

DÉBORAH SCHEIDT

'ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD'
Aspects of Alterity in Three Novels by Patrick White

Dissertação apresentada como requisito parcial
à obtenção do grau de Mestre. Curso de Pós-
Graduação em Letras/Literaturas de Língua
Inglesa, Setor de Ciências Humanas, Letras e
Artes, Universidade Federal do Paraná.

Orientadora:
Prof.^a Dr.^a Regina Maria Przybycien

CURITIBA

1997

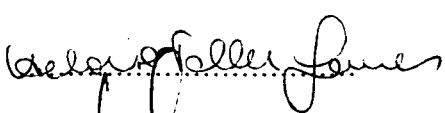
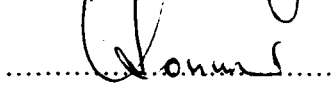
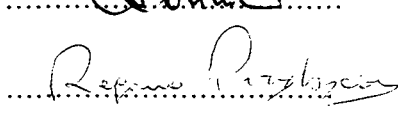
P A R E C E R

Defesa de dissertação da Mestranda *DÉBORAH SCHEIDT* para obtenção do título de **Mestre em Letras**.

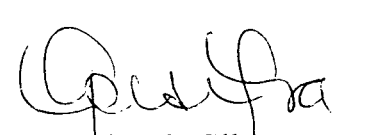
Os abaixo assinados Heloisa Toller Gomes, Thomas Bonnici e Regina Maria Przybycien, argüiram, nesta data, a candidata, a qual apresentou a dissertação:

"ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORLD: ASPECTS OF ALTERITY IN THREE NOVELS BY PATRICK WHITE".

Procedida a argüição segundo o protocolo aprovado pelo Colegiado do Curso, a Banca é de parecer que a candidata está apta ao título de **Mestre em Letras**, tendo merecido os conceitos abaixo:

Banca	Assinatura	Conceito
Heloisa Toller Gomes		A
Thomas Bonnici		A
Regina Maria Przybycien		A

Curitiba, 01 de dezembro de 1997.


Prof.ª Odete Pereira da Silva Menon
COORDENADORA

To Caroline Larcombe – for her inspiring comments

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Reading – the cliché is old, but most true – involves making unforeseen voyages to places in other ways inaccessible. First of all I would like to express my gratitude to my teachers at UFPR for partaking their love of travelling and substantial knowledge, and mainly, for pointing to so many different routes. Thanks to Dr Sigrid Renaux, for her ability to dive deeply into the text. To Dr Ana Camati, for unravelling the dazzling comings and goings in between texts. To Dr Brunilda Reichmann for flying as high as any Romantic poet. And of course, I couldn't thank enough my tutor – Dr Regina Przybycien – for being ready to wander along newly-opened pathways, for her wisdom and sensitivity, and for the right word in the right moment. Also, I wouldn't have come to this point hadn't I, in the long run, counted with the positive attitude of my father Otoniel, mother Bárbara and grandmother Margarida, who have always supported me no matter the direction I have chosen to take. But this work has also *literally* taken me to distant places. Thanks to all those Australian families (the Larcombe-Solomons, the Macalister-Knights, the Courtneys, the Normyles...) – especially their children – for having received me with genuine Aussie hospitality and friendliness and made the adventure of being the Brazilian Other less disturbing. I am much indebted to Nicholas Pounder for supplying me with loads of books (as well as for the unique experience of trading them for old saucepans). I couldn't possibly fail to mention the Morleys' warm welcome in the peak of English winter. Back home, many thanks to all my friends – Alessandro, Ana Paula, Flô, Gustavo, Ivo, Jô, Lu, Mel, Silvana, Paulo, Priscila, Regina, Zhé... and that includes the ones Far Away So Close Andrea, Cândida, Dani, Fernando, Marcos – for the endless disagreements on films, food, the concept of parody, the function of literature, women's lib, genetic control, football, religion & politics – in spite of which we have remained friends. My thanks, as well, to Faridi for helping me accept the ambiguities, to Eric and Santi Genochio for revising the English text and, finally, to CNPq, whose financial aid was invaluable in the realisation of this work.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
RESUMO.....	v
INTRODUCTION – Discovering Patrick White.....	1
CHAPTER ONE – Australia: An‘Other’ Literature.....	7
CHAPTER TWO – Patrick White: A Crotchety Old Man.....	38
CHAPTER THREE – <i>The Aunt’s Story</i> : The Alterity of the Writing.....	54
CHAPTER FOUR – <i>Riders in the Chariot</i> : The Other as Hero.....	80
CHAPTER FIVE – <i>A Fringe of Leaves</i> : Stages of Alterity.....	114
CONCLUSION – Defying the Dingoes.....	139
NOTES ON EPIGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.....	142
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	144

ABSTRACT

In a first moment this M. A. thesis probes into some contingencies of the Australian history which have been decisive to the emergence of its national identity: the European bewilderment at the geographical features of the Australian continent; the difficult encounter with its native peoples and the settlement of the penal colony. The literary manifestations springing from this context are related to the stages of post-colonial literatures as they have been termed and defined by the theorists of post-coloniality Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin and Gareth Griffiths: 1. total compliance with the centre of the empire; 2. 'abrogation' (or denial) and 3. 'appropriation.' Patrick White (1912-1990) is then presented as one Australian author of white settler descent who appropriates the discourse of the centre and the restrictive characteristics of his homeland to create both a personal reputation and a work extremely imbedded in alterity. Different aspects of his treatment of alterity are shown in three of his novels. *The Aunt's Story* (1948) reveals the alterity of the protagonist realised as effectively through narrative technique as through plot. With four outcast 'heroes', *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) is a satirical portrayal of Australian suburban conservative forces in their attempt to massacre all difference. *A Fringe of Leaves* (1977) allegorises the moment of the European encounter with the Australian land, placing its heroine in succeeding positions as the Other. In that way alterity is posited as an element that pervades White's work, his personal life and the history of his country.

RESUMO

Num primeiro momento este trabalho investiga algumas circunstâncias da história da Austrália que tiveram um papel decisivo na emergência de uma identidade nacional: o assombro europeu diante das particularidades geográficas do continente australiano; o difícil encontro com os povos nativos e o estabelecimento da colônia penal. As manifestações literárias decorrentes desse contexto são relacionadas aos estágios das literaturas pós-coloniais de acordo com a terminologia e definições empregadas pelos teóricos da pós-colonialidade Bill Ashcroft, Helen Tiffin e Gareth Griffiths: 1. cumplicidade total com o centro do império; 2. 'abrogação' (ou negação) e 3. 'apropriação'. Em seguida Patrick White (1912-1990) é apresentado como um autor australiano de descendência britânica que apropria o discurso do centro e as características restritivas da terra australiana para criar uma reputação pessoal e uma obra profundamente enredadas na alteridade. Aspectos diversos de seu tratamento do tema são estudados em três de seus romances. *The Aunt's Story* (1948) revela a alteridade da protagonista tanto através do enredo como da própria técnica narrativa. Com quatro 'heróis' marginalizados, *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) é um retrato satírico de forças suburbanas conservadoras na sua tentativa de massacrar o diferente. *A Fringe of Leaves* (1977) alegoriza o momento do encontro entre o europeu e a terra australiana, colocando a protagonista em sucessivas posições de alteridade. Procura-se mostrar, assim, a alteridade como elemento que permeia a obra de White, sua vida pessoal e a história de seu país.

Introduction

Discovering Patrick White

The future [...] will lie with people who can think and act with informed grace across ethnic, cultural, linguistic lines. And the first step in becoming such a person lies in acknowledging that we are not one big world family, or ever likely to be: that the differences between races, nations, cultures and their various histories are at least as profound and durable as their similarities; that these differences are not divagations from a European norm, but structures eminently worth knowing about for their own sake. In the world that is coming, if you can't navigate difference, you've had it.

Robert Hughes, 'Multi-Culti and Its Discontents', 1993¹

During his life, the Australian writer Patrick White, born in 1912, published twelve novels, three collections of short fiction, besides several plays, poems, articles and speeches. The letters he wrote to friends and publishers also amounted to a bulky volume. Not only was he an extremely prolific author, but on his death, in 1990, he had, like no one before, managed to attract international attention to the literature of his country.

The existing volume of criticism on White is proportional to his production. AUSTLIT, the Australian Literary database, has over 1,000 records pertaining to Patrick White by authors of assorted nationalities. Those include book-length studies, articles, essays, monographs, critical reviews, dissertations and conference proceedings, as well as a massive biography and his collected letters.

Patrick White is one of the authors from nations affected by imperialism who, through strategies that have been called 'writing back', has been helping define new literary parameters. Three quarters of the world, today, has been irreversibly affected by imperialism and this state of things has brought the literatures from former European colonies into the limelight. It is therefore a matter of surprise and concern that Patrick White should be still so little known in Brazil.

One of the reasons that might be contributing to this lack of recognition with the wider public in Brazil is that, as far as I know, only three of White's novels have been translated and published here up to now (*Voss*, *The Tree of Man*, and *The Aunt's Story*). In addition to that poor representation, they are no longer commercially available.

In what concerns Brazilian scholars, a possible explanation for not having yet 'discovered' Patrick White might be the fact that in this country a more far-reaching interest in post-colonial studies is still a very recent – but flourishing – tendency.

We have, not long ago, seen the first issue of a new literary journal, *Gragoatá*, published by the Universidade Federal Fluminense, being dedicated exclusively to post-colonial matters. The number aptly promotes the critique of our – frequently overlooked – Brazilian post-colonial past.

It is encouraging to be reminded that we have our own post-colonial theorists who have been long developing their work, concomitantly with so many other authors around the world. Silviano Santiago's writings, for example, serve as evidence of the fact that there have been conceptually similar – yet diversely realised – responses to colonialism along distinct moments in history and in corners of the globe that could not be wider apart.¹

However, it is possible to notice that Brazilian scholars, possibly due to shared language, African background and/or geographical proximity, are more closely drawn towards the post-colonial literatures of the Portuguese-speaking African countries (Angola, Mozambique, Cape Verde), Canada and the Caribbean. The contributions of Australian, South African or Indian authors, for instance, are still very little explored in Brazil and that opens whole new – and exciting – fields of investigation.

As a general objective this thesis aims at making a Brazilian contribution to the research in literatures of former British colonies and to the study of Patrick White, introducing some aspects of Australian literature and White's work, from a post-colonial perspective, to a Brazilian public.

One of the peculiarities of the Patrick White criticism is that several of the works on him are devoted to particular themes. Besides that, theses, dissertations or book-length studies on White tend to take all or a group of his novels, stories or plays as objects of study

¹ On this matter ASHCROFT et al. point out that the 'value of post-colonial discourse is that it provides a methodology for considering the dialogue of similarity and difference; the similarity of colonialism's political and historical pressure upon non-European societies, alongside the plurality of specific cultural effects and responses those societies have produced.' *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995. p. 56.

rather than individual items, which becomes evident in titles such as Karin Hansson's *The Warped Universe: A Study of Imagery and Structure in Seven Novels by Patrick White* or Rodney Edgecombe's *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*.

Such a propensity for a collective apprehension might be due to the fact that White, in spite of always coming out with the unexpected,² forged an extremely idiosyncratic work. On this topic Alan Lawson has to say that 'one should regard the whole body of White's textuality as one large text; (...) one should not separate the kinds of writing that he did over a long career, but rather see them as merely different locations for the act of writing.'³

The thematic binding element in all of White's novels which I find the most relevant in a post-colonial context, and which I intend to call attention to as the specific objective of this thesis, is the special place 'alterity' in several guises has in his novels. Alan Seymour puts that magisterially: 'Patrick White's significance, finally, as a writer and a person, was that he represented the Other, the unexpected thing, the dissonant voice, the dissident person, and because of that, he was very good for us all.'⁴

The Other – a concept I will relate mainly to cultural anthropology – appears as protagonist in most of White's novels but my analysis, due to the nature and scope of this work, will be more extensively performed on three of them: *The Aunt's Story* (1948), *Riders in the Chariot*, (1961) and *A Fringe of Leaves* (1977). This choice has been determined mainly by the possibility, in each of them, to bring out distinct aspects of White's treatment of alterity. A second reason lies in the fact that the novels are representative of the beginning, middle and end of his novelist's career.

Seymour's statement illustrates very clearly the contemporary tendency to re-insert into literary analysis the specific context around the production of the writing. As a consequence, literary criticism is becoming increasingly more aware of the fact that writers are individuals with complex personal and cultural backgrounds, and that those aspects invariably surface in their work. Before examining the novels themselves I will attempt to explore White's view of the Other in a broader context. For that we must go back to Seymour's observation and highlight two points.

² WARD, Jill. Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3, p. 77.

³ LAWSON, Alan (ed.). *Patrick White: Selected Writings*. St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1994. p. xxii.

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. xv.

The first one is that besides the fact that ‘as a writer [...] he represented the Other’ – that is, he made the Other protagonist of his novels – ‘as a person’ White also ‘represented the Other’, which is to say that in his personal life, he felt like the Other, as an Australian, a self-exile, an alleged recluse, an artist, a homosexual and a defender of individual freedom.

White was well-known for tirades such as ‘All my characters are fragments of my somewhat fragmented character.’⁵ Chapter Two will draw from many biographical and autobiographical statements available on White to try to establish parallels between his apparently incongruous feelings of incomprehension, displacement and marginality – a kind of ‘myth of misunderstanding and neglect’⁶ that, curiously, he himself helped spread out – and the long list of his outcast characters. This intermingling of fictional and real-life alterities makes a very interesting study which only recently, mainly after White’s death and the publication of his authorised biography, has been receiving due attention.

The literary theory behind this study has been called ‘post-colonial studies’. Although the term may suggest that it is concerned exclusively with the period after a nation ceases to be a colony, it is in fact the study of the literary practices ‘that characterise the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonisation to the present day, since colonialism does not cease with the mere fact of political independence and continues in a neo-colonial mode to be active in many societies.’⁷

Theorists of post-coloniality address subjects as diverse as ‘universality and difference’, ‘representation and resistance’, ‘nationalism’, ‘hybridity’, ‘ethnicity and indigeneity’, ‘language’, ‘history’, ‘place’, ‘education’, the relationship of post-colonial studies with post-modernism and feminism and so on.⁸ These and other aspects, borrowed from several fields of knowledge to enrich literary analysis, will be occasionally addressed along this work.

‘Place’ is one of the most determining aspects in post-colonial literatures, and therefore, the second point alluded to by Seymour that is extremely relevant to my work, lies in the last part of the quotation – ‘he was very good to us all’ – where ‘us’ stands for Australian writers.

⁵ Quoted in COLMER, John. *Patrick White*. New York: Methuen, 1984. p. 18.

⁶ COLMER, p. 85.

⁷ ASHCROFT et al., *Reader...*, p. xv.

⁸ These topics have been taken from *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, which brings over 80 excerpts addressing post-colonial matters. Ibid., pp. v-xii.

There is in White a very strong sense of place and a striking consciousness of the marginal position Australia occupies, as the Other, in relation to England, as well as the several identity conflicts it has to face due to its British origins. Some understanding of White's position as an *Australian* writer can only be contemplated if one is aware of the elements that have constituted the basis of Australian cultural identity.

That will be attempted in Chapter One, with the help of theorists of post-coloniality, especially, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Up to now, their work *The Empire Writes Back* has been one of the most successful attempts to gather the theoretical and creative texts which have been appearing independently in several parts of the world affected by colonialism, identify and classify their differences and similarities and propose a theoretical model for post-colonial literatures.

Ashcroft et al. emphasise the necessity that post-colonial nations have in affirming their literature as independent manifestations rather than as 'branches' of a main tree, the former centre of the Empire, and define the two processes that are essential to the establishment of post-colonial literatures: 'abrogation' and 'appropriation'.

Chapter Three analyses *The Aunt's Story*,⁹ dealing with White's appropriation of European literary modes and the characteristic way by which he attempts to inscribe 'difference' and set his writing apart from that of any other author, through exhaustive work with the creative aspect of words. As John Holloway very properly observes, one could hardly open a book by White at random, on any page, without being taken by the 'distinctiveness and individuality of contour of his writing'.¹⁰

From being a peculiar little girl, Theodora Goodman, the 'aunt' of the title, becomes what is conventionally called 'mad' as the novel progresses. The narration, inspired in modernist stream-of-consciousness techniques, follows very closely her process of insanity, so that the division between reality and fantasy becomes progressively more blurred and at a certain stage it is very hard for the reader to distinguish between the realms of 'real life' and illusion in the narration. Chapter Three studies this kind of narrative madness as White's attempt to instil alterity in the very mode of his writing.

⁹ WHITE, Patrick. *The Aunt's Story*. London: Vintage, 1994. All quotations in Chapter Three are from this edition. Page numbers are indicated in the main text.

¹⁰ HOLLOWAY, John. Patrick White. In: FORD, Boris (ed.). *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*. Vol. 8. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990. p. 247.

Riders in the Chariot,¹¹ focused in Chapter Four, amplifies the analysis of the Whitean hero started in the previous chapter. The choice of this novel in particular has been made on the premise that it brings not one, but four protagonists pushed to the margins of society due to diverse reasons. Miss Hare, Mrs Godbold, Dubbo and Himmelfarb constitute a site for White to express his sympathy towards the Other – represented here by the woman, the ‘mad’, the poor, the ethnic minority, the dispossessed – and his concern with the fact that in society all individuality is ‘massacred’ by the self-appointed preservers of ‘orderliness’ and the socially acceptable.

Riders in the Chariot is White’s most satirical rendering of Australian suburban life. ‘Difference’ is a recurring topic, which leads to the conclusion that indirectly, the novel is also an attack on the Australian literary tradition, with its glorification of the ‘average’ and the ‘typical’.

Chapter Five examines *A Fringe of Leaves*,¹² a ‘historical’ novel set in the untamed Queensland of the 1830’s. The shipwreck of the *Stirling Castle* and Mrs Fraser’s extraordinary survival has become a widely explored metaphor of the European encounter with the Other, a theme that interested White and had already been tackled by him in *Voss*.

Eliza Fraser’s story also fascinated White because of its anthropological richness. She was an English lady that ended up as slave to a group of Aborigines and, as that, had contact with dimensions of alterity not attainable to the majority of human beings. The ‘veridical’ facts are appropriated by White, so that his version of Eliza Fraser – Ellen Roxburgh – is able to embody more social roles (a poor farm girl, a high society lady, a slave and participant in tribal life, the lover of a fugitive convict and back to ‘civilised’ society) than her real-life predecessor.

¹¹ WHITE, Patrick. *Riders in the Chariot*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961. All quotations in Chapter Four are from this edition. Page numbers are indicated in the main text.

¹² Id. *A Fringe of Leaves*. London: Penguin, 1977. All quotations in Chapter Five are from this edition. Page numbers are indicated in the main text.

Chapter One

Australia: AN‘OTHER’ LITERATURE

The value of the unknown

Mapped waters are more quiet than the land is,
lending the land their wave’s own conformation:
and Norway’s hare runs south in agitation,
profiles investigate the sea, where land is.
Are they assigned, or can the countries pick their colors?
– What suits the character or the native waters best.
Topography displays no favorites; North’s as near as West.
More delicate than the historians’ are the map-makers’ colors.

Elizabeth Bishop, ‘The Map’, 1946 ⁱⁱ

The 1636 version of Mercator’s world map brings Europe, Asia, Africa and even, to a lesser extent, the Americas in shapes and configurations quite alike the ones we have become familiar with today. In the place where the massive block of Australia should be, however, lies an elaborate Latin-inscribed scroll next to the caption ‘Terra Australis Incognita’ (the unknown land in the south).

In other maps Terra Australis Incognita is also referred to as ‘Terra Australis Nondum Cognita’ (not yet known). Inscriptions such as these – which are among the first official references to Australia – may at first sight look rather naïve, pointing at Europe’s incomprehension of the world it intended to conquer. However, they also had a serious purpose in the complex of meanings that was European imperialism, which is to say that it was also desirable that the lands were represented so.

Stating that a particular piece of land was so far not known, or about to be so, was a very partial point of view, and a trademark of imperialism as a whole. In fact, navigators, cartographers and explorers should have some logical evidence that the southern lands in question were already inhabited, and therefore *known* to their native peoples.

Their previous colonising experiences told them that most lands on the planet, even those extremely inhospitable ones to European standards, such as jungles and deserts, were in some way inhabited. And besides, Portuguese (as far back as the sixteenth century), Dutch and even British navigators had long been around the place and must have stopped by during one of their journeys in the region to inspect it, or at least they should have observed, from a distance, the smoke from Aboriginal fires.¹³

However, being as mysterious to Europeans as their lands – their ‘mystery’ involving uncivilised and strange customs such as black magic and fetishism – the native peoples’ knowledge was deemed invalid, so that they too could be subjected to imperialist rule.

The adjective ‘unknown’ was significant for imperialism exactly because of its ambivalence. Basically it sparkled a whole lot of optimist expectations – undiscovered horizons hiding vast extensions of the best land, rich in precious metals, spices and human diversity.

Yet the negative thesaurus variations of the term prevail by far over the positive ones. The ‘unknown’ may suggest ‘anonymous’, ‘uncharted’, ‘enigmatic’, ‘puzzling’, ‘obscure’, ‘dark’, ‘gloomy’, ‘shadowy’, ‘sombre’, ‘ambiguous’, ‘precarious’, ‘questionable’, ‘vague’, ‘dubious’, ‘impenetrable’, ‘impervious’, ‘tenebrous’... These even if true only in very particular circumstances and at particular historical moments, were useful for righteously claiming a piece of land.

¹³ The Portuguese should have been the first to set their eyes, or maybe even their feet on the white sands of the Australian coast, as their colony of Timor was only 500 km to the north of Australia. In the 17th century Dutch and British sailors definitely did so, as indicated by wrecks retrieved from the seabed along the Australian coast and by written accounts of Dutch sailors. At the time neither the Portuguese, nor the Dutch or the British seemed to have found anything worthwhile in the land – although that was not the opinion of neighbouring Indonesian merchants, who used to visit the island annually, in search of trepang, a kind of sea-slug they traded in southern China.

The concept of the 'Colonial Other'

In Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, which argues that individuals are constructed through the acquisition of the power to express desires and needs through language, the Other is the ultimate signifier of everyone the subject is not, as well as everything the subject does not have. [...] In a more general and older sense, the phrase *the Other* has long been used by philosophers and social scientists to refer to anyone who is not I – the Other actually *defines* me because it is the ultimate signifier of everything I am not.

The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism, 1995 ⁱⁱⁱ

With the 'unknown' label attached to them, the objects of imperialism – the colonised peoples and lands – became, even before a first contact between the parts, either fantastically idealised or inherently degenerate and barbarian, but always placed in an antagonistic position in relation to the coloniser. That has led theoreticians of post-colonialism, borrowing from psychology and philosophy, to refer to the colonised as the 'Other', or 'that which is unfamiliar and extraneous to a dominant subjectivity, the opposite or negative against which an authority is defined.'¹⁴

When the right time came, the imperialistic metropolis had only to take up the mission and the challenge to get to 'know' (or 'identify', 'name', 'recognise', 'experience', 'understand', 'comprehend', 'decipher', 'inspect', 'survey', 'intercept', 'study', 'analyse', 'master', 'enlighten', 'penetrate', 'possess'...) the several colonial Others scattered around the world, with the intention of participating in their good attributes or saving them from their negative situation of opposition.

The process of Othering was thus essential to colonisation and in the beginning of the twentieth century there came to be colonial Others in relation to England all over the planet, in Canada, India, South Africa, Honduras, the West Indies, Uganda, Trinidad, Kenya, Egypt, Iraq, Cameroon, Borneo, Malaya, Jamaica, Malta, Sudan, Hong Kong, Gambia, Burma, Guiana, Papua, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, Cyprus, New Zealand, Ceylon, Nigeria, Gibraltar, Bahamas... and Australia,¹⁵ the main focus of interest of this work.

¹⁴ BOEHMER, Elleke. *Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. p. 21.

¹⁵ Some of the nations that formed the British Empire in 1920. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

Australia is usually grouped together with the USA, New Zealand and Canada, under the subdivision 'settler' colonies, or colonies in which land occupation meant the almost complete annihilation of native populations in a short period of time and the transportation of a foreign culture to a 'new' environment.

Such colonies, being predominantly white, shared certain affinities with the metropolis – in a larger scale than did the so-called 'invaded' colonies¹⁶ – even though they would always be kept in the position of the Other. The attempts of the colonisers (the few indigenous peoples left and the growing number of European descendants) to reach up to the standards of the Imperial centre would always be deemed as inferior copies of the original model, so that the authority of the Imperial force could be preserved.

The justifications for dispossessing the Other

I sat in the fading light, looking at the beautiful scenery around me, which now for the first time gladdened the eyes of Europeans; and I wondered that so fair a land should only be the abode of savage men; and then I thought [...] of their anomalous position in so fertile a country, – and wondered how long these things were to be.

George Grey, *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-west and Western Australia...*, 1841^{iv}

Life standards in the metropolitan centres went through a considerable rise during the age of imperial expansion. In the British Isles fortunes were made in a short time; exotic goods, new raw materials and a larger target-public for metropolitan manufactured products caused market and industry to boom; deportation and migration to the colonies appeared as ready solutions for the serious problems of overpopulation and poverty.

The land and the wealth it could provide constituted the central reason for the existence of the empire. Ironically, however, it was the human dimension of the project that became the main moral justification for land appropriation. The lands were inhabited by peoples who had to be 'rescued' – either for the sake of religion or science – from whatever

¹⁶ e.g.: India or the Caribbean islands, in which the indigenous populations were not dispossessed or forced to adapt to a new geographical environment, but had English imposed on them. ASHCROFT et al., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1989. p. 25.

name their particular case of Otherness received: ignorance, immoral behaviour, atheism, lust, sin, primitivism, barbarian practices or mere laziness.¹⁷

Perhaps one of the main 'humanitarian' justifications behind imperial expansion was an idea that has probably been present in all centuries, but that was especially in vogue during the Enlightenment, a philosophical movement more-or-less simultaneous with the imperial age, which the anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls attention to: the notion that it would be possible to reach a 'consensus gentium', or a consensus of all mankind.¹⁸

Enlightenment's concept of 'human being' was based on the premise that there existed some 'truly human', 'constant', or 'general' essence that would be the same for every single person on earth, an 'immutability' often 'obscured by the trappings of local fashion'.¹⁹ The idea was that there existed a basic human nature hidden among several disguising layers, made up of biological, psychological, or sociological factors. Getting to the core of humanity – the 'naked reasoner' or some superior 'metaphysical entity': 'Man' with a capital 'M', as Clifford puts it ²⁰ – would only be a matter of peeling those layers off.

This kind of philosophical thought became very convenient by the time Britain came to possess one-quarter of the world's lands. On being made to face the astounding human diversity of the planet, the 'consensus gentium' ideal sanctioned the centre's right to interfere in that diversity, attempting to level all cultures according to certain standards.

Such interference is one of the factors which makes the field of post-colonial studies today a scenery for the displaying of highly-strung feelings in so many authors. The Antiguan writer Jamaica Kincaid, for example, expresses all her resentment in relation to British imperialism in an article that pretends to explain to a tourist, in a bitter-comic tone, a little of the history of the English occupation of her homeland from the point of view of the colonised. The English, according to her

should never have left their home, their precious England, a place they had to leave but could never forget. And so everywhere they went they turned into England; and everybody they met they turned English. But no place could ever really be England, and nobody who did not look exactly like them would ever be English, so you can imagine the destruction of people and land that came from that.²¹

¹⁷ These 'rationalizations imbuing wealth-making with virtue' are thoroughly explored in BOEHMER, *Wealth, sweetness, glory: Justifications for Empire*, pp. 36-44.

¹⁸ GEERTZ, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973. p. 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 38; 51.

That 'turning into England' as well as the 'destruction' of the particularities of each culture it really meant, could be satisfactorily justified by the notion that 'there are some things that all men will be found to agree upon as right, real, just, or attractive and that those things are, therefore, in fact right, real, just, or attractive'.²²

Europe will be taken as the reference culture and those 'things' must necessarily be European. In other words, there would be a basic, truthful essence to all human beings, very much apparent in Western European peoples, but that would be concealed, in Others, under the guise of secondary factors. In theory, to use the Enlightenment metaphor of life as a stage, all the European coloniser had to do, to be of assistance to the colonial subject, was to take his/her rudimentary biological, psychological... etc., costumes off, and put on new, 'civilised' ones.

In the 1970's Geertz was among the challengers of this kind of essentialist and universalising view by maintaining that firstly, such 'levels' cannot actually be neatly separated as they are in theory (for the sake of the autonomy of the sciences), and secondly, that 'men unmodified by the customs of particular places do not in fact exist, have never existed, and most important, could not in the very nature of the case exist.'²³ The layers *are* the individual and the peeling off is thus impossible.

In short, his conclusion is that the concept of man is irremediably imbedded in the concept of culture. Man is, in fact, a creation of himself. Geertz's very idea of human being helps us understand the artificial hierarchical gap between Self and Other: 'If we want to discover what man amounts to, we can only find it in what men are: and what men are, above all other things, is various. It is in understanding that variousness – its range, its nature, its basis, and its implications – that we shall come to construct a concept of human nature that, more than a statistical shadow and less than a primitivism dream, has both substance and truth.'²⁴

Although Geertz applies the relativist approach to the study of cultures, this kind of thought has been extended to other fields of human and social sciences.

²¹ KINCAID, Jamaica. A Small Place. In: ASHCROFT et al. (eds.), *Reader...*, p. 92.

²² GEERTZ, pp. 38-9.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

The notion of the Antipodes



Macrobius's mappamundi, with equatorial ocean, 5th century

Going back to the origins of Australian Otherness in relation to Britain, those are to be located a long time prior to the settlement of the Empire and even before it started to be called Terra Australis Incognita. In fact, they take us to the first centuries of the Christian era. Around AD 150 the Greek geographer Ptolemy theorised about a 'south land' enclosing the Indian Sea and Ethiopia, suggesting that the globe was isomorphic.

The writer and philosopher Ambrosius Theodosius Macrobius (governor of Spain from AD 399 to 400) developed further these ideas and drew a map in which the world was composed of two blocks of land divided by an equatorial sea. That helped establish the notion of the Antipodes as well as created a problem: How to explain the fact that half of the earth would be upside down? How come what was on it did not fall off?

While there was no doubt that the northern hemisphere lands were upright and straight, it was hard for most people to imagine what things on the other side would be like, except that they would have to be a degeneration of the European models. Although Macrobius and others had tried to explain the Antipodes by formulating the first rudiments of a theory of gravity, their ideas were still seen as too fantastic to be believed or else, maybe

the Antipodeans had their feet in the place where they should have their heads – an idea that was rather common in the popular imagery of those times.²⁵

The great torrid heart of Australia

I was coming into the city along Anzac Parade. It was late and quiet. Occasionally a tram passed, an empty, illuminated box, leaping on the rails under a crackle of blue sparks. The trees were black, and their leaves made a little dry sound like ghostly butter pats. There were no soft, rounded sounds in the night, only dry brittle ones, and the pavement was gritty under my feet. My lips tasted of dust as they always did. The torrid street lamps were like sores on the night. [...]

It was the third waterless summer, and the heat had come down like a steel shutter over the city. The winters between had been as bad. Dry, with a parching, unslacked cold; westerly winds that drove and drove, bringing such clarity to the air, that a hill five miles away looked near enough to touch. The drought was in everything now, penetrating and changing life like blind roots at work upon a neglected pavement. The colours and quality of the world had been altered in the long months of desiccation. The pattern of existence was pulled awry.

Marjorie Barnard, 'Dry Spell', 1943 ^{vi}

By the occasion of the 'discovery' of Australia the questions as to the anatomy of the antipodean people had long been resolved. However, other deviations from the norm were verified.

After a slip by Captain Cook who, in April 1770, mistook the Australian rainy season for the dry one, the First Fleet, commanded by Captain Arthur Phillip in 1788 and bringing the first convicts, was taken aback by the aridity it found. Where were the 'streams' and 'meadows' that had so much attracted Cook? In the first three years of the convict settlement in Sydney, instead of the tropical crops with which the colonists expected to thrive, they had to deceive their rumbling stomachs with a meagre daily ration of preserved

²⁵ RYAN, Simon. Inscripting the Emptiness. In: TIFFIN, Chris; LAWSON, Alan (eds.). *Describing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*. London: Routledge, 1994. pp. 117-18.

food from the ships complemented by a wild fruit and herb diet learnt from the Aborigines. Illness and the unwillingness of convicts to work fomented the general spirit of desolation.²⁶

The edenic landscape idealised by the first settlers turned out to be a narrow band of the eastern coastal line castigated by constant droughts. Beyond the sandstone barrier that, for decades, hindered the access to the interior, three deserts were ready to welcome European explorers with death, in one of the regions in the world in which dryness assumes its highest and widest proportions.

Australia still feels, in the twentieth century, the results of its history of isolation. The sense of being at the edge of things subsists even today when Australia's geography does not impose any serious impediments to the country's progress and civilisation. That isolation, as the historian Geoffrey Blainey puts it, 'has tended to become as much a state of mind as a fact of geography.' The great torrid heart has become a powerful metaphor of the Australian state of spirit.²⁷

Nature upside down

[T]he trees retained their leaves and shed their barks instead, the swans were black, the eagles white, the bees were stingless, some mammals had pockets, others laid eggs, it was warmest on the hills and coolest in the valleys, [and] even the blackberries were red.

J. Martin, a traveller to Australia in the 1830's

vii

The unpredictability of the antipodean land and climate, so inhospitable to European colonisers, was matched by the strangeness of its plants and animals. Expressions of amazement are frequent in the first non-official literary manifestations inspired by Australia – the letters and diaries of the first settlers and travellers.

Naming geographical and biological features became a problem for early European arrivals. Australia seemed to resist what was judged to be the 'natural' way of

²⁶ BLAINEY, Geoffrey. *A Shorter History of Australia*. Melbourne: Mandarin, 1994. pp. 25-8.

²⁷ On the up-to-date character of the myth, see, for instance Blainey's article Australia: A Bird's Eye View. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, Winter, 1985, pp. 1-28.

naming, that is, by association with European features and in that way the relationship between signifier and signified became rather strained.

Looking for a way to describe a new reality, but at a loss for words suitable to describe it, travellers and explorers resorted to turning alien flora, fauna and geographical features into phoney copies of the European ones. Barron Field, in his *Geographical Memoirs* complains that 'The King's Tableland', 'The Prince Regent's Glen' and Jamison's Valley', for example, do not resemble actual tablelands, glens or valleys.²⁸

In that way the fault seemed to be in Australian nature and not in the unsuitability of the language available to describe it – a phenomenon that would be reflected in the country's early literature.

The original inhabitants

The blue green greyish gum leaves
blew behind the bitter banksia that bent
in supplication silently bereaved
bereft of the black circle that once sat
around its base to stroke and chant its songs
that made the rivers flow and life wax fat
the legends and the river now replaced
by sheep-torn gullies and a muddy silt
that sluggishly and sullen in retreat
throws up its mud to signal its defeat
the carking crows have changed their song grown deep
from tasting human flesh that left to reek
beneath the unpolluted sun in pioneer days
now veiled in smog so spirits cannot peek
the river-dove grown silent fearing song
will bring the hunter with his thundering death
the kookaburra laughs in disbelief
then waits again in fear with bated breath
the legislators move their pens in poise
like thieves a'crouch above the pilfered purse
how many thousand million shall they give
to celebrate the bicentenary²⁹
and cloak the murders in hilarity
and sing above the rumble of the hearse.

Kevin Gilbert, "The Celebrators '88", 1988 viii

²⁸ Quoted by CARTER, Paul. Naming Place. In: ASHCROFT et al. (eds.), *Reader...*, p. 404.

²⁹ The bicentenary of British occupation of Australia in 1988 was an occasion for celebrations for some and protest for Others.

Another Antipodean presence seemed to confirm Australia's stark opposition to England. In their short stay at Botany Bay Captain Cook's crew had observed distant sights of smoke that were an indication of human presence in the new lands.

But whereas the British had just invented the steam engine, the skill of starting a bonfire was the most valuable 'utilitarian' resource – in the European sense – in the lives of several groups who had arrived in Australia, probably from Asia, about 40,000 to 50,000 years before. Despite the particularities of each of those societies (maybe as many as 250 communities came to exist in Australia, judging by the estimated number of different languages spoken at the time) the colonisers labelled them all under the denomination 'Aborigines'.

The Aborigines were travelling communities who, in some researchers' view were fundamentally nomadic, probably never spending 'more than six months in the one place'³⁰ while in others' they were a little less so, as 'in some places, where food supplies were reliable and climates harsh and cold, they built small villages.'³¹ Whatever the length of their permanence, their nomadic, 'animal-like', habits were a strong justification for the British claim of their lands.

At the time, English, French, Spanish, Portuguese or Dutch colonisers, with a few exceptions, had in common the fact that they were unable to notice something which today we have only started to realise: the highly intimate relationship native peoples had with the land they inhabited and the depth of their knowledge. Australian Aboriginal peoples, such as the Gagudjus who inhabit Kakadu National Park, were hunters, food gatherers and even adept at clearing the grounds by fire, intending to control superfluous vegetation and to create hunting and travelling fields.

The imbalance they caused in the environment, however, was quickly restored and thus they left very little trace of their presence. They knew exactly when and how to intervene in the cycle of nature. In setting fire to the bush, they observed the season in which the weather would be wet enough and the vegetation dry in the outside but still fresh within, so that the fire would not spread too far and out of control. They also waited for the right stage of animal life before they came to action – just after the bird and small mammal offspring would have grown old enough to be able to find other areas in which to settle.

³⁰ BLAINEY, *A Shorter History...*, p. 7.

³¹ WRIGHT, Judith. Landscape and Dreaming. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, Winter, 1985. p. 31.

Soon the burnt site was flourishing again, the newly-green buds attracting a whole range of animal visitors – an easy target for the Aboriginal spears.³²

Unfortunately, our western ideas as to what land is, and the inevitable conceptual/semantic restrictions, will probably never allow us to understand or to define satisfactorily what the land means for an Aborigine. The Australian poet Judith Wright, who, sometime ago decided to give up literature in favour of environmental causes and especially, Aboriginal rights, compares our view of the land to a ‘painter’s’, ‘outside’ view, the reflection of our fragmented world, which is not at all comparable to the ‘earth-sky-water-tree-spirit-human complex’ of Aboriginal ‘spacetime’ where

every part of the country they occupied, every mark and feature, was numinous with meaning. The spirit ancestors had made the country itself, in their travels, and fused each part of it into the “Dreamtime” – a continuum of past, present and future – that was also the unchangeable Law by which the Aborigines lived. The spirits remained in the land, passing on their essence through the births and rebirths of Aborigines themselves, and still present in the telling of their stories.³³

The clash between those two immensely different cultures seemed inevitable. The whites invaded Aboriginal holy sites, disrupted their migration and hunting routes and raped Aboriginal women. The Aborigines burned their opponents’ fields and speared their cattle in reprisal. A vicious circle of violence was thus started, where the Aborigines were inevitably in a position of disadvantage.

Typical colonial artistic manifestations tended to depict Aborigines either as background detail or as the romantically idealised noble savage, when they were not seen as virtual devils, as in Charles Harpur’s poem ‘The Creek of Four Graves’, in which four settlers are coldly murdered during the night by painted-face Aborigines, without an apparent reason.³⁴

Australia did not develop a heroic mode of representation of its native peoples similar to the American frontier literature, involving fierce battles between Whites and Reds, where the Indians were real villains or sometimes even heroes. The explanation for that lies in the fact that Australian Aborigines, unlike American ones, never assimilated white

³² ABORÍGENES da Austrália. Pittsburgh: The National Geographic Society and WQED: Vídeo Arte do Brasil, 1988. 1 videocassette (60 min): dubl., color. ; 12 mm. VHS NTSC.

³³ WRIGHT, pp. 31-32.

³⁴ HARPUR, Charles. The Creek of the Four Graves. In: HESELTINE, Harry (ed.). *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1974. pp. 55-62.

weapons and despite their amazing warrior qualities, were slaughtered more massively and more cowardly than their American counterparts.

In the history of Australian conquest – which involved such (literally) unspeakable deeds as the poisoning of Aboriginal waterholes – there was very little of even that distorted pride in overcoming the savages that inspired the American frontier literature. In fact Aboriginal heroes such as the fugitive Sandamara, who, for a couple of months in late nineteenth century, eluded the police with his desert survival abilities, a boomerang and a spear alone, have only recently been rescued from anonymity.

Literature has been one of the expedients used in the attempt to recover some of the Aboriginal dignity usurped with colonisation. While white settler writers have been worried with re-creating a history that was deemed non-existent, breaching distances and filling a void, Aboriginal literature's two main concerns have been, according to Laurie Hergenhan, 'to conserve a long past through oral literature and, latterly, to write Aborigines back into the history of Australia'.³⁵

A country peopled by crooks and thieves

[Dr Phantom's Hyde Park] was a canopied and curtained vehicle, its four wheels rimmed with iron, and it was drawn by a piebald Waler, and driven by a white-gloved, personable murderer.

It was usual in those days for citizens of Sydney who applied for convict servants to ask for a murderer if any should happen to be available. They were in great demand, for, though apt to be impulsive on occasions of emotion, killers had generally been found to have warmer-hearted and more likeable dispositions than criminals of other persuasions. Dr Phantom, caring little for thieves, sheepstealers, pickpockets, lags, or the abductors of heiresses, employed, when he could do so, only murderers. Though he drew the line at poisoners (his dispensary being, he felt, a temptation) he was at this period particularly lucky; he was rich in the possession of 'First and Second Murderers' - as he designated them - and his servants' hall, in the neat red-brick Georgian house, some twenty miles from the capital, had never been more cheery.

Ethel Anderson, 'Juliet McCree is Accused of Gluttony', 1956 ix

³⁵ HERGENHAN, Laurie. General Introduction. In: Id. (ed.). *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia/Australian Literary Studies* (special issue), vol. 13, no. 4, October, 1988. p. xii.

If the Antipodean myths and later the Antipodean environment and its native populations constituted the two first stages of Australian alterity, a third stage was already in the process of formation due to the social-political circumstances of the Australian colonisation.

Around 1786 Britain was facing serious difficulties as to the overpopulation in its penal system. The United States of America had just declared its independence and with it, its unavailability to receive any more of the convicts Britain used to send over the Atlantic. The possibility of settling a penal colony in the lands claimed by Cook was being enthusiastically discussed, and after some extra benefits were considered, such as the political trump of establishing an advanced strategic base – at a time of fierce Imperial competition, mainly with France – Captain Phillip's First Fleet set off bound south. Around 1,000 people populated the eleven ships, including convicts, soldiers and dependants (male and female adult civilians and children).

While there were the eventual bankrupt or ostracised English gentlemen who emigrated to Australia seeking their lost status, in the next fifty years, the great majority of Australian colonists would be sent over by the British courts of justice, sentenced mainly for stealing.

After the end of their sentences they were allowed to return 'home', but such a measure was not encouraged by British authorities and most 'emancipists' decided to stay in Australia.³⁶ Some even became famous for 'their rise from disgrace to prosperity', making their fortunes in a land where 'skills precious out here could not be wasted merely because their possessors had broken the law.'³⁷ Altogether, more than 160,000 felons, of whom there were 60 men for every woman, were sent to Australia from 1788 to 1868 when the last convict ship reached Western Australia.

In the 1830's, free immigrants started to arrive in larger numbers. Australia needed hands to build a country, while Britain was facing the opposite situation, with an increase of social problems originated by overpopulation and unemployment. The task of the

³⁶ The Australian colonies stand for Britain's industriousness and capacity to transform emptiness into an organised society, capable both of enriching and redeeming. According to a survey by Edward Said, this neo-classical ideal may appear in Victorian novels that do not deal primarily with Australia, such as Dickens's *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield*, that show how the alterity of the colonies can be manipulated to serve the interests of the metropolis. While bankrupt Wilkins Micawber's happy ending consists in emigrating to Australia, the outlaw Magwith, whose return to England is not welcome, comes to suggest that the redeeming possibilities work only as long as the emancipist remains abroad. SAID, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994. pp. xvi e xvii.

³⁷ INGLIS, Ken. *Australian Colonists*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993. p. 16.

authorities in Britain was to encourage some families of low income to leave the country, whilst the local government in Australia had to find a way of bringing them over – many of them were unable to pay for their travel expenses. The solution found was the selling of Australian lands to raise the funds for voluntary immigration. About two-thirds of all free immigrants had their journey fares covered so.³⁸

Whereas the metropolis was concerned with the destiny of a society formed mainly by former criminals – Charles Darwin was one of the British visitors to complain of the disgust of having ‘to be waited on by a man, who the day before, was by your representation flogged for some trifling misdemeanour!’³⁹ – in Australia a curious process of inversion of European moral notions started to happen. At the same time that discussing one’s arrival became a taboo, the ‘new chums’, or free settlers, were received grudgingly. After all, those ‘Jemmy Grants’, as the emigrants were derogatorily called in convict rhyming slang, were given free tickets because they were good-for-nothings at home.⁴⁰

Convicts, on the other hand, were proud of having been taken by force away from their productive activities in Britain. In this way an Australian pride started to develop, hand-in-hand with a reversal of the shame of its convict origin – a joke of the time put England as ‘a den of thieves, the place where all the convicts came from’!⁴¹

Convict culture was an important ingredient in the formation of an Australian literature. Not only did convicts influence the accent, rhythm and idioms of Australian language, but, where ‘serious’ writers had at first felt powerless to describe the process of adaptation to the new land, convict humour and folksongs succeeded. Convicts also contributed a great deal to the very peculiar Australian attitude towards authority and the heroic that would be explored by the nationalist writers of the 1890’s as the beginnings of the populist myth.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁹ Quoted in Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 46.

First fictional portrayals

In [Australia's] genial atmosphere, I recovered my independence. Indeed, had my social derelictions been worse than those incurred by poverty, I was assured that society could find it in its colonial heart to forgive them all. [...] To my surprise, instead of being cast among new faces, and compelled to win for myself an independent reputation, I found that I was among old friends whom I had long thought dead or in jail. To walk down Collins-street was like pulling up the Styx. On either side I saw men who had vanished from the Upper World sooner than I. Tomkins was there to explain that queer story of the concealed ace. Jenkins talked to me for an hour concerning the Derby which ruined him. Hopkins had another wife in addition to the one whom he left at Florence, while Wilkins assured me on his honour that he had married the lady with whom he had eloped [...]. The game was made in the same old fashion, only the stakes were not so high. The porcelain was of the same pattern, only a little cracked.

Marcus Clarke 'Human Repetends', 1872 *

The imperialist age had expanded considerably the possibilities of fictional settings and themes in British literature. The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a reading public in the British Isles avid for accounts of places at the same time so distant and so closely related to their own. And yet, that public had certain ready-made ideas as to what it expected from colonial narratives.

From the time of the penal settlement all through the first half of the nineteenth century Australian landscape did not seem to agree with the dominant literary modes required by the metropolitan market. A similar process to that of the Europeanisation of Australian nature mentioned on page 15 occurred in relation to poetic and fictional literary forms.

Paul Carter quotes one literary critic who deplored the fact that Australian nature did not allow the country to be a subject of good poetry, mainly because its perennial trees, like the gum tree (the eucalyptus), did not display the 'essence' of poetry: 'the infant and slender green of spring, the dark redundancy of summer, and the sere and yellow leaf of

autumn'; in short, its seasons of the year were not properly synchronised with the 'seasons of human life' and did not allow for proper poetic metaphor.⁴²

Good literature at that time also required mountainous landscapes and 'exotic' settings. This is very apparent in 'The Creek of the Four Graves' a gloomy poem allegorising the foundation of the colony by one of the first native-born Australian poets, Charles Harpur. Although he liked to think of himself as essentially Australian, his view of Australian nature – 'mountain routes', 'wild wolds clouded up with brush,/And cut with marshes perilously deep'⁴³ – is rather Europeanised, as well as the form chosen for the poem. Harpur's adoption of the Miltonic verse is justified by Harry Haseltine on the basis that 'he hoped (perhaps naively) through his very choice of language to turn a place where people lived into a civilized society.'⁴⁴

As for the fiction of the time, the settings were also adjusted to fit the type of stories then fashionable in Europe. Early novelists sometimes committed disparities such as placing a sheep station in a wooded hill rather than in an open plain. The romantic mind, as Patrick Morgan explains, 'was often employed in Australia not to intensify reality, but to impose fantasies on a perceived vacuum.'⁴⁵

Two characteristic novels of this period are *The Recollections of Geoffry Hamlyn*, and *Tallangetta, The Squatter's Home*, written in the 1850's by Henry Kingsley and William Howitts respectively. Both have sketchy plots, featuring dispossessed English gentlemen trying to recover their lost status as heroes and despicable convicts as villains. There is also, in both novels, a journalistic interest behind the fictional one, as they also served to pass out practical information on farming for those Britons interested in emigrating. The long descriptive sections often look like artificial deviations from the fictional plot.⁴⁶

The literary production of the time is summarised by Adrian Mitchell as consisting of 'a handful of convict fictions and a sprinkling of emigrant handbooks disguised as novels; and with the goldrushes in the fifties, an increasing number of elaborated notations of their personal experiences by writers who may be collectively described as literary tourists'.⁴⁷

⁴² CARTER, pp. 402-3.

⁴³ HARPUR, p. 55.

⁴⁴ HESELTINE, p. 31.

⁴⁵ MORGAN, Patrick. Realism and Documentary: Lowering one's sight. In: HERGENHAN (ed.), p. 238.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 31.

⁴⁷ MITCHELL, Adrian. Fiction. In: KRAMER, Leonie (ed.). *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*. Melbourne: Oxford, 1981. p. 48.

Anglophile nationalism

May all thy glories in another sphere
 Relume, and shine more brightly still than here;
 May this, thy last-born infant, – then arise,
 To glad thy heart, and greet thy parent eyes;
 And Australasia float, with flag unfurl'd,
 A new Britannia in another world.

William Charles Wentworth, 'Australasia', 1823 ^{xi}

When the first Australian-born people start to boast of being 'currency' rather than 'sterling'⁴⁸ we have the earliest objective signals of the emergence of some sort of nationalist feeling in the colonies. This nationalism is inscribed in a paradox – inasmuch as people were proud of their 'difference' they also saw themselves as Britons living in the antipodes. Not even the currency lads and lasses could escape the powerful Englishness surrounding them:

[M]ost people were feeling a little more at home in Australia. The strange feeling did not go away; it just retreated a step. Even migrants who came prepared were still surprised by the strangeness of Australia. Those who were born in Australia and knew no other land must have felt more at home but were constantly told of their homeland's strangeness by the flood of newcomers who dominated the newspapers and wrote most of the poems, novels and descriptive books about Australia.⁴⁹

The origin of an Australian literature was thus linked to a nostalgic feeling for 'Home' felt even by the ones who had never been to the British Isles. Accordingly, Ashcroft et al. put as the first stage through which post-colonial literatures go through, writings done in 'the language of the imperial centre' and 'produced by a literate elite whose primary identification is with the colonising power'.⁵⁰

One of the first currency lads of renown (who was also among the first defenders of the terms 'Australia' and 'Australian') was William Charles Wentworth – a mixture of wealthy land-owner, politician, explorer, social scientist, journalist and poet. He won second

⁴⁸ 'Currency' was the term used for the paper money issued in Sydney to make up for the shortage in sterling pounds and therefore, it was less valuable than British money.

⁴⁹ BLAINEY, *A Shorter History...*, p. 100.

place in a Cambridge University poetry contest in 1823 on the theme 'Australasia'. The poem begins with the author's assertion of his duty, as an Australian, to sing his homeland. It develops with the description of Australia – in terms of Greek and Roman images – and the closing lines reveal the author's belief in Australia's capability to replace England, should the latter forgo its position as world leader.

Neither this 'nationalist' literature that, nevertheless, privileges the centre, nor the next stage – the literary production of marginalised authors, such as natives and convicts, done under the auspices of the Imperial authorities – can fully realise their subversive possibilities, due to the repressive power of the Imperial government, who has control over all the printing business in the colonies,⁵¹ although the real and much more intimidating control – that of the minds of the colonised, as the poem shows – is harder to be isolated and undermined.

Abrogation

In due time the dinner was dished up; and the old man seated himself on a block, with the lid of a gin-case across his knees for a table. Five Bob squatted opposite with the liveliest interest and appreciation depicted on his intelligent countenance.

Dinner proceeded very quietly, except when the carver paused to ask the dog how some tasty morsel went with him, and Five Bob's tail declared that it went very well indeed.

'Here y'are, try this,' cried the old man, tossing him a large piece of doughboy. A click of Five Bob's jaws and the dough was gone.

'Clean into his liver!' said the old man, with a faint smile.

He washed up the tinware in the water the duff had been boiled in, and then, with the assistance of the dog, yarded the sheep.

Henry Lawson, 'The Bush Undertaker', 1894. xii

The end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth would bring renovated feelings of nationalism to Australia. This second nationalist wave was influenced by the celebration of the Centennial (1888), in which Australia demanded more self-

⁵⁰ ASHCROFT et. al., *The Empire...* p. 5.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

determination, leading to the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia, in 1901, and a new constitution where the former colonies became the states of a federation. Other historical events in this period also instigated a great deal of patriotic fever: the 1851 goldrushes of New South Wales and Victoria, the 1854 Eureka Stockade against the official gold-mining licence system, and the participation of Australia in World War One.

Literary production followed closely the nationalist tendency by hoisting the distinctive characteristics of the land. The *Bulletin* journal appeared in 1890 intending to be the 'mouthpiece', the 'guardian' and the 'nurse' of an Australian literature.⁵² In it writers such as Henry Lawson, A. B. ('Banjo') Paterson, Joseph Furphy, Barbara Baynton, Edward Dyson, Ernest Favenc, Price Warung, went against the bucolic fantasies, artificial settings and heroic endings imposed from abroad and, for the first time, tried to create an indigenous mode of literary creation.

This declaration of literary independence was influenced by realist and documentary/journalistic tendencies. It recalled the Australian convict past, and made a point in elevating 'bush mateship' (unconditional male solidarity) to the status of heroic. The all-Australian hero was a worker, usually a peasant, shepherd or goldminer, challenging – not always successfully – the harshness of the Australian outback.

By the 1850's the 'bush', initially a term for 'unenclosed and uncultivated country' applied to the margins of established settlements, had acquired the connotations of 'isolation, loneliness, death, drought, flood, fire'⁵³ and became the central symbol of inspiration for writers.

Introducing local colour to literature was obviously not a completely new initiative of the *Bulletin* writers, but had already appeared in earlier authors. According to Adrian Mitchell, the main novelty brought about by the *Bulletin* was stylistic. British modes of expression were found inadequate to give shape to experiences that were exclusively Australian, so the Australian vernacular language and the popular modes of the bush ballad, before then restricted to the campfire, started to appear in written form. The Australian voice, when it came forth at last sounded as the 'dry, laconic understatement of the anecdotal style.'⁵⁴

⁵² GOLDSWORTHY, Kerry. Short Fiction. In: HERGENHAN (ed.), p. 538.

⁵³ FROST, Alan. Perceptions before 1855. In: *Ibid.*, pp. 110-1.

⁵⁴ MITCHELL, Adrian. Fiction. In: KRAMER (ed.), p. 69.

The short story was elected as the ideal fictional medium for representing Australianess (the ballad was the favourite poetic medium). Besides being already part of the campfire tradition, the short story, as Patrick Morgan evaluates, was important in the abandoning of the received traditions. It concentrated on existence rather than the succession of dramatic incidents of the Victorian novel, providing the brevity necessary for the portrayal of routinely activities and the tracing of 'psychological profiles of ordinary people struggling to survive in difficult conditions.'⁵⁵

An identity was being created, based on direct opposition to the traditions of the centre. British heroic modes were deemed segregating, as they reproduced the British class system; Australia was an egalitarian society and its literature proved so by paying homage to the common man in his everyday life. Besides being a literature *about* the common folk it should also *reach* the common folk. On those premises, the new Australian-only literary canon would reject, for instance, authors who were related to the European Modernist movements, exiles such as Patrick White, whose 'intellectuality' would make them atypical to the Australian spirit.

Nevertheless, 'Australianess' as conceived by the Lawson tradition had its limitations and contradictions. It placed the bushman in the position of national stereotype at a time when most people were city dwellers – not to mention the fact that very few of the 'bush' writers had had more than a superficial acquaintance with the bush itself. It also excluded or deprecated the image of several minority groups – Aboriginal, women and immigrants – being thus as discriminatory as the heritage it claimed to reject.

The kind of half-hearted nationalist feeling such as the one proclaimed by Wentworth, reaches, with the *Bulletin* writers, more radical levels – a refusal to comply with the tradition of the metropolis and the denial of the influence exerted by the centre. This process is called by Ashcroft et al. 'abrogation'. Although an inevitable and necessary step towards post-colonialism, abrogation reproduces the inflexibility of metropolitan canons, by merely substituting one stereotypical view by another.

⁵⁵ MORGAN, p. 246.

Appropriation

Nesse sentido, as críticas que muitas vezes são dirigidas à alienação do escritor latino-americano, por exemplo, são inúteis e ridículas. Se ele só fala da sua própria experiência de vida, seu texto passa despercebido dos seus contemporâneos. É preciso que aprenda primeiro a falar a língua da metrópole para melhor combatê-la em seguida. [...] O imaginário, no espaço do neocolonialismo, não pode ser mais o da ignorância ou da ingenuidade, nutrido por uma manipulação simplista dos dados oferecidos pela experiência imediata do autor, mas se afirmaria mais e mais como uma escritura *sobre* outra escritura. A segunda obra, já que ela em geral comporta uma crítica da obra anterior, se impõe com a violência desmistificadora das planchas anatômicas que deixam a nu a arquitetura do corpo humano.

Silviano Santiago, 'O Entre-lugar do Discurso Latino-Americano', 1971 ^{xiii}

After World War II Australia went through a renovated concern with national identity stronger than that of the 1890's. Whilst before the war official school syllabuses had tended to privilege British literature and history, a fresh output of Australian anthologies, collections of cultural essays, histories, fictional writings and qualified scholars encouraged the introduction of specific Australian studies at universities and secondary schools. The Australian past was scrutinised and the rigidity and radicalism of the previous tradition were challenged.

Such a movement can be compared to a literary 'counter-revolution'⁵⁶ which takes novelists and poets away from the bush tradition, leading them back towards metropolitan sources and arising the inevitable conflicts between internationalist and nativist groups, with the difference that this reinstatement cannot be defined as a simple inversion of canonical values as the Australian tradition had been.

Before the *Bulletin* we have seen that European forms and themes, to borrow Silviano Santiago's metaphors, were comparable to a pure and inaccessible star that, without letting itself be contaminated, shone to all those underlings who depended on its glare to express themselves.⁵⁷ After the period of abrogation, the image that best fits the post-war

⁵⁶ KIERNAN, Brian. Perceptions, 1915-1965. In: HERGENHAN (ed.), pp. 276-7.

⁵⁷ SANTIAGO, Silviano. O Entre-Lugar do Discurso Latino-Americano. In: Id. *Uma Literatura nos Trópicos*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1978. p. 20.

approach to literary heritage is the cannibalistic one. Metropolitan models are swallowed and digested and their virtues are ritualistically absorbed. There appears a new text, activated by the original, but imbued with the post-colonial reality. The cannibal author lives 'entre o amor e o respeito pelo já-escrito, e a necessidade de produzir um novo texto que afrente o primeiro e muitas vezes o negue.'⁵⁸

This stage – a natural sequence of 'abrogation' – has been named by Ashcroft et al. 'appropriation' (annexation with a difference). Ashcroft et al. point out three stages of replacement and 're-placement' that abrogation and appropriation will lead post-colonial societies to, and which will affect literary language, the writing process itself and, at last, literary criticism.

English transported

Se o seu filho disser que pretende aprender inglês na Austrália, desconfie. Inglês de verdade aprende-se na Inglaterra ou nos Estados Unidos. Temporadas na Austrália rendem, no máximo, certa fluência em australiano – aquela língua de pronúncia peculiar que causa em ouvidos britânicos estrago comparável ao impacto de um bumerangue desatinado.

Eduardo Junqueira, *Veja*, 27/11/96 ^{xiv}

The first stage is the replacing of the language used in the post-colonial text, which will make use of local variants rather than the standard form, named by Ashcroft et al. 'english'. The latter does not recognise English as the 'correct' version of the language or the fact that meaning is naturally, intrinsically present in words.⁵⁹

This approach to the relationship between language and meaning is similar to Clifford Geertz's regarding man and culture. In the same way that culture comes to exist concomitantly with any human experience, '[t]he meaning and nature of perceived reality are not determined within the minds of the users, not even within the language itself, but within the use, within the multiplicity of relationships which operate in the system.'⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁹ ASHCROFT et al., *The Empire...*, p. 38.

⁶⁰ ASHCROFT, Bill. Constitutive Graphonomy. In: Id. et al. (ed.), *Reader...*, p. 301.

Culture does not exist outside the human being to the same extent that 'language is co-extensive with social reality not because it causes a certain perception of the world, but because it is inextricable from that perception. Languages exist, therefore, neither before the fact nor after the fact but *in the fact*.⁶¹

Among uncountable other factors, language is, therefore, inevitably linked to 'place', a perception that post-colonial writers are particularly tempted to describe. The Canadian poet Dennis Lee puts it as a 'cadence' that he feels as

a presence both outside myself and inside my body, opening up and trying to get into words. What is it? [...] To get at this complex experience we must begin from the hereness, the local nature of cadence. We never encounter cadence in the abstract; it is insistently here and now. Any man aspires to be at home where he lives, to celebrate communion with men on earth around him, under the sky where he actually lives. And to speak from his own dwelling – however light or strong the inflections of the place – he will make his words intelligible to men elsewhere, because authentic. In my case, then, cadence seeks the gestures of being a Canadian human: *mutatis mutandi*, the same is true of anyone here – an Israeli, an American, a Quebecker.⁶²

The excellent example he provides is that of the word 'city':

Where I lived, a whole swarm of inarticulate meanings lunged, clawed, drifted, eddied, sprawled in half-grasped disarray beneath the tidy meaning which the simplest word had brought with it from England and from the States. 'City' once you learned to accept the blurry, featureless character of that word – responding to it as a Canadian word, with its absence of native connotation – you were dimly savaged by the live, inchoate meanings trying to surface through it. The whole tangle and sisyphian problematic of people's existing here, from the time of the *coureurs de bois* to the present day, came struggling to be included in the word 'city'. Cooped up beneath the familiar surface of the word as we use it ('city' as London, as New York, as Los Angeles) – and cooped up further down still, beneath the blank and the blur you heard when you sought some received some indigenous meaning for the word – listening all the way down, you began to overhear the strands of communal lives of millions of people who went their particular ways here, whose roots and lives and legacy come together in the cities we live in. Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax: 'city' meant something still unspoken, but rampant with held-in energy. Hearing it was like watching the contours of an unexpected continent gradually declare themselves through the familiar lawns and faces of your block.⁶³

White also incurs into the theme language and place in a 1969 interview:

I think perhaps I have clarified my style quite a lot over the years. I find it a great help to hear the language going on around me; not that what I write, the narrative, is idiomatic Australian, but the whole work has a balance and a rhythm which is influenced by what is going on around you. When you first write the narrative it might be unconscious, but when you come to work it over you do it more consciously. It gives what I am writing a great feeling of reality. When I

⁶¹ Ibid., pp. 301-2.

⁶² LEE, Dennis. Writing in Colonial Space. In: Ibid, pp. 397-8.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 400-1.

came back from overseas I felt I had to learn the language again. That is one of the reasons I work in Australia; you have to do a certain amount of research; and I think it's a good thing to be close to one's roots.⁶⁴

The endless process of language differentiation that goes on in Australia's multicultural present can actually be felt in the writings of Australian authors since the nationalists of the beginning of the century. However, language variations in settler colonies where English is the first tongue are never as pronounced, or as easy to be pinpointed, as in the case of invaded, diglossic or poliglossic societies where the presence of pre-colonial languages is much more strongly felt, to the point that they sometimes overpower English.

The non-existence, in settler societies, of an ancient local language very distinct from that of the coloniser to turn to when necessary, complicates further the already difficult process of asserting one's 'Otherness'. Writers trying to fashion a language of their own out of the coloniser's are often involved in controversies over the 'debasement' they would be imposing on the much revered forms of English.

The English of Australia, as Inglis explains, started highly hybridised – as well as marginalised – still in the British Isles:

In the society from which [the currency lads and lasses'] parents had come, internal migration was producing rapid changes in patterns of language, including amalgamation of accents and vocabularies. A convict born of Irish immigrants in Liverpool, for example, had grown up learning the English of Ireland and of Lancashire. In the colony he might marry a woman from another part of England, and he would live among people from various regions of the United Kingdom. His own children would be exposed to a very wide range of voices. The currency accent was a new mixture of old sounds, in which particular influences from London, Birmingham, Dublin and elsewhere could be detected by ears familiar with the originals. There were also currency idioms, deriving often from the streets and dens of the criminals' world at home, and passed on by convicts not only to their children but to those of free settlers to whom they were assigned as servants.⁶⁵

In a 1958 lecture, R. F. Brissenden complains about the difficulty in explaining Patrick White's 'extraordinary use of relative pronouns' which he qualifies as 'not only awkward but also non-English.'⁶⁶ The post-colonial argument to this kind of elitist position is very well expressed in Barry Argyle's response:

When what is English and un-English is being considered, it is unusual that an Australian should think it necessary to decide. One of the great pleasures possible in reading English from

⁶⁴ WHITE, Patrick. In the Making. In: Id., *Patrick White Speaks*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990. p. 20.

⁶⁵ INGLIS, p. 45.

⁶⁶ Quoted by ARGYLE, Barry. *Patrick White*. London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967. p. 3.

a 'foreign' country in which literature is written in English, is the recognition that the language can be made to convey experience that is 'foreign' to the reader. The recognition is comparable with that which comes from reading, say, Chaucer, who is what might be called a 'temporally remote writer', and whose way with relative pronouns is 'un-Australian.' To read White's work is to have this possibility of pleasure confirmed.⁶⁷

Local idioms were another critical target. White was often criticised for his Australianisms. One revealing situation happened in 1964, when his collection of short stories *The Burnt Ones* was to be launched in the USA. His American publishers became rather concerned about the influence of White's 'local low-life Aussie lingo' in sales, which by that time had already decreased considerably in relation to his first works.⁶⁸

White's response was emphatic in a letter to Marshall Best: 'The proof reader is also worried about some of the Australianisms. But I refuse to pander to the American reader to that extent. There is a lot in the American language I have to puzzle out for myself, and am none the worse for doing so. Why can't the American do the same when it comes to ours?'⁶⁹

His refusal to submit his art to the impositions of the market may have contributed to the failure in sales of *The Burnt Ones* in the USA, but it is concrete evidence of the subversive character of his writings as well as his awareness, even if intuitive, of a very serious post-colonial issue: the richness of English variants and how important their adoption is for the construction of a national identity.

A writing inspired in Australia

All through the War in the Middle East there persisted a longing to return to the scenes of childhood, which is, after all, the purest well from which the creative artist draws.

Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son', 1958 ^{xv}

A second stage leads to the re-placing of the act of writing itself, when the post-colonial text undermines the received notions of 'theme, form, genre definition, implicit systems of manner, custom and value'.⁷⁰ This is for Ashcroft et al the most vital step for the

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁸ MARR, David. *Patrick White: A Life*. Sydney: Vintage, 1992. p. 432.

⁶⁹ MARR, David. (ed.). *Patrick White: Letters*. Sydney: Random House, 1994. p. 262.

⁷⁰ ASHCROFT et al. *The Empire...*, p. 115.

establishment of post-colonial literatures: 'It is through an appropriation of the power invested in writing that this discourse can take hold of the marginality imposed on it and make hybridity and syncrecity the source of literary and cultural redefinition.'⁷¹

The need to re-place writing was felt by Patrick White and expressed in his first incursion into public debate, a 1958 article which has been often mentioned in post-colonial discussions. 'The Prodigal Son' was written ten years after White had returned to live in Australia for good. He had spent 20 of his 46 years in England, and the autobiographical article was meant to be a reply to certain questions posed by a journalist in relation to the reasons of White's former 'expatriation' and later return to Australia:

Brought up to believe in the maxim: only the British can be right, I did accept this during the earlier part of my life. Ironed out in an English public school, and finished off at King's, Cambridge, it was not until 1939, after wandering by myself through most of Western Europe, and finally most of the United States, that I began to grow up and think my own thoughts. The War did the rest.

Back in Australia,

[w]riting, which had meant the practice of an art by a polished mind in civilised surroundings, became a struggle to create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words. I began to see things for the first time. Even the boredom and frustration presented avenues for endless exploration; even the ugliness, the bags and iron of Australian life, acquired a meaning. As for the cat's cradle of human intercourse, this was necessarily simplified, often bungled, sometimes touching. Its very tentativeness can be a reward.⁷²

The article reproduces, metonymically, the stages of post-colonial literatures that we have been dealing with so far. The first part evinces both the full acceptance of the centre's superiority and the moment of abrogation – White's awareness that the British are not always 'right' and the shift to his 'own thoughts'.

In the second part, English is appropriated and 'place' supplies the inspiration to 'create completely fresh forms out of the rocks and sticks of words' – that is, to produce english. White's idealistic – and impracticable – wish to recover a whole *new* reality, absolutely free from the influence of the centre is in Helen Tiffin's words 'desirable and inevitable' in the 'brutal' context of colonialism and tends to happen to all post-colonial literatures.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 78.

⁷² WHITE, Patrick. The Prodigal Son. In: Id. *Speaks...*, pp. 13-17.

Post-colonial societies, Tiffin goes on, are 'inevitably hybridised, involving a dialectical relationship between European ontology and epistemology and the impulse to create or recreate independent and local identity'. This situation is, again, very complex, for the white settler colonial writer must try to 'construct' an indigeneity, at the same time that he/she makes use of the language of the centre and depends on the centre's standards of quality in order to be published. This seems to undermine constantly his/her attempts at detachment and authenticity.⁷³ But without a local reference culture, where is the white settler writer going to draw his inspiration from?

Paradoxically, the answer seems to be in the very negative qualities of the place. The 'boredom', 'frustration', 'ugliness', 'bags and iron' of Australian life and the 'simplification' of human intercourse – which had led young White to exile in a first moment, now urge him, already as a writer, to return. More than that, he looks at those same features in search of an authentic voice. The sentence 'Its very tentativeness can be a reward' touches the very point of the making of a national literature in settler colonies, in which inferiority, lack, ambivalence and silence are converted into the very elements of self-definition. The author learns to turn the otherness of the land to his/her own favour.

The remarkable phrase, the 'Great Australian Emptiness', was coined by White in this article and has been tirelessly quoted since. By allying two converging images – the actual physical reality of the Australian environment and emblematic lack of a white Australian indigenous history – the expression has become a perfect metaphor of the dilemma of settler descendants.

Through their writings White and other Australian authors (among them Miles Franklin, Eleanor Dark, Xavier Herbert) have contributed to the re-evaluation of the Australian past and the assertion of the difference between the literatures of the margin and the centre,⁷⁴ playing their part in the fashioning of a white Australian literary history.

⁷³ ASHCROFT et al. *Reader...*, p.35.

⁷⁴ HERGENHAN (ed.), pp. xi-xii.

An Australian criticism

A new generation of scholars and critics – the children of decolonization in some instances, the beneficiaries (like sexual, religious and racial minorities) of advances in human freedom at home – have seen in such texts of Western literature a standing interest in what was considered a lesser world, populated with lesser people of colour, portrayed as open to the intervention of so many Robinson Crusoes.

Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 1992 ^{xvi}

At last, after language and writing have been replaced by local variants, it becomes necessary to replace universalist Eurocentric literary theories and criticism for indigenous ones, which should offer a much broader perspective as to what can be considered as literature, the constructed character of meaning and the ascribing of literary merit.

One example from White's career evidences the fact that this stage is the hardest to be achieved in post-colonial societies. After several years of considerations, or rather, in 1954 a private-initiative trust was founded in Australia to encourage Australian-born drama, opera and ballet. However the 'Elizabethan Theatre Trust' ended up producing mostly British material. When Patrick White submitted his play 'The Ham Funeral' to the director of the Trust, Hugh Hunt, the latter enjoyed it but suggested that the play should be first produced in London so that 'the Great Australian Audience might be more willing to accept it, or less inclined to wonder whether it is having its leg pulled.' ⁷⁵

Hugh's answer, according to David Marr, was 'sad but shrewd', taking into account the insecurity with which Australians tended to regard their own taste and opinions. Besides that, the advice would relieve the Trust from the responsibility of supporting a play whose novelty, language and taste would be 'doubtful'. The position of settler societies in relation to criticism reflects, once more, the paradox of the white settler writer, who however well-intentioned, is not exempted from requirement of the centre's stamp of approval.

Patrick White went through obstacles of this kind throughout his career, but mainly in his early works. His novels were first acclaimed in New York and London, as well

as other European countries (he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1973) before his compatriots could start to take him seriously.

After that, White's status went through a one-hundred-and-eighty degree turn, so much so that he became the most researched and commented-on Australian writer in Australia. Internationally, his reputation was also boosted. In 1982 a whole issue of the (American-based) *Review of National Literatures* was devoted to White, selected among all Australian writers as *the* paradigm of the 'Australian psyche'.⁷⁶

Although White had a fundamental role in promoting Australian literature internationally, such a view, in repeating dominant systems of power, damages rather than promotes the standing of Australian literature. White cannot stand for Australian Literature but is *one* representative of *one* section of the literature of Australia, the British-settler one. He does not, as no author could, represent the whole of Australian psyche. Australian culture is a complex hybrid form composed of the cultures of the original inhabitants of the island, the first British migrants, as well as the more recent current of immigrants from all over the world.

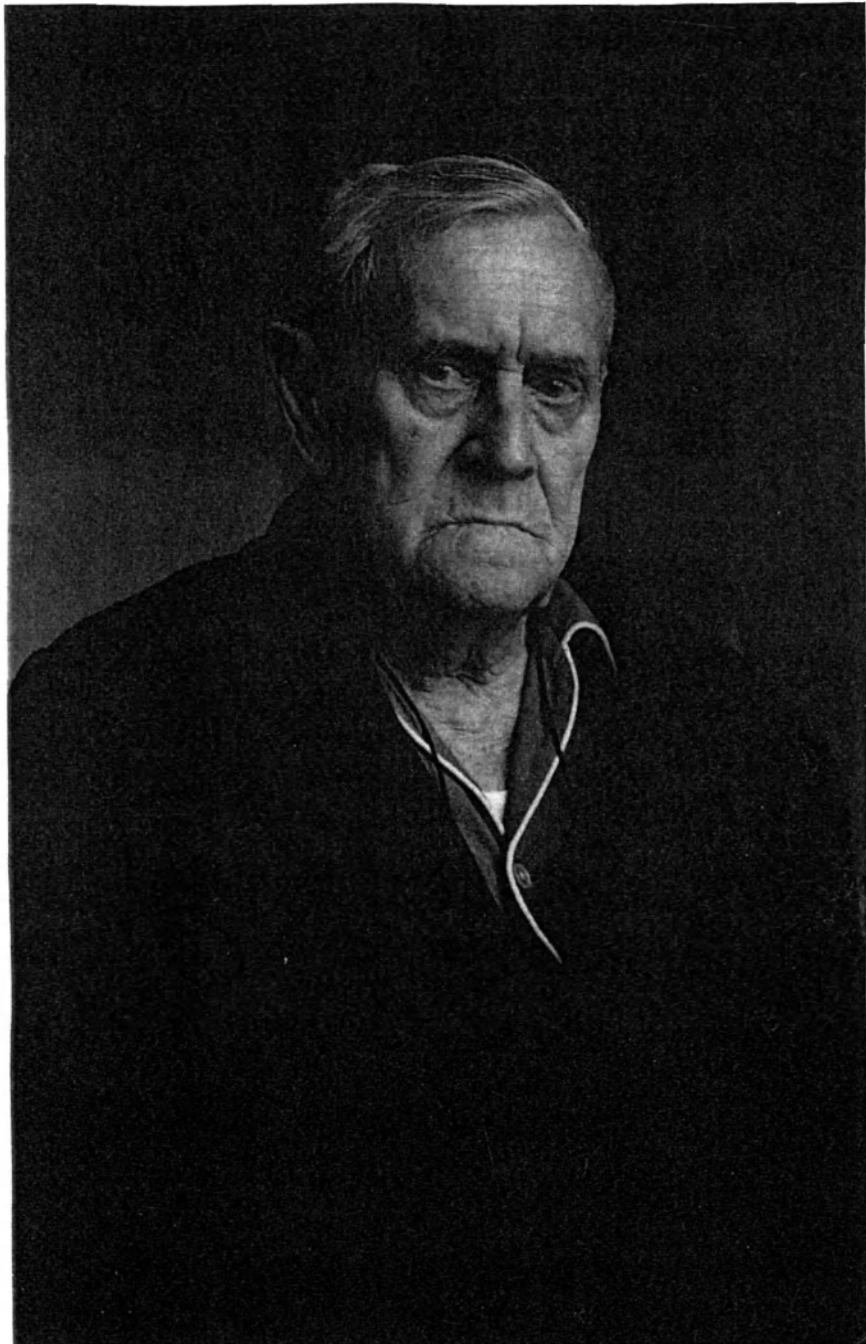
Such internally 'universalising' ideas are being challenged by a new generation of thinkers, such as Sneja Gunew, who questions the very much advertised notion that Australian society has been built on a true 'multicultural' basis. She re-evaluates recent histories of Australian literature and culture and comes to the conclusion that the term 'multiculturalism' has been used to serve a variety of institutional interests, that nonetheless always hide the 'fear of divisiveness and social fracturing' and point towards assimilation into Anglo-Celtic culture.⁷⁷ For her multiculturalism will only 'function as a useful expression of difference when it is seen as including Anglo-Celt[ic Australians]'.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ MARR, *Life...*, pp. 386-7.

⁷⁶ GUNEW, Sneja. Denaturalizing Cultural Nationalisms: Multicultural Readings of 'Australia'. In: BHABHA, Homi. (ed.). *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge, 1994. p. 105.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115.



Patrick White, 1985 xvii

Chapter Two

Patrick White: THE CROTCHETY OLD MAN

Biography, canonisation, and literary criticism

Are you sure you want to do a thesis on Patrick White
– a crotchety old man – but a wonderful writer.

Caroline Larcombe, 1995^{xviii}

When Australians hear the name ‘Patrick White’, the first image that comes to their minds is that of someone old and grumpy, who declared not to smile much in photos because of his false teeth, ‘[a]nd when I had real teeth they were so broken and crumbling, I didn’t like showing them.’⁷⁹

Or else they remember a recluse who would react uncivilisedly when accosted by journalists or reporters, declining invitations to talk in public, to lecture at universities and even to be honoured with the country’s (and the world’s) highest awards. And of course, someone who would produce the most caustic remarks on Australia and the Australian people. Only then they remember the writer. To the average Australian, the (un)public figure of Patrick White seems to cause more impact than that of the celebrated author.

This is a phenomenon that some time ago tended to cause uneasiness among critics. Vincent Buckley in a 1964 review seems concerned in observing that the ‘interest in Patrick White [as] centred on his attitude to Australia’ is ‘misplaced’.⁸⁰ With the closer integration of literary and cultural criticisms, though, White’s reactions to his country and people have become a prolific field of studies, arising interesting questions.

Indeed, Patrick White criticism has followed a steady pattern from the general and objective to the particular and personal. The interest for the biographical and

⁷⁹ WHITE, *Speaks...*, illustration section, picture no. 11.

⁸⁰ BUCKLEY, Vincent. The Novels of Patrick White. In: DUTTON, Geoffrey (ed.). *The Literature of Australia*. Ringwood, Vic.: 1964. p. 413.

autobiographical dimensions of his work have grown concomitantly with the gradual opening of the doors of his private life along the years.

When White started to be taken seriously as a writer to become the best-known Australian novelist in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, books of the general introduction kind were the commonest. To that tendency belongs Barry Argyles's 1967 review, whose introduction points out exactly the scarcity of sources on 'the details of Patrick White's life and some of the reasons behind them'.⁸¹ From there he proceeds to analyse White's work as divided in beginner's and major novels, with specific chapters for short stories and plays.

The Swedish Ingmar Björkstén's 1973 study on White,⁸² marks a period in which the world's attention was being drawn to the Nobel prize nominee. Björkstén tries to explain the international success White was achieving by stressing the 'universal' quest for existential answers in his work, as well as his following of the epic narrative tradition in his long 'life chronicles', and the transcendental vein in his novels. His chapter division is very similar to Argyle's ('Early Works', 'The Early Major Works', 'Short Stories and Plays', 'The Candidate for the Nobel Prize'). Chapter five, 'The Visionary and the Mystic' serves as a conclusion for Björkstén's book as well as a hint of the critical tendency that was to become common in the next decade – the 1980's – that of specific themes and techniques.

One representative work in the thematic line is Carolyn Bliss's 1986 *Patrick White: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. Bliss explores 'the theme of failure as it emerges and develops in [White's] fiction, [to] then consider how this concept may illuminate aspects of White's style and technique, perhaps even his sense of himself and his mission as a writer'.⁸³

The quotation above shows a certain degree of attraction towards White's life and personal opinions about writing – probably brought about by the novelty of his highly revelatory autobiography *Flaws in the Glass*, published in 1981. Yet we must notice how careful Bliss is to place biographical elements in a secondary position to 'style and technique'.

In the nineties we find ourselves much less timid in relation to the adoption of biography to evaluate literature, and, especially, to evaluate Patrick White's work. That

⁸¹ ARGYLE, p. 1.

⁸² BJÖRKSTEN, Ingmar. *Patrick White: A General Introduction*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1976.

⁸³ BLISS, Caroline. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: McMillan, 1986. p. 14.

position has definitely been encouraged by the publication, in 1991, of an extensive, authorised, nearly eight-hundred-page-long biography on White by David Marr as well as, three years later, a nearly as massive volume of his letters (also organised by Marr).

Marr worked for six years investigating White's life 'to find what made him a writer and where his writing came from'.⁸⁴ He traces White's literary life to its deepest roots, providing detailed insights into the circumstances of the creation of each novel and play, the motives behind them, the sources of literary inspiration, as well as, of course, interpretations of his work mainly on the grounds of his life-history.

Hardly any study on White nowadays can evade the influence of Marr's careful and finely-presented research. One of the latest examples of post-Marr Whitean criticism is Simon During's 1996 contribution to the Oxford Press Series on Australian Writers. During re-evaluates White's status in the Australian scene by analysing the historical and political moment which made his canonisation possible. He maintains that some aspects of White's plots are directly related to his family life and his homosexuality, or the 'closet' as During puts it. The titles of the chapters and their division ('The Career', 'The Australian', 'The Cultural Critic', 'Sex and the Family' and 'Narrative Techniques') show the special position which personal, geographical, social and cultural elements have in the overall organisation of the work, and therefore a consolidation of the new significance context has achieved over structure in the last decades.

Although each critical phase is marked by some kind of common approach, within them the general mood has been that of controversy. White's canonisation in Australia only contributed to the enlargement of the vast panorama of discordant voices around the most diverse aspects of his work. That is very well exemplified by the view of two critics on the future of White criticism.

During's opinion is that the future reserves oblivion for White, who is usually classified as a post-colonial writer mainly because he knew how to promote himself by offering the type of literature that Australia was looking for at a time the country was trying to go past the populist myth to forge a real identity of its own. However, his cultural criticism – his views on suburbia, Aboriginal peoples, women and homosexuality – would be

⁸⁴ MARR, *Life...*, p. 645.

outdated. For During White is doomed to be one more name cited in literary histories without any more serious connotations or influence in Australian literature.⁸⁵

Indeed, the peak of critical interest for White happened in the 1970's, when his canonisation was made official by the Nobel. Since then there has been a certain slackening in appeal that has not, according to Alan Lawson's much less apocalyptic view, diminished White's importance:

White's texts have for some time occupied a position of canonical authority at the centre of the field of Australian literary culture. In that sense, he is modern(ist) Australian literature's equivalent of Henry Lawson. In an important sense he cannot be displaced, just as Henry Lawson has not been displaced from *his* keystone position in the widely-familiar, earlier, populist, masculinist edifice of Australian literature. The example of Henry Lawson's posthumous reception has taught us (like recent arguments over Shakespeare's canonicity) that too much value has already been added to the figure of Lawson (or Shakespeare or White) for him to be displaceable. What does happen is that Lawson (or Shakespeare) becomes a sign of cultural value which is filled from time to time with different content; and this too will happen to the figure of White. Figures of this magnitude are not demolished or forgotten, but they do become sites of struggle which are fought over precisely because they are positions (possessions, signs, icons) of cultural value and power.⁸⁶

In the next sections we shall examine how White – the auto-biographer, the Australian, the permanent exile, the political activist, the homosexual – constructed his work concomitantly with his reputation.

'The risk of painting White blacker than he is'

Are you sure you want to do a thesis on Patrick White
There was the Long Room, at one end of the garden, at
the other the great gilded mirror, all blotches and
dimples and ripples. I fluctuated in the watery glass;
according to the light I retreated into the depths of the
aquarium, or trembled in the foreground like a thread
of pale-green samphire. Those who thought they knew
me were ignorant of the creature I scarcely knew
myself.

Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass*, 1981^{xix}

⁸⁵ DURING, p. 100.

⁸⁶ LAWSON, *Selected...*, pp. viii-ix.

Introspection in White is frequently revealed in terms of mirror imagery. Here Theodora Goodman, the ugly and clumsy heroine of *The Aunt's Story* is caught by a schoolmate gazing at a mirror:

'For goodness' sake, looking in the mirror!' said Una Russel, coming in.
Una Russel hated Theodora. She could not understand her silences.
'Yes,' said Theodora, 'I do not like my face.'
'But you look,' said Una.
'I sometimes wonder.'⁸⁷

Veronica Brady uses the episode to show that in White self-examination is rarely dissociated from external social judgement. The mirror uncovers social hypocrisies to the same extent that it points at personal truths. For Brady

Una lives the appearances. But Theodora is conscious of the faults and fissures, the cruelties, deceptions and pretences which underlie them. Una wants to marry because 'there is nothing else to do'. But Theodora has another project, for which, like Joyce's Stephen Dedalus, she must prepare herself by 'silence, exile and cunning'. 'I want to do nothing yet,' she tells Una. 'I want to see.' So she continues to 'wonder'.⁸⁸

When White looks at himself in the mirror – not coincidentally his autobiography is called *Flaws in the Glass* – what he sees is 'this green sickly boy, who saw and knew too much' (p. 5); a 'changeling' (p. 5); a 'cuckoo' (p. 10); an indecent hybrid (p. 20); a 'freak' (p. 43); a 'stranger' in his own country (p. 46); a 'peculiar youth' and a 'difficult child' (p. 47); an adolescent without a personality (p. 53); a mouse (p. 55); a closet queen (p. 80); 'an intruder, a breaker of rules, a threat to the tradition of Australian literature' (p. 139); a 'miscast', 'amateur' actor (p. 139); a novelist 'part dragonfly, part shark' (p. 140); an erratic spirit' (p. 145); a dichotic personality (p. 146); a 'many-faceted' face and 'protean body' varying 'according to time, climate and the demands of fiction' (p. 153).

It is not always easy to tell apart the occasions in which he is stating his true 'flaws' from when he is ironically quoting what he takes to be someone else's 'flawed' view of him – the Una Russel kind of glimpse. It seems as if White would – sometimes unconsciously and sometimes on purpose – appropriate marginalising views of himself.

What would make a successful writer feel like the Other and even encourage a public image of alterity? After all, White was in many ways privileged amongst his

⁸⁷ WHITE, *Aunt's...*, p. 51.

⁸⁸ BRADY, Veronica. Making Things Appear: Patrick White & the Politics of Modernism. *Island Magazine*, no. 52, Spring, 1992. p.34.

contemporaries. He was born to one of Australia's wealthiest land-owning families. When the time came to fulfil what was expected from him in the male Australian tradition – marriage and full dedication to the land – he managed, without too much opposition, to follow his own homoerotic and artistic inclinations.

Most of all, he was among the very few writers – in the world – able to dedicate themselves full-time to creative writing, without ever having to resort to lecturing, reviewing, or submitting to the demands of the market for a living. In spite of the bad time he sometimes had with the critics, specially the Australian ones, and the difficulties he met in his early career trying to find publishers, White was acknowledged as a great author still in his life-time, hardly the usual process in literature.

Even the fact of his allegedly not being recognised in Australia belongs, for the most part, to the Patrick White myth – a myth the writer himself contributed to consolidate – but which, as Alan Lawson shows us, must be considered with more care:

It is a matter of fact that Patrick White's work has been given more sustained and informed and consistent attention in Australia than anywhere else; that sales of his work continued to grow in Australia while they faltered, first in the United States and later in Great Britain; that he was awarded more prizes and honours (though he declined many of them) in Australia than elsewhere.⁸⁹

Just as he was conscious of his flaws, White himself was very much aware of his tendency to exaggerate them. When asked to evaluate the process of writing *Flaws in the Glass*, he came to the conclusion that doing a self-portrait was 'the most difficult kind of factual writing', arising in him unprecedented questions (considering that he had always been a fictional writer), such as 'is the novelist in me taking over? Shall I perhaps overdo the flaws in my anxiety to portray the real person?'. Yet, White's intentions were to make of *Flaws in the Glass* the 'quintessence of truthfulness'.

The contradictory overtones in these statements subside when we realise that White rejects the idea that 'truth' is universal and unquestionable. His purpose in writing an autobiography was 'to try to show what I *think* I am and how it came about',⁹⁰ where he himself emphasises the tentative character of the project.

⁸⁹ LAWSON, *Selected...*, p. xii.

⁹⁰ WHITE, Patrick. Truth and Fiction. In: *Id., Speaks...*, p. 81.

Whatever truth there is in the world, it is never absolute. Truth is, rather, an individual phenomenon. And most importantly, individual truths must be respected, a belief White assigned to the long list of eccentric and misunderstood protagonists of his novels.

But while fiction was always trying to intrude in the realm of truth, the opposite movement could also be verified. One of White's complaints about the Australian literary tradition was that 'so many Australian novelists are content to explore an autobiographical vein instead of launching into that admittedly disturbing marriage between life and imagination – like many actual marriages in fact – all the risks, the recurring despair, and rewards if you are lucky.'⁹¹ A marriage that he actually celebrates in all of his novels, where biographical, autobiographical and historical elements share space with purely fictional ones.

Several of his characters somehow resemble people of White's acquaintance, such as Theodora Goodman, of *The Aunt's Story*, inspired in Gertrude Morrice, White's godmother, Arthur Brown (*The Solid Mandala*), who 'might be a portrait of my [brain-damaged] cousin Philip Garland if Philip's childish wisdom had matured'⁹² or Elizabeth Hunter, the protagonist of *The Eye of the Storm*, one of the many fictional versions of his mother, Ruth. The idea for the devilish pair, Mrs Jolley and Mrs Flack, actually came from a newspaper article on two apparently respectable Philadelphian widows who poisoned their husbands for the insurance money.⁹³

In his two novels with the clearest historical background, *Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves*, White was careful to use the real-life characters of the German explorer Ludwig Leichhardt and the English traveller Eliza Fraser only as starting points for Voss and Ellen Roxburgh, so that he was able to explore 'the psychological complexities, the sensibility, and the passion'⁹⁴ a documentary or historical novel would need to avoid for the sake of credibility.

White was a confessed actor manqué who frequently described his own existence and his work in terms of theatrical metaphors, as in this statement from *Flaws in the Glass*:

All the houses I have lived in have been renovated and re-furnished to accommodate fictions. The original structure is there for anybody who knows[...]. In the theatre of my imagination I

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁹² WHITE, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait*. London: Penguin, 1981. p. 146. The page numbers of the next references to this work in Chapter Two will from now on be signalled in the main text.

⁹³ MARR, *Life...*, p. 370.

⁹⁴ WHITE, *Truth and Fiction, Speaks...*, p. 84.

should say there are three or four basic sets, all of them linked to the actual past, which can be dismantled and re-constructed to accommodate the illusion of reality life boils down to.
(p. 153-4)

This interplay truth/fiction transforms White's characters into versions of their creator and White into a kind of creation of himself. From his self-assigned position of Other – as a 'miscast actor', a placeless vagrant, a recluse, a misunderstood artist, a homosexual – he attained the freedom to fight, sometimes very aggressively, against the impositions of his time, and to express – unconditionally – his sharp critical mind.

Between Home and home

It is not that I am not Australian, I am an
anachronism, something left over from that period
when people were no longer English and not yet
indigenous.

Patrick White, *Letters*, 1965 ^{xx}

The scenes of Patrick White's life took place in a variety of settings. Besides Australia and England, his main headquarters, he also travelled through France, Germany, Greece, North Africa, the Middle East, the USA, New Zealand... He considered living in some of those places but none was singled out as home in definite terms. At the same time that he exalted Australia and, to a lesser extent England, and their influence on his work, he did not perceive himself as one hundred percent Australian or English.

Displacement was indeed one of Patrick White's earliest experiences. He was born in London on 28 May 1912, and taken to Australia at the age of six months. From then on he was always an exile within his own family. There was the domineering figure of Ruth White, who directed the building of her children's character from a distance, while his father, Dick, a 'plain good unimaginative Australian male' (p. 141) was never felt as an effective presence.

The boy, who sees himself as 'a prissy child, too well scrubbed, too well combed, from a materially protected world', (p. 35) was sent from a nanny's care to a boarding school, and at the age of thirteen, to Cheltenham College, a public school in England, which he would always refer to as his 'gaol sentence'. (p.46)

At Cheltenham, Marr tells us, away from his boyhood references and becoming aware of his homosexuality, Patrick became quiet and self-conscious, the English climate helping in the deterioration of his asthmatic condition. His holiday breaks, spent with Australians of remote connection, added to his misery. If in Australia he was sometimes considered to be almost an English gentleman, in England he suddenly became a 'colonial'. All that led the boy to the path of lonely activities: 'reading, scribbling, dreams, the fantasy of living other people's lives, the theatre, an intense and sensual bond with landscape.'⁹⁵ The results were the first of some melancholy and nostalgic poems sent home to his mother, who, proud of her artistic son, would later see to their publication.⁹⁶

Back in Australia for three years after leaving Cheltenham, he felt how deeply exile had become ingrained in him: 'I was alarmed at first, then permanently unhappy, to return home and find myself a stranger in my own country, even my own family.' (p. 21) He took refuge in the countryside and in 'jackerooing', the traditional Australian custom of sending city boys 'bush' in order to learn farming and become acquainted with the 'male' life.

Jackerooing worked in White's favour, even though he never mastered the art of sheep raising, to the despair of his father and uncles, who expected him to take over the family business. Instead, the tediousness of the country nights encouraged him to write 'three rambling immature novels, fortunately never published'⁹⁷ (p. 46) and the intimacy with the Australian landscape achieved in his excursions on horse-back would inspire him, once again abroad in years to come, to return home mentally and to compose the settings of many other novels.

The next important episode in White's life was his involvement (once more in England to study modern languages at Cambridge University) with a fellow Australian expatriate, the painter Roy de Maistre. Maistre's influence was central in White's decision to become a writer by profession and in his interest in Modernism, which becomes apparent from his first published novels.⁹⁸

It was now wartime and White enlisted as an Air Force Intelligence Officer. War was significant for two reasons. It was during the hard times in the Middle East that his

⁹⁵ MARR, *Life...*, p. 75.

⁹⁶ The collection was called *The Ploughman and Other Poems* (1935) and at the time did not sell more than a few copies.

⁹⁷ These unpublished novels, written between 1929-31, were called *The Immigrants*, *Sullen Moon* and *Finding Heaven*.

Australianess first imposed itself on him. It was also then that he met Manoli Lascaris, a Greek soldier. At the age of twenty-nine White found what he had always been looking for: 'the twin who might bring a softer light to bear on my bleakly illuminated darkness.' (p. 35)

Lascaris had a great influence on their decision to return to Australia in definite terms. Seeking once more the solace and privacy of the countryside, but without being too far from the big city, they bought a farm at Castle Hill, in the outskirts of Sydney, where they would live for the next 18 years.

Among cows, dogs, goats, 'peas which the frost bit, cabbage which caterpillars devoured, cauliflower with loose curd, broccoli which shot into seed, eggplant nobody in those days wanted' (p. 138) – and the pollen that would cause White's worst asthma crises – he got over the bad reception his novels had had in Australia. His literary production, reluctant at first, increased in pace with the years and with his gradual public acceptance in Australia.⁹⁹ By 1963 Castle Hill had lost its countryside appeal to become another rapidly-expanding suburb of Sydney so that the farm was put up for sale.

The next twenty-six years, spent in a house facing Centennial Park, in Sydney, coincided with the peak of his fame, his most prolific phase,¹⁰⁰ and his awakening to public life. Finding himself suddenly respected and celebrated, which he at the same time abhorred and saw as his deserved lot, he started to realise that he could contribute to several causes he came to embrace with enthusiasm.

His whole political activity is recorded in the volume of articles and interviews *Patrick White Speaks*, where he shows himself a defender of the instatement of Republic in Australia, world peace, democracy, the Aboriginal movement, nuclear disarmament, environment preservation and other important social and political matters. His concern with the future of Australian literature inspired him to use his 1973 Nobel Prize money to set up an award to older Australian writers whose work had not received due recognition.

Despite this settling down in Sydney (where he was to die in 1990) and his increasing engagement with his country, the feeling of permanent exile never abandoned him:

⁹⁸ *Happy Valley* (1939), *The Living and the Dead* (1941), *The Aunt's Story* (1946).

⁹⁹ The Castle Hill-phase novels are *The Tree of Man* (1954), very much imbedded in the experiences of farming, *Voss* (1957), *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) and the collection of short stories *The Burnt Ones* (1964).

¹⁰⁰ *The Solid Mandala* (1966), *The Vivisector* (1970), *The Eye of the Storm* (1973), *The Cockatoos* (1974, a second collection of short stories), *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), *Flaws in the Glass* (1981), *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986), *Five Uneasy Pieces* (1987).

He was a child of the Empire, born in London to Australian parents who took pains to see that his upbringing confirmed the puzzling circumstances of his birth. [...] At whichever end of the Empire he lived, he always knew there was another home for him on the other side of the world. It angered him to be mistaken for English, yet it mattered a great deal to him that he was born in London, and he believed the first months of his life spent in the flat overlooking Hyde Park left their traces. 'It was in a formative period.' He was to live in London and came to love it with the exasperation of a native, returning when he could for as long as he travelled. Yet London was denied him. Australia, he remarked bitterly late in his life, 'is in my blood - my fate - which is why I have to put up with the hateful place, when at heart I am a Londoner'.¹⁰¹

'To be an exile is to be alive' is the keystone of an early post-colonial article.¹⁰²

The kind of exile that White and so many other post-colonial writers stand for is not simply a geographical dislocation but a permanent exile of the mind. It represents the plight of the post-colonial writer, especially the white settler one. This writer is denied full realisation of the notion of 'home' but draws from this very 'handicap' – which would normally be an alienating factor – the stimulus to create an extremely politically-committed work.

The many in one

Of course, all artists are terrible egoists. Unconsciously you are largely writing about yourself. I could never write anything factual; I only have confidence in myself when I am another character. All the characters in my books are myself, but they are a kind of disguise.

Patrick White, 'In the Making', 1969 ^{xxi}

All the elements that have appeared as constituting White's personal experiences – mirror images, flaw-magnification, theatrical metaphors, fluidity, social preoccupation, exile, the interplay truth-fiction and rebellious attitude – appear somehow in his work embedded in his protagonists or in his dealings with the literary text itself.

Theodora Goodman, the protagonist of *The Aunt's Story* has in common with her creator the fact that she is able to experience in her life what White can only accomplish in

¹⁰¹ Marr, *Life...*, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰² LAMMING, George. The Occasion for Speaking. In: ASHCROFT et al., *Reader...*, p. 12.

make-believe. Already in her middle-age and travelling around Europe and the USA, she actually *becomes* the people she meets along the way, producing her own fiction within White's fiction.

Other works, especially the later ones, will re-address the multiple personality and ageing themes. His last novel, the very playful *Memoirs of Many in One*, is essentially a post-modern version of *The Aunt's Story*. It pretends to be the biography of Alex Xenophon Demirjian Gray, of which White claims to have been 'editor'. For the first time ever he includes himself openly as a character of fiction – a friend of the family – been assigned by senile Alex Gray to 'organise' the memoirs of her several personalities – shoplifter, nun, lover, actress – which he does respecting the disorder of her mental states.

This, together with facts related to some background details of the novel's publication – White had thought of including, on the back cover, a photo of himself dying in hospital (at the time he was suffering from serious health problems) – suggests a very good-humoured view of the post-modern theme of the death of the author.

A very important feature of *Memoirs of Many in One* is that it glamorises old age, exactly by presenting the old person as misfit and misunderstood, persecuted, like Theodora herself, by the powers of the institutionalising view and finding refuge in a fantasy world. Another variation on the theme had been *The Eye of the Storm*, in which the arrogant and aristocratic Elizabeth Hunter lies dying and remembering while fighting against her children's wish to send her to a nursing home – a painfully confessional novel, inspired in White's mother's death and his and his sister's own reaction to it.

Also confessional, but in a much more positive way, is *The Twyborn Affair* – which brings another fragmented hero(ine). The tripartite Eudoxia Vatatzes / Eddie Twyborn / Eadith Trixt inaugurates each of the parts of the book respectively as the female lover of a Greek sailor in France, the bisexual son of a wealthy family in Australia and the female owner of a brothel in London during World War II.

Eddie/Eudoxia/Eadith represents the ultimate exile of body as well as geography. White considered *The Twyborn Affair* as being 'more explicit[ly biographical] than the others' with 'plenty of disguise of course, otherwise it would be the kind of humdrum documentary expected by Australians.'¹⁰³ Having come just after *Flaws in the Glass* it is a watershed in White's career, as for the first time one of his novels dealt openly with the

¹⁰³ MARR, *Letters...*, p. 506.

theme of homosexuality and the topic of 'the woman in the man and the man in the woman' that haunted him all his life.

A Fringe of Leaves had dealt with layered personalities, but in a different way. The fact that it is a historically-based novel set in the nineteenth century but seen from a female angle already points at its subversive intent. The central character, a poor English girl transformed into a society lady, is made to face several completely unexpected situations into which she must adapt herself – the most drastic of all is her becoming a slave to a group of Aborigines, after a shipwreck. The pioneering theme had already been focused in *Voss*. The journey across the Australian desert attempted by the megalomaniac German explorer acts, in several moments, against the established historical accounts of the European encounter with Australia.

White's own ambivalence and tendency to explore differences are very clearly presented in *The Solid Mandala*. Arthur and Waldo Brown are twin brothers (the Gemini materialised) and admittedly, White's two halves. Arthur is creative, intuitive and emotional, though an eternal child. Waldo, though 'normal', is White's rational, cruel even, side, 'myself at my coldest and worst' as he affirmed. (p. 146)

The socially-endorsed opposition between the dominant and the different is also portrayed in *Riders in the Chariot*. The novel is set in the fictional suburb of Sarsaparilla, which becomes the target for one of White's most satirical renderings of Australia. The book attacks unmercifully Sarsaparilla's prejudices and provincial manners, whose scapegoats become four outcast characters: an Aboriginal painter dying of consumption, an English immigrant, a Jewish refugee from the concentration camps in Germany and an Australian old maid.

One of White's first novels, *The Tree of Man*, had already explored the theme of uncontrollable urbanisation, this time inspired in White and Lascaris's Castle Hill Years. The novel is an apology of day-by-day living. The events in the lives of Stan and Amy Parker are not 'novelistic' in the traditional sense of the word. Their dramas are the 'petty' conflicts with the neighbours, child-bringing glories and sorrows, droughts, storms, bush fires. The 'primitiveness' White declared to be his aim in writing about the Parkers was the 'simplicity of true grandeur'¹⁰⁴ which Stan Parker (as well as White) find in the wilderness of Australian nature on the opening page of the novel.

¹⁰⁴ WHITE, Patrick. *The Tree of Man*. London: Vintage, 1994. p. 9.

A Fringe of Leaves had dealt with layered personalities, but in a different way. The fact that it is a historically-based novel set in the nineteenth century but seen from a female angle already points at its subversive intent. The central character, a poor English girl transformed into a society lady, is made to face several completely unexpected situations into which she must adapt herself – the most drastic of all is her becoming a slave to a group of Aborigines, after a shipwreck. The pioneering theme had already been focused in *Voss*. The journey across the Australian desert attempted by the megalomaniac German explorer acts, in several moments, against the established historical accounts of the European encounter with Australia.

White's own ambivalence and tendency to explore differences are very clearly presented in *The Solid Mandala*. Arthur and Waldo Brown are twin brothers (the Gemini materialised) and admittedly, White's two halves. Arthur is creative, intuitive and emotional, though an eternal child. Waldo, though 'normal', is White's rational, cruel even, side, 'myself at my coldest and worst' as he affirmed. (p. 146)

The socially-endorsed opposition between the dominant and the different is also portrayed in *Riders in the Chariot*. The novel is set in the fictional suburb of Sarsaparilla, which becomes the target for one of White's most satirical renderings of Australia. The book attacks unmercifully Sarsaparilla's prejudices and provincial manners, whose scapegoats become four outcast characters: an Aboriginal painter dying of consumption, an English immigrant, a Jewish refugee from the concentration camps in Germany and an Australian old maid.

One of White's first novels, *The Tree of Man*, had already explored the theme of uncontrollable urbanisation, this time inspired in White and Lascaris's Castle Hill Years. The novel is an apology of day-by-day living. The events in the lives of Stan and Amy Parker are not 'novelistic' in the traditional sense of the word. Their dramas are the 'petty' conflicts with the neighbours, child-bringing glories and sorrows, droughts, storms, bush fires. The 'primitiveness' White declared to be his aim in writing about the Parkers was the 'simplicity of true grandeur'¹⁰⁴ which Stan Parker (as well as White) find in the wilderness of Australian nature on the opening page of the novel.

The Vivisector is White's most direct fictional incursion into the realm of art. Although he used a painter, rather than a writer as protagonist, the novel makes ironic

¹⁰⁴ WHITE, Patrick. *The Tree of Man*. London: Vintage, 1994. p. 9.

references to criticism White was himself the target of. The initial devastating newspaper reviews of Duffield's paintings resemble those of White's novels:

...that this country has been evolving an art of its own immediately recognizable for its honesty and truth, which Hurtle Duffield attempts to explode. In his three canvases here on view he reveals a pretentious predilection for sensuous exercises in egotism. He doesn't convince us either of his two manners: the meticulous dissection and abstraction of nature, or the sloppy, self-indulgent, anthropomorphic forms executed in bestial colour. Is he trying to pull somebody's leg? If so, he doesn't succeed. Let us at least hope that Duffield is rewarded by the sight of himself on display...¹⁰⁵

The title of the novel refers to the artist's perversity – a kind of perversity White's friends knew very well – the fact that the artist may use the people around him/her as raw material, discarding them when their use has been exhausted. This ugly fact is denounced in the novel by Nance, the prostitute who helps Duffield in the beginning of his career, on her deathbed: '[W]ith an artist you're never free he's makun use of yer in the name of the Holy Mother of Truth. He thinks. The Truth!' [...] When the only brand of truth 'e recognises is 'is own it is inside 'im 'e reckons and as 'e digs into poor fucker you 'e hopes you'll help 'im let it out.'¹⁰⁶

Through his fiction White gives compelling artistic expression to his own conflicts, shows an honesty that is taken to its last consequences and helps blur the usual distinctions between the fictional and the biographical.

Under the Sign of Gemini

As a man he came to put his faith in many small superstitions, in saints and lucky charms, omens and coincidences. That he was born a Gemini meant a great deal to him, for the sign of the twins seemed an emblem of his own divided and often contradictory nature, not one man but a kaleidoscope of characters trapped in a body both blessed and cursed, proud and wracked by doubt, rich and mean, artist and housekeeper, a restless European rooted in the Australian soil, a Withycombe and White, man and woman. His trust in astrology was sustained in later years as he came across men and women who shared his stars and his divided nature. Three Geminis he felt in tune with from the moment of discovery were Pushkin, Henry Lawson and Marilyn Monroe.

¹⁰⁵ Id. *The Vivisector*, London: Vintage, 1994. p. 233.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 247-8.

Susan Sontag's essay 'Under the Sign of Saturn' stands out in the recent trends of literary criticism. It is a very peculiar review of the work of the German intellectual Walter Benjamin. Based on Benjamin's obsession with the fact that he had been born 'sob o signo de Saturno – o astro de revolução mais lenta, o planeta dos desvios e das dilações...' and in several other personal oddities, Sontag conceives a 'theory of melancholy', according to which Benjamin's choice of objects of study (Baudelaire, Kafka, Karl Kraus, Goethe) was determined by the presence of a Saturnine element in them.¹⁰⁷

From White's biographical statements as well as Marr's research, it is possible to build a similar biographical theory in relation to White's approaches to writing. The equivalent of Benjamin's 'melancholy' as an inspiring force and leitmotif would be, in White, fragmentation in several guises.

The 'sign of Gemini' determines White's approach to life and to writing. For Veronica Brady he is

a classic example of the writer as suspended man, suspended between belonging and alienation, the aesthetic and the civic, the national and international. His writing reflects this oscillation not only between the two sides of the world but also between the sides of the self. It is at once profane and sacred, puritan and sensual, combining devastatingly witty social satire with a preoccupation with 'a grandeur too overwhelming to express', conventionally called God.¹⁰⁸

Critically, that suspension is shown in the 'several lines of dispute' that pervade the assessment of White's work. Critics have never come to an agreement in relation to White, who is deemed alternately 'immanent' and 'transcendent', 'national' and 'universal', 'public' and 'private', 'popular' and 'academic' property, a 'secular humanist' and a 'religious writer'...¹⁰⁹ The several dichotomies of White's nature and his division into so many fictional characters – his Otherness, in other words – constitute his very source of literary survival and point to the post-colonial character of his work.

¹⁰⁷ SONTAG, Susan. *Sob o Signo de Saturno*. Trad. Ana M. Capovilla & Albino Poli Jr. Porto Alegre: L & PM, 1986. p. 86.

¹⁰⁸ BRADY, Veronica. Patrick White. In: BENSON, E.; CONOLLY, L. W. (eds.). *Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. vol. 2. London: Routledge, 1994. p. 1651.

¹⁰⁹ LAWSON, *Selected...*, p. xi.

Chapter Three

***The Aunt's Story:* THE ALTERITY OF THE WRITING**

Narrative schizophrenia

From the church across the bay a sound of bells groped through a coppery afternoon, snoozed in the smooth leaves of the Moreton Bay fig, and touched the cheek. The blood began to flow. I am free now, said Theodora Goodman. She said this many times since the moment she had suspected her mother's silence and realized that old Mrs Goodman had died in her sleep.

Patrick White, *The Aunt's Story*, 1947^{xxiii}

The Aunt's Story is a novel about freedom. The whole plot consists of Theodora Goodman's dazzling trajectory towards it, both prior to and after the moment of her mother's death.

Part One, 'Meroë', recounts Theodora's life in Australia from childhood to her mid-forties. The independence of Theodora's mind is revealed in the unconventionality of her character and her repudiation of the time's standards of 'female normality' – beauty, refinement, vanity, domestic accomplishments, marriage or motherhood.

Part Two, 'Jardin Exotique', shows Theodora, already released from family constraints and 'half-crazed', travelling in Europe on the verge of the Second War. In a shabby hotel somewhere in the French Riviera, surrounded by fellow-refugees from a world about to shatter, she allows her many selves – all the fictions within her – to run loose.

Part Three, 'Holstius', is set in the USA, where the protagonist renounces on identity once and for all. The novel closes with Theodora's complacent and, most importantly – conscious – submission to the prospect of being taken to a mental institution.

As in so many of White's protagonists, Theodora Goodman's Otherness is not an expedient to inspire the reader's compassion. Misunderstood, alienated and even grotesque as she may appear, she is not a helpless victim of the society that does not take her in. The protagonist deliberately draws away from a world she resents, to become the subject of her

own history or, to be more exact, to compose her own story – which will happen in distinct ways in each part of the novel.

The novel's fictional realisation is thus, shaped by the very peculiar kind of freedom Theodora seeks. Events are told mainly from the protagonist's perspective, which makes the narrative itself go through three distinct moments, following the course of her mental states. The first moment (Part One) characterises Theodora, linguistically, as an outsider. Her own sharp awareness of things dictates the style of the narrative, although her acquaintances' (often marginalising and satirically portrayed) glances towards her also play an important role.

Part Two 'enacts' Theodora's madness with surrealist touches: she not only creates whole backgrounds for the characters she meets at the Hôtel du Midi, but actually becomes some of them. The narration connives with the protagonist's 'insanity' by not drawing a dividing line between what is fact and what is fantasy. It is as if the author had allowed the fictional character full control of the writing process, so much so that her schizophrenia completely takes over the narration.

The novel's conclusion, in Part Three, may insinuate that the 'institutionalising' view has triumphed over the individual one, both factually – in Theodora's submission – and stylistically – as there is the return to a more traditional demarcation between reality and fantasy, after the striking anarchy of Part Two. And yet, Theodora's compliance is only outward. For her, paradoxically, derangement leads to reality, and physical confinement releases the self from the jailhouse of reason, coherence, identity and external intrusion. In the same way, the text has broken the chains of conventional structure, action, language, point of view, and criticism, to become – despite its delirious tone – more realistic.

Shared alterities & modernism

The Aunt's Story, my first published work after settling at Castle Hill, was considered freakish, unintelligible – a nothing. You only had to pick up a library copy to see where the honest Australian reader had given it up as a bad job.

Patrick White, *Flaws in the Glass*, 1981.^{xxiv}

White always devoted a special share of his affections to *The Aunt's Story*, a fact that was often brought up in letters to friends, interviews, articles, and finally in his autobiography. It was his third published novel, the first of his great works, one of the most experimental – and what seems to have had a particular influence in his favouritism – one of the most misunderstood.

Its publication coincided with White's return in definite terms to Australia. Part Three of the novel, in which Theodora decides to go back home, was actually written on the ship during the long journey from England and in some ways allegorises White's own return.

Setting up a pattern for the next decades, the novel received mixed reviews, first in the USA and then in Europe, while in Australia – White's foremost concern – it was practically ignored, with the exception of one newspaper note dismissing it as artificial.¹¹⁰ The indifferent accolade of *The Aunt's Story* at home brought serious and lasting repercussions to White's beginner's confidence – to the point that he almost gave up on his decision to be a writer. Eight years would pass before the publication of his next novel, *The Tree of Man*, an unusually long period of silence for a mind as full of fictional possibilities and the need to express itself as White's.

This longest pause in White's career was due to a question that troubled him all along: it was extremely hard for him to dissociate the rejection of his work from personal reproach. Thus his affinity with *The Aunt's Story*, a novel he frequently labelled as 'freakish', not by coincidence one of his favourite (ironic) self-descriptive adjectives.

White's resentment as to its initial reception was still very much apparent three decades later when he collected his memoirs in *Flaws in the Glass* (even though by then the critical attitude towards the novel had had a radical shift, after its republication in 1958 following the success of *Voss*). His fondness for it, he stated, was of the kind that a father displays to an unfairly treated child, as 'for so long nobody would pay any attention to it, and even those who did take any notice didn't read it'.¹¹¹

Other subtler aspects of personal identification can be found in certain metafictional characteristics of the novel. While Theodora becomes several people to then undress herself of her identity when she chooses to go back, White returns from exile to tackle the always painful – if liberating – mission of unfolding himself into many selves through the fictions he created. Theodora's quest – her search for a private way of

¹¹⁰ MARR, *Letters...*, p. 74.

expression – is also a measure of White's personal aspiration to innovate Australian writing. The incomprehension she meets along the way may stand as an evidence of White's awareness of the price he was to pay for the otherness of his writing.

In a certain way, the criticism that Theodora's opponents are the target of – through satire – is also White's advanced rebuttal against the adversities he knew his novel would face. *The Aunt's Story* was modernist¹¹² – a tendency imported from the metropolis and rather intellectualised – at a time Australia was firmly engaged in the process of forging an independent national identity based on a populist myth. Besides its alien character, modernism posed a scepticism which clashed with the self-assured façade the new literature had to put up. The maxim 'make it new' was a menace to a 'tradition' too young and self-conscious to be so defied.

As elsewhere in the world, in a first moment modernism represented, for many Australians, the degeneration of the arts and the human thought into moral depravity and ugliness. For White it constituted the ideal instrument with which to challenge the idea of art as mimetic representation of reality – an aspect that so much infuriated him about Australian Literature.

Part One – 'This thing a spinster'

A woman of fifty, or not yet, whose eyes burned still, under the black hair, which she still frizzed above the forehead in little puffs. You could not have noticed Theodora Goodman. Her expression did not tell. Nor did she love her own face. Her eyes were shy of mirrors. Her eyes fell, except in moments of necessity, frizzing out the little puffs of hair, when she outstared, with a somewhat forced detachment, her own reflection. This thing a spinster, she sometimes mused, considering her set mouth; this thing a spinster which, at best, becomes that institution an aunt.

Patrick White, *The Aunt's Story*, 1948^{xv}

¹¹¹ WHITE, Patrick. In *The Making*. In: Id. *Speaks...*, p. 22.

¹¹² White's main sources of inspiration for the novel were Roy de Maistre's painting 'The Aunt', that featured in the cover of the first edition, and Joyce's *Ulysses*, which emerges in the parodic element of Theodora's odyssey.

In Part One White makes use of one of his favourite structuring patterns: a key-scene – here Mrs Goodman's death and Lou's (Theodora's beloved niece) request 'Tell me about Meroë' – leading many years into the past, to Theodora's childhood in the family's country property, Meroë, to then return to the present, back to the funeral scene in Sydney.

The memory of Meroë, in which 'nothing remarkable had taken place, but where music had been played, and roses had fallen from their stems, and the human body had disguised its actual mission of love and hate' saddens Theodora. To talk about the old house, auctioned after Mr Goodman's death, 'was to listen also to her own blood, and, rather than hear it quicken and fail again' she prefers to remain silent. But Meroë imposes itself in spite of Theodora's unwillingness to reveal the details of its existence. The more than one-hundred-page account is actually realised during a moment's slip of Theodora's mind, the time that she takes to tell Lou: 'But, my darling, there is very little to tell.' (p. 19, 131)

Indeed, Meroë's story, as the whole novel, has very little 'action' or 'event' as far as the well-made English novel of the nineteenth century or the traditional Australian campfire narrative are concerned. *The Aunt's Story* disturbed its first audiences because, although it pointed in its title to a very familiar Australian genre – a good story – it did not tell but 'showed' that story happening. Instead of the expected order, logic and intimacy of a pre-established narrative mode, the reader was made to face chaos, irrationality and strangeness.

On the one hand the character of Theodora deviates from that of an amusing old lady – which led Ruth White to complain to her son: 'What a pity you didn't write about a *cheery* aunt!' ¹¹³ On the other, even the potential action, the expected 'spicy bits' (as when Theodora considers murdering her hateful mother with a kitchen knife) are never accomplished except in the protagonist's mind. In defying the readers' expectation White affirms the challenging, playful nature of his writing, which Peter Hutchinson defines as 'an attack on the glib ideological presupposition of any armchair consumer.' (p. 25)

Rather than a typical narrative, thus, *The Aunt's Story* consists of a huge composite of images of places, objects, shapes, colours, people and sensations, including intuition, visions and even a touch of the occult. Such images form what Ian Reid has called a 'landscape of inner narration.' (p. 217) One of the functions of Part One is to initiate the

¹¹³ MARR, *Letters...*, p. 71.

reader into the special, or 'mythical' as some consider,¹¹⁴ status that things and places will assume for Theodora, preparing him/her for the intensification and magnification of those perceptions in Part Two.

Quite contradictorily – in what can be seen as one facet of the modernist paradox – it is often a thoroughly physical setting that leads into Theodora's mental landscape. The first 'scene' of the novel already points in that direction:

But old Mrs Goodman did die at last.

Theodora went into the room where the coffin lay. She moved one hairbrush three inches to the left, and smoothed the antimacassar on a little Empire prie-dieu that her mother had brought from Europe. She did all this with some surprise, as if divorced from her own hands, as if they were related to the objects beneath them only in the way that two flies, blowing and blundering in space, are related to a china and mahogany world. It was all very surprising, the accomplished as opposed to the contemplated fact. It had altered the silence of the house. It had altered the room. This was no longer the bedroom of her mother. It was a waiting room, which housed the shiny box that contained a waxwork. (p. 11)

Theodora's stupefaction facing the long-expected event of her mother's death reflects itself in images of the concrete world (the sudden change in the house and the bedroom, the geographical position of the furniture, the physical invasion imposed by the coffin and the dead body, and the most unexpected comparison between the compact surfaces of things and the fugitive movements of insects) rather than in more 'decorous' sentimental memories. The special – tremendously unsettling – feature of Theodora's glance is thus that it brings the 'spiritual' and the material realms closer than logic and sense would judge sound. Objects lose part of their objectivity to the same extent that feelings become materialised.

The undermining of facile binary oppositions is maybe one of Theodora's most relevant (and obscuring – if we consider character analysis) idiosyncrasies. Her sister Fanny can make a fuss over Mrs Goodman's funeral exactly because she 'understood most things. The emotions were either black or white.' For Theodora, however, 'who was less certain, the white of love was sometimes smudged by hate.' (p. 12) Her main focus of hatred is her own mother although it also appears in her (quite unexplainable) tendency to destroy some of the things she loves – even herself.

¹¹⁴ For Vincent Buckley, White is a 'victim of a mysticism of objects - or better still, a mysticism of sensations. Far too many things, objects, are presented as revelations; and it is through an unremitting concern with sensations that they are so presented.' *The Novels of Patrick White*. In: DUTTON, p. 417.

Watching the little red-eyed hawk that sometimes flies over Meroë, Theodora immediately feels close to the bird. The red eye, into which Theodora sinks hints at 'worlds that were brief and fierce' and they share 'a moment of shrill beauty that rose above the endlessness of bones' (p. 33) although that does not prevent her, some years later, from exterminating the bird in an impulsive spell. 'That was wrong' she thinks at the occasion, 'but I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives.' (p. 71)

'Less certain' is also a suitable term to define Theodora's sexuality. As a child, riding across the property with her small hunting rifle she was regarded as 'some bloke in skirts', (p. 67) an opinion that the moustache she develops in her middle-age comes to confirm. Her far from feminine ability with guns actually intimidates the two suitors who appear to court her. Frank Parrot, a neighbouring farmer, ends up marrying Fanny after the scene of the shooting of the hawk. Years later, an analogous episode, this time the shooting of clay ducks at a Sydney fair, puts an end to Theodora's relationship with the 'good match' family lawyer Huntly Clarkson.

The animate and inanimate are also interchangeable in Theodora's perception. One episode shows how she, as a girl, on passing by a creek, 'stood and let the water lip her legs. She could just hear. Now light and water lay smooth together. She took off her clothes. She would lie in the water. And soon her thin brown body was the shallow, browner water. She would not think. She would drift. As still as a stick. And as thin.' (p. 38) Her relationship with nature reveals her exceptional ability to probe deeply under the surface of things, to internalise and, ultimately, to *become* them.

Recurrent images of nature are a main device used to set the counterpoint between Theodora and some of the secondary characters. The rose motif, for instance, appears in several situations along the three parts of the novel. In Part One it is used satirically to stress the superficiality and philistinism of Theodora's mother and sister – as well as to celebrate Theodora's oneness with nature. Fanny's rose-like appearance wins her mother's favouritism: 'Oh,' [Mrs Goodman] cried, Fanny, my roses, my roses, you are very pretty.' Because Fanny was as pink and white as roses in the new dress.' (p. 27)

Awkward Theodora, though, whose new dress only emphasises her 'sallowiness' and makes her be 'thrown up' by mirrors, is the one able to let all her senses be stirred by the flowers. Mrs Goodman's disorderly and half-forgotten rose garden assumes central position in the child's universe. Lying in bed one morning she is able to sense the roses across the wall and let herself be taken by their light: 'These years had the roselight of

morning, but there were also the afternoons, in which the serious full white roses hung heavy, and the lemon-coloured roses made their cool pools in a shade of moss. There were the evenings when red roses congealed in great scented clots, deepening in the undergrowth.' Walking in the garden she can hear the flowers murmuring and feel their smoothness to the point that they 'drowsed and drifted under her skin.' (p. 21) Most importantly, Theodora's gaze does not exclude the 'small pale grub curled in the heart of a rose', which she 'could not subtract from the sum total of the garden' (p. 22)

As readily as she intuitively apprehends the secret nature of water, a stick, a flower, or the little red-eyed hawk, she becomes Meroë itself:

'Theodora,' Mrs Goodman said, 'has grown thin and yellow.'

'Yes,' said Theodora, 'it has been a trying summer.'

The hills were burnt yellow. Thin yellow scurf lay on the black skin of the hills, which had worn into black pockmarks where the eruptions had taken place. And now the trees were more than ever like white bones. (p. 83)

Literal and metaphorical ways of apprehending the material and the non-material worlds are among the elements that produce the novel's satire. When the sisters discuss their future Fanny wishes she had 'a blue silk dress, and a necklace of pearls, and a handsome husband, and six children'. Theodora's totally immodest – and therefore not less satirised – ambition, on the other hand, is reaching absolute wisdom. 'I shall know everything' she declares and delights herself with the thought of 'wrapping [knowledge] up and put[ting] it in a box. This is the property of Theodora Goodman.' (p. 40)

Fanny's universe is always tangible while Theodora's is mostly metaphorically apprehended. By the time she is sent to a boarding school she is observing a classmate when 'suddenly the voice and the presence of Violet Adams, if not her insipid words, but her white blouse in the apple trees, with the fragments of music that fell from Miss Belle's hands, swept over Theodora, and she wanted to take, and touch, and join together all these sensations and make them palpable and whole.' (p. 53) Although she lacks artistic accomplishments to materialise her visions – she never comes to write a promised 'poem about rocks' – Theodora's intuition is essentially that of a novelist, in the sense that objects, places and feelings are transmuted and intensified by her imaginative powers. Such 'fictions' as she creates are not merely fanciful but have a purpose in her essentially private world, acting as both the cause of her estrangement from people and as substitutes for intimate human contact.

Each of the parts of the novel is previewed by an epigraph. Part One's, from Olive Schreiner, deals exactly with the difficulty to 'speak and be understood by [one's] nearest of mental kin' as opposed to the ease with which the human soul 'reaches that solitary land of the individual experience, in which no fellow footfall is ever heard.' The protagonist remains fundamentally lonely and uncommunicative all through Part One, but by the time she is at school she has begun 'to accept both the contempt and the distances. Because there were also the moments of insight'. (p. 52)

These fleeting instances of epiphany happen with occasional visitors to Meroë, like a Syrian peddler who speaks little but shares with Theodora the ability to make illusions come true. His 'magic' commercial abilities can transform – in the span of a moment – a tattered old piece of cloth into a magnificent silver shawl. Another of Theodora's instant soulmates is the Man who was Given his Dinner, who appears on the girl's twelfth birthday to prophesy: 'You'll see a lot of things, Theodora Goodman. You'll see them because you've eyes to see. And they'll break you. But perhaps you'll survive.' (p. 45)

Her father occasionally becomes one of those illuminated beings, in the sense that he sees beyond the earthly Meroë (although he is not strong enough to resist his wife's pressure to sell bits and pieces of it every time she has another globe-trotting fever). Riding with him round the place Theodora experiences one of those moments of intensified vision, in which the commonest of things become involved in a kind of magical aura:

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

Together with the love for the land Theodora shares with Mr Goodman the love for books. The occasions in which she is allowed into Father's room to 'take to books' are for her solemn events. The appeal of the objects themselves is increased by the fascinating mystery of their content, which again reveals her latent novelistic/poetic vein. 'If you could not understand the words of books, the names, the names sang, and you could touch the brown, damp paper with your hands. There were the foreign books too, which Father [...] used to read all the time. There were Herodotus and Homer.' (p. 23)

The foreign words guard the secret existence of another Meroë, as Father explains, 'a dead place, in the black country of Ethiopia'. Herodotus's description of the old capital of Abyssinia actually takes the girl to another dimension of time and geography where the Australian and African Meroës become confused. This at first fills her with terror. She 'wanted to escape from this dead place with the suffocating cinder breath. She looked with caution at the yellow face of the house, at the white shells in its placid, pocked stone. Even in sunlight the hills surrounding Meroë were black.' (p. 24)

But later she learns, even more than Father, to take pleasure from her escapes to other times places. George Goodman found solace in his library from a poor marriage, by embarking on a 'perpetual odyssey [...] on which the purple water swelled beneath the keel, rising and falling like the wind of pines on the blue shore of Ithaca.' (p. 66) After Meroë has been sold and mother and daughter move to Sydney, Theodora's parodic tirades provide a kind of silent – yet implacable – backfire against Mrs Goodman's tyranny:

[Mrs Goodman's] world had always been enclosed by walls, her Ithaca, and here she would have kept the suitors at bay, not through love and patience, but with suitable conversation and a stick. Mother would have said in the end: Oh, here you are, and about time too, I was bored. What, you have seen witches and killed giants? Ah, but Ianthe, a good cook, though a horrid girl, has beaten an octopus a hundred and forty times on a stone and simmered it for eight hours in wine, and I have offered a calf to Aphrodite if she will produce six yards of purple out of the air. (p. 89)

These Greek/African parodic motifs are going to culminate in Theodora's actual, but not less fictive travels in Part Two.

If all literature requires an active role from the part of the reader, in White the thematic 'uncertainty' – brought about by an unconventional subject matter, a weird, multi-faceted protagonist and a parodic element – makes that demand much more apparent than the usual. And yet, some (widely researched) elements of technical uncertainty of White's style make his fiction even *more* demanding and disturbing.

When asked why he tended to break up language in his novels, White answered that in doing so he was 'trying to get past what is stubborn and unyielding, to convey the essence of meaning'¹¹⁵ an essence that after all can never be found, as his characters reiterate again and again. To read White is to accept the kind of dubious invitation that Theodora senses in the owner of the Spofforths' Boarding School: 'To walk inside one of the dark

¹¹⁵ MARR, *Letters...*, p. 410.

rooms in which Miss Spofforth lived, to sit among the dark, sponged plants, to say: If I could give expression to something that is in me, but which I have not yet hunted down. This is what Miss Spofforth invited'. (p. 51)

Carolyn Bliss's detailed stylistic analysis of White's work shows that White recurrently adopts 'subjunctive, conditional and generally conjectural constructions' (such as the expressions 'as if', 'or else' and 'could') as destabilising elements.¹¹⁶ These stratagems, together with regular appearance of figures of speech and sentence fragmentation, achieve the double function of taking the authorial omniscience off the writer and placing the reader into a position in which he/she must provide the meaning that is missing. See, for example how unfinished sentences and figures of speech act in the following passage:

When they lagged beyond the last warning of a bell, when they dragged round the hill, lost in the trees, detached from the wave of girls that flowed on Sundays across the paddocks towards the church, Theodora Goodman and Violet Adams. On Sundays the trees smelt of sleep, and smoke, and crushed ants, and the thin grey, distilled smell that is the smell of trees that have stood a long time in sun. Theodora Goodman and Violet Adams yawned churchward together through the trees. Or they ducked with one head when magpies slashed at their boaters with savage beaks.

The abrupt full stop after 'Theodora Goodman and Violet Adams' enhances the friendship between the girls at the same time that it hints at a complicity whose extent and consequences the reader must work out for him/herself. The effect of synaesthesia, a device that invariably opens new possibilities for familiar expressions, is here intensified by the adoption of an indefinite point of view: is it the novel's omniscient narrator, the girls or both who declare the smell of sleep in the trees?

White's narration, as seen in plenty of examples in this chapter, does not make a very clear separation between mental and physical realities. In addition to that, Thelma Herring points out, facts, both mental and physical, are often expressed by juxtaposition of images rather than by statements.¹¹⁷ Theodora's vicarious sexual experience with the Greek cellist Moraïtis as well as her motherly feelings towards Lou are subtly implied by the very sequence of scenes in which the announcement of Fanny's pregnancy takes place:

And the music which Moraïtis had played was more tactile than the hot words of lovers spoken on a wild nasturtium bed, the violins had arms. This thing which had happened between

¹¹⁶ BLISS, p. 187.

¹¹⁷ HERRING, Thelma. *Odyssey of a Spinster: A Study of The Aunt's Story*. In: WILKES, G. A. (ed.). *Ten Essays on Patrick White*. Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1970. p. 9.

Moraïtis and herself she held close, like a woman holding her belly. She smiled. If I were an artist, she said, I would create something that would answer him. Or if I were meant to be a mother, it would soon smile in my face. But although she was neither of these, her contentment filled the morning, the heavy, round, golden morning, sounding its red hibiscus note. She had waited sometimes for something to happen. Now existence justified itself.

About this time Fanny wrote to say it was going to happen at last. (p. 112)

Another of Herring's observations relevant here is that the same images can appear in different contexts, with different implications, showing that White refuses to stick symbols with a single significance. The image of water, for example, expresses positive connotations in Theodora's preference of Lou to her brothers. The girl is 'as unpredictable as water' while the boys could have been 'piled into two heaps of stones.' (p. 16) The same concepts of fluidity/inflexibility are reversed by the occasion of the Easter Agricultural Show, which Theodora visits with Huntly Clarkson and a group of stylish but shallow high society ladies: 'Theodora wore a long, oblong dress of striped brown silk. Her attitudes were those of carved wood, while the powdered, silky, instinctively insinuating bodies of Elsa Boileau and Marion Neville flowed. Their laughter flowed wonderfully over the shoulders of Theodora Goodman.' (p. 117)¹¹⁸

'Uncertainty' is thus in the core of White's work. It is interesting to notice how that particular aspect echoes the changes in approach that his work (as well as literature in general) has been suffering. White's novels, like Theodora's face, often '[burn] with what [can] not be expressed' (p. 33-4). This was initially a main target of reproach, as a 1964 comment comes to prove: 'It is ironic that where in his mature novels White fails it is because the prose which is so insistently used to discriminate, define, and value *things* surrenders to the endless flow of their textures and so ends by blurring the distinctions between them.'¹¹⁹ The same feature, today, calls for the trendiest approaches.

Carolyn Bliss has made of this same 'fortunate failure' before words one of the central argument of an extensive study, pointing out the deconstructive possibilities of White's work: 'In White's case, an understanding of language's limits and hazards often silences him before the vastness he would voice. Like Derrida, he sees that the signifier can never be firmly tethered to the signified, that meaning slithers free of constraints, and that, consequently, language is finally unreliable.'¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹⁹ BUCKLEY, pp. 417-8.

¹²⁰ BLISS, p. 185.

Part Two of the novel will reinforce those ideas by bringing the metafictional element more openly into the story.

Part Two – ‘There is no life-line to other lives’

‘My sister Ludmilla has put things in a nutshell,’ he said. ‘Our story has a touching simplicity of its own, which I had not realized before.’

‘It is a complete fabrication,’ said the beard.

‘A what?’ asked Petya.

‘A lie.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said the woman. ‘All this Pavel nonsense first. I agree. How much do we know that they are not spies?’

‘You should talk your mouth off, Anfisa,’ the horse-dealer said.

‘Is it not free speech, gypsy, that we are fighting for?’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Alyosha Sergei. ‘If it is a lie, let us at least discuss the lie.’

Patrick White, *The Aunt’s Story*, 1948 ^{xxvi}

Contemplating the ugly furniture in the hall of the Hôtel du Midi while she waits for a room, Theodora concludes that ‘[t]here is perhaps no more complete reality than a chair and a table.’ This once more reiterates her attitude towards the material world in Part One, although a new stage of the protagonist’s life as well as the transition to Part Two of the novel are signalled by the amendment she makes right after: ‘Still, there will always also be people.’ (p. 135) Later on the same day, walking in the hotel’s Jardin Exotique, Theodora anticipates the moment when she’ll meet the other guests: ‘Even though she had not yet seen them’ – very symbolically – ‘she waited to touch their hands.’ (p. 141)

Point of view will suffer a significant turn in Part Two – in that the other characters will no longer appear as opposing forces to Theodora’s freedom, classifying her as inadequate, mad, or reprehending her lifestyle – even though she has long surpassed the limits of the ‘socially-acceptable’ conduct.

One of the reasons for this sympathetic attitude is obviously technical. We must bear in mind that, unlike Part One, in which mother, sister, servants, schoolmates and neighbours had all set a disapproving eye on the protagonist, now Theodora is the sole central consciousness in the novel. She seems to have arrived at a stage in which she has ceased to acknowledge external criticism and her perception can work now as a filter which

leaves any disavowing opinions out of *her* story. A second reason is thematic: all the characters with whom Theodora identifies more closely *do* have something in common with her. They are all exiles, for one thing – escaping from their homelands (America, Russia, Greece, Germany, England) but also from the past (the Demoiselles Bloch), unfortunate love affairs (Mme Rapallo and Lieselotte), a bloody revolution (Sokolnikov), a nagging patroness (Wetherby) or indifferent parents (Katina Pavlou). Some live off a world of illusion (Rapallo and Sokolnikov) and some (like Katina) remind Theodora of her own forsaken childhood. Through their accounts, or the fantasies Theodora builds around them, as J. F. Burrows demonstrates in detail, she re-examines aspects of her former life, and tries to come to terms with the distresses of her past.¹²¹

In Part Two ‘the art of becoming’, though still widely practised on things and places,¹²² becomes centred on people and their life stories. When Theodora meets the Greek girl Katina Pavlou the reader is warned that ‘Theodora Goodman had become a mirror, held to the girl’s experience. Their eyes were interchangeable, like two distant, unrelated lives mingling for a moment in sleep.’ And so when the girl addresses her indifferent governess Miss Grigg: ‘There was an earthquake, do you remember?’, (p. 142) it is Theodora herself who in the next pages relives all the details of the experience, travestied as Katina’s governess. The vision is dissipated at the moment they are lying on the Greek beach and Theodora shields her protégée with her own body, suddenly noticing that ‘[o]ver the opposite island the same small cloud was as ordinary and unmoved, as simple and touching, as a handkerchief’ (p. 145), this being a real-life handkerchief dropped by Katina on the gravelled yard of the garden.

The reader has been too well-prepared from the beginning the novel to expect reverie and impersonation from the part of the heroine. Having declared openly that from now on mirroring and free association are going to be much more intensely and directly conveyed than in the former chapter, the narrator (as an authority that – only to a certain extent, as we have seen – has guided and elucidated the reading) can retreat once and for all, leaving the reader to try to put together the scattered pieces of Theodora’s life by him/herself. So that when, at the lunch table, the Russian ‘General’ Sokolnikov, taken by nostalgia, and, probably inspired by the presence of mannish Theodora, mentions the fact

¹²¹ BURROWS, J. F. *Jardin Exotique: The Central Phase of The Aunt’s Story*. In: WILKES, pp. 85-108.

that his sister Ludmilla 'took snuff, and spat in the corners, and wore boots like a Cossack under her long skirts', Theodora is immediately transported to Russia where she can feel her boots on the cold grass and her rifle under her armpit. Now she is Ludmilla herself, although the transition has come about unannounced. (p. 149)

The routine of the small hotel becomes increasingly more lively and dramatic as Theodora 'experiences' her former life as Sokolnikov's sister, getting to know his aristocratic relative Anna Stepanovna in her property in Russia and his young lover Varvara. She finds out in time how Varvara marries another man, Anna Stepanovna is executed by the Russian revolutionaries and herself, Ludmilla, is killed by the Bolsheviks while trying to cross the border disguised in men's clothes.

The 'chapters' of this sentimental Russian novel are alternated with several other episodes, in which Theodora 'goes' on a visit to Katina's Aunt Smaragada in her Athenian garden, acts as companion and confidante to the illustrious American Madame Rapallo (when she has the opportunity to watch Rapallo's daughter Gloria, the 'Principessa dell' Isola Grande', in her Italian mansion) and even plays the voyeur, glancing into the love life of the mediocre poet Wetherby and the former countess Lieselotte.

Theodora's specially developed ability at free association, mixing together senses, memory and imagination¹²³ account for these and other 'fugues'¹²⁴ in Parts Two and Three. The first two elements are fairly verifiable within present or previous contexts, providing the reader some ground with which to establish a certain link between the (otherwise completely fortuitous) 'fantasy' and 'reality' levels.

In the earthquake episode, for example, Theodora's sensations are definitely activated by the external stimuli of Katina's remark and handkerchief. Her recollection of former travels around Europe – we know that before coming to the hotel Theodora had been disappointed by her travels around Europe – could well account for her visualisation of a Greek island.

¹²² Theodora's perception of Mme Rapallo's room in the darkness in the night she steals the nautilus shell is a good example of that. (p. 210-2)

¹²³ HUMPHREY, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Los Angeles: ?, 1954. p. 43.

¹²⁴ The term is employed by Burrows on account of its double connotation. A fugue, means 'flight' but also 'a piece of music that begins with a short, simple tune, which is then repeated by other voices or instrumental parts with small variations according to a particular musical pattern.' The musical reference is actually made in White's text. BURROWS, p. 90; SINCLAIR, John (ed.). *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*. London: Harper Collins, 1994.

The third element, however – sheer fantasy – constitutes a complicating factor, as long as it impairs an objective dissociation of the two levels of the narrative and conceals the actual part that the secondary characters' testimony really have in the version presented through Theodora's consciousness.

The ironies among character, author and reader at work are thus considerably more difficult to describe than in Part One, as here there are multiple possibilities of interpretation.

The case of Sokolnikov and Ludmilla is specially enthralling. Although some of Sokolnikov's lines are actually his own – the stories he tells are the external catalyst needed by Theodora to compose the Russian characters – it is practicably impossible to determine where he is speaking and where Theodora is acting as his (very liberal with the facts) surrogate narrator. We know for sure that Theodora is the first to take the initiative to become Ludmilla but there are also suggestions in the text that Sokolnikov and Theodora have a kind of an agreement to perform the general's story. This theory can be either supported – at the end Sokolnikov says 'You, Ludmilla, you are an illusion. You died years ago in the forests of Russia.' Theodora answers 'Thank you for accepting this illusion' (p. 236) – or disclaimed on the basis that any fact concerning Sokolnikov might as well be a product of Theodora's delirious mind.

In the same way that White uses a 'deceiving' title for his novel and subverts the Australian concept of a good story, he now revolutionises the pre-established relationship reader/text by undermining, through an ambiguous point of view, the authority traditionally invested in the writer/narrator.

The adoption of an unreliable narrator is according to Peter Hutchinson, one of several 'games' that an author can play with the reader. Literary games, despite their playful connotation, act as 'various means by which an author can draw [the] reader into a closer, essentially enquiring, or speculative relationship with a text'¹²⁵ – although, the side-effect, which White was well aware of, is that some readers will feel threatened and consequently, draw away from the text, halfway through it.

In speaking of 'unreliability' in relation to White's choice of point of view I do not imply that Theodora's behaviour shall be submitted to external, and even less to moral

¹²⁵ HUTHINSON, Peter. *Games Authors Play*. New York: Methuen, 1983. p. 1.

judgement (as some critics have thought ¹²⁶), but that the novel's narrative voice (which follows mostly Theodora's mind) withholds information, omitting the constant transitions between fact and fantasy. Or, from another perspective, we could perhaps reach the opposite conclusion and consider it a more 'honest' than usual narration, in the sense that it simply abolishes the dividing lines between two kinds of fantasy which spring from the same source – White's mind.

Ultimately what we see is that Theodora's approach to life prefigures the author's conception of literature itself. Several other critics besides the ones already mentioned in this work have mused over White's own special way of apprehending reality, which would constitute the much celebrated 'distinctiveness' of his writing. For Alan Seymour White 'did pull you out of the ordinary way of observing experience'.¹²⁷ Graeme Smith finds White's novels and short stories to 'touch the things half-felt in our lives; the things we can't be sure aren't magic in our contacts – perhaps never brought to the stage of speech – with other human beings'.¹²⁸

As already mentioned, that distinctiveness is extended to White's fictional language. Alan Lawson observes how, in White's first published story, 'The Twitching Colonel' (1937) one already 'notices the mannerisms of style that insist upon its formal existence *as language* rather than as a medium through which 'reality' appears untouched'.¹²⁹ White not only shows that stylistically in his texts but seems to include, mixed with the character's accounts, the theme of the unreliability of words.

This becomes epitomised in the Jardin Exotique section of *The Aunt's Story*. The complexity of its metafictional implications is astounding. In the following passage the very characters half-imagined by another fictional character, refer to themselves with scepticism and reflect about the constructed character of the language through which they have come to 'life', thus (covertly) addressing the matter of their own imposture.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ E.g. the American critics Orville Prescott and Diana Trilling, who could not find any coherent external motivation to guide the character's actions or Peter Beatson, who found Theodora 'untrustworthy'. Both quoted by WEIGEL, John. *Patrick White*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983. p.39.

¹²⁷ Quoted by LAWSON, *Selected...*, p. xvi.

¹²⁸ SMITH, Graeme Kinross. *Australian Writers*. Melbourne: Nelson, 1980. p. 297.

¹²⁹ LAWSON, *Selected...*, p. xvii.

¹³⁰ In Linda Hutcheon's terminology this kind of metafictional technique is classified as 'linguistically self-reflexive' in which the text demonstrates its 'awareness of both the limits and the powers of [its] own language' (as opposed to 'diagetically self aware' texts – conscious of their own narrative processes) and a 'covert' form of literary narcissism, a text which is 'self-reflexive but not necessarily self-conscious' (as opposed to 'overt' forms, in which 'self-consciousness and self-reflexion are clearly evident, usually explicitly thematized or even allegorized within the "fiction"') *Memoirs of Many in One*, the last of

'You will not leave me,' Katina said.

'No,' said Theodora.

It was a cold stone, which she would have warmed if it had been possible, but her hands were as watery as promises.

'No,' her voice said, speaking the code language of human intercourse.

But even Katina Pavlou had begun to know that people are generally forced to do the opposite of what they say. She knew that the weather had changed, and that a wind which had started up from the sea was threading the grey paths. You could also hear the stairs protest beneath Sokolnikov.

'Ludmilla,' he called, 'are you coming?'

So Katina Pavlou took the fact for granted.

'I suppose I shall go and darn my stockings,' she said. 'Or I shall write a reply to a letter, in reply to a reply.'

And as it was more or less arranged, Theodora went towards the General's voice. 'Let us make this walk that will give no pleasure to anyone,' said Alyosha Sergei. 'Let us at least explore your perversity.'

In the hall he was huge, in his overcoat and scarves, and a flapped fur cap that he had fastened over his ears.

'So that you will have to shout,' he said, 'and will think twice for the truth of what you say.'

Remembering Katina Pavlou, Theodora did not reply.

Expectations, promises, social conventions ... the characters might be discussing here the very standing of the literary 'reality'— which ultimately turns out to be a very big 'White lie.' One of the aspects that makes fiction so intriguing is the fact that it is always a fabrication of someone's mind whose acceptance is pre-arranged between the parts. Such a lie is usually multi-layered, what is taken to extremes in this alleged conversation between Sokolnikov and Theodora/Ludmilla:

'You see, Ludmilla,' said Alyosha Sergei, 'it is the same as anywhere else, the same. In the window above the *quincaillerie* there is a woman who will have a child in December. I have watched her adding it up. When the post-office clerk from Marseille, who has seen his future in a mirror, cuts his throat in the bathroom of his wife's father, who has invited him for fifteen days to tell him his faults, they will stitch silver tears on *crêpe* and pretend that it was insanity, so that they can give him a tombstone and curse his grave.' (p. 179)

Besides being unsure of the real identity of the storyteller (Sokolnikov, Theodora or both?), the reader becomes distanced a number of times from the original narrator. Reading resembles the opening of Chinese boxes. The stories of the (fortuitously selected) pregnant woman and suicidal clerk are made up by Sokolnikov. The character of Sokolnikov, at least in part, is devised by Theodora who in her turn is a creation of White – the mastermind behind all the parallel stories.

White's novels, very similar to *The Aunt's Story*, but belonging to his 'post-modern' phase would be both 'diagetically' and 'overtly' self-conscious. HUTCHEON, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional*

Even though the importance of the presence of a co-author can be demonstrated in countless passages along the novel, the episode that follows is especially illustrative, as it deals with several interesting metafictional aspects.

Entering her 'chambre modeste' at the Hotel du Midi one evening, Theodora is comforted by the objects that she has brought with her as a 'safeguard' to make the room 'recognizable' – a darning egg, a dictionary and a 'superfluous' leather writing case. The fact that the two last items are direct metafictional references might be pointing to the displacement and interchangeability that Theodora is about to stir up. Suddenly the hotel room (through the technical device of recurring imagery), remits to the gardens of Meroë: 'And now the small room was a box with paper roses pasted on the sides.' (p. 196)

As if holding another microcosmic shoe-box in her hands, Theodora comes to witness a love/hate scene between Wetherby and Lieselotte. The act of sex, as imagined by the protagonist, blurs the boundaries between character and setting, as '[h]ot hands twisted paper roses. Sweat had begun to penetrate the paper wall. It spread, larger than Africa, lapping the dry surface with thick, swollen, African lips.' The frontiers between the lovers' feelings – like those between Meroë and the rooms of Hotel du Midi or between people and place – aren't better delimited:

'But I have felt something stronger in your arms.'

'That,' said Lieselotte, 'is pity.'

'But it is also love.'

'Have it your own way. It is also contempt. It is also power.' (p. 197)

Next, the room is again Theodora's, and she sits holding a bed-time book, the Acts of the Testament – 'a book in which people come and go.' The ease with which the characters move in the ancient narrative amazes her: 'People no longer come and go, said Theodora, people are brought and sent.' And so reflecting she *brings* back Lieselotte and Wetherby, who immediately complain of the interruption imposed on them:

'Ah,' cried Lieselotte, her sigh turning on the pillow. 'Where were we, my love?'

'Why, we were where we left off,' Wetherby replied. (p. 198)

Even when the lovers are discussing among themselves, their arguments invariably involve 'Theodorean' metafictional discussions on the nature of objects. When Wetherby

accuses Lieselotte of being still a little girl who has 'learnt to look at objects through a glass eye and then to describe their antics', she replies: 'The antics of objects are indescribable, [...] I never expect to make more than an attempt.'

The smooth sea of sex in which the lovers finally become immersed is the same that brings back the Odyssey theme – in the shape of Epaphroditos/Theodora 'swimming too, somewhere off the shores of an island, Theodora hitched her trousers under the green water and prepared to touch land. Fire was coming towards her, and voices, and finally heads, along the banks of a little creek.' (p. 198)

Not only the images of water and fire but the obscure Greek character of Epaphroditos constitutes a (comic) link between the two scenes. According to Burrows the name 'Epaphroditos' was not known in Homer's work but was an adjective meaning 'beloved of Aphrodite', so that the shore in which Theodora lands turns up to be her own private version of Ithaca, governed by the goddess of love rather than by Athena.¹³¹

The scene's real break occurs when Theodora is 'awaken' by Sokolnikov, who commits her to steal the exquisite, but very fragile, nautilus shell Mme Rapallo keeps in her room. Rapallo wakes up soon after the deed is accomplished and in the stormy fight with Sokolnikov that follows, the nautilus is shattered to pieces. On contemplating the pieces on the carpet, 'Theodora herself felt considerably reduced' (p. 214).

With that the symbolic value of the shell becomes clear. Several significant events will be unleashed by the nautilus scene. First Katina 'discovers fire' in the arms of Wetherby. Next Sokolnikov reveals he is in fact only a major and Madame Rapallo confesses that her daughter does not exist. At last, in a fit of jealousy against Wetherby, Lieselotte throws a lamp at him, setting fire to the hotel, and causing her own, Wetherby's and Mme Rapallo's deaths.

The break of the nautilus shell has thus arisen a chain reaction of illusion destruction which culminates with Theodora's departure to a new stage of her odyssey. If, on the one hand, she has been, as the epigraph to Part Two had predicted, 'walk[ing] against a united world, asserting [her] dividedness', that 'great fragmentation of maturity' is being relentlessly undermined, the breaking of the shell insinuates, by the outward world of social judgement that lurches beyond the doors of the Hôtel du Midi.

¹³¹ BURROWS, p. 100.

Part Three – ‘Because you gotta go somewhere’

A psicopatologia do século XIX (e talvez ainda a nossa) acredita situar-se e tomar suas medidas com referência num *homo natura* ou num homem normal considerado como dado anterior a toda experiência da doença. Na verdade esse homem normal é uma criação. E se é preciso situá-lo, não é num espaço natural, mas num sistema que identifique o *socius* ao sujeito de direito; e, por conseguinte, o louco não é reconhecido como tal pelo fato de a doença tê-lo afastado para as margens do normal, mas sim porque nossa cultura situou-o no ponto de encontro entre o decreto social do internamento e o conhecimento jurídico que discerne a capacidade dos sujeitos de direito.

Michel Foucault, *A História da Loucura*, 1972 ^{xxvii}

From the United States Theodora writes her sister that ‘the time has come at last to return to Abyssinia’. ‘Theo is coming home,’ Fanny announces. ‘What is more, she appears to be quite mad.’ (p. 256) Frank’s opinion is that his sister-in-law should be committed to a boarding house, where she will surely be happier ‘[w]ith a mob of similar old girls.’ (p. 258)

The travel theme that underlies *The Aunt’s Story* is important not only as the backbone for the *Odyssey* parody, but as a metaphor of Theodora’s ‘madness’ – in fact the profound oneness-with-the-world feeling which is a ‘symptom’ of what is normally called ‘schizophrenia’.¹³²

According to the psychoanalyst R. D. Laing this kind of arbitrary labelling – when schizophrenia is not a disease but a social label – occurs because we are unable to live peacefully with the two-sided nature of our selves. Whilst we are more-or-less conditioned to believe in the total immersion in the external region of the self as something healthy and normal, the shift to internal time and space is deemed an anti-social and essentially pathological deviation from ‘normality.’¹³³

¹³² Cf. this psychoanalytical case: ‘James [...] contou que quando caminhava sozinho no parque [...] vendo casais se amando, começou a sentir de repente uma tremenda ligação com o mundo inteiro, com o firmamento, as árvores, as flores e a relva – e também com os namorados.[...] Temia ser absorvido, embarcado pela Natureza, com perda irremediável de seu *self*, contudo o que mais temia era também o que mais desejava.’ LAING, R. D.: *O Eu Dividido: Estudo existencial da sanidade e da loucura*. Trad. Áurea B. Weissenberg. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1991. p. 99.

¹³³ Ibid. *A Política da Experiência e a Ave do Paraíso*. Trad. Áurea B. Weissenberg. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1974. pp. 94-5.

‘When your life is most real, to me you are mad’ goes the epigraph to Part Three, by Olive Schreiner. What White conveys through his schizophrenic protagonist – which corroborates Laing’s theories – is that the trip inwards is not unhealthy in itself.¹³⁴ The actual drawback lies in our ignorance on almost all aspects related to that world and our fear of penetrating it. With the result that we are unable either to accept those who, like Theodora, are not afraid to embark, or to help others who, once inside get lost and confused or are overwhelmed by what they find there.

Incapable of understanding those travellers, we submit them to a ‘conspiracy’ of family, social group and official authorities that systematically downgrades them in their legal and existential status.¹³⁵ This is precisely what characterises Part Three of Theodora’s odyssey. With few exceptions, such as the little boy Zack, whom Theodora instantly recognises as one of her kind, most of the people she comes across in the small mid-American town will share Fanny and Frank’s verdict, coming to pronounce her mad and unable to lead an ordinary life.

Having got off her train in the middle of the night, Theodora wanders around, arising curiosity and concern among the sympathetic local residents but herself mostly amazed by the new freedom of being able to leave everything behind: luggage, tickets, name, ‘practical’ handbag, hat... The Johnsons are the family who receive Theodora/Miss Pilkington among their mess of dogs, furniture and children and invite her to stay overnight. She escapes just after dinner towards the hills, settling herself in an abandoned shack.

There Theodora receives the visit of Holstius, one more of her alter-ego figures. While her other ‘creations’ have, almost literally, sprouted from ‘real-life’ people, Holstius evolves from no-one in particular, but is, at the same time, a composite of several people Theodora has met in her life, mainly her father and The Man who was Given his Dinner. Holstius advises her to ‘accept the two irreconcilable halves’: (p. 277)

‘You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow [...]. ‘Or flesh and marble, or illusion and reality, or life and death. For this reason, Theodora Goodman, you must accept. And you have already found that one constantly deludes the other into taking fresh shapes, so that there is sometimes little to choose between the reality of illusion and the illusion of reality. Each of your several lives is evidence of this.’ (p. 278)

¹³⁴ Cf. Burrows’s article.

¹³⁵ LAING, *A Political...*, p. 90.

He also prepares Theodora for the people who are about to come for her, 'with every sign of kindness. [...] They will give you warm drinks, simple, nourishing food, and encourage you to relax in a white room and tell your life. Of course you will not be taken in by any of this, do you hear? But you will submit. It is part of the deference one pays to those who prescribe the reasonable life. They are admirable people really, though limited.' (p. 283)

Theodora's incompatibility with 'the reasonable life' brings her closer to another modernist schizophrenic, Septimus Smith, the retired soldier in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Septimus feels the same oneness with nature and is placed in an mental clinic for quite the same reasons as Theodora: his 'breakdown' constitutes a deviation from what his psychiatrist – Sir William Bradshaw – defines as the 'sense of proportion'. Both Septimus and Theodora find in 'madness' release from the constraints and delimiting categorisation of the external order. Both must be moulded into fixed and stable, and thus, 'proper', social beings, by the preservers of that order.

One description of how Woolf represents fictionally her characters' schizophrenia is indeed very similar to that of White in relation to Theodora's:

Such schizophrenic experience gives rise to a fluid, mobile form of subjectivity that manifests itself most often in nonconventional, nonlinguistic visual imagery.[The characters'] consciousness seems to run on such images as trees, the ebb and flow of water, the boundless sky, animals, and mist, to name just a few. These images are characterised by a hazy obscurity and mysticism, far removed from logical distinction and stasis, and hence are least susceptible to linguistic definition and a conventionally accepted unity of meaning.¹³⁶

A crucial difference between Theodora and Septimus, though, is that the latter cannot find his way back to the external dimension of time and space, being engulfed in a complete blackout of consciousness which ends with his suicide. Theodora, on the other hand, accedes to the fact that she cannot fight against the powers that be.

Her lives are endless, meeting, parting and entering into each other,

so that the impulse for music in Katina Pavlou's hands, and steamy exasperation of Sokolnikov, and Mrs Rapallo's baroque and narcotized despair were the same and understandable. And in the same way that the created lives of Theodora Goodman were interchangeable, the lives into which she had entered, making them momentarily dependent for love or hate, owing her this portion of their fluctuating personalities, whether George or Julia Goodman, only apparently deceased, or Huntly Clarkson, or Moraitis, or Lou, or Zack, these were the lives of Theodora Goodman, these too. (p. 284)

¹³⁶ WANG, Ban. "I" on the Run: Crisis of Identity in *Mrs Dalloway*. *Modern Fictional Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1. Spring, 1992. p. 187.

In order to keep this special knowledge Theodora chooses another side of escape, the escape into the inner world, or 'under her hat' (p. 283) as Holstius puts it. The ending of the novel recovers the hat and rose metaphors as signifying the opposition between the internal and external worlds. 'The great black hat', which stands for reason, certainty and mainly, social imposition, 'sat straight', although 'the doubtful rose trembled and glittered, leading a life of its own.' (p. 287)

Learning to divide and multiply

Then Theodora sighed.

'It has been interesting,' she said, 'and at times lovely.'

'It has been? It is,' Holstius said. 'Your sense of permanence is perverted, as it is in most people. We are too inclined to consider the shapes of flesh that loom up at us out of mirrors, and because they do not continue to fit like gloves, we take fright and assume that permanence is a property of pyramids and suffering. But true permanence is a state of multiplication and division. As you should know, Theodora Goodman. Faces inherit features. Thought and experience are bequeathed.'

Patrick White, *The Aunt's Story*, 1948 xxviii

A Patrick White novel invariably leads to serious reflection even when its theme strikes the reader as 'freakish'. Theodora Goodman's story, especially, embodies two opposite trends that are not at all mutually exclusive within one text: 'analysis, reflection, a mirrored image' as well as 'escape, fantasy, a dream image.'¹³⁷

On the one hand she is the explorer of a bizarre dimension of oneness with the world. On the other, her story leads to the challenging of some long-held assumptions: the place of woman in society, the notion of the individual as being autonomous, self-contained and fully conscious of itself, and the indisputable judgement of the social control authorities.

Her odyssey is a celebration of freedom of thought and yet its outcome is gloomy: for the free-thinker, the extra-perceptive, the non-compliant, the incoherent, the different, there seems to be no room within the ordinary social structures but the margins – 'some

¹³⁷McFARLANE, James. The Mind of Modernism. In: BRADBURY, Malcolm & McFARLANE, James (eds.). *Modernism: 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986. p. 71.

good solid boarding house' (p. 258) or asylum 'where there are folks who'll make you comfortable.' (p. 287).

Or the dusty shelves of a library. *The Aunt's Story* was possibly forgotten for a length of time for reasons comparable to those that lead its protagonist to a mental institution. *It disturbed*, firstly because it went against the whole of the Australian literary tradition and secondly because it subverted some of the very literary and philosophical canons we have been *bequeathed* with as being universally valid and thus, sacred. The latter point is well discussed by Alan Lawson:

One of the principal ways in which the novel unsettles us as conventional readers is by *appearing* to offer a couple of the very familiar narrative conventions, by *appearing* to conform to a couple of traditional ways of writing and producing meaning, by offering, that is, *models of reading* in which we have been well-trained. It then undoes these models, and their culturally-specific philosophical underpinnings, quite powerfully.¹³⁸

Such 'models of reading' – Lawson speculates – include the Hegelian Triad towards unity. Part One, being apparently stepped on reality and Part Two, on illusion, *look as though* they are endorsing Hegel's ideas of a 'thesis' and an 'antithesis'. Part Three would stand for the 'synthesis' by pointing at the unitary integration of the previous elements.

However, if we consider carefully Holstius's statements by the end of the novel, we will be led to re-evaluate the former sections and come to the conclusion that much of the reality in Part One was in fact illusory, as the fantasy of Part Two had been much more deeply embedded in reality than we may have realised at first sight. The novel, and particularly its ending, 'muddles' rather than distinguishes the binary oppositions upon which our Western thought is traditionally based.

White's adoption and subversion of the theme and structure of the journey of self-discovery is another disestablishing strategy appointed by Lawson. Unlike Ulysses, to take an example from classical literature, or Lilly Briscoe, a modernist heroine par excellence, Theodora never returns home or applies the last stroke to her unfinished work. The message of the novel, on the contrary, lies on endlessness and fragmentation – multiplication and division – as Holstius reminds Theodora – rather than the addition and subtraction of a well-tied ending.

¹³⁸ LAWSON, Alan. Bound to Dis-integrate: Narrative and Interpretation in *The Aunt's Story*. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 9.

Alterity is discussed thematically as well as stylistically in the very crisis of language and meaning suggested by the novel.

Chapter four

Riders in the Chariot: **THE OTHER AS HERO**

Dinkum Aussies

Once a jolly swagman camp'd by a Billabong
Under the shade of a Coolibah tree
And he sang as he watched and waited till his 'Billy'
boiled
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.

Waltzing Matilda, Waltzing Matilda,
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me
And he sang as he watched and waited till his 'Billy'
boiled
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.

Down came a jumbuck to drink at the Billabong
Up jumped the Swagman and grabbed him with glee,
And he sang as he shoved that jumbuck in his tucker-
bag
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.

Up rode the squatter mounted on his thoroughbred
Down came the troopers, one, two, three.
Whose [sic] that jolly jumbuck you've got in your tucker-
bag?
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.

Up jumped the Swagman and sprang into the Billabong
You'll never catch me alive said he.
And his Ghost may be heard as you pass by the
Billabong;
You'll come a-waltzing Matilda with me.

A. B. (Banjo) Paterson, 'Waltzing Matilda', 1895 ^{xxix}

Like the first representations of its geography, Australian history started with blank spaces where the national heroes should be. As a 1840's popular poet put it, in Australia 'The woods have never rang with War's loud crash,/ No chivalry has swept the silent plains;[...] Here are no storied tombs, nor sculptured shrines,/ On which we read a

Saint, or Hero's praise'.¹³⁹ The heroes that the first colonists celebrated in official occasions were borrowed from the *crème de la crème* of British society – the king, the houses of Parliament, the judges, and the victorious generals Nelson and Wellington.

When around the 1820's the blank had started to be filled with locally-inspired heroes, those seldom came from the elite. The special conditions of the antipodean environment determined that what should distinguish an Australian champion should be his special aptness to *survive* in the daily battle against a hostile land. Although British travellers and immigrants often looked down on the first Australians as being rough and uncouth, currency lads and lasses elected their heroes according to their practical abilities, such as handling wild cattle, shooting and swimming. As for character, they must be fearless, sustain hope in the most heartbreaking conditions, and never lose tragic dignity even in face of death.¹⁴⁰

Explorers were also greatly admired for that same capacity of taming the harsh environment. But in Australia the fact that many of those explorers saw their grandiose ideals *beaten* – like Leichhardt himself, who disappeared in the outback in 1848 never to be found again – seemed to increase, rather than damage, their popular appeal. A classic example is that of Burke and Wills, the most famous of all Australian explorers.¹⁴¹ On an April evening in 1861 they returned to their camp from the central plains – with months of delay, weakened by hunger and illness, only to find that those remaining of their party had left – in that very morning! – towards another camp, with the consequence that they starved to death.

Hand in hand with the sense of defeat facing the continent, anti-authoritarianism soon became an important heroic attribute in a land populated mostly by convicts and their descendants. That showed itself either in the 'poor but honest' figure who stood up to the ruthless and the powerful, such as Jack Donahoe (or Doolan) of a popular 1820's song, or in the bushranger, the avenger of the Australian outback. This character resembles a lot the Brazilian 'cangaceiro', a kind of Robin Hood who, in taking justice into his own hands, challenged the laws of God and men. The most famous bushranger was to be Ned Kelly (the comparison with Lampeão is again possible), who robbed his first bank in 1878 and for three years defied law and order. For the authorities of the time, concerned with the models of

¹³⁹ Quoted by INGLIS, p. 320.

¹⁴⁰ CLARK, Manning. Heroes. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, Winter, 1985. p. 61.

¹⁴¹ INGLIS, p. 299.

behaviour young Australians were following, the public reverence inspired by such figures was alarming.

The nationalist writers appropriated those themes of loneliness and anti-authoritarianism, adapting them to the 1890's. Among Australia's most popular heroes of the end of the nineteenth century are the protagonists of Banjo Paterson's ballads 'The Man from Snowy River' and 'Waltzing Matilda'.

The latter, specially, still says a lot about contemporary Australia. If there is such a thing as the characteristic Australian irony 'Waltzing Matilda' is its musical epitome. The cheerful tone by itself does not hint at the gloomy incidents the words disclose – theft, defiance of law and suicide. It is also ironic that the rather unorthodox (to say the least) moral message of the song should not prevent most Australians from considering this their unofficial national anthem – a song that belongs to the outback as well as to the city, serving the purposes of community meetings, rallies, marches, folk and school events, or any gathering of Australians abroad.¹⁴²

Although Australia never incurred in an armed conflict to assert its independence, its national identity was often affirmed in situations of war. One of the most important public holidays in Australia, ANZAC (Australian and New Zealand Armed Corps) Day, celebrated on 25th April, recalls not a victory but a bloodbath followed by a strategic retreat (commonly attributed to the incompetence of the English command) from the Italian shores of Gallipoli, in 1915, against the Turks.

Australian war memorials have always tended to revere the anonymous soldier of lower rank rather than admirals or generals. The typical statue depicts 'the little digger, a common Australian soldier standing with rifle reversed, the digger hat on his hand, and the face of a simple bush boy, whose way of life had taught him about pluck and courage and sticking to his mates and survival, and what to think of the big brass who had presided over death and destruction.'¹⁴³

After World War II industrialisation brought progress even to the bush and the bushman lost much of his original appeal. The suburb – middle-way between the bush and the city – became a new symbol of Australia. The new heroes were to be found in the fields of sports, politics and mass-media, at the same time that materialism, conservatism (there

¹⁴² SEMMLER, Clement. Waltzing Matilda. In: Id. *The Banjo of the Bush: The Life and Times of A. B. "Banjo" Paterson*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press. ? p. 88.

¹⁴³ CLARK, p. 66.

were several cases of censorship in Australia, from the 1940's to the 1970's), and philistinism started to give rise to a wave of self-critical, comical and satirical portraits of Australia. White's fictional suburb of Sarsaparilla, the setting for novels (*Riders in the Chariot* and *The Solid Mandala*), plays ('The Season of Sarsaparilla') and short stories, is perhaps the most famous of these critiques of suburbia.¹⁴⁴

Whitean heroes and villains

Some years ago I got the idea for a book about a megalomaniac explorer [...] When I returned here after the War and began to look up old records, my idea seemed to fit the character of Leichhardt. But I did not want to limit myself to a historical reconstruction (too difficult and too boring), I only *based* my explorer on Leichhardt. The latter was, besides, merely unusually unpleasant, whereas Voss is mad as well. [...] Two of the greatest difficulties have been to try to make an unpleasant, mad, basically unattractive hero, sufficiently attractive, and to show how a heroine with a strong strain of priggishness can at the same time appeal.

Patrick White, Letters, 1956 xxx

Although manifested in variable degrees of subliminality or straightforwardness, the central message of White's novels, stories, plays and non-fictional writings is almost invariably anti-authoritarian. Starting with himself as the protagonist of his autobiographical

¹⁴⁴ A quick examination of one of flourishing cultural aspects of Australia today, its movie industry, shows that the Australian hero – although no longer portrayed as representative of a whole country or group, but as an individual – still draws inspiration from Australia's past of anti-authoritarianism and loneliness. 'Gallipoli' denounces England's use of Australian soldiers as cannon fodder in World War I. 'Exile' is set in the 19th century and re-enacts, within Australia, the British colonisation of the Continent. A poor man sent into exile to an abandoned coastal island for having stolen a number of sheep, starts a new life in a place apparently barren. The black comedy 'Mushrooms' also tells the story of two widowed shoplifters, who end up gaining the sympathy of a police investigator. 'The Piano', set in colonial New Zealand, shows an extra-perceptive woman fighting against the fate imposed on her by her father and husband. 'Shine', 'Angel Baby' and 'Lilian's Story' all subvert the concept of madness and question the place allotted to the mad in society. 'Bad Boy Bubby', an Australian version of Kaspar Hauser's story, looks at society's incapacity to deal with the outcast. 'The Adventures of Priscilla, the Queen of the Desert' is a moving portrayal of a group of drag queens 'conquering' the country by facing the prejudices and false morality of several little towns of the Australian outback. 'Muriel's Wedding' satirises, in a style that is quite similar to White's, the alienation of life in the suburbs, at the same time that the protagonist goes against the narrow-minded conventions of the ones around her.

statements, the great majority of White's heroes and heroines defy the status quo and are seldom seen as well-adjusted individuals.

Neither are they spared the occasional lash of their creator's tongue, although it is exactly their inadequacy and clumsiness that grants them a dignity of their own. In those aspects it is possible to detect an affinity between the Whitean hero and those unsuccessful heroes of Australian history and folklore – explorers, outlaws, defeated soldiers or the common man defying the harsh environment .

The protagonists of *Riders in the Chariot* are perhaps the most clear example of White's concern with the treatment which the Other receives in society.

Mary Hare, Ruth Godbold, Mordecai Himmelfarb and Alf Dubbo are people with extremely diverse backgrounds – an ugly and impoverished spinster; a washerwoman and mother of six; a foreign refugee and a homeless artist. These people are united at the moment they all converge to the suburb of Sarsaparilla, driven by their shared, if individually realised, vision of God's chariot of fire, and bound by an understanding of each other's feelings and difficulties facing a society that does not see the different with good eyes.

The reasons for their exclusion from the community are no less distinct than their backgrounds. Miss Hare's isolation in the crumbling mansion Xanadu, as well as her oneness with the natural world have gained her the label 'The Madwoman of Xanadu.' Mrs Godbold has set herself the mission of infinite loving kindness which entitles her to utter poverty and physical abuse. The former Professor Himmelfarb will never become 'one of the boys' in the factory where he has chosen to work in Australia, due to his Jewish orthodoxy and self-inflicted humility. Dubbo, in his turn, is doubly alienated for being both a displaced Aborigine and the doomed artist suffering from consumption, alcoholism and venereal disease.

Although these four protagonists seem to form a microcosm of Australian society – inasmuch as they are a native Australian, an English naturalised citizen, an immigrant from continental Europe and an English-descendant Australian – they are not intended to be representative of Australia in the same way as Paterson's or Lawson's protagonists were.

As a matter of fact, the profoundly individualised and often bizarre universes of White's protagonists – which transforms them into exceptions, odd men out – constituted a threat to the nationalist tradition of glorifying the general and the representative. The feeling of mateship between men trying to grab a stray horse in Paterson's ballad or in Lawson's comic portrayal of a lonely shepherd tending the dead body of a mate on Christmas day,

appears in White's world as the occasional moments of epiphany with other excluded or self-excluded, or sardonically parodied into instances of extreme cruelty towards the Other.

The inner, separated existence of the members of this quartet and the shared vision that drives them towards the Sydney suburb of Sarsaparilla is portrayed in such a richness of detail that each of their life stories could stand as a short novel in itself.

These heroes' designs are opposed by a number of villains, representing degrees of evil that range from mere bad taste, abstention from responsibility, or yielding to hypocrisy and materialism – seen in Mr Rosetree, Tom Godbold, Mrs Chalmers-Robinson, Mr Calderon, Mrs Pask and Hanna – to utter malignancy, which appears as anti-semitism, ethnic prejudice, discrimination and intolerance, brought about by Mrs Jolley and her fellow Arch-conspirator Mrs Pask.

Riders in the Chariot becomes thus a colossal allegory, set in a contemporary background, of the eternal fight between good and evil over humanity.

White's philosophy of difference

'Who was that woman?' Asked Mrs Colquhoun, a rich lady who had come recently to live at Sarsaparilla.

'Ah,' Mrs Sugden said, and laughed, 'that was Miss Hare.'

'She appears an unusual sort of person,' Mrs Colquhoun ventured to hope.

'Well, replied Mrs Sugden, 'I cannot deny that Miss Hare is *different*.'

Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot*, 1961 ^{xxxi}

'*Difference*' constitutes a recurrent theme in *Riders in the Chariot*, being approached in diverse ways by the novel's characters and by the narrative voice. In the following passage between Miss Hare and Himmelfarb, 'difference' assumes a multicultural connotation:

'I don't think I ever met a Jew. Perhaps one. An old man who was useful to my father. A piano tuner. Are Jews so very different?'

'There is all the difference in the world.'

'Do you like it?'

'We have no alternative.'

'I understand,' she said. 'I, too, am different.'

He laughed, and picked up the twig of wilting plum blossom which she had let fall.

'That would appear, mathematically and morally, to make us equal,' he said. 'I am glad.'

Without irony, though. So that she was glad in turn. This Jew would not be one to go laughing at her.

'In the factory where I work,' the Jew told her, and he had returned inward, behind walls higher than those he had mentioned, 'I'm considered the most different of all human beings.'

'Of course!' she cried. 'They always behave like that.' (p. 94)

Even Dubbo, a character who rarely speaks, has his say on the subject. His is the artist's viewpoint and his reading of the world – and difference – is often expressed in terms of shapes and colours. The literary form his vision takes – a cheeky song – is also very significant as an example of the refined irony that pervades White's whole work. The apparently inconsequent rhymes are sung by a 'dirty abo', who is, besides, drunk, deserving little attention from his audience. Yet, the song is a serious statement on the position of the historically dispossessed and prophesies Himmelfarb's crucifixion and Dubbo's own death by consumption:

Hi digger, hi digger,
Nail it! Nail it!
Nail the difference till it bleeds!
It's the difference, it's the difference
That will bleed the best.
Poppies are red, and Crimson Ramb-lers,
But men are redd-est
When they bleed
Let'em! Let'em!
L-ehht.... (p. 280)

Dubbo's song points at certain attitudes to difference that, in several occasions, are going to generate all the conflict in the novel. Most of the time evil reveals itself in apparently harmless, banal, chatter:

'I am so afraid you are not happy at Xanadu,' remarked Miss Hare – it was at breakfast, over the crispies in the kitchen.

'It is not that I'm not happy,' answered Mrs Jolley. 'I am always happy, of course, more or less. It is that a lady does expect something different.'

Miss Hare mashed her crispies.

'What?'

'Oh, you know,' said Mrs Jolley, 'a home, and a Hoover, and kiddies' voices.' (p. 53)

In this passage the concept of difference is satirically reversed. For Mrs Jolley difference is, paradoxically, conservative as well as materialistic. Mrs Flack, Mrs Jolley's companion in mischief, on a phone conversation with her nephew Blue – who has just won

the lottery – equals difference to envy and deceit, not to mention sexual undertones, comically explored by White:

Waddaya know! I would never ever! Golly, I am pleased, Blue! But watch out now, won't you? I am telling you people will act different. People, when they get a smell of someone else's luck, are very, very different. People, at the best of times, are different underneath their clothes. Eh? You know, Blue, I did not suggest. You will never find me descending to anything low – thoughts or talk – never low. (p. 396)

Not as evil, and even more comic than the two grannies are Haïm and Shulamith Rosenbaum, portrayed by White as the ultimate case in Australian assimilation. Jewish refugees escaping from Nazi Europe, they take pains to fully embody the local life-style and to banish anything that 'is not Australian', (p. 208) including their ethnic difference, which has caused them so many problems in the past.

On arriving in their new homeland they become Harry and Shirl Rosetree, indulgent but proud parents of 'Steve and Rosie who learned so much so fast: they had learnt to speak worse Australian than any of the Australian kids, they had learned to crave for ice-cream, and potato-chips, and could shoot tomato sauce out of the bottle even when old black sauce was blocking the hole.' (p. 208) Their 'conversion' to Catholicism is another amateurish attempt to become more Australian than the Australians – it is too late when Shirl finds out, to her despair, that the neighbours 'Arch and Marge are Methoes. [...] That is what people are, it seems.' (p. 208) At the end of the novel Shirl, by now Sheila, appears remarried and boasting about her devout Anglicanism.

Ways of approaching difference become the main watershed between good and evil in the novel. With one puzzling exception in Mrs Godbold, as we shall see further down, the novel's heroes are among those characters who have respect and regard towards difference. Its villains are, in general, those who attempt to erase it, either because of their pusillanimity or because they have appointed themselves as the preservers of certain social and moral conventions.

The Madwoman of Xanadu

Nothing but faith could have resisted [Mrs Jolley's] very material opposition, and Miss Hare did have hers, to revive which she would run off into the bush, and after picking up the crystal thread, follow it over pebbles. Each pool would reveal its relevant mystery, of which she herself was never the least. Finally she would be renewed. Returning by a different way, she would recognize the Hand in every veined leaf, and would bundle with the bee into the divide Mouth.

Patrick White, *Riders in the Chariot*, 1961 xxxii

The Australian spinster Mary Hare resembles Theodora Goodman in several aspects. She is a 'small, freckled thing' with a tendency for inwardness and isolation, and a special perception of place (her property, Xanadu, is a Romantic version of Theodora's Meroë). Like Theodora, 'very little of [Miss Hare's] secret, actual nature had been disclosed to other human beings'. (p. 11)

Miss Hare's oneness with nature is even more developed than young Theodora's. When going home Mary does not walk along the main entrance path leading to the official front gate with its 'attempt at heraldry'. (p. 12) Rather, suggesting the hare of her name, she crawls down a tunnel through the shrubbery. The real Mary is revealed in the undergrowth surrounding Xanadu:

Speckled and dappled, like any wild thing native to the place, she was examining her surroundings for details of interest. Almost all were, because alive, changing, growing, personal, like her own thoughts, which intermingled, flapping and flashing, with the leaves, or lay straight and stiff as sticks, or emerged with the painful stench of any crushed ant. Her hands, almost always dirty and scratched, from constant need to plunge into operations of importance – encouraging a choked plant to shoot, freeing a fledgling from its shell, breaking an afterbirth – were now hung with dying ants, she observed with some distress. One slithered from her father's bloodstone ring, which she wore not as a memento of her father, but because its device officially confirmed here ownership of Xanadu. (p. 15)

One of the several binary divisions blurred by the novel lies in the fact that Mary is able to, simultaneously, keep strong bonds with two antagonistic factors: the native wilderness *and* the alien element, represented by the intruding property. That, reinforced by some aspects of her family history and even the architecture of Xanadu in itself, places her in

the meeting point between nature and civilisation. She can be regarded, thus, as an allegorical figure of the encounter between the Australian land and the European settler.

Houses frequently assume central positions in White's work. The story of Xanadu – from its conception to its demolition – runs parallel to, and is sometimes closely interwoven with, the plots of the Riders.

Significantly, the building and destruction of houses is a recurrent theme in post-colonial literatures around the world.¹⁴⁵ The several characters' conceptions of 'home' and 'housing' reveal different constructions of identity and forms of connection with the land. They serve to point, satirically, at social injustice and hypocrisy. The author also refers repeatedly to native and non-native vegetation in the novel to signalise the process of appropriation.

Miss Hare is a second-generation Australian, fruit of the controversial liaison between the bourgeois Hares, whose fortune has been built upon the wine trade, and the Urquhart-Smiths, with aristocratic pretensions. Mary's father is the 'original' Mr Norbert Hare, who 'did or contemplated doing things nobody else would have thought of'. (p. 14) Xanadu springs from his desire to *enact* Coleridge's 1797 poem. Parodying the feat of Kubla Khan, Mr Hare decrees the construction of his own 'pleasure-dome'. With that he not only diverges from what the pragmatic colonial mind sees as 'good sense', but also affronts directly the conservative traditions of his wife's family.

Mr Hare's 'folly at Sarsaparilla' is his megalomaniac attempt to impose some of the ancient European splendour upon the banality of the Australian land, an idea that causes sniggers of disdain among his acquaintances. After several years' labour Xanadu turns up a huge mansion decorated in gold, iron frills, Italian marbles, mosaics, reproductions of Greek statues, and an actual dome of greenish glass, not to mention the elaborate park, conceived to challenge the 'native cynicism of that [...] grey, raggedy scrub.' (p. 15)

The contrast with the Urquhart Smiths' gothic church in Mumblejing is patent. The building ordered by Sir Dudley, an official representative of the Queen, is 'so solid, so lovely-old, so English [...] seem[ing] to proclaim the situation at Mumblejing as indestructible.' (p. 13)

Mr Hare is a potential visionary who, like his daughter, at times senses the presence of the chariot. On defending the kind of stare beyond 'anchorage in time and space'

¹⁴⁵ AHSCROFT et al., *The Empire...*, p. 28.

(p. 15) – that is, unrestrained imagination, pleasure, exuberance and evanescence – as an alternative to prescribed sobriety, rationality and indestructibility, he rebels against the status quo and lays bare his condition of colonial displacement.

On the other hand, by aspiring to belong to ‘That Class’ of Australians that ‘were returning home to show they were as good as anyone else’ (p. 14) but at the same time downgrading all things Australian, his values become distorted and his visionary possibilities flunk. Indeed, the land does not take long to react and the ‘scrub, which had been pushed back, immediately began to tangle with Norbert Hare’s wilfully created park, until, years later, there was his daughter, kneeling in a tunnel of twigs which led to Xanadu.’ (p. 15)

Gardens may become useful metaphors for post-colonial writers in which the arbitrary inclusions and exclusions they represent can be comparable to the European treatment of difference and impositions on its colonial Others. To the same extent that the Australian bush subverts the constructed boundaries between the ornamental and the obnoxious, Miss Hare transcends her grandfather’s absolute Eurocentrism as well as her father’s ineffective displacement to develop a relationship of perfect integration with the local natural environment. Yet White does not fall in the easy nationalistic/populist trap of privileging native scrub over European-imported vegetation. Mary loves the plants introduced by her father as much as she loves the bush; that becomes evident in the fact that her crucial meeting with Himmelfarb takes place under one of Mr Hare’s magnificent plum trees.¹⁴⁶

The conflict of the novel begins when Miss Hare decides to use the income from an inheritance to hire a governess for Xanadu, in a clumsy attempt to revive some of its grandeur. The employer immediately perceives some obscure wickedness in the outwardly all-respectful and ladylike Mrs Jolley, and the two become involved in a fierce psychological battle, until one day Miss Hare’s allies – the bush and small animals that have been closing the circle around Xanadu for years – make their definitive break into the house, causing Mrs Jolley to flee in terror.

This manoeuvre, however, fosters Mrs Jolley’s closer association with another matron, the Sarsaparilla dweller Mrs Flack. With that their latent evil finally surfaces.

¹⁴⁶ This is precisely the point made by Rodney Edgecombe. The Weeds and Gardens in *Riders in the Chariot*. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 26. D. R. Burns, on the other hand, sees the choice of the plum tree for this moment of lyricism as one more example of White’s praise of anything European and consequent hatred of Australia. The Elitist Case for Equality: Patrick White’s Pioneering ‘Visionary Monster’ Novel. *Overland*, no. 125, Summer, 1991. p. 69.

Together they form the duo of 'Arch-conspirators', the targets of White's most biting satirical attacks on the Australian suburbanite. Part of the satire lies in the reactionary ideas and arbitrary manners of the 'tormentors-in-chief': (p. 80)

Mrs Jolley was a lady, as she never tired of pointing out. She would repeat the articles of her faith for anybody her instinct caught doubting. She would not touch an onion, she insisted, not for love. But was partial to a fluffy sponge, or butter sandwich, with non-pareilles. A lady could never go wrong with pastel shades. Or Iceland poppies. Or chenille. She liked a good yarn, though, with another lady, at the bus stop, or over the fence. She liked a drive in a family car, to nowhere in particular, but looking out, in a nice hat, at faces on a lower level. Then the mechanism with which her superior station had fitted her would cause her head to move ever so slightly, to convey her disbelief. (p. 44)

Their nicety is in fact repulsive. Satirical exaggeration, again, promotes the widows' chattering mood to the status of diabolical evil:

As tea and contentment increased understanding of each other, as well as confidence in their own powers, it was only to be expected that two ladies of discretion and taste should produce their knives and try them for sharpness on weaker mortals. Seated above the world on springs and *petty point*, they could lift the lids and look right into the boxes in which moiled other men, crack open craniums as if they had been boiled eggs, read letters before they had been written, scent secrets that would become a source of fear to those concerned.' (p. 75)

Materialism and sheer bad taste are also among their vices. Mrs Flack's 'lovely home' (p. 74) is the realm of texture-brick walls, garden pixies, pastel blues and pinks, plastic dressing-table sets, and holiday-souvenir ashtrays. These satirical representations of certain (stereotypical) middle-class values and tastes as evil have been widely quoted by a number of critics convinced of White's elitism and presumption.¹⁴⁷

Like every good satirist White does not refrain from speaking his mind and his statements are definitely partial, not to mention the fact that his cruel treatment of some people accounted for his reputed 'arrogance'. However, more than trying to impose his own values White was denouncing a process of cultural standardisation going on in the 1960's in Australia. His positions in relation to suburban ugliness are coherent with the approach to difference postulated elsewhere in the novel: the ugly is what is imposed as conventional or falsely moralistic, crushing the different in the process.

Far from an exception, White's attitude towards the moral and aesthetic standards of suburbia was very much in tune with the cultural milieu of post-war Australia. The year

¹⁴⁷ One of the fiercest attackers is, again, R. D. Burns, in three of his articles on what he calls the Australian 'visionary monster' novel.

before the publication of *Riders in the Chariot* the architect Robin Boyd had provoked the 'aesthete's scorn – and, often as not, audiences' guffaws of self-recognition', with *The Australian Ugliness*, a book that probed into the Australian dream of owning a little house in a lower-middle-class suburb.

Boyd contrasts the functionality of the past with the 'featurism' of the 'typical' Australian home of the late fifties. The pastel curtained sun-room, 'plastic dream' table, not to mention '[p]lastic, wall-to-wall burgundy Axminster carpet, reindeer-frosted glass doors, and flights of plaster ducks over converted fireplaces' ¹⁴⁸ he describes could well be located in White's Sarsaparillan homes.

In another field, that of mass media, the suburbanite was also the target of the comedian Barry Humphries, a friend of White's, and an Australian he admired greatly. Humphries's famous television character, Edna Everage, has been defined as the 'embodiment of prurient puritanism and repressive social control, whose career has escalated from housewife to superstar, [...] perhaps the greatest domestic monster of all – a destroyer, responsible for her husband Norm's "dicky prostate", little Kenny's homosexuality and the domestic neurosis suffered by daughter Vamai, "the fattest anorexic in the world."'" ¹⁴⁹

The parallelism with the Mmes Jolley and Flack stands out, even more by the end of the novel. While still extolling the virtues of religion, motherhood and family life, each woman finds out that the other has been indirectly but effectively responsible for the death of her husband not to mention the fact that Mrs Flack has mothered a bastard son and Mrs Jolley has been given the cold shoulder by her children.

Yet, the major villainy of the duo is no doubt their intolerant treatment of alterity, revealed in their opinions on each of the Riders. Mrs Flack's position is condescending when she claims to 'feel sorry for the sick and simple' such as '[t]hat pour soul at Xanadu'. (p. 77) On finding out of Miss Hare's meeting with Dubbo Mrs Jolley expresses all her distaste: 'Pooh! Some dirty abo bloke! I would not have an abo come near me. And in the bush. They are all undesirable persons. And in the bush! You will run into trouble, my lady. Mark my words if I am not right.' (p. 63-4) Neither does she approve of Miss Hare's relationship with Mrs Godbold: 'I would not of thought that a lady like you, of Topnotch Hall, and all, would associate beneath them. Mind you, I do not criticize. It is not my business, is it? Only I cannot truly say I have ever been on any sort of terms with a lady living in a shed.' (p. 64)

¹⁴⁸ Quoted by KIERNAN, Brian. *Perceptions, 1915-1965*. In: HERGENHAN (ed.), pp. 280-1.

White typifies in the Mesdames Jolley and Flack the kind of flag-wavering nationalists he despised so much. The couple think of themselves as 'the voice of Sarsaparilla', '[taking] for granted its right to pass judgement on the human soul, and indulge in a fretfulness of condemnation':

'I would not of thought it would of come to this,' Mrs Flack repeated, 'a stream of foreign migrants pouring into the country, and our boys many of them not yet returned, to say nothing of those with permanent headstones still to be erected overseas. So much for promises and Prime Ministers. Who will feed us, I would like to know, when we are so many mouths over, and foreign mouths, how many of them I did read, but forget the figure.' (p. 211)

That kind of opinion is to reappear in Mrs Flack's phone conversation with her nephew/son Blue, already mentioned above. Her remark 'It was *them* that crucified Our Saviour', (p. 397) works as Himmelfarb's death sentence.

¹⁴⁹ JONES, Dorothy; ANDREWS, Barry. Australian Humour. In: *Ibid.*, p. 70.

The Jewish reffo

Himmelfarb was a worry, because he had to be just right. Of course I had studied Judaism over the last few years, and talked endlessly with Jewish friends, but in the end what helped me most was the fact that throughout my life I have been an outcast myself in one way and another: first a child with what kind of a strange gift nobody knew; then a despised colonial boy in an English public school; finally an artist in horrified Australia – to give you just a few instances. There have also been occasions when anti-Semitism has touched me personally in a mild way: when Manoly and I settled here in Castle Hill the postman of that day would not speak to us, because, we discovered, he thought we were foreign Jews speculating in land (I, if you please, was pretending to be an Australian); again when I once protested against paying over again the fare of somebody who had travelled in the same taxi, the driver stood on the kerb screaming at me: 'Go back to Germany!' (In those days practically any foreigner here was of Jewish extraction, and added to that there was my strange diction which many seemed to find practically incomprehensible.) These little instances do have an influence on one's outlook.

Patrick White, *Letters*, 1961^{xxdiii}

Although White had but an 'adoptive' and temporary relationship with Judaism, the background of Himmelfarb's life in Germany constitutes a detailed portrayal of Jewish culture. The description of Jewish traditions along the novel (among which the *Bar Mitzvah*, the *Succoth*, the *Sabbath*, the wedding ceremonial and ritual clothing), as well as many scattered references to orthodox and Hasidic Jewish practices¹⁵⁰ do not merely add ethnic colour to the narrative, but constitute the backbone for Himmelfarb's characterisation.

Also meaningful is the fact that where the sections assigned to the background of the other Riders are sites of animated critical dispute, if not completely opposite views, Himmelfarb's remains apart as the majority's favourite.¹⁵¹ Mordecai Himmelfarb, born in the

¹⁵⁰ Cf. DELMONTE, Rodolfo. Various Types of Ambiguity in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*. LiNQ, vol. III, nos. 3 & 4, p. 39.

¹⁵¹ Cf. '[T]he most fully developed, the most original and powerful creation in the work, is Himmelfarb, the history and reality of whose Jewish experience are evoked with the most solid and accurate understanding.' WALSH, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Hornsby, N.S.W., George, Allen & Unwin, 1977. p. 54. and 'To some extent the story of Mordecai Himmelfarb possesses what the stories of the other

eighteen-eighties to a family of prosperous merchants, is taken by White to signify the Other both as representative of a historical minority and as an individual split between conflicting worlds.

Young Mordecai experiences his people's Diaspora vicariously – in the 'stream of relatives which poured in suddenly and away', (p. 96) as well as in the letters of his mother to scattered relations in Poland, Rumania, the United States, even China and Ecuador. Later in life he becomes personally involved in his people's predicament with the disappearance of his wife during a Nazi raid in World War II and his own near extermination in the gas chambers and subsequent emigration to Australia as a political refugee.

From early in life Himmelfarb is driven towards opposite directions. His orthodox mother believes that Jewish presence 'might have ensured and hastened redemption for the whole world' (p. 111) and consequently, she 'pray[s] that God will recognize a good Jew' (p. 111) in her son. A rabbi confirms Mordecai's special mission on finding in the boy's forehead the sign of the *zaddik*, one of the thirty-six holy people who 'go secretly about the world, healing, interpreting, doing their good deeds' in each generation. (p. 155) With that Himmelfarb's messianic position becomes established and is later reinforced by several people of his acquaintance.

His father, however, 'a worldly Jew of liberal tastes' (p. 97) who later in life is converted to Christianity, wishes only that 'the world should recognize a good man' (p. 111) in Mordecai and is overjoyed when the latter reveals an exceptional intellectuality. From the age of ten the boy distinguishes himself for his aptitude with Hebrew, soon extended to Greek, Latin, French and English. Having become especially interested in English literature he is accepted by Oxford University for a doctorate and is soon appointed to a readership in English at the University of Bienenstadt.

White was always a defender of intuitive as opposed to intellectual knowledge, and Himmelfarb comes to illustrate those beliefs. His intellectuality comes together with the vanity and arrogance that deviate him from his ancestral faith. The 'spiritual amnesia' of his early adulthood destines him to 'bite the dust', (p. 101) the fate of every Jew taken by pride, as Mordecai has been taught by his mentor, Cantor Katzmänn.

After serving as a volunteer in World War I and being awarded several medals for bravery, Himmelfarb marries Reha Liebmann, the daughter of a Jewish printer. By the

three visionaries lack, namely, an authentically created historical context for the anguish and alienation of

next world war, having become too engrossed in his own professional success and ego-centred life, despite his friend's constant warnings, he ignores the gravity of anti-semitic feelings in Germany and the risk he is imposing on his family by remaining in the country.

On the fateful day of the Nazi raid to Himmelfarb's ghetto, it is apparently a coincidence that the Jew saves his own skin by paying a visit to a gentile acquaintance, Konrad Stauffer. Only after details of his escape with the Stauffers' help have been arranged does he remember Reha. Himmelfarb hurries home but it is too late: she has already been taken and is never seen again. After some weeks hidden in his friends' country property, Himmelfarb, blaming himself for his wife's end, goes to the police and is taken to a concentration camp.

Friedensdorf is the first of the hells he must go through. The rationality with which the Nazi treat Jewish extermination is shockingly opposed to the moments of uncertainty, terror, or pathetic hope that Himmelfarb witnesses in his companions in the collective sheds, train, and admission areas to the gas chambers. The protagonist, however, is saved almost miraculously on being assigned as a corpse collector just before his Jewish workmates instigate a mutiny that sets the whole camp in flames.

His travels in Palestine and immigration to Australia revive the myth of the wandering Jew, that who feels compelled to retell his story again and again, as he explains to Miss Hare under the plum tree:

'If we should continue to meet,' the Jew was saying, 'and I revert to the occasion when I betrayed my wife, and all of us, for that matter, you must forgive me. It is always at the back of my mind. Because a moment can become eternity, depending on what it contains. And so I still find myself running away, down the street, towards the asylum of my friend's house. I still reject what I do not always have the strength to suffer. When all of them had put their trust on me. It was I, you know, on whom they were depending to redeem their sins.' (p. 154)

Suffering, another recurrent Whitean theme, has brought him back to faith and away from rationalism and pride, the 'intellect' which, he believes, 'has failed us'. (p. 198) After several self-inflicted menial jobs, the old professor finds himself piercing holes in a metal plate at Brighta Bicycle Lamps Factory, at Barranugli, a 'barren and ugly' district of Sydney.

The establishment is owned by Harry Rosetree. But where Himmelfarb chooses exile as an ultimate signifier of his ethnic identity and a chance to expiate his former errors,

for the Rosetrees emigration represents their opportunity to abandon Judaism without too much opposition. Yet it does not seem that through the Rosetrees White is condemning religious dissidence as an evil in itself. The real harm lies in the Rosetree's attempt to forsake Jewishness because it has become too cumbersome, and in their conversion to ruthless materialism, instead.

Their choice of Catholicism is not spontaneous, but hastily accomplished for the sake of convenience. Still, from time to time '[t]here in the dark of their texture-brick shell, surrounded by the mechanical objects of value, Shirl and Harry Rosetree were changed mercilessly back into Shulamith and Haïm Rosenbaum.' Discomfort does not cease with sleep '[f]or Haïm would again be peddling Eisenwaren, and as frequently compelled to take to his heels through the villages of sleep; and Shulamith, for all the dreamy validity of her little Cross, would suffer her grandmother, that gaunt, yellow woman, to call her home down the pot-holed street, announcing that the stars were out, and the Bride had already come.' (p. 209)

Himmelfarb realises it is his mission to bring out those carefully suppressed feelings. On the Seder night, in which, traditionally, Jews leave their front doors open and receive a stranger for dinner, he suddenly senses he must play the part of the Rosetrees' visitor. His train trip to Rosetree's district is carried with Jewish symbology (which expresses Himmelfarb's hope) and Australian satire (that points at his failure): 'Journeys implied a promise, as he had been taught, and known, but never dared accept. A promise that he would not dare, yet envisage. Only an address, which he had heard discussed at smoke-o, of the Home Beautiful, the promised house. In Persimon Street, Paradise East. So he clung to that promise. He nursed it all the way in the obviously festive train.' (p. 382)

The reception is, indeed, cold; Shirl hides the chicken soup and Harry leaves the Jew alone with the excuse that he must water his shrubs. This is done not because he takes to gardening, but '[b]ecause Mr Rosetree had learnt what was done in the suburb in which he happened to be living for the time being.' (p. 387) For the Rosetrees obeisance to Jewish rituals must now be masked as nostalgia or substituted by mechanical hobbies sanctioned by the community.

The reversal of values in which the Rosetrees have become involved is once more reflected and contrasted in the character's conceptions of 'home'. Himmelfarb keeps his few belongings – mostly worshipping objects and a few pieces of old furniture – in a derelict house. That is his means of *living* his Jewish homelessness, a fact that, he believes, 'history

has proved'. His dwelling is deliberately 'almost a booth [...] which the wind may blow down, when one has closed the door for the last time, and moved on to another part of the desert', (p. 301) pointing at the ephemeral nature of matter as opposed to the eternity of the spirit.

Rosetree has long lost contact with the history of his people and, as a consequence, their spirituality. Moving house, for him, has become a matter of land speculation:

Rosetrees lived at 15 Persimon Street, Paradise East, in a texture-brick home – city water, no sewerage, but their own septic. Telephone, of course. Who could get through the morning without a telephone? It was already quite a good address, and would improve, but then Rosetrees would probably move on, to realize on the land. Because, what was land – such nasty, sandy, scrubby stuff – if not an investment? All around the texture-brick home, Mrs Rosetree listened mornings to the gumtrees thudding down. And all around, the homes were going up. The brick homes. (p. 207)

His fortune has been built up on the meaningless, low-paid labour of his workers and that is why his factory is a modern version of Hell:

[T]hrough another door [Himmelfarb] could look down into the infernal pit in which the Brighta Lamps were cut and put together with an excessive casualness and the maximum of noise. The machinery was going round and round, and in and out, and up and down, with such a battering and nattering, though in one corner it slugged and glugged with a kind of oily guile, and through a doorway which opened on to a small, wet, concrete yard, in which an almost naked youth in rubber boots officiated with contempt, it hissed and pissed at times with an intensity that conveyed hatred through the whole shuddering establishment. (p. 200)

The workers responsible for the mass production of 'Brighta Lamps', 'Boronia Geometry Sets', 'the Flannel-Flower Bobby Pins', and 'My Own Butterfly Clips', (p. 375) become the participants in a demoniac, if monotonous ritual:

Ladies sat at their assembly tray, and repeated with dainty skill the single act they would be called upon to perform. Or eased their plastic teeth. Or shifted gum. Or patted the metal clips with which their heads were stuck for Friday night. There were girls, too, their studied eyebrows sulking over what they had to suffer. And gentlemen in singlets, who stood with their hands on their hips, or rolled limp-looking cigarettes, or consulted the sporting page, and even, when it was absolutely necessary, condescended to lean forward and take part in some mechanical ritual which still demanded their presence. (p. 200)

Brighta Lamps Factory is thus a suitable setting for the happenings of Good Friday's eve. It is one of White's most controversial passages, probably because it so boldly challenges the nationalist writers' view of Australia. In the bush 'mateship' had meant men

idealistically standing by each other to get over the adversities of Australian nature. White chose to dig up a much less noble aspect of bush nationalism, the fact that egalitarianism included only certain classes of whites, downgrading or overlooking ethnic and religious difference. In White's suburban hell the Lucky Sevens group led by Blue – driven by money (they have just won the lottery), tediousness, booze and xenophobia – get together to put up a mock crucifixion of a Jewish 'reffer'.

The processions that go past the factory just before the scene and mingle along their way – a funereal service and a circus parade – attach ambivalent meanings to Himmelfarb's crucifixion.

First, it becomes clear that, despite the brutality of the act itself, the scene is a kind of vaudeville spectacle. Analogy with the crucifixion of Christ is farcical rather than accurate. Chanting 'Go home to Germany' (p. 409) the workers, following the Lucky Sevens, drag Himmelfarb to the factory's patio, where his clothes are ripped, he is bashed out and tied up to a shabby jacaranda stump. In Xanadu, Miss Hare sees the marble shudder and crack and in her shed Mrs Godbold irons white sheets like those in which 'the women [...] had received the body of their Lord.' (p. 411) Hanging from the tree, Himmelfarb is thrown an orange and spat on the face, while Rosetree makes a Pilatean retreat to the telephone, turning his back on the happenings.

When finally Mr Theobalds, the factory's foreman, comes to Himmelfarb's rescue, he attributes the episode to Australian wit: 'Remember,' Ernie Theobalds continued, 'we have a sense of humour, and when the boys start to horse around, it is that that is gettin' the better of 'em. They can't resist a joke. Even when a man is full of beer, you will find the old sense of humour hard at work underneath. It has to play a joke. See? No offence can be taken when a joke is intended.' (p. 417) Himmelfarb stumbles home and is looked after by Mrs Godbold and Miss Hare, while Dubbo, watching the scene from the window, composes his Deposition painting, featuring Himmelfarb as Christ and Mrs Godbold and Miss Hare as the first and second Marys. The analogy is complete by Himmelfarb's death on Good Friday, diagnosed with heart failure.

But the whole episode has upset critics a lot more than its parodic nature and very emphasised 'contrived' character would have us believe. This happens because, besides its pastiche side it implies the appalling fact that Himmelfarb survives the Holocaust only to be annihilated by xenophobia in the hands of a gang of Australian thugs.

Himmelfarb stands in the meeting point between what would soon be deemed 'one of the most successful long-distance movements of people in recorded history'¹⁵² and the protests of those who have wanted to keep Australia 'pure'¹⁵³ which at the time the novel was written caused waves of hostilities towards Jews, and, later, towards 'Mediterraneans', Slavs, the Lebanese, Turks, the Vietnamese, and Asians in general. White's message is clear – and very disturbing – in denouncing, in its very beginning, a darker side to what would become Australia's much advertised and cherished multicultural structure.

Invisible man

He is, they tell me, the one surviving speaker of his tongue. Half a century back, when he was a boy, the last of his people were massacred. The language, one of hundreds (why make a fuss?) died with them. Only not quite. For all his lifetime this man has spoken it, if only to himself. The words, the great system of sound and silence (for all languages, even the simplest, are a great and complex system) are locked up now in his heavy skull, behind the folds of the black brow (hence my scholarly interest), in the mouth with its stained teeth and fat, rather pink tongue. It is alive still in the man's silence, a whole alternative universe, since the world as we know it is in the last resort the words through which we imagine and name it; and when he narrows his eyes, and grins and says 'Yes, boss, you wanna see me?', it is not breathed out.

David Malouf, 'The Only Speaker of His Tongue', 1985

xxxiv

While Himmelfarb is the Other deprived of Europe Dubbo is the Other deprived by Europe.¹⁵⁴ Fictional as it may be,¹⁵⁵ Dubbo's characterisation, like Himmelfarb's, is by no

¹⁵² BLAINEY, Australia... p. 19.

¹⁵³ WALSH, Richard. Australia Observed. *Daedalus*, p. 427.

¹⁵⁴ McLAREN, John. The Recovery of Europe in Post-Colonial Fiction. In: McGAW, William (ed.). *Inventing Countries: Essays in Post-Colonial Literature*. Wollongong, N.S.W.: SPALCLALS, Department of English, University of Wollongong, 1987. pp. 18-9.

¹⁵⁵ To Adam Shoemaker, '[t]he portrayal of Dubbo again evinces White's singular imaginative power, for the character is, according to the author, entirely an imaginative creation. When asked in an interview if the persona of Alf Dubbo was based in any sense upon a living individual, White replied, "No, not at all. I've only known one or two Aborigines in my life. The inspiration came purely from my own head... I don't know what Aborigines think of my books."' SHOEMAKER, Adam. *Black Words White*

means fortuitous, but historically endorsed. Both men represent the position of ethnic minorities in crucial moments of their history. While in Europe the Nazi were attempting to eradicate difference through mass extermination, in Australia much the same was happening, albeit less radically and in inverse mode, through a policy of Aboriginal assimilation.

That policy started in 1908 when an Aboriginal Act was approved in Australia, determining that any half-caste aboriginal child could be taken from their parents to be 'assimilated' into white society. Thousands of children, between the 1920's and the 1970's, were taken away from their families to be brought up in Mission Homes or such like institutions. Besides the emotional damage caused by the break-up of numerous families, the Act is behind recent land-right controversies. Legally, many of those children, today adults, have been deprived of a piece of land because they have totally lost contact with their original communities and are thus unable to prove affiliation to the country.¹⁵⁶

Through Dubbo, White denounced the destruction or undermining of ancient Aboriginal practices sanctioned by the Act, that was to lead to the current state of affairs. The little ancestral knowledge Dubbo still has survives intuitively, despite his Europeanised upbringing and the fact that the elements that would have played a decisive part in his life as an Aborigine have been distorted by white intervention. The river that so much attracts him as a boy for its foliage and pleasantly shaped stones, is also a meeting point for prostituted Aboriginal women. At dusk

[b]lack gins would begin to congregate along the bank, some in clothes which the white women had cast off, others in flash dresses from the stores, which splashed their flowers upon the dark earth, as the gins lay giggling and anticipating. Who would pick them? There were usually white youths hanging around, and older drunks, all with money on them, and a bottle or two. (p. 312)

The scene recalls the circumstances of his own origins. Born in a reserve to a 'gin' and an unknown white father, Dubbo is taken at the age of nine by Reverend Calderon who intends to make the boy the subject of his 'Great Experiment' in assimilation. 'On little Alf Dubbo, the parson decided, he would lavish all he could: fatherly love, and spiritual

Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988. St. Lucia (Qld): University of Queensland Press: 1989. p. 95. Simon During, on the other hand, sees the same fact as deprecating: 'It is relevant to note that, as late as the early 1960s, according to David Marr, he had never met an Aborigine. [...] For him native peoples were victims but not agents: and a sure sign of this is that they were wholly available to be imagined by the great white writer.' DURING, p. 30.

¹⁵⁶ ZINN, Christopher. Aboriginal children torn from their mothers seek justice. *The Guardian Weekly*. London: Oct. 16, 1994.

guidance, to say nothing of Latin verbs, and the dates of battles.' (p. 313) The project fails when the Rector cannot contain his homosexual inclinations towards the boy and is caught in the act by his sister, Mrs Pask. It is Dubbo, though, who receives all the blame, being banished by Mrs Pask.

Despite its fictionalised details, Dubbo's background is clearly stepped on factual reality. Critics who find Dubbo's characterisation, unlike Himmelfarb's, lacking 'an authentically created historical context to justify the anguish and alienation of the character'¹⁵⁷ may be ignoring the consequences of the assimilation policy and downgrading the seriousness of British dispossession of Aboriginal lands.

Another (and a more relevant) shortcoming is that White does not show as much of Aboriginal culture as he does of Judaism. This is in part justifiable by the fact that in the 1960's Aboriginal Studies had not acquired the amplitude they have today and reliable accounts on Aboriginal life were scarce. Although it was not until the 1970's, with *A Fringe of Leaves*, that White took the first step towards a closer contact with an Aborigine, his poignant depiction of Dubbo's crises of identity shows that White was very sensitive to the cause of native Australians.

For the whites Dubbo is 'a brute that no decent man would touch, only with a broom'. (p. 309) His white half is conveniently forgotten: 'Who[...] would not have expected laziness from the bastard of an old black gin out at the Reserve? It did not occur to the critics, of course, that the boy might have inherited his vice from some Irish ancestor. Propriety alone made them reduce Alf's Irish ancestors to the mythical status of the Great Snake.' (p. 314)

As for his own people, Dubbo avoids them, since he has acquired some white manners, 'a certain delicacy with cutlery [...] together with a general niceness or squeamishness of behaviour' (p. 383).

Being too rough for the whites but too gentle for the blacks, Dubbo perceives his mind as a pool where two fish live in permanent struggle. Of those two fish, it is the Aboriginal one that sends him 'bush', getting rid of his shoes on the way, barefoot as it was the habit of his ancestors. It is the white fish, though, that reminds him that he must run away. 'There was always the possibility that he might be collected for some crime he began to suspect he had committed, or confined to a reserve, or shut up at a mission, to satisfy the

¹⁵⁷ COLMER, *Riders...*, p. 21.

social conscience, or to ensure the salvation of souls that were in the running for it.' (p. 340-41)

As with other ancient Aboriginal customs, 'going bush' and 'walkabout'¹⁵⁸ can be accomplished only figuratively and ironically now. At first Dubbo roams around country towns and stations, or the outskirts of big cities, where he prefers the rubbish dumps. When he finally makes for Sydney, he sleeps in parks and then in squalid rooms, rented from landladies 'sufficiently low, and hopeful, and predatory, to accept an abo.' (p. 342)

During this period he is lonely except for a couple of outcasts like himself, who offer him both solidarity and treachery. Mrs Spice, a bottle collector, shares with him her tent in a rubbish dump but also contaminates him with syphilis. Hannah is the prostitute who rents him a room and sees that he receives medical treatment, though she sells his precious paintings against his will.

Such places and people provide a sad contrast to the nomadic Aboriginal traditions and approach to life seen in Chapter One.

The very name 'Dubbo' – which can be read as the combination of the words 'dumb' and 'abo' – points at Dubbo's marginal position, as well as the main peculiarity of his character. 'Never communicative, he retired into the scrub of half-thoughts, amongst the cruel rocks of obsession.' (p. 340) Dubbo is voiceless in terms of standard dialogue most of the time. He grows up to be a silent figure because his references, cultural and personal, have been wrenched from him early in life, replaced by obsolete knowledge and moralistic concepts. Mrs Pask, who deems herself as his art teacher, is horrified at what she sees as his obscene paintings and forbids the boy to use oils.

Yet, Dubbo's silence is only metaphorical. He is an artist, who communicates (and disturbs) through his art. The absence of paint does not impair him from exerting his artistic gift. Where he does not speak the narrative voice provides the details of his mostly visual, expressionistically conceived thoughts. In a rubbish dump, after having been expelled by Mrs Pask

he would lie on an old mattress, where its overflow of springs and stuffing allowed, and dream of paintings which circumstances prevented him temporarily from doing. He was painting all the time. Except in paint, of course. In these new pictures which his mind created, the bodies of men were of old springs and rubber, equally, with the hair bursting out of them, and

¹⁵⁸ 'Walkabout' and 'go bush' are Australianisms that derive from the Aboriginal practice of spending a period of time away from home, wandering in the bush. TURNER, G. W. *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand*. London: Longman, 1972. p. 203.

sometimes a rusty rabbit-trap for jaws. He would paint the souls inside the bodies, because Mr Calderon had told him all about the souls. Often he would paint them in the shape of unopened tins – of soup, or asparagus, or some such – but pretty battered, and the contents all fermented, waiting to burst out in answer to a nail. He would snooze and compose. (p. 336)

Painting becomes the central objective of his life and the need to buy the raw-materials for his work leads him to perform several odd jobs, preferably those which do not involve speaking. The first time he talks to Himmelfarb at Brighta Bicycle Lamps Factory, the latter is amazed: 'Then the black fellow did something extraordinary. He spoke.' (p. 350)

But when Dubbo does speak, it is in a surprising variety of norms and registers, a capacity he brings from his childhood, in which, in his 'gentle, imitating voice' (p. 314) he had tried to persuade Reverend Calderon that he did not need to learn Latin verbs.

Dubbo has but one closer contact with each of the other iluminatti and speaks to them only once. He first appears in all his dignity, set against a natural background – the scrub around Xanadu. His exceptional perception of nature stands out in the few words he exchanges with Miss Hare, asserting, against all odds, that the latter is standing in a bog. A few minutes after his departure 'the water did come in over the tops of Miss Hare's shoes.' (p. 63)

In his only encounter with Mrs Godbold, during his 'mission of love' (actually a visit to a brothel) he is at his most talkative, loquacity and sarcasm having been aroused by liquor. As he has a purple bruise on the forehead, vomit-smeared pants and from time to time spits blood, he does not hesitate to reveal: 'I owe everything to the Reverend Timothy Calderon, and his sister, Mrs Pask'. (p. 313) This includes this eloquent speech:

'Okay, Mrs Khalil. I will sing and dance for you instead.'

'If you will allow me,' he added, very reasonable. 'And even if you cut up rough. Because I am compelled to.'

Many of the words were borrowed, but those could have been the cheaper ones. A certain gravely cultivated tone and assembly of educated phrases were what, it seemed, came natural to him. [...] His eyes were fixed obsessively on some distant standard of honesty and precision. He would never quite lose sight of that – he made it clear – and it was what infuriated some of his audience most. (p. 313)

Mrs Godbold is among the watchers and Dubbo's sarcasm gives way to tenderness, when, having collapsed, he is being nursed by the good lady. She is one of the few people who listens to him with attention, and for the occasion his speech changes completely. Now the tone is gentle and full of happy reminiscences of the past. The mock

standard norm and formal register of the previous passage become a spontaneous account of nostalgic memories:

'When the frosts were over, the Reverend Calderon used to take us down along with the river, and Mrs Pask would bring a basket. We used to picnic on the banks. But they would soon be wondering why they had come. I could see that all right. Mrs Pask would begin to remember daffodils. I could see through anything on those days in early spring. I used to roam around on my own when I got tired of sitting with the whites. I would look into holes in the earth. I would feel the real leaves again. Once I came across a nest of red hornets. Hahhh!' He laughed. 'I soon shot off, like I had found wings myself! And seven red-hot needles in me!' (p. 318)

Next, after having repeatedly observed Himmelfarb at the factory, where Dubbo sweeps the floor, the 'Abo' and the Jew finally meet in the lavatory of the factory, where the two men share their opinion of the bible. Dubbo proves an earnest reader, though not for the reasons that had been imposed on him by his mentor. The final reunion of the four Riders is only possible through Dubbo's view of the Chariot. That is, in fact, Dubbo's appropriation of a Frenchman's painting he had found in a book 'into his own terms of motion, and forms partly transcendental, partly evolved from his struggle with daily becoming, and experience of suffering': (p. 342)

One figure might have been done in marble, massive, white inviolable. A second was conceived in wire, with a star inside the cage, and a crown of barbed wire. The wind was ruffling the harsh, fox-coloured coat of the third, flattening the pig's-snout, while the human eye reflected all that was ever likely to happen. The fourth was constructed of bleeding twigs and spattered leaves, but the head could have been a whirling spectrum. (p. 458)

White's Aboriginal protagonist provides one more example of the utter controversy that his work invariably arises. J. J. Healy has seen the novelist's initiative of including an Aborigine as one of the elected as being an indication of his 'peace with Australia, with himself in Australia.' For him Alf is 'the vehicle for an integrated conception of man in Australia, embracing black and white, innocent and guilty, past and present.'¹⁵⁹ During, on the other hand, has accused White of being unable to 'imagine a postcolonial Australia' a fact that would be implicit in his 'failure to absorb the consequences of settlement for indigenous peoples.'¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ HEALY, J. J. *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia: 1770-1975*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1978. p. 204.

¹⁶⁰ DURING, p. 29.

In fact it does not seem that through Dubbo White is expressing his belief in the possibility of some kind of 'intercultural harmony' in Australia.¹⁶¹ Quite on the contrary, the only people who really see him are three other outcasts. With Dubbo's death, the last vestiges of him, his paintings, are auctioned for a few shillings to then disappear and 'if not destroyed when they ceased to give the buyers a laugh, have still to be discovered.' (p. 461)

If Healy's idealistic praise does not convince, neither does During's accusation of indifference, which disqualifies White as a true post-colonial writer. As seen above, Dubbo's crises of identity imply clearly White's strong feelings in relation to the British treatment of Aboriginal Otherness. Two of the main features in Dubbo's characterisation – his speechlessness and the multiplicity of voices he effects in his few dialogues – are especially signifying of Dubbo's post-colonial displacement.

Dubbo's silences are important in themselves because they are charged with meaning, 'for those who care to receive it'. Himmelfarb very well defines his 'non-relationship' with Dubbo as something 'solid' yet 'unratified', 'silent' yet 'eloquent'. (p. 309) Voicelessness is a recurrent post-colonial metaphor of the subject 'gagged'¹⁶² by the imposition of English together with a whole set of foreign values on his world.

The English book, as Homi Bhabha has affirmed, is among the 'signs taken for wonders' – the main emblem of the Empire 'as an insignia of colonial authority and a signifier of colonial desire and discipline'¹⁶³ The great Public Library Dubbo sometimes stops by to look at books becomes thus very significant. Reading does not come easily for Dubbo: 'All the readers had found what they had been looking for, the black man noticed with envy. But he was not altogether surprised; words had always been the natural weapons of Whites. Only he was defenceless. Only he would be looking around.' (p. 342) And yet, the words of his oppressors will also become weapons in his mouth.

In the case of native peoples in settler colonies that silence becomes literal as well as metaphorical, due to the extinction of their original tongues. But while on the one hand Dubbo is doubly silenced, on the other he is also a kind of linguistic chameleon, able to adapt

¹⁶¹ SHOEMAKER, p. 97.

¹⁶² ASHCROFT et al., *The Empire...*, p. 84.

¹⁶³ BHABHA, Homi. Signs Taken for Wonders. In: ASHCROFT et al. (eds.). *Reader...*, p. 29.

his discourse according to the circumstances. This reminds us of the 'mimicry' pointed out by Bhabha and alluded by so many post-colonial critics.¹⁶⁴

Mimicry, as Ashcroft et al. observe, can imply collusion with the centre when it emerges 'from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed' and when it causes 'those from the periphery to immerse themselves in the imported culture, denying their origins in an attempt to become "more English than the English"'¹⁶⁵ (something similar to the Rosetrees' attitude towards Australia).

In Dubbo's case, what Bhabha calls the 'sly civility'¹⁶⁶ of the colonised does not characterise his complicity but his very means of contesting colonial authority. He adopts, for example, his mentor's own language and modulation of voice to protest against the education that has been imposed on him. Later in life he learns to use that language with causticity as well, to call attention to his normally invisible or undesired figure: at Mrs Khalil's place he deliberately uses a variation of the standard norm that is exaggerated and out of context to disturb the audience.

And however, Dubbo is not always a bitter figure. With the other Riders what we see is that the European language is used to express his own Aboriginal knowledge, some nostalgic events of his past and the biblical vision he shares with them. Dubbo has been made mute and invisible, but remains nonetheless as a spokesperson of his people's plight.

A doubtful saint

I am coming to believe, not in God, but a Divine Presence of which Jesus, the Jewish prophets, the Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi and Co. are the more comprehensible manifestations. This presence controls us but only to a certain degree: life is what we, its components, make of it. Hence the existence of megalomaniac politicians, dictators, mafia millionaires, greedy landlords, rapists, murderers, self-obsessed spouses within the same scheme which embraces the Teresas, St. John of the Cross, Thomas Merton, and others who continue to speak to us out of the historic waxwork-museum – all these along with the anonymous who lift us from the gutters, wiping the vomit from our lips, who comfort us as our limbs lie

¹⁶⁴ Cf. PARRY, Benita. Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse.; SHARPE, Jenny. Figures of Colonial Resistance; GRIFFITHS, Gareth. The Myth of Authenticity. In: ASHCROFT et al. (eds.). *Reader*. pp. 41; 100; 240.

¹⁶⁵ ASHCROFT et. al. *The Empire...*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁶ Expression quoted by SHARPE, Jenny. *Figures...* p. 101.

paralysed on the pavement, feed us within their limited means, and close our eyes – these humble everyday saints created for our consolation by the same mysterious universal Presence ignored, cursed, derided, or intermittently worshipped by the human race.

Patrick White, 'Credo', 1988 ^{xxxv}

Mrs Godbold's life is totally devoted to the Other, in the broadest possible sense of the word (i.e. anyone who is not the self). Plump and fertile, mother of six daughters, she takes in washing and tends all the Riders and several of the minor characters in their states of sickness or despair. For Miss Hare

Mrs Godbold had become and indeed remained the most positive evidence of good. Physically she was too massive, and to some no doubt displeasing: too coarse, too flat of face, thick-armed, big of breast, waxy-skinned, the large pores opened by the steam from her copper. But nobody could deny Mrs Godbold her breadth of brow. She wore her hair in thick and glistening coils, and her eyes were a steady grey.

As for existence, that was endless. She knew by heart the grey hours when the world evolves, and would only rest a while to enjoy the evening star. Strangled by the arms of a weaned child, she was seldom it seemed without a second baby greedy at her breast, and a third impatient in her body. She would scrub, wash, bake, mend, and drag her husband from floor to bed when, of an evening, he had fallen down. (p. 66).

White's interest for Jungian psychology has often drawn critics to relate Mrs Godbold to the archetype of the Magna Mater. The antecedents to her all-inclusive and sometimes overwhelming motherly tendencies (at one stage, after having been severely bashed by her husband she goes to a whorehouse after him) are in her past in the fen countryside of England. Being the eldest child of a large family, still as a young girl she takes over the mother's place to help her widowed father. The death of a younger brother while under her care in the hay fields is the major episode of her youth and already implies the enormous capacity for physical and emotional endurance she will be known for:

She was holding in her hands the crushed melon that had been her brother's head. In the dying field.

Several people ran to help. And on the way. But it was she, of course, who had to carry her brother. It was not very far, her blurry mouth explained. From that field. To the outskirts of the town. She was strong, but her thoughts were tearing as she carried the body of her brother. (p. 238)

The incident is followed closely by her father's second marriage. Feeling usurped of her position, Ruth decides to emigrate to Australia. These Freudian overtones, ironic in

their obviousness,¹⁶⁷ also explain her role as a modern saint. By working as a maid in several wealthy houses in Sydney, and particularly in the Chalmers-Robinsons', her final position, she pursues atonement for the sins of too much love for her father and negligence towards her dead brother.

Critics that condemn White for his elitism and supposed hatred of middle-class do not take into account the satirical arrows that he launches with impartial incisiveness at all social classes. Through the Chalmers-Robinsons White exposes the money-oriented marriage, exceeding narcissism and shallow religiousness of a high society couple. The 'classy' socialites are ridiculed in much the same way as the 'unfashionable' Sarsaparillans. Mrs Chalmers-Robinson and her friends wear monkey furs and fill their time with

luncheons, and [...] dinners, but preferably, [...] luncheons, for there the wives were without their husbands, and their minds could move more nimbly divested of weight: wives who had stupid husbands were in a position to be as clever as they wished, whereas stupid wives might now put their stupidity to its fullest, its most profitable use.

It was the period when hostesses were discovering *cuisine*, and introducing to their tables *vol-au-vent*, *sole Véronique*, *beignets au fromage*, and *tournedos Lulu Wattier*, forcing their husbands into clubs, hotels, and even railway stations, in their longing for the stench of corned beef. (p. 245)

All this meaningless grandeur has its working-class counterpoint in Tom Godbold, the man who delivers ice to the mansion, whose values are 'beer, sex and the trots, in that order.' (p. 230) Ruth's association with him is far from an attempt to have a better life or rise in social status. She is aware that life with Tom will be tough but sets herself the mission to 'bear all [his] sins [...] and more.' (p. 263) Her story after their marriage, in which we find Ruth in the beginning of the novel, is summarised in almost fairy-talish style although the events related are far from magical: 'So Ruth Joyner left, and was married that afternoon, and went to live in a shed, temporary like, at Sarsaparilla, and began to bear children, and take in washing.' (p. 270)

It is common sense among critics that, of the four Riders, Mrs Godbold is the most imperfectly realised. One of the reasons appointed is that the character does not 'develop' along the novel,¹⁶⁸ or as someone else puts it, that 'in the woman herself, there is no change worth mentioning'.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ BURROWS, *Archetypes...*, p. 67.

¹⁶⁸ COLMER, *Riders...*, p. 35.

¹⁶⁹ BURROWS, *Archetypes...*, p. 67.

Indeed, that changelessness is stressed by the author himself. By the end of the novel, several years after Himmelfarb's death, the trio Mrs Colquhoun, Mrs Chalmers-Robinson and Mrs Wolfson (the former Mrs Rosetree) reappear in a fashionable restaurant to gossip about the recent course of their lives. They are wearing extravagant hats (one of them is shaped as a volcano that actually emits smoke) to call attention to a 'charity' function. Mrs Godbold, by contrast, is still in her 'temporary' shed behind the post office and

[n]obody could remember having seen her except in some such cotton dress, a cardigan in winter, or the perennial, flared overcoat. Her massive form had never altered, except to grow more massive in its pregnancies.

If she indulged herself at all in her almost vegetable existence, it was to walk a little way down the hill, before the children returned, after the breeze had got up in the south, to walk and look, it seemed incuriously, at the ground, pursued by a galloping cat. (p. 478)

Yet, the deficiencies attributed to the fictional characterisation of Mrs Godbold have little to do with her sameness along the story. As in the Hegelian readings of *The Aunt's Story*, such a view comes to prove, once again, the pervasiveness of academic hegemony. A more consistent and relevant fault lies in the character's position as a practical saint.

Mrs Godbold's goodness comes to work as a blindfold to the individuality of the ones around her. Her positions seem to point dangerously to an essentialist view of humanity, as in this dialogue with guilt-ridden Mr Rosetree when the latter, trying to reclaim Himmelfarb's body for a Jewish funeral, meets the laundress in her shed:

'But he is buried. [...] Like any Christian.'

Mr Rosetree opened the mouth which he hoped most desperately to use.

'But this Himmelfarb was,' he said, 'a Jew.' [...]

'It is the same,' she said. [...] 'Men are the same before they are born. They are the same at birth, perhaps you will agree. It is only the coat they are told to put on that makes them all that different. There are some, of course, who feel they are not suited. They think they will change their coat. But remain the same, in themselves. Only at the end, when everything is taken from them, it seems there was never any need. There are the poor souls, at rest and all naked again, as they were in the beginning. That is how it strikes me, sir. Perhaps you will remember, on thinking it over, that is how Our Lord Himself wished us to see it. (p. 445)

Loving kindness here is extremely close to intolerance. Mrs Godbold becomes a contradictory character as long as she does not conform with the 'philosophy of difference' presented elsewhere. On asserting that all men are identical in nature and on ignoring

completely other systems of belief, Mrs Godbold would be going against the 'goodness-as-difference' design of the novel, thus trespassing the borderline towards evil.

Not only does she fail to soothe someone who is in real need; she also becomes inadvertently (she is unaware of Rosetree's state of mind and does not understand the Jewish religion) but frightfully cruel, contributing to Rosetree's tragic ending. This seems to be confirmed in the fact that before hanging himself in his bathroom Rosetree repeats several times 'It is the same!' (p. 447-8)

After Himmelfarb's death, evil seems to take hold of Sarsaparilla. Miss Hare disappears never to be seen again, Dubbo and his paintings are gone and Xanadu is razed by the bulldozers.

By the end of the novel goodness is preserved in Mrs Godbold (despite the contradictions in her characterisation) and the 'arrows she had shot [...] at the face of darkness, and halted it': (p. 489) her children and the children of her children. Those will inhabit the ugly fibro homes that emerge from the rubble of Xanadu. Quite unexpectedly, White treats the invading suburbia in sympathetic terms: 'the children coming home from school, [...] a row of young cauliflowers, [...] a convalescent woman, who had stepped outside in her dressing-gown to gather a late rose' are all positive 'signs of life.' (p. 490)

The novel ends without clear winners or losers, only everyday manifestations of life that will continually rekindle the battle between opposite forces, a battle once fought by the four, now forgotten, Living Creatures.

Whitean satire

Had a letter yesterday from Mrs Untermeyer. She finds the ending of *Riders* 'contrived'. This seems to be a very fashionable word. But isn't a work of art contrived, unless it is a naturalistic novel, or an academic painting? What about all the great set-pieces of Crucifixions in painting down the ages? What I tried to bring off was a literary, contemporary version of one of those set-pieces which we know so well. 'Contrived' certainly.

Through its heroes, *Riders in the Chariot* presents marginality from the point of view of the marginalised. The novel denounces the conservative social forces which oppress the non-compliant individual at the same time that it celebrates the common humanity that can exist within personal difference.

Unresolved dualities of this kind recur throughout the novel, frustrating the expectations of those readers who seek clear-cut answers. The incidents recounted are constantly oscillating between the spiritual and the pragmatic, the sublime and the grotesque, the poignant and the farcical, the comic and the sinister, the individual and the communal. The mystical theme is set against a background of utterly base and worldly suburbanity.

Although White claimed he did not intend to 'preach sermons'¹⁷⁰ in his works, he wrote fiction having in mind that '[t]here is always the possibility that the book lent, the record played, may lead to communication between human beings.' In the specific case of Australia he believed that '[t]here is the possibility that one may be helping to people a barely inhabited country with a race possessed of understanding.'¹⁷¹ His attempts to actualise that social potentiality of art were intensified along his career, as he became more and more engaged in the affairs of his country and people.

In wishing to promote awareness, White's concern was with forms of art that Linda Hutcheon calls 'extramural', that is, they reach beyond the realm of art per se towards the world. Satire is one of these committed modes of artistic expression, which has an 'ameliorative aim to hold up to ridicule the vices and follies of mankind, with an eye to their correction.'¹⁷²

But satire has its side-effects. Some critics were appalled by what they judged to be White's Anti-Australianess, misanthropy and elitism. When accused of reviewing favourably a play because 'it rubishe[d] Australia', White replied that it had appealed him because 'it rubbishe[d] a lot of the rubbish in Australia.'¹⁷³

D. R. Burns has been one of the novel's most eager attackers, accusing White, in several articles, of 'Austrophobic rage, giving Sydney the full technicolor treatment as a latter day Babylon' and of discovering 'the stuff of condemnation in even what we would have thought were the most innocent of occasions and people' such as the

¹⁷⁰ COLMER, *Patrick...*, p. 14.

¹⁷¹ WHITE, *Prodigal...*, p. 17.

¹⁷² HUTCHEON, p. 43.

¹⁷³ WHITE, Patrick. Patriotism. In: *Speaks...*, p. 139.

‘grandmothers’.¹⁷⁴ Burns also divides the prose employed in the novel into two modes, one celebratory, when referring to the Riders, who are ‘pure, not Australians in the pejorative sense at all’ comprising ‘three sorts of being: Women, Aborigines and Post-War Immigrants’,¹⁷⁵ and another condemnatory ‘which rates the local residents as a mere clutter, no better than the objects they use and so carelessly discard, that “scum of French letters”’.¹⁷⁶

This kind of position is a consequence of the unorthodox weapons the satirist makes use of to achieve his/her goals – irony, paradox, antithesis, parody, colloquialism, anticlimax, obscenity, violence, vividness and exaggeration¹⁷⁷ – which may cause the reader to reject the work as being extravagant, failing to grasp the intentional character of what is so obviously an implausible situation. Or else the reader, as it is the case of D. R. Burns, misses the satirical intent altogether, i.e., the positive design and the commitment to change within the writer’s nastiness, coming to view the latter as an adversary rather than an ally.

Satire is also frequently deemed an inferior form of literature because of its topicality. In White’s case we see that some of the issues he discussed more than thirty years ago – such as Australian identity, the appropriation of European culture, Aboriginal dispossession and crisis of identity, dogmatism and ethnic intolerance – have become, even more actively today, focuses of debate.

The minority groups he was defending in the sixties are today gaining more space to speak for themselves. Recent anthologies, such as *The Oxford Book of Australian Short Stories* now take the care to advertise on their back covers, that they are ‘notable for the quality of writings by Aboriginal and non-Anglo-Saxon contributors, and for the abundance of fine stories from women’,¹⁷⁸ even though the competition is still unequal.¹⁷⁹

Despite its faults, *Riders in the Chariot* still has much to say about the position of the Other in Australia.

¹⁷⁴ BURNS, D. R. Australian Fiction versus Austrophobia. *Overland*, no. 90, December, 1982. p. 51.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁶ *Id.* The Elitist..., p. 69.

¹⁷⁷ HIGHET, Gilbert. *The Anatomy of Satire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962. pp. 18-19.

¹⁷⁸ WILDING, Michael (ed.). *The Oxford Book of Australian Short Stories*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995.

¹⁷⁹ Especially in the case of Aboriginal-descendant authors, who appear only twice among the forty-nine authors. Cf. GUNEW.

Chapter Five

***A Fringe of Leaves:* STAGES OF ALTERITY**

The Eliza Fraser Myth

In the Australian consciousness Fraser Island [...] has become a symbol of the possible ways in which Australians may relate to the land, its earlier inhabitants and its convict history, and to each other.

Elizabeth Perkins, 'Escape with a Convict', 1977^{xxxvii}

By the time the 'Great Australian Emptiness' came to be ingrained in the Australian imagination, the vast extension of sea surrounding it had already developed a mythology of its own. An English Newspaper in 1787 viewed the project of the convict settlement in the antipodes with sarcasm. The opinion was that two-thirds of the convicts would reach no other land than 'the bottom of the Sea.'¹⁸⁰

Of the many accounts of sinking ships along the Australian coast, the episode of the *Stirling Castle* is one of the most widely mythologised, due to the unexpected direction the events would take and the hearsay cloud in which they were soon immersed.

In 1836 the English vessel commanded by Captain Fraser was sailing home from Van Diemen's Land (the name given by its Dutch 'discoverers' to the colony that was to become the State of Tasmania) when she hit a reef and started to sink fast. Two longboats set off towards the virtually unexplored coast of Queensland, one of them reaching the island that today bears the Captain's name.

The weeks spent in the sea had been calamitous in themselves, for some members of the crew – including the Captain – became severely sick, others died, and Eliza Fraser, the Captain's wife, gave birth to a stillborn child. On reaching land the feeling of relief lasted but a few hours. In their clumsy attempt to negotiate with the local inhabitants, the shipwrecks were captured and eventually parted. Although Mrs Fraser came to witness the death of

¹⁸⁰ Quoted by FROST, Alan. *Perceptions Before 1855*. In: HERGENHAN (ed.), p. 95.

several of the crew, including her husband, her own life was spared – maybe due to the native women’s intervention – and that is how she came to spend around four months among the Kabi people.

However much Mrs Fraser was subjected to forced labour and even physical punishment during her stay, the fact that she was exhibited to other tribes during a corroboree suggests that she must also have achieved some kind of distinguished position among her captors. It was during this festive gathering of tribes that she came across her rescuer. Graham according to some, Bracefell in other versions (or maybe both) was an escaped convict who had long been living among the Aborigines. He agreed to take Mrs Fraser as far as Brisbane, then the Moreton Bay Convict Settlement. In return, his protégée was to intercede on his favour with the settlement authorities.

Showing signs of high mental stress on returning to white society, she never attempted to fulfil her promise, but after some time married another captain, returned to England and ended up her days in a tent telling of ‘savages with blue hair growing from their shoulders in the form of epaulettes’¹⁸¹ and exhibiting her scars for the price of sixpence.

So that, as Jim Davidson concludes, Mrs Fraser was first in promoting her own story to the status of myth. Still in the nineteenth century it was widely publicised in London, taking the form of ballad, pamphlet, magazine article and book. In Sydney it overshadowed other shipwreck accounts for quite a long time and there was even an American volume on the matter.

Apparently, the incident gathered such public appeal for two reasons. On the one hand it caught on puritanical curiosity by insinuating at certain obscenities practised by savages on a ‘virtuous’ Englishwoman. On the other it also carried a strong political message, being effective to justify the necessity of an imperial enterprise ‘in favour’ of those natives too ignorant to accept the benefits of civilisation.¹⁸²

This strong moralising drive is patent in John Curtis’s 1838 ‘historical’ work, *The Shipwreck of the Stirling Castle* in which the author states openly his intention to ‘convey a moral lesson’ through Mrs Fraser’s ordeal. This, according to Robert Dixon is attempted through the magnification of Mrs Fraser’s Christian and feminine virtues, which allow her to

¹⁸¹ DAVIDSON, Jim. Beyond the Fatal Shore: The Mythologization of Mrs Fraser. *Meanjin*, vol. 49, no. 3, p. 450.

¹⁸² Ibid.

survive Hell in the shape of bush (referred to by Curtis as a 'thorny vale'), inhabited by demonic natives who take advantage of her widowhood to increasingly harass her.¹⁸³

After this sudden transition into fame Mrs Fraser became forgotten until the Australian artist Sidney Nolan visited Fraser Island and, between 1947 and 1964, did a long series of Eliza Fraser paintings, which rekindled interest for the episode in the years to come.

In 1969 the Canadian poet and novelist Michael Ondaatje published a long poem, 'The Man with Seven Toes' inspired in Nolan's paintings. The Sydney Opera House was to be inaugurated featuring a 1969 opera on the story with the participation of Nolan himself in the setting and Patrick White (who by then had already the first sketches of *A Fringe of Leaves*) in the libretto. Even though it never came to be performed, two other musicals sprang from the initiative. *Eliza Fraser and the Fatal Shore*, a historical account by Michael Alexander, appeared in 1971, while 1976 marked the boom of Eliza Fraser re-readings, with five works: Tim Burstall's film (transformed into a novel by Keneth Cook) a South African novel, *An Instant in the Wind*, by Andre Brink; the Italian film *Swept Away* by Lina Wertmuller and Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*.

The versatility of these re-readings (the English lady/convict situation adapted into Italian heiress/labourer, Angolan white woman/ANC terrorist, white woman/black slave) and their comparison with the earlier works have encouraged, from the nineteen eighties on, the story to become a favourite starting point for discussions of such topics of contemporary interest as the conflict between coloniser and colonised, myth formation, the constructed character of history and the woman condition.

Of the story's many appropriations White's is perhaps the one that probes deepest into the numerous subtleties that can be found in the relationship between people – 'the cat's cradle of human intercourse' as he put it in 'The Prodigal Son'¹⁸⁴ (when living among the Aborigines his protagonist actually plays at cat's cradle with the children around her). That he could do so is perhaps the reason by which White gave up on the operatic version of the story to go back to his original project; the intricate novel that resulted, turned out nearly four-hundred pages long.

White elaborated a lot on the historical/mythical sources available, changing whatever suited him, but mainly, adding more social universes to the original account to transform it into a careful analysis of the relationship between the Self and the Other in

¹⁸³ DIXON, Robert. Public and Private Voices. In: HERGENHAN (ed.), pp. 133-4.

various unexpected situations. His version gives special emphasis to the inverted mirror function of the antipodean colonies in relation to Britain and to the false moralities and hypocrisies of the British-derived social milieu of the time. It also deals directly with the elements studied in Chapter One as having had a crucial role in shaping Australian identity: inhospitable nature, convict past and Aboriginal peoples.

The first two sections of the novel serve as a kind of prologue, where the reader is launched into the world of many undertones and hidden implications of Victorian 'polite conversation'.

'Shades of meaning'

Now that the moment had arrived, her throat was contracting, bloodless; her heart went *fut fut fut* inside the layers of fur, merino, caoutchouc, and flesh.

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976 xxxviii

Ellen Roxburgh, White's version of Eliza Fraser, enters her own story obliquely. The task of her introduction is masterly bequeathed to a trio of early Sydney dwellers and again it is possible to identify the subtle metafictional character of so many works by White. The novel starts as, having left the Roxburghs to the second leg of their journey home, the Merivales and Miss Scrimshaw exchange impressions on the just-departed couple.

Duty – imposed by old family connections as well as curiosity – rather than sympathy for the Roxburghs has motivated the visit. However, Mrs Merivale must declare her most deep feelings 'for those poor souls in their wretched little tub, and all the miles of tedium an danger between them and what they love.' (p. 10)

Gossip is invested with grandeur as Miss Scrimshaw, taken by sudden sybiline powers, theorises upon the reason for the couple's hurried choice of a ship for their journey, which she suspects to be Mrs Roxburgh's dislike of Garnet Roxburgh, the brother-in-law she has met for the first time in Van Diemen's Land. The scarcity of references on Mrs Roxburgh, except that she is one of the 'dark people'(p. 12) of Cornwall, besides being dangerously silent and a 'mystery', lead them to question Mrs Roxburgh's status as a lady

¹⁸⁴ WHITE, *Prodigal...*, p. 17.

‘born and bred’.(p. 99) Miss Scrimshaw concludes her ‘esoteric confidences’ about her new acquaintance by stating that ‘Mrs Roxburgh could feel life has cheated her out of some ultimate experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer, if need be.’ (p. 17) Intuitions of this kind are going to recur throughout the novel.

Besides presaging the outcome of the events, this opening section also shows very clearly that despite the harshness of the environment, the colony is ruled by a system of social ordering as strict (if not stricter) than the one operating ‘at Home’.

As Mrs Roxburgh does not appear to have either birth or money she is immediately deemed inferior to her rich and traditional husband. She can thus be looked down on by the Merivales, who, although colonials, represent imperial authority in full, Mr Merivale being ‘engaged by the Crown as a surveyor’.(p. 8) Even the penniless and adulating Miss Scrimshaw, patronised by the Merivales due to an ‘Exalted [English] Connection’, and whose ‘duty [is] to agree’, (p. 7) feels in Mrs Roxburgh a safe terrain on which to let go ‘her own voice’, although with no intention to ‘cast aspersions of any kind on any of [the Merivales’] acquaintances’ she is quick to observe.

But the structure of the colony allows for even more refined social distinctions. On their way home Mr Merivale stops by the house of the emancipist Delaney to fetch a leg of pork. Delaney ‘had become finally a man of substance from being engaged in the carrying trade and whatever other gainful ploys nobody was altogether certain’ (p. 16). His wealth accounts for his having something to do with the Merivales, but that does not exempt him of his ‘inferior’ status. Mrs Merivale, who could not commit the indelicacy of disregarding the Roxburghs, now openly refuses to pay the emancipist’s wife a visit, even though her husband reminds her that ‘*/s/he* will be disappointed.’

Both perspectives, Mrs Merivale’s and Delaney’s, are shrewdly presented by the narrative voice, that shifts freely from one point of view to another. When Delaney himself invites Mrs Merivale in, ‘[f]rom her throne [on the carriage] she returned the stare of this preposterous subject, too round-eyed and solemn for the size of the favour he was asking. But the emancipist wasn’t Irish for nothing: foreseeing how he would be received, his mouth had shut in a saucy grin as he reached the end of his proposition.’ (p. 18)

Despite the scorn Delaney inspires in the ladies, his detailed report of the fate of two ‘honest fellers’ killed by the Aborigines unites, momentarily, rulers and ruled against the unruly – those ‘loathsome savages’. (p. 20) The reason for the Aborigines’ behaviour – the whites had harassed their women – although mentioned is not taken into account. The

Aborigines are not worth defending at all, which shows that they stand at the absolute bottom of the Australian social scale.

Through incidents that might be regarded as mere background detail, this 'prologue' deals with all the social strata that will reappear along the novel, as read by the 'respectable' middle class (represented by the Roxburgh brothers, the Merivales, Miss Scrimshaw and later the Moreton Bay settlement commandant and his partisans) but reread and subverted through Ellen's perspective.

White's perspicacity as a social critic is again revealed in section two which refers to the meeting between Roxburghs and Merivales, but now from the perspective of the Roxburghs, for whom it has been no less of a social duty. In the intimacy of their cabin they can talk about the colonial 'women' (not 'ladies', Mr Roxburgh contemptuously remarks) whose 'profession, surely, [is] to scent unhappiness in others.' (p. 23)

And yet, Ellen remembers with a certain satisfaction the envy her shawl has aroused in Mrs Merivale, who, on inspecting the object of her admiration becomes 'a composite of tremulous feathers, discursive fabrics, and barely controlled greed, her glance travelling from the shoulders of the individual she had condescended to patronize, over the intaglio brooch, the bosom (very discreetly here), eventually arriving at the fringe.' (p. 24)

White's precise tone in describing his characters' clothing does suggest a certain legacy from the Victorian novel – which is one of the authorial devices employed to characterise fictionally the historical period in which *A Fringe of Leaves* takes place. What could be taken as a certain frivolity in dealing with detail is in fact – as it was in the Victorian novel – a tool for probing deeper into the psyche of the characters.

Clothes and jewellery, in special, will have a special metaphorical value along the story as Ellen is progressively stripped of her many layers of petticoats and skirts, being reduced to wearing a fringe of leaves around her waist, among which she hides her wedding ring – the last remnant of her previous life which 'bumping against her as she walked, [became] continual source of modest reassurance.' (p. 219) – until finally, she returns to civilisation stark naked.

Ellen's trajectory into the Australian heart of darkness and back is accompanied by a gradual peeling off and adding of layers, physically symbolised by the clothes she wears (or does not wear) in the process. Significantly, for Allan Lawson *A Fringe of Leaves* is exactly 'about the process of discovering more layers, about discovering that there is never an essential central self, but just more and more layers of experience, layers of personality,

layers of temperament, layers of relationship; that nowhere is there something that would make singular sense of that whole, but rather more and more facets.’¹⁸⁵

In the next sections we shall examine some of those layers of meaning as they are revealed along the several stages of alterity the protagonist goes through.

Stage One – ‘A poor farmer’s daughter’

She had heard tell of Ireland, America, and France, but had no unwavering conviction that anything existed beyond Land’s End, and in the other direction, what was referred to as Across the River.

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976^{xxxix}

One significant deviation from the historical event that inspired the novel is that White’s heroine is not the worldly and well-travelled wife of a Captain (Eliza Fraser had been brought up in Sri Lanka), but someone who passes from poverty and isolation to a luxurious but sheltered life.

The episodes of Mrs Roxburgh’s life as Ellen Gluyas are re-enacted in many occasions as she indulges in the ‘self-conducted tour[s] through the back-waters of experience’(p. 24) that make up, for the reader, the protagonist’s past life. Her father was an alcoholic – sometimes given to abusing her physically – while her mother, fragile and sickly, demanded her daughter’s constant attention. Ellen sees herself in the first part of her life as ‘less than a maid: her mother’s drudge and her father’s unpaid hand.’ (p. 172)

Their battered farm has been the whole world for her. While Mrs Fraser had her youth spent in a tropical region as one explanation of her survival, in Ellen’s case it is the Gluyas’s farm that evokes closeness to nature and hard work, experiences that never altogether abandon her as she climbs up socially and help her endure the hardships to come: ‘Poor as it was, moorland to the north where sheep could find a meagre picking, and a southerly patchwork of cultivable fields as compensation, she admitted to herself on days of minimum discouragement that she loved the place which had only ever, to her knowledge, been referred to as Gluya’s.’

Her travels are imaginative ones, fuelled by her father’s tales of the neighbouring Tintagel, a place only a few miles away she will never actually come to visit, although the

¹⁸⁵ LAWSON, *Bound to...*, p. 12.

girl often dreams of a 'god' coming from Ireland to her rescue: 'Her mind's eye watched the ship's prow entering the narrow cove, in a moment of evening sunlight, through a fuzz of hectic summer green.' (p. 45)

Who comes instead is Austin Roxburgh, a summer lodger expecting to benefit from the country air and 'simple farm cooking' but according to her mother '[n]o ordinary lodger. [...] A gentleman of independent means, but poor health [...] scholarly taste' (p. 45-6) and 'an established and respected family'. (p. 66)

Mr Roxburgh is about twenty years older than herself but the relationship between them already assumes the character that will prevail in later life. When Ellen takes him for a walk on a day that promised a storm '[h]er improvidence did not prevent her feeling much older, wiser, than this slanted stick of a gentleman. If the storm did burst upon them, she was strong and jubilant enough to steady the reeling earth, while he, poor man, would most probably break, scattering a dust of dictionary words and useless knowledge. (p. 51)

There is here a hint at the fact that hypochondriac Mr Roxburgh will be another target for White's anti-rationalist feelings. At one stage Ellen comes to notice that her husband does not actually listen to her, being 'too engrossed in his own thoughts, and perhaps always had been' (p. 137) His approach to life and death is purely literary. He has no intimacy with land other than his above-the-average attachment to Virgil's *Georgics* (during the shipwreck he actually goes back to the flooded cabin to fetch the volume). That already suggests the impossibility of his survival in a land that, in his own understanding, represents the frontier of the concept of civilisation.

Stage Two – ‘Improved, but not altogether approved’

So, from living isolated on a poor Cornish farm, Ellen Gluyas entered into temporary purdah in a Gloucestershire mansion...

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976 ^{xi}

With the death of her parents Ellen has no alternative but to accept Austin Roxburgh’s ‘extraordinarily injudicious proposal’ (p. 42) of marriage.

Her doubly subaltern position as woman and working class in the nineteenth century makes it impossible for her to keep the family’s farm. It also introduces the initiation theme into the story, which in different occasions follows the Pygmalion formula. Mr Roxburgh compensates his failure at writing by transforming his wife into ‘his work of art’: ‘This could be the project which might ease the frustration gnawing at him: to create a beautiful, charming, not necessarily intellectual, but socially acceptable companion out of what was only superficially unpromising material.’ (p. 54)

To a certain extent it is possible to draw a parallel between the relationship husband/wife and that of England/Australia. As Hellen Tiffin observes, Australia is an invention of England in the same way that Mrs Roxburgh is a product of Austin’s interests and narcissism.¹⁸⁶

Austin justifies his autocratic position with the theory that ‘the crude lends itself all the better to moulding’, especially in a woman, who has more ‘wax’ than a man and is ‘easily impressed’. (p. 107) The phallogocentrism and eurocentrism in the Western cultural discourses have indeed caused an approximation between different categories of Other and the parallelisms between imperialism and women’s oppression has been discussed fictionally and theoretically by authors such as Jean Rhys, Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood, Sneja Gunew and J. M. Coetzee.

The Other is the one available to be exploited, changed, subjugated: Ellen and Austin’s honeymoon is postponed so that ‘the bride might be initiated without delay into the customs she was expected to adopt’. Little by little Ellen Gluyas, the ‘hoyden’, gives place to

¹⁸⁶ TIFFIN, Helen. Recuperative Strategies in the Post-Colonial Novel. In: McGAW, William (ed.). *Inventing Countries: Essays in Post-Colonial Literature*. Wollongong, N.S.W.: SPACLALS, Department of English, University of Wollongong, 1987. p. 37.

refined Mrs Roxburgh's as she learns how to comply to her husband's and mother-in-law's expectations.

So she 'corrected her speech, and learned to obey certain accepted moral precepts and social rules, most of them as incongruous to her nature as her counterfeit of the Italian hand and her comments on the books with which her husband wished her to persevere.' (p. 71) She is instructed to pray and keep a journal for the sake of character formation, to preside over tea and to keep her feelings at bay.

What at first feels like 'pretending' is converted into a permanent expedient and 'former critics were soon applauding her for observing the conventions they were accustomed to obey.' (p. 66) Applause, however, does not altogether disguise a certain uneasiness. Like her counterpart Eliza Doolittle, she becomes fated to inhabit an in-between world, where it becomes impossible to retreat into her Ellen Gluya's self or to assume Mrs Roxburgh's role in definite terms (a similar identity conflict as faced by settler colonies).

Significantly, Ellen feels that her servants despise her for 'suspect[ing] her of wanting them to re-admit her to a society she had forsworn without sufficient thought for the secrets she was taking with her.' Her new acquaintances, even the most sympathising ones, such as her mother-in-law, find it hard to truly receive her as one of them. Old Mrs Roxburgh 'was convinced that this honest and appealing girl could never be admitted to [her society] except in theory, and her heart began to bleed for her.' (pp. 64-5)

Although Mr Roxburgh – and here his personal attitude has much in common with that of the defenders of imperialism – may rejoice in his altruism for having rescued Ellen from a position of economical and cultural inferiority, what he does is to reinstate his own role in the patriarchal organisation by changing the character of Ellen's submissive female position – from servile daughter to that of the 'solicitous wife to a sickly man':

To please and to protect became Ellen Roxburgh's constant aim; to be accepted by her husband's friends and thus earn his approbation; to show the Roxburghs her gratitude in undemonstrative and undemeaning ways, because anything else embarrassed them. What she would not admit, or only half, was her desire to love her husband in a manner acceptable to both.

Just as she was to learn that death was for Mr Roxburgh a "literary conceit", so she found that his approach to passion had its formal limits. For her part, she longed to, but had never dared, storm those limits and carry him off instead of submitting to his hesitant though loving rectitude. (p. 67)

After the couple have been married for some fifteen years Ellen's repressed sensuality gradually comes to the surface. Not by coincidence, that happens as they approach the 'world of unreason' of a penal colony in the antipodes: 'If she shuddered once or twice, and chafed the gooseflesh out of her arms, it was because she knew she would be led deeper than she would have chosen, and inevitably trapped in what she most loathed.' (p. 70) Very subliminally, here White gives the first clues of Ellen's intuitive identification with the colonial Other – the fallen gentlemen, criminals and 'savages' – all about to play decisive roles in her life.

Stage Three – Exploring depths

Removing the superfluous bonnet and loosening her matted hair, she felt only remotely related to Ellen Roxburgh, or even Ellen Gluyas; she was probably closer to the being her glass could not reveal, nor her powers of perception grasp, but whom she suspected must exist none the less.

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976 ^{xli}

Though her husband defines Van Diemen's Land 'a hard and morally infected country' (p. 73) Ellen has a different perception of the place. Her stay in the colony becomes a period of self-reflection and the starting point for her release from the constraints her marriage has been imposing on her.

The great interest and empathy she feels towards convict life are wrongly interpreted by her brother-in-law as apprehension: '[You] need not fear, or feel embarrassed [...] The authorities keep the wretches suitably employed, and on the whole subdued.' (p. 73)

From the carriage in which Garnet Roxburgh drives them to his property, Ellen watches a group of convicts pushing a cart-load of stones and cannot avoid 'a pang of commiseration through the hardships and indignities suffered during girlhood, but was more intent on avoiding the prisoners' undoubted resentment of the physical ease and peace of mind they must imagine if they were to open their eyes.' (p. 75) Besides reminding her of her own youth and maybe too easy social ascension, these 'human-beasts' prefigure what she is going to go through in a few months' time among the Aborigines.

Soon they arrive at Garnet's property, Dulcet, which is another of the buildings 'that have eaten into the gnarled and aboriginal landscape and become part of it.'¹⁸⁷ Such blatantly unconvincing household names along White's novels – 'Meroë', 'Xanadu', 'Glastonbury' – point, metonymically, at the phenomena of displacement and appropriation inspired by the post-colonial situation.

The denomination 'Dulcet' turns out to be especially ironic considering that the house and sheep station are run mostly by former convicts – or 'miscreants' as Garnet sarcastically refers to them.¹⁸⁸ Ellen witnesses the kind of treatment allotted to those when she accompanies Garnet on one of his daily inspections of the farm, and the landowner, on finding a gap in the fence that surrounds the pastures, abuses two careless shepherds with a whip and threatens to 'set up [his] own private triangle and see [his] own justice done.'

Remembering the cloud of mystery and the taboo that has always involved the reputation of Garnet Roxburgh – from the 'unproved' accusation of forgery that led to his 'emigration', to the allegedly 'accidental' death of his wife in a buggy accident some years before (not to mention Garnet's affair with a married woman Ellen is still to find out) – she writes in her journal:

How much of the miscreant, I wonder, is in Garnet R.? Or in *myself* for that matter? I know that I have lied when necessary and am at times what the truly virtuous call 'hypocritical'. If I am not all good [...] I am not excessively bad. How far is it to the point where one oversteps the bounds? I would like to talk to these miscreants, to satisfy myself, but do not expect I ever will. (p. 79-80)

This kind of feeling of uncertainty, that characterises Ellen (and indeed, every one of White's protagonists) is intensified by her contact with the wilderness around Dulcet. It is as if she could not 'look for assurance, here in a foreign country, in any of those darker myths of place which had dispersed her fears during her Cornish girlhood', (p. 98) although she finds herself greatly attracted towards Australian nature.

So much so that the crucial sex scene between Ellen and Garnet happens among unfamiliar trees, parasite flowers, moss and giant ferns. It is important to notice that Ellen does not deem herself a passive victim of Garnet's seductive powers but regards adultery as 'an experience of sensuality she must have awaited all her life, however inadmissible the

¹⁸⁷ WHITE, *The Aunt's...*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁸ The system resembles in some aspects that of colonial Brazil, in which the male convicts (sometimes actually referred to as 'slaves') are used for heavy outdoor labour while the female convicts act

circumstances in which she had encouraged it.' (p. 103) On looking back at Garnet, she sees him as 'less her seducer than the instrument she had chosen for measuring depths she was tempted to explore.' (p. 104)

Garnet sees his own 'immorality' as a disease Ellen partakes: 'Most of us on this island are infected. [...] You, Ellen, though you are here only by chance, have symptoms of the same disease.[...] You and I would enter hell the glorious way if you could overcome your prudery.' (p. 121-2)

Garnet's cynical acceptance of his own defects and the deterministic quality he ascribes to the element 'place' find a counterpart in Mr Pilcher, the unpleasant second-mate of *Bristol Maid*, the cargo vessel that is hurriedly prepared to accommodate the Roxburghs on their journey back to England. Pilcher tells Mr Roxburgh how the land ahead of them, the Queensland coast, is inhabited 'only [by] dirty blacks [...] and a few poor beggars in stripes who've bolted from one hell to another. The criminals they found out about! That's th'injustice of it. How many of us were never found out?' (p. 134-5) Pilcher's own criminal side is revealed during the shipwreck episode, when he steals Ellen's ring and cuts the rope that links the two longboats together.

Although both Garnet and Pilcher have a certain understanding of the artificially set boundary lines between what is good and evil and the injustice underlying it, they are only partially able to see the Other. Garnet defines himself as an outlaw, although he is unable to level himself with the other convicts. Pilcher identifies with the convicts who have experience 'printed on [their] back[s] in blood' but not with the 'dirty blacks'.

Ellen, by contrast,

did sincerely sympathize with, and had suffered for, those who had been brought to her notice in Van Diemen's Land, but still had to bridge the gulf separating life from their own lives, whether stately rituals conducted behind the brocade curtains of their drawing-room at Cheltenham, or a makeshift, but none the less homely existence in a corner of this draughty little ship. Neither of them had felt the cat, only the silken cords of their own devising with which they tormented each other at intervals. Yet, she believed, she would have borne all, and more, were someone to require it of her. (p. 137)

The passage is again premonitory as Ellen is the one character along the story who aspires to and who will achieve an actual connection with the Other.

as domestic servants – as well as sexual relief – of their master. Ellen senses the jealousy in the young 'miscreant' kitchen-hand assigned to attend to her.

Stage Four – The Australian heart of darkness

We left behind one by one
[...] our civilised
distinctions

and entered a large darkness.

It was our own
ignorance we entered.

I have not come out yet.

My brain gropes nervous
tentacles in the night, sends out
fears hairy as bears,
demands lamps; or waiting

for my shadowy husband, hears
malice in the tree's whispers.

I need wolf's eyes to see
the truth.

I refuse to look in a mirror.

Whether the wilderness is
real or not
depends on who lives there.

Margaret Atwood, *Journals of Susanna Moodie*, 1970
xlii

With the near extinction of native cultures on Fraser Island and elsewhere in Australia, details on Aboriginal life were very scarce at the time White was writing *A Fringe of Leaves*.¹⁸⁹ In order to re-create the Aboriginal community in his novel he spent some time on the island and met Wilf Reeves, a half-caste story-teller interested in the preservation of the oral traditions of the Butchulla People (White was 49 years old and that was the first time he had any close contact with an Aborigine).

Reeves warned White not to trust Curtis's version of the shipwreck, which had been based on Mrs Fraser's sensationalistic reports of physical and moral abuse. The story that circulated among the Aborigines, and that White elaborated on, was one in which the

¹⁸⁹ Preservationists trying to save Fraser Island from mining were having trouble to prove the archaeological value of the place, but with the help of a campaign, to which White himself contributed significantly by providing the funds for archaeological research, the Island was saved. MARR, *Life...*, p. 551.

white group had initially been welcomed as reincarnated spirits and the surviving woman had been accepted in the life of the tribe until she was taken away by some other whites.¹⁹⁰

Details of Aboriginal life in *A Fringe of Leaves* remained 'a feat of White's imagination',¹⁹¹ although not at all romanticised or condescending. The routine of the tribe is actually shown in all its squalid details, from the second-class status attributed to the women to the flea plagues that determine their next nomadic move. And yet, accusations of anti-Aboriginal feelings have not proved consistent.

For one thing, the tone with which he depicts this 'savage' society is not more caustic than what has been allotted to the 'civilised' ones, distinctions that become increasingly more muddled as the novel progresses. Another fact that must be taken into consideration is that the account is not done from the Aboriginal point of view, but from Ellen's – and her judgement must be that of a Victorian woman who never spent enough time with her captors to learn their language, develop closer individual relationships, or understand their life-style in depth.

Even so she is sometimes able to transcend the prejudices of her time, which allows her to enjoy a few moments of genuine happiness among 'her black mentors' and, unlike Eliza Fraser, to form a balanced – sometimes even fond – opinion of them once she is again back in white society.

Moments of bliss happen especially with the tribe's children – who are the first to get over their initial hostility and, at times, behave affectionately towards Ellen. Having lost two babies of her own she on one occasion feels that '[t]he young children might have been hers. She was so extraordinarily content she wished it could have lasted for ever, the two black little bodies united in the sun with her own blackened skin-and-bones.' (p. 230)

One of the things that allows Ellen to survive what at first seems almost unbearable – such as the ritualistic hacking of the prisoner's hair until her scalp is a bloody mass – is her capacity of abstraction. In putting side by side happenings of her several 'lives' she comes to understand that there are no absolute codes of behaviour among human beings.

On first finding herself the target of the Aboriginal women's attention, for example, she sees herself once more as Ellen Gluyas, newly-wed, entering the most unexpected and frightening territory in her life: the drawing-rooms of Cheltenham. Forced labour as child-minder, beast-of-burden, root digger, and opossum hunter and the penalties

¹⁹⁰ MARR, *Life...*, p. 381.

suffered for not performing her duties satisfactorily are but variations of her many obligations as a lady and her husband's frowning face at her efforts at singing or drawing.

Her new reality allows a re-evaluation of her former selves and the great gap existing between Ellen Gluyas and Mrs Roxburgh. Sometimes she feels closer to her Ellen Gluyas self: 'The whole of life by now revolved round the search for food, which her own aggravated hunger made seem the only rational behaviour. It was in any case what she had accepted as the answer to the hard facts of existence before she had been taught the habits and advantages of refinement.' (p. 227)

Suddenly, she finds herself joining in the women's shrieking and hand-clapping when the men return from their hunting expeditions with some big prey. Feasting on some fragments of snakeflesh brings her into a state of euphoria hardly ever felt before in the most intense sexual pleasures of her life. On the other hand, on catching herself imitating the other women's gestures – searching each other's heads for fleas and lice, as well as taking the crushed insects towards her mouth – the image that comes to her mind is, ironically, that of her friend Mrs Daintrey's tea table, 'the Worcester service, the sandwiches filled with crushed walnut and cinnamon butter, and a tea-cake on its doily in the silver dish' (p. 239)

One of Ellen's most significant insights is that she – and the reader – comes to see the Aborigines not so much as evil but as 'practical'. The harsh treatment – mainly the scanty ration of food – they dispense their white 'slave' is determined mostly by their own poverty and permanent struggle to survive.

Yet, periodically Ellen sees herself elevated to the state of 'demi-goddess', being anointed, decorated and stared at as the Aboriginal women's own 'work of art'. This is obviously a re-enactment of her husband's and mother-in-law's previous attitude towards her, although we must be careful to notice the different approaches by which they attempt to manipulate Ellen's otherness.

The very fact that she continues to be slave *and* goddess shows, according to Helen Tiffin, that 'assimilative fixity is not characteristic of the Aboriginal response as it is of the English class system'. Aborigines read the world according to a 'both/and' philosophy, while Europeans tend to label human experience in terms of 'either/or'.¹⁹² This takes us back to the end of *The Aunt's Story* and the multiplication-division/addition-subtraction antagonism involving the outcast and society.

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 551.

On coming across a human bone fallen from a basket, Ellen is led – out of mere hunger – to get over her initial revulsion and to pick it clean. Of all the adversities she faces when living among the Aborigines this inadvertent participation in their cannibal rites is definitely the most disturbing. ‘In the light of Christian morality she must never think of the incident again.’ (p. 244)

Yet, Ellen’s understanding of the Aboriginal ‘both/and’ approach points to a way for putting up with this otherwise maddening experience. She had sensed at the end of the ceremony ‘something akin to the atmosphere surrounding communicants coming out of church looking bland and forgiven after the early service’ (p. 243) and comes to see cannibalism as a variation of the Christian ritual of taking God’s body and blood. The practice also recalls an episode of her childhood, when she had bathed in Saint’s Hya’s pool, ‘its black waters had cleansed her of morbid thoughts and sensual longings, so she could not have explained how tasting flesh from the human thigh-bone in the stillness of a forest morning had nourished not only her animal body but some darker need of the hungry spirit.’ (p. 245)

A new integration with the Australian nature is also achieved after the ingestion of the Aboriginal girl’s flesh. Where at first ‘beauty flaunted a hostile radiance, and the spirits of place were not hers to conjure up’ (p. 222) after the ritual she joins the tribe’s ‘wailing, either of supplication or lament’ and ‘the spirit of the place, the evanescent lake, the faint whisper of stirring trees, took possession of her.’ (p. 246)

Soon after her involuntary participation in the cannibalistic ritual, she finds out that she has been cast away on an island, which hinders her opportunities of escape. White uses the episode to once more tackle the question of the submissive role of the Victorian woman, always guarded against ‘the habit of making important decisions’. The matter had already occurred to Ellen in Van Diemen’s Land, when she wondered ‘what important decision she had ever made, beyond that of accepting her husband’s proposal, and on another occasion, giving way to her unconfessed continence.’ (p. 118)

Now, ‘[i]n her dispiritment and acceptance of her fate, she was glad that her discovery absolved her from making an attempt to escape by following the coast to Moreton Bay. She was immured, not only in the black’s island stronghold, but in that female passivity

¹⁹² TIFFIN, *Recuperative...*, p. 41.

wished upon her at birth and reinforced by marriage with her poor dear Mr Roxburgh.' (p. 237)

But soon the tribe gives signs of preparations for a long journey and '[i]f canoes implied a voyage to the mainland, she would be faced with coming to a decision more positive than any she had hitherto made in a life largely determined by other human beings or God: she must resolve whether to set out on the arduous, and what could be fatal, journey to the settlement at Moreton Bay. (p. 247)

She is again spared the crucial decision by her meeting, during a tribal ceremony, with Jack Chance – whom she takes, at first, for another Aborigine dancing to entertain his fellows – but who is in fact an escapee from the Moreton Bay Settlement.

Stage Five – The saviour-lover

[S]he covered him with her breasts and thighs, lapping him in a passion discovered only in a country of thorns, whips, murderers, thieves, shipwreck, and adulteresses.

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976 xliii

In the escape section of *A Fringe of Leaves* Curtis's image of a 'thorny vale' (which stands for Mrs Fraser's torments in hell) is rescued and subverted by White, to become a setting of physical passion of the most liberating kind between a Victorian lady and an outlaw. As in the previous stages, the climactic moments – which are also the instances of Ellen's life in which she escapes her role of 'virtuous' woman (adultery, cannibalism and now, love affair with a criminal) – happen amidst the Australian wilderness.

During their escape the couple are lead to sleep together under the 'luxurious privacy' (p. 260) of a narrow shelter, and, almost naturally, to satisfy their 'shared hunger' (p. 269). Ellen and Jack inaugurate an unprecedented sensuality in White's novels. Twenty years before, in the first sketches of *A Fringe of Leaves*, the protagonist never surrendered entirely to her rescuer. The change, according to Marr can be attributed to a new self-confidence acquired with the Nobel.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ MARR, *Life...*, p. 553.

The love scene in the lily pond is one of these rare moments in White's fiction where sex and lyricism come together:

[S]he plunged in, and began diving, groping for the roots as she had seen the native women. However clumsy and inexperienced, she was determined to make a contribution by bringing him a meal of lily-roots. [...] After which he slipped in, and was wading towards her as she retreated. It was sad they should destroy such a sheet of lilies, but so it must be if they were to become reunited, and this after all was the purpose of the lake: that they might grasp or reject each other at last, bumping, laughing, falling and rising, swallowing mouthfuls of the muddy water. [...] He caught her by the slippery wrists, and they kissed, and clung, and released each other, and stumbled out. (p. 285)

White's characterisation of his protagonist, like that of his Aborigines, is not at all condescending. The idyllic adventure she lives with Jack is shown in all of its inconsistency, its 'bared, ugly teeth', (p. 119) as Ellen has previously defined her relationship with Garnet. Periodically she must face the old moral precepts ingrained in her, and to consider the impending judgement of civilisation:

By daylight she could hardly think what manner of pact they had made during the hours of darkness. Had love been offered truthfully by either party? Or were they but clinging to a raft in the sea of their common misery? She could remember her panic, a sensual joy (not lust as Garnet Roxburgh had aroused) as well as gratitude for her fellow survivor's presence, kindness, and strength. (p. 271)

The Victorian definition of 'love' – supposed to be 'selfless, never sensual' – has now been put in question. Ellen cannot tell what kind of love has 'restored the youthful skin to her breasts, the hollow in a smooth, leaf-patterned flank; the tendrils of hair singed off ritually by her black mentors were again stirring in the armpits.' (p. 284)

Those doubts are further enhanced by Jack's confession – he has murdered an unfaithful lover in England:

'Do yer believe I was guilty? Eh? [...]
'I believe many have murdered those they love - for less reason.' [...]
'There, Ellen! There! I knew we'd understand each other.'
But did they? Now that they were again lovers he might suspect her of faithlessness, and kill her in the night with his little axe. (p. 291)

In these last days in the bush, especially, Ellen is shown in all her human frailty and her feelings waver constantly between understanding of the Other, physical attraction and repulsion, rage and guilt. At the impending approach of civilisation, Jack becomes more

vulnerable and Ellen, more shrewd. She now walks ahead of her protector and makes her first independent move, by climbing up a tree from where she can see a farm in the distance.

Ellen's almost forgotten role as the widowed and rich Mrs Roxburgh returns ever more powerfully as she considers her arrival with a convict lover: 'And what would others know? [...] Even if the pardoned convict respected the laws of decency, would society think to see her reflected in his eyes, or worse still, the convict in hers?' (p. 296)

Jack solves the impasse by fleeing back into the bush, leaving Ellen immured in guilty feelings.

Further Encounters

'Naked?' The voice was just discernible...

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976 ^{xliv}

The last section of the novel acts as an epilogue and counteracts the prologue by presenting Ellen's reaction on meeting several people who stand for the symbolic order she has left behind. Most of the action takes place within the borders of Moreton Bay convict settlement, which consists a good opportunity for White to deal with the theme of imperial authority.

After Jack returns to the wilderness, Ellen, exhausted and delirious from sunstroke, carries on towards the farm she has observed from the tree and is found by its owner. The time in which she is nursed by the farmer's wife represents a period of comfort and reassurance, as the Oakes remind her of the uncomplicated people of her Ellen Gluyas times.

Soon, however, the official and unofficial preservers of white middle class conduct ratify their presence. The first of them is the garrison's surgeon sent to treat Mrs Roxburgh. His mission, assigned by Captain Lovell, the settlement's highest authority, is to restore the patient to full health as quickly as possible so that she can produce her 'own account of [her] adventures'. (p. 308)

On hearing of her shocking nakedness, the wives of the settlement officers also play their part by organising a complete wardrobe and a proper reception. Miss Scrimshaw, a portent from the past, makes her reappearance as the governess of the Lovell children, also assigned to serve as escort on Ellen's trip to the settlement. On their meeting Ellen is already wearing a sober widow's dress and Miss Scrimshaw brings the finishing touch to respectability: a black bonnet with a veil. Deeply affected by her recent experiences in self-awareness, which she comes to feel as 'a source of embarrassment, even danger', (p. 307) Ellen is grateful for the concealment of 'lights' and 'thoughts' (p. 320) provided by the veil, which symbolically marks her return to white middle-class values.

Yet, the prospect of being transferred to Moreton Bay does not please her – she feels like a prisoner herself and is haunted by the memories of Jack's scar-inscribed back and the accounts of his sufferings – 'Nobody 'as suffered without they bit the dust at Moreton Bay'. (p. 267) But she makes a point in fulfilling her promise towards her rescuer.

More than ever she identifies with the convicts. Her bonds with them are renewed when, from the Commandant's house she hears the distant screams of a convict being punished, and collapses. She insists to see the convicts and stands in their way, even though she is reminded that it is 'no place [...] for a lady': 'she was united in one terrible spasm with this rabble of men, their skins leathery above the unkempt whiskers, eyes glaring with hatred when not blurred by cataracts of grief, hands pared to the bone by hardship. (p. 334)

Like the Aboriginal children, the young Lovells act as a relief from the roughness of the settlement reality with their spontaneous and disinterested curiosity for her 'adventures', providing a high contrast with the tension of Ellen's encounters with the convicts, the Commandant and Mr Pilcher, who turns out to be the only other survivor of the shipwreck.

Captain Lovell's role as the Crown's emissary to maintain law and order is presented (and ridiculed) in his eagerness to write a report on the Roxburgh affair. The Captain shows little concern for Ellen's emotional state and soon after her arrival at the settlement she too comes to be under his jurisdiction: "'Come!' he commanded the prisoner. 'Everybody has been waiting to see you.'" (p. 321)

Historically, the Eliza Fraser affair had served as justification for punitive enterprises against Aborigines.¹⁹⁴ But where Mrs Fraser herself had been (or had been made

¹⁹⁴ DAVIDSON, p. 451.

to look) ready to contribute to the system of imperial control, Ellen is aware of the fact that her experience is going to be appropriated against her captors and rescuer, whom she now must defend.

Although the questioner is eager to hear of the mistreatments inflicted upon her both by the Aborigines and by the escaped convict, Ellen ingeniously refuses to comply with his coaxing. She plays down the horrors she is expected to disclose by affirming that the Aborigines 'were not unkindly – considering they had been fired on. [...] I would say they treated me – reasonably – well. Of course they beat and pinched, and held fire sticks under me, to frighten me into climbing trees for 'possums and maggoty old honey.[...] Oh, I don't blame the blacks!' (p. 327) She also stops herself in time from disclosing the experience of cannibalism – 'probably the most misunderstood and least acceptable feature of otherness in alien peoples'¹⁹⁵ – revealing only that it was 'a kind of communion'. (p. 329)

This is also the moment in which Ellen pleads for Jack Chance's pardon. To which the Captain's answer is at first discouraging:

'Perhaps you do not realize, Mrs Roxburgh, that the man was convicted for the brutal murder of his mistress, herself a slut of the lowest order.'

'Oh, Captain Lovell,' she cried, 'most of us are guilty of brutal acts, if not actual murder. Don't condemn him simply for that. He is a man who has suffered the brutality of life and been broken by it.' (p. 330-1)

This dialogue between them shows clearly the imperial/colonial conflict in the Captain's reducing view as opposed to Ellen's questioning of what is supposed to be the 'natural' organisation of things.

Ellen's brief and very reticent encounter with her fellow-survivor, Mr Pilcher, provides another opportunity for contrasting the dominant discourse and the Other's view. After having presumably gone through the same experiences as Ellen (including cannibalism), Pilcher has lost his previous venom and now dedicates himself totally to religion.

The rough inscriptions in the little unconsecrated chapel built by him, 'GOD IS LOVE', 'in the wretchedest lettering, in dribbled ochre' (p. 352) reminds Ellen of another church, the one in Hobart Town where she had attended Christmas Service.

There the occupant's social rank determined their disposition in the pews: the town's elite in the most prominent ones, and the prisoners at the rear. Above the altar, the

¹⁹⁵ TIFFIN, *Recuperative...*, p. 38.

epitaph in gold: 'HOLY HOLY HOLY LORD GOD OF HOSTS', had filled her with doubt and reluctance as 'the chariots of the hosts were charging through the stone arch towards assured victory' (p. 98) and she found herself to blame for belonging 'to the winning side.' (p. 95)

In this poor chapel, by contrast, she finds relief: 'At last she must have cried herself out: she could not have seen more clearly, down to the cracks in the wooden bench, the bird-droppings in the rudimentary altar. She did not attempt to interpret a peace of mind which had descended on her (she would not have been able to attribute it to prayer or reason) but let the silence enclose her like a beatitude.' (p. 353)

Neither experiences are actually related to fear of god, or any kind of spiritual enlightenment in the strictly religious sense of the word – the Christian habits she had acquired after her marriage never ceased to be mere conventions to indulge her husband and mother-in-law. Ellen's epiphany lies in her painful identification with the 'human rubble' who inhabit the settlement, where she herself feels like another prisoner of conventions, as opposed to her privileged position in the Hobart congregation.

The user is the costume

The Commandant was contained by patience. 'It's by hearing different versions of the same incident that we arrive at the truth, Mrs Roxburgh, in any court.'

'Oh,' she cried, 'I was never in court. Perhaps that's why I was never sure whether I'd arrived at the truth – whatever the incident, Captain Lovell. For all that, I survived.'

Patrick White, *A Fringe of Leaves*, 1976 ^{xlvi}

White's writing is so instigating exactly because it allows the most controversial interpretations, constituting practical evidence that meaning is constructed rather than imbued in the core of the text. The ending of *A Fringe of Leaves* is especially so, prompting three main critical approaches.

Again, as in the *Aunt's Story* in relation to the Hegelian triad, the very structure of *A Fringe of Leaves*, insinuates a certain trajectory of development. The protagonist *seems* to have grown from innocence to maturity, from darkness to light, from fragmentation to

wholeness. Some critics take this as an indication of a happy ending complete with Ellen's imminent marriage to Mr Jevons, the prosperous English businessman she meets on the boat bound for Sydney. Elizabeth Perkins rejoices at Ellen's 'willingness to resume , at the end of the book, her feminine role as a wife.'¹⁹⁶ Virginia Carruthers says she 'would like to believe' in the possibility of Ellen Gluyas Roxburgh Jevons settling in the colony with her new husband, where they would experience total matrimonial fulfilment.¹⁹⁷

On the other hand, the very act of being undressed and again dressed up suggests a movement towards the core of the self but also a return to the former state, so much so that other critics consider the ending as a 'deflation' of Ellen's 'epiphanies'. John Weigel believes that she would be all too 'willing to resume to many of the hypocrisies of her pre-jungle life. Her ordeals enlightned her but did not redeem her.'¹⁹⁸

A third mode of reading draws its material from Ellen's conflicts and the constant overlapping of her several lives, rather than from a final state of happiness, enlightenment or assimilation. At significant occasions along the story, as we have seen, Ellen's Cornish past comes back inadvertently not only in her memories but also in her speech and manners. It would be too simplistic, however, to imagine, as some critics do, that those signify 'her authentic self break[ing] through the acquired social façade' or even worse, that '[t]he novel portrays civilization as only a narrow fringe that distinguishes natural, more elemental forces beneath'.¹⁹⁹

Ellen's selves cannot be so easily dissociated from each other, as it is impossible to do the neat separation of layers, to come to the core of humanity, to dissociate civilisation from savagery or the user from the costume. The conclusion she comes to is very similar to that of Clifford Geertz in relation to cultural relativity (see Chapter One).

As Tiffin sees it, the protagonist's future, up to the end of the novel, and hence, to the end of her existence, remains 'fraught with undefined contingencies'. (p. 354) The main strength of the novel, from a post-colonial perspective, lies exactly in the possibilities it opens by not offering a traditional closure : 'Instead of arriving at a general statement about experience, "human nature", the way language operates, post-colonial texts point towards a conceptual critical framework within which points of view and their surrounding codes are

¹⁹⁶ PERKINS, Elizabeth. *Escape With a Convict: Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves*. *Meanjin*, vol. 36, no. 2, p. 267.

¹⁹⁷ CARRUTHERS, Virginia Kirby- Smith. Patrick White's Improbable Iseult: Living Legend in *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, June, 1992. p. 43.

¹⁹⁸ WEIGEL, p. 115.

not fixed or static, but are instead the subject of constant negotiation between differing orders.²⁰⁰

The conclusion is a non-conclusion, because truth is never absolute, as Ellen finds out soon after her marriage: 'Her parents in the past, and now her husband and mother-in-law, expected more of her than they themselves were prepared or knew how to demonstrate. It had pained and puzzled her as a child, until as a girl she too began accepting that there are conventions in truth as in anything else.' (p. 66)

¹⁹⁹ COLMER, *Patrick...*, p. 76.

²⁰⁰ TIFFIN, *Recuperative...*, p. 40.

Conclusion

Defying the dingoes

Above all, I was determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary, dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism. On the whole, the world has been convinced, only here, at the present moment, the dingoes are howling unmercifully.

Patrick White, 'The Prodigal Son', 1958 ^{xlvi}

Australian colonisation can be represented as Britain's writing on the huge scroll-shaped blank space that was once Terra Australis Incognita.

In the imperial mind Australia came to fulfil ambivalent roles. On the one hand it was radically distinct from Europe – Britain's inverse not only in geographical position but also in its vastness, emptiness, dryness, bizarre nature and 'primitive' inhabitants.

But at the same time, the antipodean Other also had to share some 'common essence' with the European Self, so that it could represent the possibilities of enriching, redeeming and even bringing out Britain's most cherished virtues – i.e., its capacity to organise the chaos.

Caught between its otherness and its potentiality, Australia becomes a permanently *unrealisable* 'new Britannia in another world.' That basic ambivalence imbues the dominant discourse with the elements for its own subversion.

Early nationalist currents, such as the *Bulletin* writers of the 1890's, believe in the possibility of constructing an identity unspoiled by the centre's interference.

Decolonisation,²⁰¹ however, does not happen with the establishment of a national tradition which merely inverts the parameters of imperial value. Rather than the erasure of European 'texts', decolonisation implies their rereading and rewriting. Post-colonial texts are those which insert themselves into the façade of closure, certainty or conclusiveness of the dominant discourse, to lay bare the latter's ambivalence.

²⁰¹ By this term I do not mean the possibility of a 'return' to a pre-colonial state, but the slackening of the centre's power over the colony.

On these terms – and in spite of the controversy around the matter – it is possible to affirm the post-colonial character of Patrick White's work. His most important contribution to Australian literature is maybe the fact that he subverts the notion of the literary text as a tool to express some essential Australianess. Taking as a starting point Australia's history of alterity and his own personal experiences as a white settler descendant, an exile, an artist and a homosexual, he transforms his writings into metonyms of the post-colonial dilemma.

One of his tools is stylistic. As Veronica Brady observes, White 'undermines the nexus between words and things, making words rather ends in themselves and leaving things to float free, opaque and strangely uncontrolled by the human mind.'²⁰² The amazing diversity of readings available (and possible) around White's work is a measure of the extent to which his style brings out the arbitrariness between signifier and signified.

Among the several techniques of formal experimentation adopted by White are discontinuity, fragmentation, uncertainty, fluidity, slips in time, stream of consciousness, parody, allegory, pastiche, literary games, defected expectations, incoherence, obscurity, surreal elements, recurring imagery, juxtaposition, free association, figures of speech, irony, *grammatical deviations* and *metafictionality*.

White's novels discuss alterity through their narrative mode as well as through their themes.

Another way of disestabilising the traditions received from the centre and from nationalist groups is through the celebration of difference and the elevation of the different to the status of hero. Instead of showing characters who, even when isolated from society, are still part of a group – men fighting the Australian environment for some common design – White's protagonists are always 'above the ordinary' people who do not fit in the usual class distinctions and are involved in quests that, apparently, concern only themselves.

Yet, individuality in White is not equivalent to self-centredness. As a rule, his loners stand for some kind of conflict between society and the minorities: Himmelfarb and Dubbo belong to ethnic outnumbered groups; Theodora Goodman and Mary Hare are middle-aged spinsters too readily labelled as mad; Ellen Gluyas/Roxburgh feels all the constraints of being a woman in the nineteenth century.

The Other as viewed by White is both an individual and a social being.

²⁰² BRADY, *Making...*, p. 34.

Still a third of White's post-colonial trumps is his subversion of the notions of fictional and historical narratives and their rather arbitrary separations. His plots refuse to follow pre-established canons or to keep strictly to one or the other side. The three novels presented in this work, for example, are, in some way, reinterpretations of the narrative of quest formula. Theodora Goodman's odyssey does not lead to unity but to multiplicity. The ending of *Riders in the Chariot* points to the permanent continuity of the battle between good and evil, rather than the victory of virtue over sin. Instead of coming to a conclusion about her essential 'soul', Ellen Roxburgh attains self-awareness by finding within herself innumerable layers of meaning that overlap and mix together.

White's more open incursions into history, especially in *A Fringe of Leaves* and *Riders in the Chariot* are critical statements on available historical sources. His version of Eliza Fraser's adventures exposes 'both the fictive nature of European history and the ways in which fictions, specifically those dealing with alterity, appropriate, annihilate or marginalize competing perspectives to produce authoritative and apparently objective historical accounts.'²⁰³

In *Riders in the Chariot* he chooses to discuss history, especially that of the dispossessed, from a synchronic perspective, as it was happening around him. White's satirical outlook, ridiculing some cherished Australian institutions, rendered him severe responses from readers and critics who did not realise the extent of his social commitment.

White's meaning is slippery, his characters are always 'less certain', his perception of history, controversial and his endings, open.

Attaching some kind of final significance to White's writing would go against those premises. This work has attempted, instead, to show White's novels as sites of struggle, formal and thematic, reflecting specific social and historical moments and the interconnection between national, personal and fictional alterities.

²⁰³ TIFFIN, *Recuperative....*, p. 33.

NOTES ON EPIGRAPHS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

-
- ⁱ HUGHES, Robert. Multi-Culti and Its Discontents. In: *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. p. 96.
- ⁱⁱ BISHOP, Elizabeth. *The Complete Poems*. New York: The Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995. p. 3.
- ⁱⁱⁱ CHILDERS, Joseph.; HENTZI, Gary (eds.). *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995. p. 216.
- ^{iv} As quoted by RYAN, Simon. Inscribing the Emptiness: Cartography, exploration and the construction of Australia. In: TIFFIN, Chris; LAWSON, Alan. (eds.). *De-scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and textuality*. London: Routledge, 1994. p. 121.
- ^v Featured in *Ibid*, p. 118.
- ^{vi} BARNARD, Marjorie. Dry Spell. In: WILDING, Michael (ed.). *The Oxford Book of Australian Short Stories*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995. p. 70.
- ^{vii} Quoted by CROSBY, Alfred W. Ecological Imperialism. In: ASHCROFT et al. (eds.). *The Post Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995. p. 420.
- ^{viii} GILBERT, Kevin. *The Blackside: 'People Are Legends' and Other Poems*. Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990. p. 25.
- ^{ix} ANDERSON, Ethel. Juliet McCree is Accused of Gluttony. In: WILDING (ed.), p. 48.
- ^x CLARKE, Marcus. Human Repetends. In: *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ^{xi} Quoted by INGLIS, Ken. *Australian Colonists*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993. p. 50.
- ^{xii} LAWSON, Henry. The Bush Undertaker. In: STEWART, Douglas (ed.). *Short Stories of Australia: The Lawson Tradition*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1967. p. 15.
- ^{xiii} SANTIAGO, Silviano. O Entre-Lugar do Discurso Latino-Americano. In: Id., *Uma Literatura nos Trópicos*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1978. pp. 22-3.
- ^{xiv} JUNQUEIRA, Eduardo. Farra com sotaque. *Veja*, n. 48, 27/11/96. p. 98.
- ^{xv} WHITE, Patrick. The Prodigal Son. In: Id. *Patrick White Speaks*. London: Johnathan Cape, 1990. p. 14.
- ^{xvi} SAID, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994. p. xviii.
- ^{xvii} Featured in MARR, Patrick White: A Life. Sydney, Vintage, 1992. picture no. 79.
- ^{xviii} Personal correspondence, on 13.v. 95.
- ^{xix} WHITE, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait*. London: Penguin, 1981. p. 1.
- ^{xx} MARR, David (ed.). *Patrick White: Letters*. Sydney: Random House, 1994. p. 288.
- ^{xxi} WHITE, Patrick. In the Making. In: *Speaks...*, p. 23.
- ^{xxii} MARR, David. *Patrick White: A Life*. Sydney: Vintage, 1995. p. 12
- ^{xxiii} WHITE, Patrick. *The Aunt's Story*. London: Vintage, 1994. pp. 11-2.
- ^{xxiv} Id. *Flaws...*, pp. 143-4.
- ^{xxv} Id. *Aunt's...*, p. 12.
- ^{xxvi} *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8.
- ^{xxvii} FOUCAULT, Michel. *A História da Loucura na Idade Clássica*. Trad. José T. Coelho Netto. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1995. p. 133.
- ^{xxviii} WHITE, *Aunt's...* p. 284.
- ^{xxix} Quoted in SEMMLER, Clement. Waltzing Matilda. In: Id. *The Banjo of the Bush: The Life and Times of A. B. "Banjo" Paterson*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, ?, pp. 93-95.
- ^{xxx} MARR, *Letters...* pp. 107-8.
- ^{xxxi} WHITE, Patrick. *Riders in the Chariot*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961. p. 7.
- ^{xxxii} *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- ^{xxxiii} MARR (ed.), *Letters...*, p. 180.
- ^{xxxiv} MALOUF, David. The Only Speaker of his tongue. In: WILDING (ed.), p. 207.
- ^{xxxv} WHITE, Patrick. Credo. In: *Speaks...*, p. 197.
- ^{xxxvi} MARR (ed.), *Letters...* p. 204.
- ^{xxxvii} PERKINS, Elizabeth. Escape with a convict: Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Meanjin*, vol. 36, no. 2, June 1977. p. 266.

-
- xxxviii WHITE, Patrick. *A Fringe of Leaves*. London: Penguin, 1977. p. 16.
- xxxix Ibid, p. 47.
- xl Ibid, p. 64.
- xli Ibid, p. 82.
- xlii ATWOOD, Margaret. *Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970. p. 8.
- xliii WHITE, *Fringe...*, p. 280.
- xliv Ibid, p. 301.
- xlvi Ibid, p. 326.
- xlvii Id., *Prodigal...*, p. 16.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABORÍGINES da Austrália (Australia's Twilight of the Dreamtime). Pittsburgh: The National Geographic Society: Vídeo Arte do Brasil, 1988. 1 videocassette (60 min.): dubl., color.; 12 mm. VHS NTSC.
- ARGYLE, Barry. *Patrick White*. London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967.
- ASHCROFT, Bill; GRIFFITHS, Gareth; TIFFIN, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- (eds.). *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- BESTON, John, B. Love and Sex in a Staid Spinster: *The Aunt's Story*. *Quadrant*, vol. XV, no. 5, p. 22-27, October, 1971.
- BISHOP, Elizabeth. *The Complete Poems*. New York: The Noonday Press/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.
- BJÖRKSTEN, Ingmar. *Patrick White: A General Introduction*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1976.
- BLAINEY, Geoffrey. Australia: A Bird's-Eye View. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 1-28, Winter, 1985.
- *A Shorter History of Australia*. Melbourne: Mandarin, 1995.
- BLISS, Carolyn. A Radiant Cacophony: Patrick White, The International Legacy. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 5-8. June, 1992.
- Style and Technique: The Discipline of Failure. In: Ibid. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: McMillan, 1986. pp. 184-207.
- BOHEMER, Elleke. *Colonial and Post-Colonial Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- BRADY, Veronica. *A Fringe of Leaves: Civilization by the Skin of Our Own Teeth*. *Southerly*, vol. 37, no. 2, pp. 123-140, June, 1977.
- Patrick White. In: BENSON, E.; CONOLLY, L. W. (eds.). *Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. vol. 2. London: Routledge, 1994. pp. 1651-2.
- A Properly Appointed Humanism: Australian Culture and the Aborigines in Patrick

-
- White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Westerly*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 61-68, June, 1983.
- Making Things Appear: Patrick White & the Politics of Modernism. *Island Magazine*, no. 52, pp. 32-37, Spring, 1992.
- Patrick White and Literary Criticism. *Australian Book Review*, no. 133, pp. 7-10, August, 1991.
- BRISSENDEN, R. F. *Patrick White*. London: Longmans, Green & CO, 1966.
- BUCKLEY, Vincent. The Novels of Patrick White. In: DUTTON, Geoffrey.(ed.) *The Literature of Australia*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1964. pp. 413-426.
- BURNS, D.R. 'Visionary Monsters' Versus 'Contained Accounts': Self Contradiction in Australian Fiction Since 1960. *Southerly*, vol. 53, no. 2, pp. 146-153, June, 1993.
- The Elitist Case for Equality: Patrick White's Pioneering 'Visionary Monster' Novel. *Overland*, no. 125, pp. 68-75, Summer, 1991.
- Australian Fiction versus Austrophobia. *Overland*, no. 90, pp. 44-51, December, 1982.
- BURROWS, J.F. Archetypes and Stereotypes: *Riders in the Chariot*. In: WILKES, G.A. (ed.). *Ten Essays on Patrick White*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970. pp. 47-71.
- 'Jardin Exotique': the Central Phase of *The Aunt's Story*. In: *Ibid.*, pp. 85-108.
- CARRUTHERS, Virginia Kirby-Smith. Patrick White's Improbable Iseult: Living Legend in *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 37-43, June, 1992.
- CHELLAPPAN, K.; PAVITHRA, N. E. The Romantic and Mystic Elements in *Voss* and *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Journal of Australian Literature* (India) vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 35-42, June, 1990.
- CHILDERS, Joseph; HENTZI, Gary (eds.). *The Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- CLARK, Manning. Heroes. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 57-84, Winter, 1985.
- COLMER, John. *Patrick White*. New York: Methuen, 1984.
- *Riders in the Chariot*. Port Melbourne, Vic.: Edward Arnold, 1978.
- DANIEL, Helen. The Aborigine in Australian Fiction: Stereotype or Archetype? *Modern Fiction Studies*. vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 45-60, Spring, 1981.
- DAVIDSON, Jim. Beyond the Fatal Shore: The Mythologization of Mrs Fraser. *Meanjin*, vol. 49, no. 3, pp. 449-461, Spring, 1990.
- DAVIE, Michael. The Fraying of the Rope. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 369-394, Winter, 1985.

-
- DELMONTE, Rodolfo. Various Types of Ambiguity in Patrick White's *Riders in the Chariot*. *LiNQ*, vol. III, no. 3 & 4, pp. 37-52, 1974.
- DURING, Simon. *Patrick White*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- DUTTON, Geoffrey. *The Literature of Australia*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1964.
- EDGECOMBE, Rodney S. *Vision and Style in Patrick White*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- Patrick White's Style - Again. *Antipodes*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 83-87, November, 1987.
- The Weeds and Gardens in *Riders in The Chariot*. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 25-31, June, 1992.
- FIGUEIREDO, Eurídice (ed.). *Gragoatá*. Niterói: EDUFF, 1996.
- FOUCAULT, Michel. *História da Loucura na Idade Clássica*. Trad. José T. Coelho Netto. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1995.
- GEERTZ, Clifford. The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man. In: *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books Inc., 1973. pp. 33-54.
- GILBERT, Kevin. *The Blackside: 'People are Legends' and Other Poems*. Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990.
- GUNEW, Sneja. Denaturalizing Cultural Nationalisms: Multicultural Readings of 'Australia.' In: BHABHA, Homi (ed.). *Nation and Narration*. New York: Routledge, 1994. pp. 99-120.
- HANSSON, Karin. *The Warped Universe: A Study of Imagery and Structure in Seven Novels by Patrick White*. Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1984.
- HEALY, J. J. *Literature and the Aborigine in Australia: 1770 - 1975*. St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1978.
- HERGENHAN, Laurie. (ed.). *The Penguin New Literary History of Australia/Australian Literary Studies* (special issue), vol. 13, no. 4, October, 1988.
- HERRING, Thelma. Odyssey of a Spinster: A Study of *The Aunt's Story*. In: WILKES, G. A. (ed.) *Ten Essays on Patrick White*. Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1970. pp. 3-20.
- HESELTINE, Harry. (ed.). *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse*. Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin, 1972.
- HOLLOWAY, John. Patrick White. In: FORD, Boris (ed.). *The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*. vol. 8. London: Penguin, 1990. pp. 147-163.
- HIGHET, Gilbert. *The Anatomy of Satire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

-
- HUGHES, Robert. *Culture of Complaint: The Fraying of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- HUMPHREY, Robert. *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel*. Los Angeles: ?, 1954.
- HUTCHEON, Linda. *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- HUTCHINSON, Peter. *Games Authors Play*. New York: Methuen, 1983.
- INGLIS, Ken. *Australian Colonists*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993.
- JONES, Joseph; JONES, Johana. Postwar: The Moderns. In: Ibid. *Australian Fiction*. Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1983. pp. 87-127.
- JOSE, Nicholas. Cultural Identity. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 311-342, Winter, 1985.
- JUNQUEIRA, Eduardo. Farra com sotaque. *Veja*, n. 48, 27/11/96. p. 98.
- KRAMER, Leonie. (ed.). *The Oxford History of Australian Literature*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1981.
- LAWSON, Alan. Bound to Dis-integrate: Narrative and Interpretation in *The Aunt's Story*. *Antipodes*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 9-15. June, 1992.
- (ed.). *Patrick White: Selected Writings*. St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1994.
- LAING, R. D. *O Eu Dividido: Estudo Existencial da Sanidade e da Loucura*. Trad. Áurea B. Weissenberg. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1991.
- *A Política da Experiência e a Ave-do-Paraíso*. Trad. Áurea B. Weissenberg. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1974.
- LODGE, David. *The Modes of Modern Writing*. London: Edward Arnold, 1983.
- MAES-JELINEK, Hena. Fictional Breakthrough and the Unveiling of 'Unspeakable Rites' in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* and Wilson Harris's *Yurokon*. *Kunapipi*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 33-43, 1980.
- MACFARLANE, James. The Mind of Modernism. In: BRADBURY, Malcolm & MCFARLANE, James (eds.). *Modernism: 1890-1930*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986. pp. 71-93.
- MALOUF, David. Something of a Miracle. *Australian Book Review*, no. 133. pp. 4-6.

August, 1991.

MARR, David. *Patrick White: A Life*. Sydney: Vintage, 1992.

— (ed.). *Patrick White: Letters*. Sydney: Random House, 1994.

McLAREN, John. The Recovery of Europe in Post-Colonial Fiction. In: McGAW, William (ed.). *Inventing Countries: Essays in Post-Colonial Literature*. Wollongong, N.S.W.: SPACLALS, Department of English, University of Wollongong, 1987, pp. 1-26.

MOORE, Susan. The Quest for Wholeness in *Riders in the Chariot*. *Southerly*, XXXV, pp. 50-67, 1975.

MORLEY, Patricia. A Modern Odyssey. In: Ibid. *The Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*. Toronto: McGill & Queen's University Press, 1972. pp. 63-84.

— The Quaternity. In: Ibid. *The Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*. Toronto: McGill & Queen's University Press, 1972. pp. 153-183.

OSBORNE, Charles (ed.). *Australian Stories of Today*. London: Faber & Faber, 1961.

PERKINS, Elizabeth. Escape With a Convict: Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Meanjin*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 265-269. June, 1977.

POLLARD, Arthur. *Satire*. London: Methuen, 1970.

PRIDEAUX, Helen. The Experimental Novel in Australia: Part 2: Patrick White. *Prospect*, vol. 3, no. 3, pp. 20-22. 1960.

REID, Ian. The Landscape of Narration in *The Aunt's Story*. In: EADEN, P.R. ; MARES, F.H. (eds.). *Mapped But Not Known: The Australian Landscape of Imagination*. Netley, S.A.: Wakefield Press, 1986. pp. 210-218.

SAID, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage, 1994.

SANTIAGO, Silviano. O Entre-Lugar do Discurso Latino Americano. In: *Uma Literatura nos Trópicos*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1978.

SARKAR, Subhas. Patrick White: The Quest for Human Values. *Journal of Australian Literature* (India), vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 43-47, 1990.

SCHAFFER, Kay. Australian Mythologies: The Eliza Fraser Story and Constructions of the Feminine in Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* and Sidney Nolan's 'Elisa Fraser' Paintings. *Kunapipi*, vol 11, no. 2, pp. 1-15, 1989.

SEMMLER, Clement. Waltzing Matilda. In: Id. *The Banjo of the Bush: The Life and Times of A. B. "Banjo" Paterson*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press. ? pp. 88-101.

-
- SHAPCOTT, Thomas W. (ed.). *Australian Poetry Now*. Melbourne: Sun Books, 1970.
- SHOEMAKER, Adam. *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929-1988*. St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1989.
- SINCLAIR, John (ed.). *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*. London: Harper Collins, 1994.
- SINGH, Kirpal. The Fiend of Motion: Theodora Goodman in Patrick White's *The Aunt's Story*. *Quadrant*, vol. XIX, no. 9, pp. 90-92, December, 1975.
- SMITH, Angela. Any Gnawing Things in the House?: Epigraph to *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Australian Book Review*. no. 133, pp.10-11, August, 1991.
- SMITH, Graeme Kinross. *Australian Writers*. Melbourne: Nelson, 1980. Pp. 297-307.
- SONTAG, Susan. *Sob o Signo de Saturno*. Trad. Ana M. Capovilla & Albino Poli Jr. Porto Alegre: L & PM, 1986.
- STEWART, Douglas.(ed.). *Short Stories of Australia: The Lawson Tradition*. Melbourne: Angus and Robertson, 1967.
- THOMPSON, J. et al. (eds.). *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Verse*. Adelaide: Penguin, 1968.
- TIFFIN, Chris; LAWSON, Alan (ed.). *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- TIFFIN, Helen. Recuperative Strategies in the Post-Colonial Novel. In: McGAW, William (ed.). *Inventing Countries: Essays in Post-Colonial Literature*. Wollongong, N.S.W.: SPACLALS, Department of English, University of Wollongong, 1987. pp. 27-45.
- TURNER, G. W. *The English Language in Australia and New Zealand*. London: Longman, 1972.
- WALSH, Richard. Australia Observed. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 421-438, Winter, 1985.
- WALSH, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Hornsby, N.S.W., George Allen & Unwin, 1977.
- WARD, Jill. Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves*. *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 19, no. 3. pp. 77- 81.
- WANG, Ban. "T" on the Run: Crisis of Identity in *Mrs Dalloway*. *Modern Fictional Studies*, vol. 38, no. 1. Spring, 1992. p. 187.
- WEIGEL, John. *Patrick White*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.

WHITE, Patrick. *The Aunt's Story*. London: Vintage, 1994.

— *The Burnt Ones*. London: Vintage, 1995.

— *The Cockatoos*. London: Penguin, 1978.

— *The Eye of the Storm*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975.

— *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait*. London: Penguin, 1983.

— *A Fringe of Leaves*. London: Penguin, 1977.

— *Memoirs of Many in One*. London: Penguin, 1987.

— *Patrick White Speaks*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.

— *Riders in the Chariot*. Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1961.

— *The Solid Mandala*. London: Vintage, 1995.

— *The Tree of Man*. London: Vintage, 1994.

— *The Twyborn Affair*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1979.

— *The Vivisector*. London: Vintage, 1994.

— *Voss*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960.

WILDING, Michael (ed.). *Australian Short Stories*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995.

WOOLF, Virginia. *Mrs Dalloway*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971.

— *To the Lighthouse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin and The Hogarth Press, 1969.

WRIGHT, Judith. Landscape and Dreaming. *Daedalus*, vol. 114, no. 1, pp. 29-56, Winter, 1985.

— Patrick White and the Story of Australia. In: Id. *Going on Talking*. Springswood, N.S.W.: Butterfly Books, 1992. pp. 49-52.

ZINN, Christopher. Aboriginal children torn from their mothers seek justice. *The Guardian Weekly*. London: Oct. 16, 1994.