of a soul to God, and which therefore implicitly maintains an essential distinction between creature and Creator."[8] Daise Morrow

is the only character in White's stories to maintain a sort of epithalamian mysticism over a period of time, and there is something decidedly secular and earthy about her pan-eroticism. Characters like Harold Fazackerley who blunder into a moment of fusion with nature are too frightened to do anything other than retreat back into banality. White thus ironicizes the element of mysticism in his stories.

Patrick White is by self-confession a lapsed Anglican:

> I was brought up an Anglican. Oh, then I gave that away completely. After the war I tried to belong to the Church of England, but I found that so completely unsatisfactory. I wouldn't say I am a Christian."[9]

Franz Kafka was the fervently religious, but unorthodox son of an orthodox Jew who paid lip-service to Judaic religious ritual for social purposes.[10] Both White and Kafka write a kind of fiction that is concerned scarcely at all with man as a socio-political animal, and is obsessed instead with probing into individual *homo dei's* soul. White and Kafka both strive to reveal man's spiritual aspirations from a religious point of view that is personal, undogmatic, artistically original and frequently ironic. Considerable criticism has already been devoted to religious interpretations of Kafka and White separately, but I hope in making this novel comparison of the two writers in close juxtaposition at least to gain a new perspective on some old problems.

It should also be noted that Patrick White did study German and French literature at Cambridge University, and that he has been said to have been influenced by many German authors, including Kleist, Büchner, and the dramatists of the German Expressionist movement.[11] Indeed, when White claims that as the main task of his art he "wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and poetry, which alone could make bearable the lives of such (ordinary) people,"[12] he seems to be echoing the artistic credo of the German Christian mystic, Friedrich Novalis, who wanted "to give the commonplace a higher significance" in order to achieve "the elevation of all phenomena to the state of the miraculous."[13] It is religious intentions of this kind which provide the link between the stories of White and Kafka.

White's and Kafka's religious logic is nightmarish because it is so often frightening, imagined in a context of imminent insanity or death by lonely, outcast figures. Pasley draws our attention to what he calls Kafka's "dream-like narrative," and what I would prefer to term "nightmare logic," in the concluding sections of *The Judgement* and *A Country Doctor*. These aspects are "the private time-scale (galloping, dragging), the dissolving of one scene into another, the feeling of a preordained frustration, the sudden materialisation of things (the groom, the wound), the absence of astonishment, the lack of bearings, the attempt to escape . . ."[14] I would suggest that in certain of White's stories, such as the representation of ecstatic insanity in *Clay*, of agonized insanity in *The Letters*, the bracketing of insanity and mystic vision as co-extensive in *A Woman's Hand* and in the representation of erotic and spiritual elevation experienced temporarily by three characters in *The Cockatoos*, White displays a similar kind of "dream-like narrative" or nightmare logic. White and Kafka also induce nightmarish moods by locating the quest for the spirit in environments that seem startlingly incongruous, or even inappropriate to the extent of inducing the tone of the grotesque or black humour. White, for example, locates his religious vision in such settings as suburban back-yards adorned by pumpkins or cockatoos, in gobs of spit or in lines of ants in *The Tree of Man*, or in the garbage dump. Kafka locates his religious vision in such places as circus cages, in superstitious peasants' sick rooms, in the stiflingly bad air of obscure law courts, or in puddles of beer in a village pub. Both White and Kafka are very fond of animal and insect imagery to express the allegorical nature of the human quest for God. White attaches particular religious significance to the behaviour of ants, screeching peacocks, swarms of cockatoos, dogs, cows, and even a lovebird.[15] Kafka delights in tantalisingly casuistic fables about a man who metamorphoses into a beetle of sorts in *Report for an Academy*, a mole in *The Gigantic Mole*, a dog in the *Investigations of a Dog*, and a black panther in *The Hungerartist*. These animal masks are sometimes satiric, sometimes tragic guises for White and Kafka to omit the cluttering details of mundane realism and to concentrate allegorically on the startling points they wish to make about *homo dei*.

Kafka's religious vision is that of the tortured paradox, of the ironic search for a spiritual self or a *deus absconditus* that is both

necessary and by definition unattainable. Suffering is viewed as an end in itself, because suffering produces the only awareness that human beings can attain of the absence of God and of our need for him. It is everywhere plain in the diaries and his stories that Kafka found in his writing this kind of suffering awareness and in that sense saw in his art a prayer, an act of worship.

In a previously mentioned interview with Craig McGregor, Patrick White sounds a surprisingly similar note:

> 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; it's an attempt to express that, among other things, that I try to do. Whether he confesses to being religious or not, everyone has a religious faith of a kind. I myself am a blundering human being with a belief in God who made us and we got out of hand, a kind of Frankenstein monster. Everyone can make mistakes, including God. I believe God does intervene; I think there is a Divine Power, a Creator, who has an influence on human beings if they are willing to be open to him. Yes, I pray. . . . I wouldn't say I am a Christian; I can't aspire so high. I am a very low form of human being; in my next incarnation I shall probably turn up as a dog or a stone.

White's unorthodoxy, his concept of writing as spiritual exploration in search of God, and his ironic self-belittlement of his religious importance as an individual, these are the things he has in common with Kafka. If White's expression in the above-quoted passage seems a little simplistic in contrast with Kafka's polished paradoxes in *Observations Concerning Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Way*, it should be remembered that White is here speaking in an interview. White's statement that human beings somehow got out of hand and became Frankenstein monsters is a rough equivalent of the fall from grace, although White very unorthodoxly leaves open the question whether God or man was responsible for this fall. Kafka for his part says of the fall:

> Die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies ist in ihrem Hauptteil ewig. Es ist also zwar die Vertreibung aus dem Paradies endgültig,

> das Leben in der Welt unausweichlich, die Ewigkeit des Vorganges aber (oder zeitlich ausgedrückt: die ewige Wiederholung des Vorgangs) macht es trotzdem möglich, daß wir nicht nur dauernd im Paradies bleiben könnten, sondern tatsächlich dort dauernd sind, gleichgültig ob wir es hier wissen oder nicht.
>
> Man's banishment from paradise is for the main part eternal: although this banishment from paradise is therefore final, and life in this world is unavoidable, the eternity of the process (or expressed in temporal terms: the eternal repetition of this process) does make it possible in spite of this, that we not only might be permanently in paradise, but in fact that we are there permanently, regardless of whether we are aware of this or not.[16]

The success of the religious logic that Kafka uses here is dependent upon our acknowledging our spiritual blindness, our utter lack of understanding of our position in God's creation, and therefore the possibility that what we do perceive is not just limited, but downright misleading and the opposite of God's truth. Certainly Kafka affirms a world along these lines, viz.:

> es gibt nichts anderes als eine geistige Welt; was wir sinnliche Welt nennen, ist das Böse in der geistigen, und was wir böse nennen, ist nur eine Notwendigkeit eines Augenblicks unserer ewigen Entwicklung.
>
> There is no other world than the world of the spirit; what we call the world of the senses is the presence of evil in this world of the spirit, and what we call evil is only the necessity of a moment in our eternal development.
>
> Wahrheit is unteilbar, kann sich also selbst nicht erkennen; wer sie erkennen will, muß Lüge sein.
>
> Truth is indivisible and can therefore not know itself; he who claims to know the truth, must be a liar.[17]

The logical impossibility for human beings to perceive spiritual truth, as Kafka sees it here, is depressing. But with typical paradox, Kafka turns back from this dead-end of human impotence, and applies himself to a casuistic examination of faith:

> Der Mensch kann nicht leben ohne ein dauerndes Vertrauen zu etwas Unzerstöbarem in sich, wobei sowohl das Unzerstörbare als auch das Vertrauen ihm dauernd verborgen bleiben können. Eine der Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten dieses Verborgenbleibens ist der Glaube an einen persönlichen Gott.
>
> Man cannot live without an enduring faith in something indestructible within him, although this indestructible aspect of himself and his faith in it may remain permanently hidden from him. One of the possibilities of expressing this state of latency is the faith in a personal God.[18]

Kafka's view is clearly that man needs faith, whether it be faith in his own spiritual immortality or faith in a personal God, because how else could man retain his sanity when confronted daily with the rule of "foul devilry"?[19] But at this stage Kafka's religious logic becomes cruelly Mephistophelean, for he says:

> Die Tatsache, daβ es nichts anderes gibt als eine geistige Welt, nimmt uns die Hoffnung und gibt uns die Gewißheit.
>
> The fact that there is no other world than the world of the spirit takes away our hope and gives us certainty.[20]

At first one thinks that Kafka is assuring us here of the certainty of salvation. Then, with a horribly sinking feeling in the pit of one's stomach, one realises that he may equally be assuring us of the certainty of our damnation. This is the same black humour that we find in Kafka's stories and parables. Martin Buber expresses the blackness of the world that Kafka represents in his fiction with these words:

> A broad meaninglessness governs without restraint; every notice, every transaction is shot through with meaninglessness, and yet the legality of the government is unquestioned. Man is called into this world, he is appointed to it, but wherever he turns to fulfil his calling he comes up against the thick vapors of a mist of absurdity. The world is handed over to a maze of intermediate beings – it is a Pauline world, except that God is removed into the impenetrable darkness and that there is no place for a mediator.[21]

I shall have cause to return to this characterisation of Kafka's phenomenal world in his fiction later; for the time being I note only that Buber insists on the unambiguous positivity of Kafka's faith in the face of absurdity and characterizes this faith as being essentially different from that of the Christian by quoting another Kafkian aphorism:

> He who believes can experience no miracle. During the day one does not see stars.

and commenting on it thus:

> This is the nature of the Jew's security in the dark, one which is essentially different from that of the Christian.[22]

The Jewish God is also a *deus absconditus*, e.g. Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 65:15): "Truly Thou art a God Who hides Himself, O God of Israel, Saviour!," but the Jew does not rely on the intercession of Jesus Christ for grace and redemption, but solely on his faith. Buber argues bravely against the consensus of Kafka critics that it is this faith that gives Kafka the spiritual strength to withstand the horrors that he creates in his fiction as an objective representation of the phenomenal world around him.

Patrick White, like Kafka, stresses the irrationality of faith and how much we need this faith, when he says in a letter to Dr. Clem Semmler:

> I suppose what I am increasingly intent on trying to do in my books is to give professed unbelievers glimpses of their own unprofessed factor. I believe most people have a religious factor, but are afraid that by admitting it they will forfeit their right to be considered intellectuals. This is particularly common in Australian where the intellectual is a comparatively recent phenomenon. The churches defeat their own aims, I feel, through the banality of their approach, and by rejecting so much that is sordid and shocking which can still be related to religious experience . . . I feel that the moral flaws in myself are more than anything my creative source.[23]

In this passage White seems decidedly more positive and evangelistic about religious faith than Kafka, but both writers agree on locating religious quests in their fiction well outside the orthodoxy of the churches and in settings that are deliberately "sordid and shocking."

Kafka's unorthodoxy is reflected in the dry, ironic sense of humour with which he approaches religious themes. This has its counterpart in Patrick White's tough religious farce, as for example in *A Cheery Soul* where Miss Docker is pissed on by a dog, which, as she observes, is God spelt backwards. She is pissed on presumably as a punishment for her thick-skinned presumption in finding herself worthy of a communion of souls. White and Kafka both reveal a strong element of whimsy in their discourses on reincarnation and personal immortality. White, in the interview quoted above, expressed his mock humility with the flippant view that he could not hope for the personal immortality promised to orthodox Christians who have experienced the grace of Jesus, and that instead he might be reincarnated as "a dog or a stone." Kafka has a similar humour about reincarnation and immortality in the following aphorism:

> Ein erstes Zeichen beginnender Erkenntnis ist der Wunsch zu sterben. Dieses Leben scheint unerträglich, ein anderes unerreichbar. Man schämt sich nicht mehr, sterben zu wollen; man bittet, aus der alten Zelle, die man haßt, in eine neue gebracht zu werden, die man erst hassen lernen wird. Ein Rest von Glauben wirkt dabei mit, während des Transportes werde zufällig der Herr durch den Gang kommen, den Gefangenen ansehen und sagen: 'Diesen sollt ihr nicht wieder einsperren. Er kommt zu mir.'
>
> One of the first signs of dawning metaphysical knowledge is the desire to die. This life appears insupportable, another life unattainable. One is no longer ashamed of wanting to die; one asks to be taken out of the old cell, which one hates, into a new cell, which one has yet to learn to hate. A remnant of faith encourages one to hope that the Lord will happen along the corridor at the moment of one's transportation, look at the prisoner and say, 'Don't lock this one up again. He is to come to me.'[24]

Both White and Kafka here are using whimsical variations of the Buddhist idea that one must progressively purify oneself in the prisons of various humiliating incarnations before one can hope for the release of nirvana, and even this release is seen here by Kafka as a moment of arbitrary whimsy by a casual Lord, too much to hope for, a castle in the air as it were.

These theoretical statements by Kafka and White on religious faith are all very well, but one inclines to ask just how one comes by such faith. Patrick White gives a typically humorous reply to this question in another interview he had with Thelma Herring and G.A. Wilkes:

> I think the turning-point (from atheism to faith) came during a season of unending rain at Castle Hill when I fell flat on my back one day in the mud and started cursing a God I had convinced myself didn't exist.[25]

Of course White feels that he is battling with intellectual, academic rationalism and unimaginative atheism in Australia, and that therefore to make a confession of faith in God, especially where this confession of faith occurs outside an organised church, is to risk being branded a weirdo. He is therefore aggressive in insisting on the superiority of intuition as epistemological method, and on the aim of his art "to convey a splendour, a transcendence." He goes on to say:

> I wanted to suggest my own faith in these superhuman realities. But of course it is very difficult to try to convey a religious faith through symbols and situations which can be accepted by people today.[26]

Like Patrick White, Kafka too rejects traditional religion; it is no longer a valid way in the twentieth century of representing spiritual truth. Kafka makes this quite clear in his diaries. For example:

> Ich bin nicht von der allerdings schon schwer sinkenden Hand des Christentums ins Leben geführt worden wie Kierkegaard und habe nicht den letzten Zipfel des davonfliegenden jüdischen Gebetmantels noch gefangen wie

> die Zionisten. Ich bin Ende oder Anfang.
>
> I was not, as Kierkegaard was, introduced to life by the hand of Christianity, which was in any case already on the decline, nor was I able, as the Zionists were able, to catch hold of the last tip of the vanishing Jewish coat of prayer. I am either the end or the beginning.[27]

But if both Kafka and White, in their own diverse, original ways, search for a new beginning, for new images to represent a new quest for knowledge of divinity and the divine spirit in man, how successful are they in convincing us that they have made this beginning?

Both writers have a satirical-grotesque side, and a serious, spiritual side. With satire they clear away the generally accepted conventions that bind communities to falsehood. Then, in isolated and heightened moments of epiphany they reveal their irrational intimation of spirituality and divinity. The term "epiphany" seems to have been brought into a literary context by James Joyce, who, never one to be modest about his writing, decided to call a collection of his prose poems epiphanies. Richard Ellmann in his biography of Joyce comments,

> The epiphany did not mean for Joyce the manifestation of godhead, the showing forth of Christ to the Magi, although this is a useful metaphor for what he had in mind. The epiphany was the sudden 'revelation of the whatness of a thing,' the moment in which 'the soul of the commonest object ... seems to us radiant.' The artist, he felt, was charged with such revelations, and must look for them not among gods but among men, in casual, unostentatious, even unpleasant moments. He might find 'a sudden spiritual manifestation' either 'in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself!' Sometimes the epiphanies are 'eucharistic,' another term arrogantly borrowed by Joyce from Christianity and invested with secular meaning. These are moments of fullness or of passion.[28]

Kafka's epiphanies are without exception negative; that is, they

are realisations by central, representative figures of failure to achieve transcendence, of failure to fulfil the great life-task they had set themselves. His epiphanies emphasize the moment of insight into the inevitability of this failure, and are often rendered with a wry, ironic twist. The reader is obliged by the narrative techniques employed to share in this metaphysical insight, but he also shares in the liberating nature of this confession of failure. We know from Kafka's fragments that the confession of failure, the acknowledgement of the inevitability of one's own sin, is the beginning of the struggle for religious understanding and faith. As Kafka himself puts it:

> Geständnis, unbedingtes Geständnis, aufspringendes Tor, es erscheint im Innern des Hauses die Welt, deren trüber Abglanz bisher draußen lag.
>
> Confession, unconditional confession, the door flies open, there appears inside one's house a world whose dim, reflected splendour had up until then remained outside.[29]

Seen from this religious point of view, Kafka's novel *The Trial* is not the depressing story of an innocent man arrested without grounds and executed without reason, worn down to passive acceptance by his unsuccessful campaign to justify himself. Rather it shows how the anti-hero at the beginning of the story denies the religious experience and affects the pose of religious innocence through invincible ignorance. But in the course of the novel he becomes increasingly involved in his case, that is, with an introspective examination of his sin, his responsibility, with the notion of quest for spiritual redemption.

In such stories as *The Metamorphosis* and *The Judgement* the central figures are sons escaping from the unjust tyranny of authoritarian father-figures. In the misery of their flight they seek ineffectually for some existential self-justification or some spiritual compensation. The central figures in some of White's stories such as *Clay*, *The Letters*, and peripherally, *The Cockatoos* are also often over-sensitive sons who are tyrannised by domineering mothers. They seek with equal ineffectuality for some kind of spiritual self-fulfilment to compensate them for the communal life that they have forfeited. The central figures in these stories by Kafka and White are outsider antiheroes. They simply do not belong. They have

been made so insecure by their parental figures that they are unfit for the normal social stresses of communal life.

White, like Kafka, sees the quest for an epiphany as a search for a liberating truth within one's soul. As epigraphs to *The Solid Mandala* White quotes Paul Eluard, "There is another world, but it is in this one" and Meister Eckhart, "It is not outside, it is inside: wholly within." White feels that intellectual rationalism is an active hindrance to this quest for the spiritual world within because intellect leads to the proud denial of the irrational. And so many of his successful questers – because unlike Kafka, White has many tragically successful questers who catch a brief glimpse of some modern, ironicised equivalent of the Holy Grail – are therefore simpletons like Arthur Brown who "danced his mandala, on an afternoon flowing with fire."[30] The mandala is perhaps one of the best religious images that White has found to express the inexpressible moment when one of his characters discovers "the infinite in everything."[31] On the whole Kafka does not allow his characters to achieve this logically impossible moment of mystic fusion with spirit, with the possible exception of certain moments that are deliberately expressed with irony and a grotesque mood in *The Metamorphosis* and *The Hungerartist.*

White and Kafka share a common obsession with the symbol of the wound of Jesus Christ becoming universal, a wound in the side signifying spiritual pain and awareness of sin. White and Kafka also share, as will be clear from the passages I am about to quote, a tragic conviction that man is agonizingly caught between the tree of knowledge from which he has eaten, and the tree of life towards which he is perpetually striving. In White's *Riders in the Chariot* we read of Dubbo the aboriginal painter, who sees himself as Peter who has failed to give witness:

> The blood ran down the hands, along the bones of the fingers. The pain was opening again in his side.
>
> In his agony, on his knees, Dubbo saw that he was remembering his Lord Jesus. His own guilt was breaking him. He began to crack his finger-joints, of the fingers that had failed to unknot the ropes, which had tied the body to the tree.[32]

Dubbo-Peter wishes to redeem the murder of Christ, namely here the Jew in Sarsaparilla, by re-enacting within himself the wound of Christ, in order to act out his own sinfulness. His main hope is to redeem himself through his artistic task of rendering in a painting the other characters taking Jesus down from the cross. Dubbo sees that he must render this cross, "the tree to life,"[33] with blue:

> So, in his mind, he loaded with panegyric blue the tree from which the women, and the young man His disciple, were lowering their Lord. And the flowers of the tree lay at its roots in pools of deepening blue.[34]

What does this scene from *Riders in the Chariot* have to do with Kafka? In his aphorisms Kafka too differentiates between the tree of knowledge and the tree of life:

> Wir sind nicht nur deshalb sündig, weil wir vom Baum der Erkenntnis gegessen haben, sondern auch deshalb, weil wir vom Baum des Lebens noch nicht gegessen haben. Sündig ist der Stand, in dem wir uns befinden, unabhängig von Schuld.
>
> We are not only sinful because we have eaten from the tree of knowledge, but also because we have not yet eaten from the tree of life. The state in which we find ourselves is sinful, independent of personal guilt.[35]

It is of course dubious whether Kafka would necessarily identify Christ's cross with the tree of life and thereby affirm the miraculous intercession for our sinfulness by the Messiah. Nevertheless, Kafka is very fascinated with the image of the wound in Christ's side. The patient in *A Country Doctor* has "in his right side, in the region of the hips . . . a wound as big as the palm of the hand." The patient complains, "I came into this world with a beautiful wound; that was my only equipment." The doctor tries to console the patient by giving him pride in his wound, saying, "Many offer their side and scarcely hear the axe in the forest, let alone that the axe comes closer to them."[36] The wound signifies the spiritual distinction of having quested for suffering as an awareness of man's religious dilemma, an awareness not given to all, in spite of what appears to be a humorously exaggerated notion that there is a general rush to be martyred, to find meaning in one's life by offering oneself up to

be sacrificed.

Kafka's concept of religion and the path to salvation is very much one of strict, moral duty. Consider the following aphorism:

> Wieviel bedrückender als die unerbittlichste Überzeugung von unserem gegenwärtigen sündhaften Stand ist selbst die schwächste Überzeugung von der einstigen, ewigen Rechtfertigung unserer Zeitlichkeit. Nur die Kraft im Ertragen dieser zweiten Überzeugung, welche in ihrer Reinheit die erste voll umfaßt, ist das Maß des Glaubens.
>
> How much more oppressive than the most unrelenting conviction of the sinfulness of our present state is even the weakest conviction of the eternal vindication of our temporal existence that is to come. Only the strength to bear this second conviction which in its purity fully comprises the first conviction, is the measure of faith.[37]

Here Kafka defines faith, not in terms of a miraculous inspiration from God or a joyful, even egocentric belief in one's personal immortality, not in fact as something effortless or solacing at all. Faith is a stern moral duty; it is the ever-present challenge to bear the responsibility of moral self-justification, while at the same time knowing all along that one is inevitably sinful. Nor does Kafka suggest that we can look forward to our reward for such strenuous moral effort itself, because heaven is potentially present at every moment of our lives as a mystic correspondence of two incompatibilities, time and eternity:

> Jedem Augenblick entspricht auch etwas Außerzeitliches. Dem Diesseits kann nicht ein Jenseits folgen, denn das Jenseits ist ewig, kann also mit dem Diesseits nicht in zeitlicher Berührung stehen.
>
> There is something beyond time which corresponds to every moment of our time. No Hereafter can follow this life because the Hereafter is eternal and cannot therefore come into temporal contact with this life.[38]

It is therefore according to Kafka our religious duty to become aware of our sinfulness and to seek moral ways of justifying our

lives. A sinful life is one in which a person protests his innocence, as Joseph K. does at the beginning of *The Trial*, or tries to blame his personal sinfulness on some comfortable abstraction like original sin. Kafka offers an ironical definition of original sin with these words:

> Die Erbsünde, das alte Unrecht, das der Mensch begangen hat, besteht in dem Vorwurf, den der Mensch macht und von dem er nicht abläßt, daß ihm ein Unrecht geschehen ist, daß an ihm die Erbsünde begangen wird.
>
> Original sin, that old injustice committed by man, consists in the reproach which man makes and which he never ceases making, namely that an injustice has been done him, that original sin was committed against him.[39]

These theological subtleties of Kafka are not just empty exercises in wit and word-play, nor are they remote and metaphysical. They represent a moral challenge to the reader; they also offer a new perspective on Kafka's fiction by revealing that he is not merely a religious black humourist, as much of his fiction might easily suggest if read in isolation from these aphorisms.

Many of Kafka's stories seem to gain a positive meaning if they are interpreted from an ethical viewpoint. In *The Judgement*, for example, Georg is forced to scrutinize ethically his apparently successful business career, his alleged love for his father, and the motivations for his forthcoming marriage. He is not granted any insight into his own sinfulness and he dies uncomprehendingly protesting his innocence, "Dear parents, I really have always loved you." But we the readers have experienced a revealing glimpse beneath the surface of a typical conventional life and we know that Georg is guilty of egoism, arrogance, subconscious hatred of his father and shallow materialism. Such sins are of course all but universal and do not mean to imply that the father's arbitrary revenge disguised as justice is in any way an acceptable moral stance. But Kafka's narrative focus is almost always on the outsider quester-son and his spiritual expectations of this quester are high. Similarly, in the parable *Before the Law*, we are surely invited by Kafka to judge that the quester for spiritual truth has been too easily daunted, and that his passive and devious methods of patience and bribery are ethically insufficient. It is true that he has been

maliciously misled by the intermediary doorkeeper of the law, but it is after all the ethical function of evil to present a challenge to man, and this man from the country fails his test, as is shown by the two facts that there is a divine gleam from within the law, so the goal was worth attaining, and that this particular entrance to the law had been reserved for him alone and has gone unused. In contrast to *The Judgement*, the protagonist in *The Hungerartist* does attain awareness of his sinfulness. At the very end he confesses to charlatanry and hypocrisy in having sought the admiration of the people for his art of starving. But he dies purified by his confession and achieves the same religious goals of humility and self-effacement that Gregor Samsa the beetle arrives at in *The Metamorphosis.*

There is one particular aphorism that could explain the negative tone of much of Kafka's fiction. It is this:

> Das Negative zu tun ist uns noch auferlegt; das Positive ist uns schon gegeben.
>
> To do what is negative is the task that lies before us; the positive foundation has already been given to us.[40]

That is to say, Kafka regards it as an indisputable fact that we are in our higher essence souls striving for spirituality: this is "das Positive," the spiritual basis on which we can rely. But what he wants to show in his fiction are the human, all too human obstacles that prevent us from achieving serene awareness of the positive vision. "Das Negative" is his moral job as an artist to expose, and to help us overcome these all too human obstacles that stand between us and salvation. And so his fiction becomes a painful analysis and satire of the false idols, the golden calf that we wrongly worship in our everyday lives. Kafka looks for man's ethical self-justification in whether or not he is capable of forming a communion of souls through love. His story, *A Country Doctor* is a tragic demonstration of human failure in this regard. The doctor is helped by no one, no one that is except the devil who exacts his evil price. The appearance of communion and loyalty in the family is destroyed by Kafka in *The Judgement* and *The Metamorphosis.* Patrick White is equally satiric in his analysis of family bonds in *Down at the Dump*, *The Night the Prowler* and *Dead Roses.* But unlike Kafka, White does achieve a positive religious vision in some of his stories, and not just in essays or personal interviews. Particularly in *Down at the Dump*

White represents a love, the spiritually panegyric, panerotic love of Daise Morrow which is immortal in that it survives her physical death and enters the soul of her niece.

There are moments, however, when Patrick White's almost cruel sense of humour incongruously invades the realm of suffering and the quest for God. In *A Cheery Soul* Miss Docker's ebullient pretensions to divinity and her adamant refusal to admit suffering look very much like an irreverent parody of the quest for *unio mystica.* It is therefore very appropriate that instead of finding God at the end of her search, she is pissed on by the cryptogrammic dog. But White's cruellest religious jest in this story is not at the expense of Miss Docker, but of Mr. Wakeman. Mr. Wakeman's spiritual humility but hopeless ineptitude arouses sometimes farce, sometimes pathos. At times, it seems that he is mocked as Christ was mocked and tortured by the soldiers, that he is in fact undergoing an *imitatio Christi.* Beatson discovers this *imitatio Christi* in Stan Parker in *The Tree of Man* and Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector* and comments:

> By a paradox which is fundamental to Christianity, it is at the heart of the earthly labyrinth, the centre of Hell when man is at the greatest distance from God, that he discovers his divinity. It is now that he performs the true *imitatio Christi*, undergoing the same necessity that made Christ cry out: 'my God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' At the lowest point of the descent, when he has arrived at Calvary, man merges with God.[41]

But *A Cheery Soul* seems to parody this mystic paradox, because Mr. Wakeman, whose very name itself is a blatant irony, experiences only a negative epiphany. He plumbs the depths of humiliation, but instead of being rewarded with a vision of God, he achieves only the tardy insight into the sinfulness of do-gooders before he dies, farcically rather than spiritually illuminated in "a blaze of pumpkins." Ivy Simpson's epiphany in *Sicilian Vespers* is equally negative, and grotesque this time rather than farcical because of the juxtaposition of her monstrous copulation with Clark Shacklock and the miracle of Christ Pantocrator whose glass eye in the golden dome above seems to "swell to overflowing" with an "enormous tear."

In *The Night the Prowler* Felicity Bannister experiences the

same dark night of the soul that Mr. Wakeman had experienced on a farcical level, when she cries out, "I fuck you, God, for holding out on me!"[42] If this seems an inappropriate way for a mystic quester to address the hidden God, it is entirely consonant with her finally finding this God in a kind of squalid *pieta*, helping an old alkie to die without the blasphemy of nihilism on his lips. White is determined to create his own harsh religious paradox, to find God's hand at work in the most sordid aspects of our society. It is clearly scenes such as these that differentiate White from traditional Christian mystics like Meister Eckhart. Even in *The Cockatoos* where the birds as seen in the magnolia tree are divinely beautiful, they are seen in other scenes looking like demoniacal, brutal messengers from Hell. Nor can the cockatoos inspire man to become reborn with new ethics or a new spirituality. Instead three adults experience a temporary heightening of their erotic drives. The potential for love is ruined by the archetypal Judas figure, Mr. Figgis, who, in a way typical of White's more bigoted Sarsaparillans, destroys sacred joy in the erotic and the aesthetic with his envy that is masquerading as outraged puritanism.

In *A Woman's Hand* the vision of *unio mystica* contained in the display of the peacocks or in the impossible uniting of the irreconcilable opposites "fur and feathers" is equally ambivalent. We are apparently left to our own religious speculations by an authorially remote White and we conclude somewhat at our own risk that the brief spiritual affinity with the source of all being experienced by Clem Dowson, Nesta Pine, and Harold Fazackerley does not yield, as of course yield it must, to a dark night of the soul that is at least dignifiedly tragic, but rather to a lobotomized placidity. White's grotesque sense of humour once again intrudes on any attempt to view his stories, as opposed to his novels, as serious tragedies of the *unio mystica.* The most accurate statement we can make on White's religious sense in his stories is that he has ruthlessly elided all sentimentality and all facile optimism from his depiction of man's sometimes agonized and sometimes farcical quest for the Godhead.

PART FIVE

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE SHORTER PROSE FICTION

In an interview with Craig McGregor that took place some years after the publication of *The Burnt Ones* and some years before *The Cockatoos* appeared, Patrick White had the following to say about his short stories:

> Short stories? I don't really like writing them so much – though I have nearly got enough for another volume. All my effects are cumulative, and one doesn't really have the time to get the effects you want. The novella is more satisfactory; you can put more into it. Sometimes if I become very depressed while writing a novel and I get an idea for a short story I get that down, and afterward I feel as though I have been liberated somehow.

It is not uncommon for writers of fiction to compose stories or novellas as off-shoots of their major works, composed while this is in progress, and embodying a theme or an incident which doesn't quite fit within the framework of the novel. Thomas Mann, for example, composed *Death in Venice* as a companion piece on death to his great epic *The Magic Mountain.* But authors' intentions about whether an idea will grow under artistic treatment to a story, a novella, or a novel are unreliable, because Thomas Mann informs us that he had intended *The Magic Mountain* to be a brief, comic story as an antidote to the tragic-lyric form of *Death in Venice.*

If we accept this connection between short story and novel, we will expect to find certain bonds of theme and imagery between the shorter and the longer works of Patrick White's prose fiction. Although, as I have affirmed in the introduction to this monograph, the short stories and novellas can stand alone on their own merits, susceptible to interpretation as independent works of art, it is equally true that their themes and images are enriched when read in conjunction with the novels. For example, in the short story *Clay*

there is a brief and mildly puzzling reference to Clay as a child being terrified by the antics of clowns at a circus and burying his head in his Aunt Maud's bosom. In the novel *Riders in the Chariot*, where White has the space to develop the omitted scene at length, he provides a detailed description of presumably these same clowns enacting a farcical-macabre scenario of a public hanging, in which a clown is required to spin at the end of a hanging rope and to feign death, and one of the grannies in the audience screams "They will kill the silly bugger yet!"[1] The amplifying of this incident in the novel is more satisfying aesthetically, but the story *Clay* stands as an independent narrative entity because the focus of our interest there is not on the clowns, but on Clay's hysterical reaction to any mildly scary incident and on his instinctive reaction to dive for the cover of the nearest mature female's bosom for protection, a reaction that he repeats in insanity with his mother at the end of the story.

To take another example: in *The Tree of Man* Mr. Parker senior is said to be a drunkard who once "answered a question in a sermon."[2] This incident is amplified in *A Cheery Soul* to form a theologically farcical climax. Further, at the end of this story a decrepit old cattle dog pisses on Miss Docker, and we are given to understand this is the sentence of God upon her because dog "is God turned round."[3] But at the conclusion of the novel *The Solid Mandala* Waldo Brown's corpse is eaten by his own dogs as a fitting punishment because as a proud rationalist he had denied God and religion all his life. White's implied judgement in the story is farcical with overtones of pathos for a woman now irrevocably condemned to loneliness, whereas his judgement in the novel is harsh and unrelenting. Nevertheless, the common pun or word-play on which they depend confirms our hypothesis about White's religious sense of humour. We have already noted this inclination to religious puns in connection with the word "stroked" at the climactic epiphany of *The Vivisector*, and with the word-plays on "blesse's" and "remumber" at the climax of *The Letters*, and with the pun on the word "floods" at the end of *The Night the Prowler.*

Obviously there are many other connecting links between White's stories and novels, but to trace them all is not the purpose of this work. It is rather the function of this section to characterize the narrative and structural techniques of the stories, and to decide to what extent these differ from the techniques of the novels.

Many critics have now attempted to define the short story and in so doing to differentiate it from the anecdote, the sketch, the novella and the novel. I have no original words of wisdom to offer on these theoretical definitions, except perhaps to observe that none of the definitions works for the myriad of stories written in this century, but many of them work for some of these stories. White himself says, as we have noted in the initial quotation of this section, that he prefers to write novellas to short stories, but perhaps what he means by this is that he prefers to write longer stories to shorter stories. Are there hard and fast rules distinguishing a short story from a novella? Do we for example postulate that any story in excess of ca 6000–8000 words is a novella rather than a story? Or that any story that meaningfully illuminates the lives of more than say two characters separately is so complex as to make it a novella rather than a short story? Or that any story that does not limit itself to the representation of a single crisis or turning-point in the life of one central character, but instead creates capsule biographies of three or four characters through a complex network of flashbacks, constitutes a novella? Or where the thematic intentions of the author within the one story are not limited to the creation of a single effect but where instead there are clearly sub-themes and a number of effects ranging from the farcical to the tragic, that here the border from short story to novella is clearly crossed? The last two questions seem to point towards useful distinctions between short story and novella, particularly as they are written by Patrick White, but are certainly not sufficient justification for the literary theoretician to insist on drawing a dogmatic line between the two closely related forms.

I now propose to take what seem to me to be some of the more perceptive generalisations about the rhetorical and structural techniques pertinent to the short story and the novella, and investigate the measure of their relevance to White's stories.

These generalisations raise the following issues: the search for the overriding point of view and the hidden narrator; the art of an author making indirect comment and implied value judgements without reducing his characters to manipulated puppets; the startling metamorphosis of apparently simple and mundane events into disturbing spiritual problems; the analogy with film techniques in cutting abruptly from one scene to another and thus relying on

themes and leitmotifs to establish a continuum rather than on the chronological sequence and the causality of the traditional plot; the selection of a single crisis in the life of the main character as an illustration of the crucial turning-point in his life and hinting at a climactic epiphany for this character, or for the reader of the story; the structural relationship of beginning, middle and end; endings which feature a twist in the tail or a dramatic shock as opposed to open endings which leave the reader puzzled and disturbed; the increasing significance attached to inanimate objects and their often symbolic influence on the characters; the tendency of the contemporary short story to evolve a new kind of open-ended parable; the moral task of the short story to celebrate the uniqueness of the individual as a counterbalance to the conveyor-belt uniformity of modern mass society (in this sense perhaps the short story is making a virtue out of a necessity, because its very conciseness forces it to limit its perspective to one or two main characters); the tendency of modern short stories to the grotesque and the absurd as another way of emphasizing the moral contrast between the way of life of the often strange outsider-protagonist and conventional society and therefore the close relation of the short story to theatre of the absurd and to epic theatre, both of which aim to shock rather than to lull, to trouble rather than to console; the notion that the novella is especially suitable to render "degenerative or pathetic tragedy"; the uniqueness of the novella as consisting in the "double effect of intensity with expansion"; the achievement of a compressive quality in the novella "by an unwavering thematic focus and an accumulation of structural parallels."[4]

Structurally considered, Patrick White's stories almost inevitably rise, often from paradoxically inappropriate, mundane or farcical levels, to a passionate climax. This climax is either set in the concluding scene, or if in the penultimate scene, it is in order to create a deliberately ironic anticlimax in the end. This climax often coincides with some decisive event such as death or insanity, but the climax itself is not external, but internal. It almost invariably takes the form of an epiphany, either for the main character, or often, for the reader.

Reid defines epiphanies as "sudden momentous intuitions . . . when an individual is most alert or most alone."[5] Patrick White favours an especially elevated kind of epiphany which he features as

a characteristic climax for so many of his stories. In the stories collected in *The Cockatoos* the intuition of the epiphany is often related to the search of the outsider for an ecstatic insight into the underlying principle of all being in the cosmos, a fleeting moment of understanding of the workings of a hidden God in our earthly world, or a tragic triumph over petty egoism and possessiveness, which White sees as the evil of our world, through the medium of inspired love. This moment of transcendence of earthly preoccupations and of death and of the tormenting fact of individuation is characteristically gained by an isolated, unconventional individual, a romantic revolutionary against conventional society.[6] Even where the medium of the character's *unio mystica* is love, it is not the intimacy of two lovers that White stresses, but the panerotic or universal qualities of this love. The medium for these epiphanies can be solitary meditation on infinity as with Clem Dowson, aesthetic delight in the beauty of nature with Christian overtones as with Nesta Pine, or a vision uniting the dualistic principle of all being as with Harold Fazackerley, all within the one novella, *A Woman's Hand.* In *The Full Belly* Iordanou seeks for God through the medium of music and confused erotic worship of the ascetic Panayia. In *The Night the Prowler* Felicity Bannister finds harmony with the ways of a hidden God through the unconventional practice of *caritas.* In *Five-Twenty*, *Sicilian Vespers* and *The Cockatoos* there are what I would call negative sexual epiphanies, in which a character yearns for sexual union rather than mystic union and is either farcically or grotesquely taught the imperfections of this goal. The main characters in these three stories do not show sufficient understanding to grasp what they are being taught, and it is we the readers who experience a decisive insight into their failure. Mrs. Natwick in *Five-Twenty* farcically loses the object of her lust in the moment preceding its consummation. The grotesque inadequacy of Ivy Simpson's blasphemous and tasteless copulation is brought out by contrast with both the praying congregation and with the tear in the eye of Christ Pantocrator. The praying congregation has found spiritual serenity whereas she has gained only a temporary respite from the tormenting mundanity of her rationalistic and atheistic, and therefore pointless existence. The cockatoos inspire flowing passion in the inhibited Mick Davoren and the frigid Busby Le Cornu, but Mick cannot overcome the sin of his possessiveness and presumably for this reason he is punished by being grotesquely murdered. Olive Davoren is accorded an ironic heightening of her

artistic sensitivity and her erotic love for her husband. But she drops away from her inspiration to a trivial widowhood, and Busby sinks back to isolation and despair. Although all three of them, and Tim Goodenough too in his own way, spontaneously feel religious awe of the cockatoos, they never do understand the transformation this vision should make to their lives. It is the reader who comprehends the tragic inevitability of their failure and experiences in this sense a negative epiphany. In *Fête Galante*, by way of contrast, Thekla herself understands all too well the dual nature of her sexual failure. In lusting for the Olympians she has committed the sin of hybris, and in her lust she has betrayed her ascetic Panayia, just as hunger had driven Iordanou to betray his Panayia in *The Full Belly*. Like Ivy Simpson in *Sicilian Vespers* she is grotesquely transformed by her lust into a monstrous fish with the sly face of a woman. In *The Eye of the Storm* we find yet another reference by White to this strange monster.[7]

It is fascinating to note how many of the climactic epiphanies in *The Burnt Ones* are negative and sexual in character. When Mrs. Mortlock's breath goes "crrkk in her throat" in the last lines of *Dead Roses*, she is annihilated by her awareness of her sexual envy of Cherie Flegg and of having wasted her life because of her sexual inhibitions and her social pretentiousness. In *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight* there is a climactic revelation from the tape recorder, but no character gains real insight because of this revelation. Instead Nora stands isolated in her purity and her humility, and it is we the readers who are struck by the decisive insight into her moral superiority over the other characters' average corruption and deceitfulness. Constantia Phillipides experiences a tragic epiphany at the conclusion of *A Glass of Tea*; she says, as she rises for "a moment above the mounting tide of blood: 'I am the one, you see, who broke!'"[8]

She has taken her life because of her jealousy for her husband. But more than this she rises above her jealousy at this moment, because now in the self-sacrifice of her death, she is concerned only with guaranteeing her husband's future happiness. It is of course ironic that it is herself rather than the glasses who breaks and that she dies knowing that Aglaia will not break under the strain of becoming Phillipides' second wife, and that her sacrifice has not been in vain. In *Clay* the main character's ecstatic sexual suicide is

only instinctive self-gratification and it is once again the reader who is given a climactic detail of his clinging to the white wedding shoe in death. In the two concluding scenes of *The Evening at Sissy Kamara's* it is once again not the main character, Poppy Pantzopoulos, who comes to an intuitive understanding of her life's dilemma, but the reader. Because White has startlingly juxtaposed the tragic with the trivial, the reader intuitively grasps, without any comment from the author, the true nature of heroic self-sacrifice as opposed to Poppy's nervous, self-belittling flirtation with the idea. Similarly at the conclusion of *A Cheery Soul* Miss Docker continues on her falsely cheerful path, unaware that God has passed judgement on her through both Mr. Wakeman's sermon and the dog, but we the readers have comprehended the failure of her life and her way. But if *A Cheery Soul* features a negative, farcical religious climax, *Down at the Dump* compensates with the spiritual realisation by Daise Morrow of the love that transcends death and the partial comprehension of her gospel by Meg Hogben. The ensuing anti-climactic coda of four pages in fact rises out of its triviality and sordidness to a renewal of the climactic epiphany in White's representation of Meg's spiritual meditation and the resultant "warm core of certainty."[9] The remaining four stories in *The Burnt Ones* all feature climaxes involving sexual suffering. In *Being Kind to Titina* Dionysaki feels with full bitterness the irony that he has come to love Titina too late because she has now become a whore. But when he offers up his throat for self-sacrifice in expiation of earlier sin against her, he is forced to comprehend a further irony, namely that his "extended throat was itself a stiff sword."[10] White will not allow him to escape from his sin into the comfortingly passive pose of martyrdom; he must continue to accept the responsibility for further acts of aggression, as these are symbolically indicated by his 'sword.' The suffering awareness that Tibby Szabo gains from sexual disappointment remains, by way of contrast with Dionysaki, strictly farcical and Andrew Taylor is justified when he wittily points out that Tibby is not so much 'a burnt one' as he is 'roasted.'[11] In *The Letters* Charles Polkinghorn is allowed only one moment of tragic lucidity as he understands that all three of them, himself, his mother and his aunt, are fatefully "blessés." But his epiphany is, apart from Maud's letter, set in a context that is grotesque and farcical, and his moment of brief dignity is quickly lost in the ensuing parody of the Oedipus-myth. *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats*

constitutes a rare exception among White's stories, because here the main character Kikitsa is allowed to transform herself and her way of life as the result of her suffering when she is deprived of her cats and as a result of her epiphanous understanding of sexual psychology. "It was simply that Kikitsa's face had undergone a change, the way faces will, by joy, or suffering."[12] This is the only one of White's stories with a climax that is both sexual in nature and also happy, indeed farcically so; the concluding anticlimax of Maro Hajistavrou's hatred and envy only serves by way of contrast to highlight Kikitsa's sexual joy.

We have noted that the climactic epiphany in White's stories is often followed by an ironic anticlimax. When the anticlimax is extended sufficiently, it tends to form a coda with a structural importance in its own right. We have also noted how in *Down at the Dump* the coda actually presented a renewal of the epiphany. This structural feature has particular relevance to *A Woman's Hand*, where in a lengthy coda whose artistic justification had been difficult to perceive until this moment, Harold Fazackerley perceives the healing union of the world's dualistic poles and merges himself in ecstatic unity with nature:

> He was the black water trickling, trickling at the bottom of it (a great gorge). He was the cliffside pocked with hidden caves. He was the deformed elbows of stalwart trees.[13]

The earlier epiphanies of Clem and Nesta here reach not just a renewal but a new and high er peak of spiritual understanding. But inevitably this peak too is followed by an anticlimax of trivia as the Fazackerleys wait uncomprehendingly to die. *Sicilian Vespers* and *The Cockatoos* also feature extended codas. The function of the coda in *Sicilian Vespers* is to allow us to understand through a flashback to Ivy's childhood why she was driven to her sexual-religious blasphemy in San Fabrizio. We understand, but Ivy doesn't, that her confusion has been caused by her having sexually adored her father who had scorned her and who had also drummed into her that religious exaltation is only hocus-pocus. For her adulthood she has learnt from his rationalism and atheism, but in so doing she has had to drain out her instinctive religious fervour, leaving her an empty but tough shell. The coda in *The Cockatoos* is less well integrated, and Tim Goodenough's story is really a separate

one, tenuously linked by the cockatoos. The inadequacy and brutality of Tim's response to the cockatoos are not excused by his justifiable fear of forever being tied to his mother's apron strings, and the reader, as so often in the other stories, is left to come to his own understanding during the extended anticlimax of the coda, of the spiritual and moral failure of all four major characters in this novella.

White's stories tend to have a surface of social trivia and a tension emanating from a hidden, psychological or spiritual truth towards which White's few elect protagonists struggle. White prefers on the whole to replace chronological plot development with a complex network of flashbacks designed to allow the story to comment on itself by the careful juxtaposition of these flashbacks with the present, and to give depth to the characterisation to the extent that the structural movement might be said to resemble a whirlpool spiral into the past and into the subconsciousness of the present with the moment of greatest suffering and highest awareness coinciding at the bottom of the spiral. White's characters tend to fall into two distinct groups in their attitudes to this whirlpool. The larger group are the satirized bourgeoisie who pretend that the whirlpool is simply not there, and who construct fortress-homes and fortress-conventions to protect themselves from it. The alleged positivity of their gospel of happiness and their commitment to order and respectability are undercut by their sour denial of love and their fear of the mysterious and the unknown. The smaller group of seers is not happier, but is often blessed with the instant of epiphanous transfiguration we have discussed above. These seers have given themselves up to the whirlpool, sometimes involuntarily because they bear the mark of fate, and sometimes as a sign of their romantic revolt against the conformist majority. They are more open to such emotions as religious awe, humility, serenity, affinity with nature and generosity in love. They are also more prone in the moments of highest pressure to depths of agony, insanity, violence or death.

We have already noted that the moods in White's stories vary enormously and often abruptly within the one story from farce and satire to tragic pathos. The key to these variations is inevitably to be found in White's many styles which range from the ridiculing mimicry of Australian slang to the lyric positivity and startling

power of his serious imagery. One has the feeling that the intensity and the sensitivity of the style and the character-psychology are such that White is sometimes obliged to let off steam in these stories either through outbursts of incoherent passion or through an explosion of ribald farce that can be glaringly out of harmony with the rest of the story. For the most part, however, White remains austere, ironic and elusively aloof from his material. These words denote the essentials of White's overriding point of view in most of his stories. Michael Wilding, in commenting on the story *Five-Twenty*, notes

> a somewhat patrician note of the superior anthropologist in denoting the minutiae with a rather distasteful objectivity. It's a narrow line between deep sympathy and contempt. White presents a terrifying picture of the urban industrial world, redeemed by no possibilities, no hopes; it is a powerful nihilism whose gestures and attempts towards mystical communions and epiphanies only confirm the hopelessness.[14]

It may be true of *Five-Twenty*, and of certain others of White's stories that feature what I have called negative sexual epiphanies, that the attempts at "mystical communions" are unsuccessful. But this does not justify Wilding in claiming that the stories are informed by "a powerful nihilism." Failure and suffering are for White necessary paths to religious experience and "true knowledge comes only from torture in the country of the mind."[15] The depressing ordinariness of his characters' lives is redeemed, but not so much by erotic ecstasy, as by a flash of intuitive vision into the hidden harmony of creation or by a spiritual acceptance of the necessity of suffering.

Even in the inevitability of failure, White's characters are saved from nihilism because what appears to be the triviality of their lives opens up to show hidden depths of repressed intensity. At their climaxes these only apparently humdrum characters fairly explode with emotional intensity and thereby prove their human individuality. R. Hinton Thomas claims that it is

> the task of contemporary literature, in the mass-society of this scientific age, . . .'die menschliche Substanz in einer Welt

> zu zeigen, die allen poetischen Reizes entbehrt,' 'die Behauptung des Menschen im Alltag und in der Uniformität'[16] ('to show the essence of being human in a world that lacks all poetic allure,' 'the assertion of what is human in everyday life and in the midst of uniformity'). This is a task which the short story can be particularly well fitted to perform, whether by the special interest it may show in 'konkrete, oft nebensächliche oder unscheinbare Vorgänge' ('concrete, often trivial or insignificant events') . . . or by preoccupation with the frankly absurd.[17]

These generalisations about the contemporary German short story seem particularly pertinent to White, who is expert in stirring apparently absurd mixes of the trivial and the mystic, the mundane and the Dionysian, the materialistic-rationalistic and the religious-miraculous. These prodigious and abrupt leaps in mood and meaning give White's stories a kinship with the shock effect emanating from theatre of the absurd. Ionesco's *The Rhinoceros* for example, aims, like White's stories, to reveal through an exploration of the absurd, the incongruous and the surreal, the vital differences between the social conformism of the bourgeoisie and the potentially volcanic tremors of the individual soul.

There is another form of modern theatre that White's stories resemble, and that is epic theatre. R. Hinton Thomas perceptively establishes the relationship between epic theatre and many short stories when he says:

> We are here concerned with a feature of many a short story that might be spoken of as a 'Verfremdungseffekt' ('distancing device') and this establishes a point of contact with epic theatre, which, renouncing the conventional structural unity of a play and allowing it to consist of a series of more or less loosely connected scenes, aims not at creating the sense of illusion, but at putting the audience in a critical state of mind, at creating 'epische Distanze' ('epic distance') at lifting 'alltägliche Dinge . . . aus dem Bereich des Selbstverständlichen'[18] ('everyday phenomena out of the realm of the self-evident').[19]

There are two major points here. The first is the structural point

about the "series of more or less loosely connected scenes." The second is the aesthetic effect on the readers or the audience, namely to give them critical distance from the characters and to estrange them from what has always appeared obvious, thus jolting them into reviewing the familiar with new eyes.

Taking the structural point first: it is dubious whether the sequence of scenes in epic theatre is quite as loose as is generally assumed. The sequence in White's stories is certainly not loose. I would suggest that Brecht, and White too, substitute another pattern of order for the old one of linear chronology and rising emotions, namely the order of a network of juxtapositions that are determined by such intellectual considerations as illumination of contrasting themes and dialectical paradoxes in characterisation. Indirect comment, often satirical, is created by this network of juxtapositions. But here the comparison between Brecht and White must be abruptly halted. For in all other respects they are at the opposite end of the literary poles. It was Brecht's intention to alienate the audience from the familiar environment in order to provoke them into demanding social change towards what he saw as the political rationalism of communism, whereas White forces his readers to review the familiar from a new spiritual awareness that is entirely anarchistic, irrational and private. Brecht optimistically celebrates man as a social creature rationally and historically working towards a utopian political organisation. White pessimistically celebrates man as a religious creature doomed to a suffering remoteness from God and obsessed in his loneliness with a spiritual transcendence of his inevitable agony. With unembarrassed obviousness Brecht pushes his audience didactically towards his simple, political message, whereas White as narrator prefers to remain elusive, remote, complex, non-political and even obscure.

A brief comparison between the narrative stance and the structural technique of juxtaposition in the fiction of James Joyce and Patrick White brings us far closer to understanding the functions of relative distancing between author and characters, and characters and readers. In a statement on the narrative stance of James Joyce that he claims "has now become a commonplace of modern fiction," Richard Ellmann says that this stance seeks

> a presentation so sharp that comment by the author would

> be an interference. It leaves off the veneer of gracious intimacy with the reader, of concern that he should be taken into the author's confidence, and instead makes the reader feel uneasy and culpable if he misses the intended but always unstated meaning, as if he were being arraigned rather than entertained. The artist detaches himself from his material so as to push the reader into it.[20]

We do indeed feel uneasy at the end of such stories by White as *A Cheery Soul* or *The Cockatoos*, as we search for a meaning that will integrate the many puzzling jigsaw-pieces. Instead of coolly debating the morality of characters as Brecht intended us to, we find ourselves at the conclusions of the above two stories sympathizing in surprising intimacy with Miss Docker, Busby Le Cornu and Tim Goodenough as they confront the insoluble dilemmas of their lives. These insoluble dilemmas are caused by the inevitability, the unchangeability of their characters. Almost none of White's characters is allowed to develop meaningfully in the course of the stories. They are trapped tragically or farcically in the conformist and usually puritanical prisons or their class or in the haunting traumas of their alienated childhood. There is no escape for them, but there is for the reader through his liberating understanding of the reasons for their limitations.

There are a few notable exceptions to this law of immutability of character in White's shorter prose fiction. They are Kikitsa Alexiou in *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats*, Meg Hogben in *Down at the Dump* and Felicity Bannister in *The Night the Prowler.* Meg and Felicity do not so much develop gradually and naturally as they are transformed potentially by an intimation of the spiritual transcendence for which they have been seeking. Kikitsa acts out her transformation in her new sensual serenity towards nature and her own body, and also towards the awakened sexuality of her husband. Undoubtedly the time-jumps and the general compression of White's novellas contribute to this impression of abrupt change rather than gradual development, but it is also true that White wishes to depict above all the unpredictable abruptness and isolation of the moment of grace and the full illogicality and often grotesque negativity of the epiphanous transfiguration.

The question of compression in White's stories brings us to the

issue whether his stories might not be more usefully classified as novellas. Even in such a comparatively uncomplicated story as *Five-Twenty*, White tends to reach back through the flashback into extensive evocation of the past and to tell the story of the malformation of Royal Natwick's character as much as the story of Ella Natwick's insane, erotic expectations of the gentleman in the pink Holden. *The Letters* too shows the germ of White's inclination to reach back into the past and relate impressionist, capsule biographies, instead of illuminating one crucial turning-point in time and leaving the before and the after to be hinted at or filled in by the reader. But *The Letters* is vigorously unified by White's device of quoting the letters themselves and thus thematically and stylistically integrating the extended chronology. The only stories that are unambiguously short stories, it seems to me, are *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight*, *Miss Slattery and her Demon Lover*, *The Letters*, *The Full Belly* and *Five-Twenty*. These stories tend to restrict themselves to a single incident, a single theme, or a single confrontation.

But I am undoubtedly being very conservative in speaking of the short story in these terms. Ian Reid tells us that it was in the first two decades of this century that critics insisted that a short story had to have

> three related qualities: it makes a single impression on the reader, it does so by concentrating on a crisis, and it makes that crisis pivotal in a controlled plot.[21]

It is clear that White's stories make complex impressions on the reader, that they are often almost plotless, predominantly low-key and slow to build up pressure, and that the protagonists are often suffering a permanent crisis of quiet desperation throughout their lives and the stories. It is also clear that most of White's stories have no definitive beginnings, are almost all middle, and have open endings that show the suffering as often as not going on uniformly after the conclusion of the story. Most of the stories, it is true, reach a climactic epiphany of one kind or another, but in the anticlimaxes that follow, the inexorable, low-key rhythm of quiet anguish seems to stretch out like an unending desert into the future. In this respect White's stories fit very well into William James' characterisation of his brother's complex shorter prose fiction as giving

> an impression like that we often get of people in life: their orbits come out of space and lay themselves for a short time along ours, and then off they whirl again into the unknown, leaving us with little more than an impression of their reality and a feeling of baffled curiosity as to the mystery of the beginning and of their being.[22]

Many of White's stories can be usefully interpreted as novellas if we agree that "the novella's medial scope enables it to render with especial force the 'degenerative or pathetic' kind of tragedy, as Springer calls it, in which the protagonist's fate is neither heroic nor petty." Springer further claims that the "relentlessness and the depth of the misery (in the tragic novella) expand it beyond the single episode which often characterizes the short story." Leibowitz advances the theory that the novella has the "double effect of intensity with expansion." Reid adds that the "compressive quality is achieved by an unwavering thematic focus and an accumulation of structural parallels."[23] Let us attempt to relate these generalizations to the medium-length story, *Clay*. Certainly the main figure of the story, Clay, is not heroic, not even in his transfigurations at the end. He is often petty, until he begins to realise himself in insanity, but we might best ascribe this pettiness to an inevitable inheritance from his mother and his environment, which he outgrows at the same time as he remains faithful to them, in a spiritually heightened state, as his continuum. This raises the paradoxical question of whether his tragedy is degenerative. True, he does lapse into insanity, presumably from the pressure of his unfulfilled dream on his unbearably dreary reality. But how gloriously visionary, and also how hilarious this insanity is, when compared with the flat nothingness of his painfully learnt conformism. So he does not just degenerate into insanity, he rises at the same time to a spiritual self-realisation in insanity and despair, like so many of White's central figures in the novels and the stories. Nevertheless, the ambiguous direction of his fate allows him to be compared quite well with the heroic antihero of that classical tragic novella, *Death in Venice*, Gustav Aschenbach. Aschenbach degenerates from dignified artist respected by the conventional middle classes to a leering, cosmetically adorned pedophile who is trapped by his lust into a fatal passivity towards the ravages of disease in Venice. But Aschenbach is compensated for his tragic fall by a visionary insight into the daemonic relationship of the artist to life whence he draws

inspiration and to the artistic form which he reveres. The ambiguity of Aschenbach's degenerative tragedy is parallel to that of Clay, except that Clay's drama unfolds on an incomparably more pedestrian and trivial plane. But then that is explicable because White, as we have already noted, is committed to "discovering the extraordinary behind the ordinary." In a way White's artistic task is much harder than Thomas Mann's, because White is aiming to express a spiritual revelation in the unpromising host of a simpleton and bureaucrat, whilst Thomas Mann had a sophisticated artist as his medium. The visions accorded to Aschenbach and Clay are therefore on planes as different as the sublime and the grotesque. The parallel nevertheless is an illuminating one, because in both cases ecstasy is achieved at the cost of rationality, and in both cases the inspiration floods from the Dionysian impulse, from the repressed libido, and overwhelms a lifetime based on Apollonian order and the self-restraint called for by convention. To summarise then: the structural movement of degenerative tragedy is to compensate the central character spiritually for what he has suffered in his fall.

To return to the other aspects of the novella's structure present in *Clay*: chronologically the story takes us from Clay at five years old being tormented because he was different, through his equally tormented adolescence, his first and only job as a civil servant, the death of his mother, his marriage, and further through attainment of his true self in insanity, his compulsive attempts at art and his erotic day-dreaming, to death by suicide. White does not mark off the chronological segments one from the other in his usual fashion of inserting abrupt blanks of silence. Instead he glues the various segments together with generalisations about Clay's character that cover the years in between. The resultant impression is of a parodied epitome of a "Bildungsroman," or novel of apprenticeship, in that the main character is educated to mature years, but instead of taking a responsible place in middle class society he turns compulsively inward to dreams and insanity. In any case the focus is unwaveringly on his misery, and it is the intensity of this focus which expands *Clay* as a novella from the single episode. These episodes gather accumulative impetus and force as they rush towards his fall into insanity, and a feeling of growing intensification is created as the style becomes more laconic in the dialogue-parodies and more and more frenetic, abstracted and obscure in the surreal prose of Clay's interior monologue. This feeling of intensification is also created by

the repetition of a few key images or leitmotifs, such as the wedding picture and the bridal shoe, by the increasingly dense colour symbolism, and by what Patrick White in *The Tree of Man* calls a "mysticism of objects."

We have briefly noted in the previous section Heseltine's discovery that certain objects in White's fiction "console and soothe by the solidity of their presence" and thus gain a more than ordinarily symbolic significance. Heseltine quotes from *The Aunt's Story*, "There is perhaps no more complete a reality than a chair and a table" and claims that these two objects are made into "two of the major unifying symbols of the entire novel."[24] In *Clay*, when the titular antihero first begins to write, he is obsessed with the apparent permanence of a table, and in general with "objects, the mysterious life which inanimacy contains."[25] In my specific analysis of *Clay* I have shown in detail how White traces the increasing insanity of the main character with a prose that is feverishly surreal, and how objects like the table or the white wedding shoe acquire from Clay's point of view an eerie, independent life of their own. Objects play similarly eerie and supernatural roles in others of White's stories. Herbert Heckmann claims that objects have acquired a vital new significance in modern literature generally:

> There is in modern literature something like an uprising of objects against the falsifying sovereignty of the subject. This is particularly noticeable in Franz Kafka's *Description of a Struggle*, to take just one example. Here objects escape the orderly control of a respectable, bourgeois world: they themselves become active and defend themselves against the thoughtless clutches of man. They thereby acquire a new fascination, which transports the observer into orgies of discoveries. This requires, however, a virtually phantasmagoric alertness, a dreamlike sacrificing-up of the self to objects."[26]

This theory clearly has general validity for White's fiction. Think of the supernatural significance of the glasses in *A Glass of Tea*, of the primitive, magical power invested in his talisman of the cockatoo's sulphur crest by Tim Goodenough in *The Cockatoos*, of the "blaze of pumpkins" at the conclusion of *A Cheery Soul*, of the miraculous glass eye of Christ Pantocrator in *Sicilian Vespers*, of the role of

Clem Dowson's hutch in *A Woman's Hand*, of Harvey's raped mausoleum in *The Night the Prowler*, and on the more farcical level of the vengeful declaration of independence by the tape-recorder in *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight*, and the "disembowelled mattress" in *Down at the Dump.*[27]

The spiritually heightened significance of things is of course just as widespread in White's novels as it is in the stories. But then this is true of most of the rhetorical and structural techniques that we have analysed in White's shorter prose fiction, whether we are talking about searching for the overriding point of view, about beginnings, middles and ends, epiphanies, or open-ended parables. I would therefore suggest that the conclusions I have reached about White's stories are in general valid for his novels and that the only real differences between his stories and his novels are the effects of compression, of sustained intensity and tension, and of a lyric density of imagery that we find in the stories. Indeed the more successful works of Patrick White's shorter prose fiction resemble nothing quite so much as climactic compressions of his own novels.

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All quotations from White's stories in *The Burnt Ones* and *The Cockatoos* are acknowledged simply with bracketed page numbers in the body of the text. The editions used are:

The Burnt Ones, Viking, New York, 1964.

The Cockatoos, Viking, New York, 1975.

Cocotte was published in *Horizon*, 1, May 1940.

The Twitching Colonel was published in the *London Mercury*, 35, 210, April 1937.

Fête Galante was published in the *Meanjin Quarterly*, 36, 1, May 1977.

I have been unable to obtain a copy of *After Alep* which was published in Jack Aistrop and Reginald Moore (eds). *Bugle Blast*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1945.

INTRODUCTION

References

1. John Colmer, for example, in his recent book, *Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot*, Edward Arnold, Melbourne, 1978, maintains that "it is the duality of White's fictional world that

is wholly authentic not its willed gestures towards a reconciling harmony" (p. 53).

2. William Walsh, *Patrick White's Fiction*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1977, p. 77.

3. William Walsh, *ibid.*, p. 69.

4. For a complete list of these reviews and brief articles see Alan Lawson, *Patrick White Bibliography*, Melbourne, O.U.P., 1974, pp. 81–83 and pp. 96–97. There were some notable exceptions to the favourable tone of these reviews. V.S. Naipaul waspishly and mistakenly said of *The Burnt Ones*: "These stories are the diversions of a novelist: they will leave Mr. White's reputation intact. The manner, which has been described as stylish, cannot support the matter. And the stylishness, of which the fashionable title might be said to form part, comes over as pure embarrassment" (*The Spectator*, 16 October 1964, p. 513).

5. Leonie Kramer does not share my high opinion of Patrick White's shorter prose fiction. She says, "I do not happen to think that White is a great short-story writer, or even a particularly good one" (*Bulletin*, 24 October 1964, vol. 86, p. 51). Igmar Björksten concurs with this judgement, when he claims, "The short story is not Patrick White's best medium of expression. His vision needs more space to unfold itself, the whole existence of man to give itself justice. . . . Themes treated in the form of an etude become emasculated. The broad symphonic style, the great carefully planned canvases rather than the sketch are better suited to express White's visionary insights" (*Patrick White*, Univ. Queensland Press, 1976, p. 78). But Patrick White's better stories are not short stories and they are certainly not sketches. They are complex, carefully planned novellas. Jack Lindsay seems to be the only reviewer of *The Burnt Ones* to realise that certain stories such as *Dead Roses* and *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats* were actually superior to the novels, perhaps because they had "a new clarity and compactness" as opposed to the "self-indulgence" of the novels. Lindsay is also remarkably perceptive in his suggestion that "It is by a consideration of the

sparer and more intellectually controlled form of such stories that one can bring out what was cloudy and weak in the larger canvases" ("The Stories of Patrick White," *Meanjin Quarterly*, 23 December 1964, p. 372).

6. *The Night the Prowler*, in *The Cockatoos*, Viking, N.Y. 1975, p. 144.

7. J.F. Burrows, "The Short Stories of Patrick White," *Southerly*, 1964, pp. 116–25. Subsequently re-published in revised form in G.A. Wilkes (ed), *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, Angus and Robertson, 1970, pp. 163–81.

8. From a *New York Times* Review, as quoted on the dustjacket of *The Burnt Ones*.

9. A.D. Hope, *Native Companions. Essays and Comments on Australian Literature 1936–1966*, Angus and Robertson, 1974, p. 78.

10. Charles Higham also stresses "the quality of disgust ... the dwelling on physical ugliness of setting and character," and goes on to say, "In Sarsaparilla, that prototype of the Australian suburb which is the focal point for Mr. White's anti-humanism, we might as well be in Montherlant's Paris, Celine's hell-ship, Waugh's Los Angeles, Camus' Oran, or Nathanael West's New York. White is among the more extreme pessimist writers of the century, with a streak of black humour, icily sardonic and contemptuous that reminds one at times of Genet" ("Darkness at Sarsaparilla," *Bulletin*, 86, 12.12.1964, p. 51). This judgement on *The Burnt Ones* over-emphasizes White's satire and completely ignores the religious aspirations of his fiction, which admittedly emerge much more clearly ten years later in *The Cockatoos*.

11. Cf. the definitions offered of the short story by Ian Reid, *The Short Story*, Methuen, 1977, and R. Hinton Thomas (ed), *Seventeen Modern German Stories*, O.U.P., 1965. This latter work contains the valuable appendix, Herbert Eisenreich, "Eine Geschichte erzählt sich selbst" pp. 169–75.

12. See J. McLaren's criticism of L. Kramer's essay on *The Tree of Man* in "The Critical Point," *Overland*, 61, Winter 1961, p. 57.

13. Patrick White, *The Prodigal Son* in H.P. Heseltine and S. Tick (eds), *The Writer in the Modern World*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962, p. 117.

14. Cf. *The New York Review of Books*, 3, 19.11.1964, p. 14, "There are good moments in these stories, but they could have come from White's novels, and the best of the stories could, in fact, have been extracts from fairly episodic novels."

THE TWITCHING COLONEL

References

1. *The Twitching Colonel* in the *London Mercury*, 35, 210, April 1937, p. 607. All further quotations from this story are indicated in this section by bracketed page numbers in the text.

2. Cf. Brian Kiernan, who says in general of White's novels, "The literary conventions adopted are those of a high and decadent Romanticism, explicitly Gothic. We recognize them from the beginning: the hero with his visionary quest, his Nietzschean hunger for the exaltation of his own ego; the division of the characters into the bourgeois and the 'discoverers' who try to free themselves from the flux of time and the demands of a materialistic world and attain a state of transcendental being" (*Images of Society and Nature*, O.U.P., Melbourne, 1977, p. 118).

3. Brian Kiernan makes a similar parallel between White's novels and lyric poetry: "They (the novels) are 'poems' in the sense that they are extremely complex, ambiguous and ironic linguistic structures" (*ibid.*, p. 147).

DEAD ROSES

References

1. Northrop Frye, *Literary History of Canada*, as quoted in Mordecai Richler (ed) *Canadian Writing Today*, Penguin 1970, p. 321.

2. Ian Reid provides a useful analysis of White's "ironic stance" and his wit by commenting closely on specific passages from the novels ("Review Article: Commonwealth Literature," *Southern Review* vol. IV, no. 4, 1971, pp. 318–20).

3. William Walsh says of "the beefy, Betjemann-type Anthea Scudamore and the poor deluded obsessionist Clay" that "they are specimens rather than subjects . . . (and) are altogether too weak and limp. Each story appears to have a vacancy at a point where it should pulse with life" (*op. cit.*, p. 68). Admittedly White's attitude to these characters has something of the cool detachment of a scientist, but there are moments of pathos in both stories where authorial irony is temporarily dissolved in pity for these unfortunates. Their suffering and our pity should fill the vacancy about which Walsh complains.

4. J.F. Burrows, *op. cit.*, *Southerly*, 1964, p. 123.

5. Harry Heseltine, "Writer and Reader: *The Burnt Ones,*" *Southerly*, 25, 1, 1965, pp. 70–1.

WILLY-WAGTAILS BY MOONLIGHT

References

1. In his sharp criticism of *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight* J.F. Burrows ties himself in unnecessary knots of indignation at

White's alleged blurring of the satiric perspective and at his inconsistent characterisation of Nora ("The Short Stories of Patrick White," in G.A. Wilkes (ed) *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, Angus and Robertson, 1973, pp. 163–5). Burrows' distinction of the three different levels of Nora's characterisation is very perceptive, but his evaluative insistence that these levels are incompatible is not convincing. Certainly White does direct some condescending irony at Nora trying to be what she is not, namely a smart member of Sydney's upper middle-class, but as White's characterisation spirals downward and inward into the essence of the real Nora in her loneliness, it is appropriate that authorial irony yields to pity and even admiration.

2. Cf. William Walsh: "*Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight*, designed to exhibit with an almost Somerset Maugham kind of cynicism that people are not always what they appear to be, is altogether too neat and deficient in White's characteristic resonance and seriousness" (*op. cit.*, pp. 67–8). Cf. Andrew Taylor's view that this is the worst story in *The Burnt Ones*, being "very slight, and creakily engineered" ("White's Short Stories," *Overland*, No. 31, March 1965, pp. 17–19). Cf. V.S. Naipaul's claim that "the story called *Willy-Wagtails by Moonlight* is scarcely more than a smoking-room anecdote" (*The Spectator*, 16 October 1964, p. 513). Cf. Charles Higham's opinion that the story "is very funny, spiteful and ingenious, but good farce depends on its audience feeling at least a shred of sympathy for those involved. Here, Mr. White's dislike of all concerned leaves one simply shrugging" ("Darkness at Sarsaparilla," *Bulletin*, 86, 12.12.1964, pp. 51–2). Higham has evidently overlooked White's attitude towards Nora at the end of the story.

CLAY

References

1. Cf. Hameeda Hossain's remark that "Patrick White's 'outsiders'

burn inwardly with a patient endurance, for there is no redemption only an escape, often beyond the pale of reality into an illusory world of their own creation" ("Review of *The Burnt Ones*," *The Australian Quarterly*, 37, 4, December 1965, p. 121). This has particular relevance to *Clay*, but one must remember that in other stories in *The Burnt Ones*, such as *A Glass of Tea* or *Being Kind to Titina*, there are moments of epiphany that redeem suffering through the insight gained from it.

2. Harry Heseltine refers us to incidents from the novels such as Voss experiencing spiritual baptism in the river crossing of chapter 10, and Theodora Goodman swimming "through the sea of roses towards that other Ithaca." ("Patrick White's Style," in *Quadrant*, VII, 1963, p. 68).

THE EVENING AT SISSY KAMARA'S

References

1. Cf. D.R. Burns: "Predictably the stories about the Greeks are the more successful as regards richness of human and social detail and the sympathy the author extends to the characters making these histrionic gestures which are said to be part of the Mediterranean way. The stories about Australians (in *The Burnt Ones*) amount, for the most part, to a merciless and obsessive 'putting down' " (*The Directions of Australian Fiction 1920–1974*, Cassell, Australia, 1975.

2. White's satiric caricatures of Basil and Sissy tend to undermine John Barnes' claim that in White's Greek stories "the comedy is there, but the impulse towards caricature that is uncontrolled in the Australian stories, is held in check by an embracing understanding, something that amounts to a conviction that the lives of people are genuinely interesting" ("New Tracks to Travel: The Stories of White, Porter and Cowan" in *Meanjin Quarterly*, 25, June 1966, p. 159).

A CHEERY SOUL

References

1. John Barnes seems to overlook White's zany sense of humour when he irately claims, "The melodramatic scene in the church is, one feels, laying things on a bit thick; and even worse is Miss Docker's concluding encounter with a dog, which is a gratuitous insult offered by the author. The urgency of his personal feelings here causes White to write below his real level" ("New Tracks to Travel: The Stories of White, Porter and Cowan," in *Meanjin Quarterly*, 25, June 1966, p. 159).

2. Miss Docker's over-confident theology looks like White's self-parody of Laura Trevelyan's serious hope in *Voss* 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."

BEING KIND TO TITINA

Reference

1. Clement Semmler also stresses the similarities between the Australian and the Greek stories, when he says of *Being Kind to Titina*, "the story, of course, is still of Sarsaparilla or Castle Hill. Strip off Alexandria or Athens, and the basic terms are the same" ("Sarsaparilla in Solferino," *Australian Book Review*, 1, 8. June 1962, p. 94).

THE LETTERS

References

1. As quoted in H.P. Heseltine and S. Tick, *The Writer in the Modern World*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962, p. 117.

2. As quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 117–8.

THE WOMAN WHO WASN'T ALLOWED TO KEEP CATS

Reference

1. Kikitsa's transformation is so overwhelming that Andrew Taylor is justified in claiming that "the main contrast in one of the best stories, *The Woman Who Wasn't Allowed to Keep Cats*, . . . is not between the Greeks and their Americanised visitors, but between an indulgent and smothering sensuality that bores, tires or irritates, and the sharp feline sexuality that succeeds it" ("White's Short Stories," in *Overland*, No. 31, March 1965, p. 78).

DOWN AT THE DUMP

References

1. Not that all Australian slang is drab. Occasionally even in this story the vitality and the tough humour of the Whalleys emerge authentically through the slang vocabulary and intonation patterns, triumphing then over the unimaginative ritual cursing and the worn-out clichés.

2. John Barnes wrongly claims that *Down at the Dump* is the only story in *The Burnt Ones* in which White asserts transcendence of suffering or squalor: "Only in *Down at the Dump* does White aim at any assertion of positive values, and the result is a piece of obtrusive preaching. As in most of the stories in this volume, the characters are little more than ciphers, arranged in various positions to make a point. Here the different kinds of love are contrasted, and the blighting of the tender adolescent love that is shown awakening is forecast" ("The Stories of White, Porter and Cowan," *Meanjin Quarterly*, 25, June 1966, p. 157). It is not the blighting of Meg's and Lummy's love that is predicted. On the contrary. Meg is shown to have inherited Daise's mantle and will be able like Daise to transcend the suburban blight with her understanding and love for the suspicious Lummy. This is clearly indicated in her prophetic vision of their family life in Lummy's truck (p. 298). Furthermore, if Daise's up-dating of Christ's Sermon on the Mount is preaching, then it is a sermon that is ethically necessary for our society, brief, moving and disturbing.

3. Corresponding to the complex meshing of limited points of view is White's protean variety of styles and tones. R.B.J. Wilson captures the nature of this variety well when he says, "White darts from description to comment, from one character to another, from irony to admiration, from one kind of narrative voice or tone to another – whether satiric, compassionate or philosophical – working always in sentences free in syntax and often fragmentary in form" ("The Rhetoric of *Down at the Dump*," in Leon Kantrell (ed), *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen*,U.Q.P., 1976, p. 282).

4. Sylvia Gzell, "Themes and Imagery in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*," in Clement Semmler (ed), *Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism*, O.U.P., Melbourne, 1967, p. 258.

A WOMAN'S HAND

References

1. In a review of *A Woman's Hand* Geoffrey Lehmann also stresses White's mysticism, saying that "White is fundamentally an ecstatic and visionary, in the line of Revelations, Blake, Whitman and Lawrence" and that Nesta Pine's "madness is the madness of those who are spiritually pure and understand the meaning of redemption, which is the positive agent of White's vision" ("A Flight of Peacocks," *The Bulletin*, 88, 15 October 1966, p. 57).

2. Cf. J.F. Burrows who claims that some of White's stories are "damaged by the mechanical working-out of a pre-ordained idea and by a unity of action that is contrived rather than imagined" ("The Short Stories of Patrick White," *Southerly*, 24, 2, 1964, p. 122) and Andrew Taylor who accuses White of creaky engineering, claiming that some of his stories "display the chronic weaknesses of the short story and White – obviousness, facile symbolism, crudeness of conception – which the expansive novels tend to eliminate" ("White's Short Stories," *Overland*, 31, March 1965, p. 19). Both critics are admittedly writing about what they considered to be the worst stories in *The Burnt Ones*, but Taylor in particular seems to be contentiously overstating a questionable case.

THE NIGHT THE PROWLER

Reference

1. Anthony Hassall fails to perceive the positivity of Felicity's transcendence when he claims that "her ultimate revelation, if that is what it is, is one of total, Beckettian nihilism" ("Patrick White's *The Cockatoos*," *Southerly*, vol. 35, 1, March 1975, p. 5).

SICILIAN VESPERS

Reference

1. Peter Beatson, *The Eye in the Mandala. Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*, Paul Elek, London, 1976, p. 120.

THE COCKATOOS

Reference

1. Cockatoos are of course not the only birds in White's fiction to bear the symbolic import of grace and transcendence. Cf. Harry Heseltine: "the number of birds which sweep through the pages of White's books is quite remarkable. It is not often that they are there for their own sake. The advent of wings almost invariably coincides with scenes in which human beings aspire to a state of existence beyond the normal" ("Patrick White's Style" in *Quadrant*, VII, 1963, p. 65). Cf. Sylvia Gzell: "The white bird of the soul occurs in both *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot* to suggest the possibility of a freedom which allows transcendent experience and is part of it. The image is frequently linked with description of awkward movement to imply the difficulty of achieving this freedom" ("Themes and Imager in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*" in Clement Semmler (ed), *Twentieth Century Australian Literary Criticism*, O.U.P., Melbourne, 1967, p. 256). Cf. the birds which Sister de Santis feeds in a ritual ceremony at the conclusion of *The Eye of the Storm* and which brings her a moment of transcendent joy: "She could feel claws snatching for a hold in her hair.
She ducked, to escape from this prism of dew and light. This tumult of wings and her own unmanageable joy. Once she raised an arm to brush aside a blue wedge of pigeon's feathers. The light she could not ward off: it was by now too solid, too

possessive; herself possessed." (Penguin, p. 589)

FÊTE GALANTE

Reference

1. White uses a similar contrast of crimson and cream in *The Eye of the Storm.* Sister de Santis, "obsessed by her vice of roses," begins to "snatch like a hungry goat" at the fresh buds, "while blown heads, colliding with her flanks, crumbled away, to lie on the neutral earth in clots of cream, splashes of crimson, gentle heart-shaped rose rose." In this scene Sister de Santis shows a sensual greed similar to Thekla's, and a similar "dichotomy of earthbound flesh and aspiring spirit" parallelling the colour symbolism (*The Eye of the Storm*, Penguin, pp. 202–3).

JOURNEY INTO THE INTERIOR: THE RELIGIOUS SENSE IN PATRICK WHITE AND FRANZ KAFKA

References

1. Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind*, Penguin, 1961, p. 199.

2. John Docker offers a helpful analysis of this quest for transcendence as he finds it in *Riders in the Chariot*: "While this side of death full transcendence is impossible, it is imperative, given the superficiality of the industrial and commercial world, always to be trying for it. The spirit might achieve the permanence of transcendence immediately if divested of the body; but since this cannot be, the self can enjoy the moments of transcendence which the body, with its senses, instincts, and non-rational feelings, makes possible

through harmonies with the natural universe. Such harmonies themselves are the pledges that a transcendental realm of eternity exists" (*Australian Cultural Elites*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1974, p. 76).

3. W.C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, University of Chicago, 1961, pp. 286–7.

4. Harry Heseltine, "Patrick White's Style" in *Quadrant*, VII, 1963, p. 67. The phrase "mysticism of objects" stems of course from White himself in *The Tree of Man.*

5. Peter Beatson, *The Eye in the Mandala. Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*, Paul Elek, London, 1976, pp. 29–31, 159–65.

6. Thelma Herring, "Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*," p. 72, in G.A. Wilkes (ed), *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, Angus and Robertson, 1970. Cf. John Colmer who agrees that White makes use of "religious concepts, such as apocalypse and mystic union with the divine" (*Patrick White's Riders in the Chariot*, Edward Arnold, Melbourne, 1978, p. 3).

7. Marjorie Barnard sees such an epiphany in *The Tree of Man*, where, she says, "the goal of man's long, inarticulate seeking is glimpsed. It is the ineffable moment. It has no substance. It is of the creative spirit, it comes and it goes; but that it should come, even once in a lifetime, is a positive gain, an apotheosis. It is the troubling of the waters at Bethesda. It does not touch the loneliness for it is a personal, private and detached revelation. Each man's life is a mystery between himself and God" ("The Four Novels of Patrick White," *Meanjin*, 2, 1956, p. 170).

8. Denis de Rougemont, *Passion and Society*, trans. Montgomery Belgion, Faber, London, 1956, p. 149, p. 168 & pp. 153–4 respectively. All three quotations as cited by Patricia A. Morley, *The Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*, U.Q.P., 1972. For further analysis of White's mysticism, see Morley's work, especially pp. 12–13, p. 206, p. 243.

9. This is an extract from an interview of Patrick White by Craig McGregor, *In the Making*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1969, pp. 219–222.

10. Cf. Klaus Wagenbach, *Kafka in Sebstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten*, Rowohlt, Hamburg, 1964, pp. 28–30.

11. Cf. R. Brissenden, *Patrick White*, Longmans, Green, London, 1966, p. 8. Cf. also Dennis Douglas, "Influence and Individuality: the indebtedness of Patrick White's *The Ham Funeral* and *The Season at Sarsparilla* to Strindberg and the German Expressionist Movement" in Leon Cantrell (ed), *Bards, Bohemians and Bookmen*, U.Q.P., 1976, pp. 226–280.

12. Patrick White, "The Prodigal Son," in H.P. Heseltine and S. Tick (eds), *The Writer in the Modern World*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1962, p. 117.

13. Friedrich Novalis, *Werke und Briefe*, Winkler, München, 1962, Fragment 86, p. 424.

14. Malcolm Pasley, Introduction to Franz Kafka, *Short Stories*, O.U.P., 1963, p. 21.

15. Cf. Peter Beatson, *op. cit.*, pp. 150–4.

16. Franz Kafka, *Hochzeitsvorbereitungen auf dem Lande*, Fischer, Frankfurt, 1976, "Betrachtungen über Sünde, Leid, Hoffnung und den wahren Weg", Fragment 64/65, p. 35.

17. Franz Kafka, *ibid.*, Fragments 54 & 80, p. 34 & p. 36.

18. Franz Kafka, *ibid.*, Fragment 50, p. 34.

19. Martin Buber, "Kafka and Judaism," in Ronald Gray (ed), *Kafka A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice-Hall, N.J., 1962, p. 161.

20. Franz Kafka, *op. cit.*, Fragment 62, p. 35.

21. Martin Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

22. Martin Buber, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

23. As quoted by Peter Beatson, *op. cit.*, p. 167.
White expresses these religious intentions with a striking whimsy in *The Eye of the Storm.* Mary de Santis says that once you have passed a certain age, "You're no longer altogether a person: more like an electric bulb going on and off, and perhaps, if you're lucky, you may throw a light on something that hasn't been noticed before – by you or anybody." (Penguin, p. 203)

24. Franz Kafka, *op. cit.*, Fragment 13, p. 31.

25. *Southerly*, 1973, 2, p. 137.

26. *Southerly*, 1973, 2, p. 136.

27. Franz Kafka, *Tagebuch*, Februar 1918.

28. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 1959, N.Y. p. 87.

29. Franz Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 204.

30. Patrick White, *The Solid Mandala*, Penguin, p. 289.

31. Epigraph from William Blake to *Riders in the Chariot.*

32. Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot*, Penguin, p. 433.

33. Cf. Peter Beatson, *op. cit.*, p. 140, "the jacaranda tree on which Himmelfarb is crucified becomes both the Crucifix and also the Jewish Tree of Light." Margaret Walters criticizes the "Biblical parallels" in *Riders in the Chariot* as "arbitrary" and claims that "White's attempt to re-create the Christian story never succeeds in suggesting a contemporary relevance, nor do the resonances he borrows from it really illuminate his portrayal of modern living." ("Patrick White," *New Left Review*, 18, January 1963, pp. 37–50.)
J.F. Burrows refutes this criticism of the novel, but then goes on to condemn the novel for making facile use of character-stereotypes and for "irresoluteness" ("Archetypes

and Stereotypes: *Riders in the Chariot*" in G.A. Wilkes (ed), *Ten Essays on Patrick White*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1970, pp. 47–71).

34. Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot*, Penguin, p. 436.

35. Franz Kafka, *op. cit.*, Aphorism 83, pp. 36–7.

36. Malcolm Pasley (ed), Franz Kafka, *Short Stories*, O.U.P., 1963, pp. 57–9.

37. Franz Kafka, *op. cit.*, Aphorism 99, p. 39.

38. Franz Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 69.

39. Franz Kafka, *ibid.*, p. 219.

40. See Pasley's illuminating interpretation of this aphorism in Malcolm Pasley (ed) "Introduction to Franz Kafka," *Short Stories*, p. 16.

41. Peter Beatson, *op. cit.*, pp. 30–1.

42. Cf. the interpretation of Peter Beatson, *ibid.*, p. 33.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN THE SHORTER PROSE FICTION

References

1. *Riders in the Chariot*, Penguin, pp. 453–5.

2. *Tree of Man*, Penguin, p. 11.

3. *The Burnt Ones*, Viking, N.Y. 1964, p. 180.

4. Ian Reid, *The Short Story. The Critical Idiom*, Methuen, 1977,

pp. 43–47, and pp. 54–65. An admirably succinct summary of a myriad of theoretical definitions of short story and novella is to be found in these pages.

5. Ian Reid, *ibid.*, p. 28. Cf. the definition of epiphany by Richard Ellmann which I quote in the preceding section of this work.

6. Cf. Frank O'Connor's claim that the short story is "by its very nature remote from the community – romantic, individualistic and intransigent" (*The Lonely Voice*, p. 21).

7. In a work by Odilon Redon, Elizabeth Hunter finds her spiritual semblance in "the artist's image of what he called a skiapod." "Unlike most of the other monsters in the book, this half-fish half-woman appeared neither allied to, nor threatened by, death: too elusive in weaving through deep waters, her expression a practically effaced mystery; or was it one of dishonesty, of cunning?" (*The Eye of the Storm*, Penguin, p. 194).

8. *The Burnt Ones*, p. 104.

9. *ibid.*, p. 308.

10. *ibid.*, p. 198.

11. Andrew Taylor, "White's Short Stories," in *Overland*, No. 31, March 1965, p. 18.

12. *The Burnt Ones*, p. 268.

13. *The Cockatoos*, Viking, N.Y., 1975, p. 91.

14. Michael Wilding, "Short Story Chronicle," in *Meanjin Quarterly*, June 1971, p. 259.

15. *Voss*, Penguin, p. 475.

16. W. Jens, *Literatur und Politik*, Verlag Günter Neske, Pfullingen, 1963, p. 20. As quoted by R. Hinton Thomas, see reference 17.

17. R. Hinton Thomas, Introduction to *Seventeen German Stories*, O.U.P., 1968, p. 28.

18. B. Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1957, p. 76.

19. R. Hinton Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

20. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, N.Y., 1959, p. 88.

21. Ian Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

22. As quoted by Ian Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

23. As quoted by Ian Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Reid names his sources as Judith Leibowitz, *Narrative Purpose in the Novella*, The Hague, 1974, and Mary Doyle Springer, *Forms of the Modern Novella*, Chicago, 1975.

24. Harry Heseltine, "Patrick White's Style," in *Quadrant*, VII, 1963, p. 67.

25. *The Burnt Ones*, p. 117.

26. Herbert Heckmann, "Aufstand der Dinge," in *Die Welt der Literatur*, 17, September 1964.

27. *The Burnt Ones*, p. 290 and p. 305.

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