Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

As a student of Commonwealth Literature, particularly of Australian Literature, I read Patrick White's novels with great interest , and during my study I found that there were women protagonists in as many as four novels (The Aunt's Story , The Eye of the Storm, A Fringe of Leaves and The Twyborn Affair) and major women characters in two novels (The Tree of Man and Voss). I felt that this centrality of women in White's novels needed to be critically examined. When I had to choose a topic for my M.Phil. dissertation, I inevitably opted to work on the women protagonists in White's novels, and selected for the purpose five novels, three with women as central protagonists and two with women as secondary protagonists. I decided to focus my attention on Theodara Goodman in The Aunt's Story, Amy Parker in The Tree of Man, Laura Trevelyan in Voss, Elizabeth Hunter in The Eye of the Storm and Ellen Roxburgh in A Fringe of Leaves.

I

The limited objective of my study of five major women characters in Patrick White's novels is to evaluate his depiction of feminine consciousness in itself and as an instrument or medium for expressing his spiritual and ethical concerns. I do not want to go into the psycho-analytical aspect of White's special interest in creating women protagonists, though I would like to

take note of what David Tacey says in his Patrick White : Fiction and the Unconscious: "...the choice of a female protagonist has the additional advantage of catering to the author's own 'ambivalence', as he refers to his homosexual nature."[1] David Tacey , in his Jungian study of White's novels traces White's interest in female protagonists primarily to the archetypal image of the Mother and secondarily to his sexual 'ambivalence'. It is the question of the Mother's archetypal image that is of some significance in understanding White's major women characters.

I am not interested in imposing a single 'thesis' on the interpretation of White's women protagonists, the way, for instance, Geoffrey Dutton or Laurence Steven does. According to Dutton, 'Patrick White's novels have been a barometer of the destructive process';[2] and Steven finds in White a search for 'a wholeness, that can be found, not in a world beyond the world we live in, but in human relationships.'[3] Any such thesis, I believe, delimits our understanding of a great multi-dimensional novelist that White is, though such theses do sometimes illuminate some aspects of the great writer's works. It is true that White, like most writers, has some specific spiritual and moral concerns and tries to impose on his major characters a certain symbolic pattern of significance. But I would like to believe that the characters, once they are invested with life, tend to bounce into independent life, escaping from the authour's confining grasp. My attempt would be, therefore, to look at the five

women characters as separate individuals and not as members of one family, and examine the complexity of each one's unique life-situation.

II

In order to get a proper perspective for our study, it is profitable to have a brief historical view in respect of women characters in pre-White Australian fiction G.A.Wilkes, in his Australian Literature: A Conspectus, divides the Australian literary history into three phases:[4] Phase I : Colonial period, shaped mainly by European patterns ; Phase II (1880-1920) : the Nationalist Period of nativistic literature: Phase III (1920-to the present) : the Period of Self-assertion . At every stage two processes were at work : one, that of looking to Europe for models and influences ; two, that of seeking an independent and conscious identity . Although in their second phase the two processes were hostile to one another, in the third phase they blended harmoniously together to produce a literature that was distinctive and mature.

The first novel with a woman protagonist is probably Catherine Spence's Clara Morrison: A Tale of South Australia during the Gold Fever, which was published in 1854. It depicts the history of a gentlewoman sent to Australia as a governess, but obliged to go into service instead. It is a watered-down Jane-Austen-like novel with a heroine who discusses Byron and reads Tennyson. The Nationalist Period produced two important novelists, Joseph Furphy and Henry Handel Richardson, both of whom created some interesting

women characters. Furphy's Such is Life (1905 - 45), a trilogy, has many women characters of whom the most outstanding one is Maud Beaudesart who marries three husbands. It is Richardson who is the first novelist who created heroines who are modern. Maurice Guest (1896) presents the life story of an Australian girl Louise Dufrayer, who has a tragic love affair with a young Englishman named Maurice. In Louise the author explores those curious semi-hysterical moods in which rational conduct is momentarily suspended. Louise is the precursor of Theodara Goodman of Patrick White's The Aunt's Story. The post-1920 period, dominated later by Patrick White, produced in its earlier years two novelists who wrote novels with women protagonists. Katherine Prichard's Black Opal (1921) has in it a Lawrentian heroine, who keeps close to the earth, advocating, in a way, the cult of the primitive. She explores the cult in a substantial way in her Coonardoo (1929), in which a native girl is tragically caught between the incompatible demands of black and white societies. Coonardoo is inwardly bound to her aboriginal race by her senses, appetites and instincts. The novel explores the blind, elemental level of human behaviour, in a way that is constantly challenging the novelist's range and control. In Patrick White's A Fringe of Leaves there is a reverse situation in which a civilized woman is captured by a primitive tribe and subjected to its social mores. The other novelist was Martin Boyd, who wrote Galsworthian novels, depicting the fast vanishing leisured and cultivated society of the pre-I War period. Lucinda Brayford (1946) , which, in terms of the history of

Lucinda, depicts four generations of the Vane family, evoking brilliantly the manners of the period. Boyd creates some interesting heroines in his later novels, like Alice in The Cardboard Crown (1952) and Diana von Flugel in Outbreak of Love (1957). When we compare Patrick White with his contemporaries, we find that he is immensely superior to all the novelists mentioned earlier in terms of his deep probing of the spiritual world in addition to the insightful satarization of the urban middle class of the new Australian society. He is superior to them also in terms of his narrative style which has the capacity to depict all layers of the human mind.

III

In addition to the brief overview of the pre-White Australian novel, it is worthwhile to briefly look at Patrick White's life so that the perspective becomes a little more sharp. Patrick White was born in 1912 in London. His parents were Australians who visited London for business purposes. Patrick White was brought up in Australia, but returned to school in Cheltenham at the age of 13. After school he went back to Australia where he worked on sheep stations as a gentleman-apprentice. He returned to England in 1932 to study modern languages at King's College, Cambridge. It was here in Cambridge that he studied European literature, music and art. He decided to be a writer and started writing novels, plays, poems and reviews. His first novel, Happy Valley, was published in 1939 and his second, The Living and The Dead , in

1941. He spent four years in the Royal Air Force in the Middle East and Greece. He then returned home after publishing his third novel, The Aunt's Story (1948). It is this novel which pushed him into the literary limelight. John Devonport wrote in the Observer : ' The book has genius. Mr. White is as witty as he is compassionate.' [5] Peter Green in the Daily Telegraph called it 'A *tour de force* of the most unexpected kind.' [6]

If the first two novels were 'experiments in modernism', as Mark William says, The Aunt's Story gave a new form to the modernist tendencies and transformed them into something Australian. While in Europe White imbibed the spirit of modernism as deeply as possible: he read Eliot, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Dostoevsky, Kierkagaard, Jung and so on. In his interview with Ingmar Bjorksten, he says, 'I don't know about influences,' [7] but he also speaks to him about his interest in Judaeo-Christian mysticism, Greek mythology, Hinduism, Buddhism, and further confesses: 'Carl Jung's depth psychology and archetypology have served as literary guides.' [8]

It is interesting to see that the early literary historians did take note of him as an important writer, but they seem to have put him in the 'Lawson-Furphy tradition' of 'the novels of the countryside.' [9] The later historians like Barry Argyle do put him in the Lawson-Furphy tradition, but Argyle defines the tradition differently. He says that the tradition was that of the constant need for defining freedom. "The iron law of freedom is that freedom needs constant definition", says Argyle, "and Patrick White involves himself in the

process."[10] After The Aunt's Story,. Patrick White was involved more deeply in this process, which was part of the wider movement of the search for Australian identity. He wrote The Tree of Man (1955) precisely to celebrate the early life of the settlers. He then wrote Voss (1957) in order to explore two things: one, the ambivalence of the spirit of adventure and the megalomania of the Germans in Europe. These two novels put him in the category of 'major writers', and from then on the upward trend never flagged.

The later novels, Riders in the Chariot(1961), The Solid Mandala ((1966), The Vivisector(1970), The Eye of the Storm (1973) are works 'in which qualities of largeness, uninhibited confidence and creative energy are strikingly present.'[11] Critics all over the world took note of this Australian literary giant, and the Nobel Prize was awarded to him in 1973. Then followed two novels of mellowed maturity, A Fringe of Leaves (1973) and The Twyborn Affair (1979).

Patrick White died in 1990, leaving a rich legacy of 11 novels, 2 books of short stories, 6 published plays and an autobiography.

Critics have discovered various thematic patterns in his novels: if John Colmer finds in them 'a duality of vision,'[12] Laurence Steven finds in them 'a search for wholeness,'[13] Ingmar Bjorksten finds in them the theme of 'suffering leading to insight,'[14] David Tacey an obsession with the Mother

archetype.[15] Carolyn Bliss finds in them the theme of failure. She says in her book , Patrick White's Fiction, "Major characters experience what seems a necessary, redemptive or facilitating failure."[16] All these are important insights. But what Patrick White himself says in an interview with Creig McGregor is very revealing:

> "Religion. Yes, that's behind all my books. What I am interested is the relationship between the blundering human being and God...I think there is a Divine Power, a creator who has an influence on human beings if they are willing to be open to him."[17]

He further says in the same interview:

> "I belong to no church, but I have a religious faith, it's an attempt to express that, among other things, that I try to do...In my books I have lifted bits from various religions...Now that the world becomes more pagan, one has to lead people in the same direction in a different way."[18]

It would be worthwhile bearing the critics' views and the author's own ideas in mind when we undertake to critically examine the women protagonists we have chosen for our study.

Chapter II

THE AUNT'S STORY: *Fragmentation of Maturity*

The Aunt's Story is generally considered to be Patrick White's first major novel, and it has a woman protagonist, Theodara Goodman. White says in his autobiography, Flaws in the Glass, that Theodora Goodman is based on his godmother, Gertrude Morris, whom he credits "for her unobtrusive opening of windows in my often desperate youthful mind."[1] In "A Conversation with Patrick White" published in Southerly, White makes a very significant remark about the novel which we have to bear in mind when we start looking critically at the central character : "The Aunt's Story is a work which celebrates the human spirit."[2]

The novel has three parts, the first being a straight narrative, and the second and the third, presenting problems 'both explicitly and implicitly,'[3] since they are 'oblique and elliptic,' resisting easy comprehension. It is imperative, therefore, that we have a thorough grasp of the fictional facts given in Part I, entitled 'Meroe'. The novel begins with a loaded statement :'But old Mrs. Goodman did die at last'. David J. Tacey in his Jungian study of White's novels finds the opening very significant. He says, "The opening line affirms by negation matriarchal entrapment....The mother is dramatically reduced in power."[4] As far as the story goes, Mrs. Julia Goodman is dead, leaving behind her two daughters, Theodara and Fanny. Theodora is a spinster of fifty

and Fanny is a married woman with three children. Theodora, who has been looking after her mother during her old age, feels free now. The way the two daughters' feelings at the death of their mother are described is significant. For Fanny the 'Dear mother' is 'an idea', just as 'people will talk of Democracy or Religion, at a moral distance'(p.11).[5] The irony suggests that Fanny is a superficial kind of person. The suggestion becomes accentuated when we read about Theodora's feeling:

> "I am free now, said Theodora Goodman. If she left the prospect of freedom unexplained, it was less from a sense of remorse than from not knowing what to do. It was a state that she had never learned to enjoy" (pp. 11-12).

For Fanny emotions are either black or white. "For Theodora, who was less certain, the white of love was sometimes smudged by hate. So she could not mourn. Her feelings were knotted tight"(p.12). After suggesting that Theodora, who is now gaining the centre of the narrative space, is a very sensitive, introspective woman, the narrator gives a close-up of her face:

> "Black had yellowed her skin. She was dry, and leathery, and yellow. 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...Her eyes were shy of mirrors...This thing a spinster, she sometimes mused, considering her set mouth; this thing a spinster which, at best, becomes that institution, an aunt"(p.12).

Yes, Theodora is an aunt to two nephews and a niece. She deeply loves Lou, her niece. It was too intimate, physical to express. Lou had no obvious connection with Frank or Fanny. Lou, on the other hand, was 'like some dark and secret place in one's own body'(p.13). Her relationship with Lou is the one

relationship she values. But since her life so far was tied to her mother, who she hated more than loved, her sense of freedom goes with her loss of identity. 'Since her mother's death, she couldn't say with conviction: I am I' (p.13).

Theodora learns that her mother has left her everything she had. The will, which is with Mr. Clarkson, a Sydney solicitor, is duly read and the disappointed Frank Parrot, Fanny's husband, asks Theodora: "What are your plans?" Theodora replies: "I shall probably go away"(p.17). But she doesn't know where. Frank suggests that she should go to Europe, where she might find a husband. After the funeral, when Theodora and Lou find themselves together, Lou, the sensitive girl, says: 'I don't want to die.' She asks her aunt to tell her about Meroe, the place where the Goodman family lived before the widowed mother and Theodora moved to Sydney at Moreton Bay. Theodora remembers Meroe with sad nostalgia, but says, 'Darling, there is very little to tell'(p.19).

Chapter 2 takes us to Meroe and Theodora's childhood. Theo, as a child, loves nature, the volcanic mountains in the north and the family rose-garden to the south. David Tacey says, 'Nature is the archetypal force wherever she [Theodora] happens to be,'[6] and he talks of Mother Nature who protects her as against her own mother who is fond of Fanny and critical of Theo. George Goodman , the father, is an unsuccessful landowner, always buried in his 'foreign' books, Homer, Herodotus and so on. There is a strong bond between Theo and her father, who to her is 'thick and mysterious as a

tree'(p.26). Father often talks to her of another Meroe, a dead place in the black country of Ethiopia. Since Mrs. Goodman is often bored with Meroe and refuses, as she says, to vegetate, George Goodman has been forced to sell some of his estates to go abroad, to Europe and even to India.

David Tacey speaks of the Oedipal pattern and of 'a significant transference of sexuality to the father/daughter relationship.' [7] Theo often goes out with her father, sometimes carrying a gun., which makes her feel free. She shoots a rabbit and loves the pungent smell of shooting. Father looks at the dead rabbit and says, 'Death lasts a long time'(pp. 29-30). With her mother, Theo is always uneasy, and mother is always critical of her long, thin and yellow - yellow like her sash - face, whereas she is always fond of Fanny,' my pretty little parakeet'(p26). She wants Fanny to play the piano, saying, 'The piano is not for Theo'(p.28). On such bitter days when Theo feels crushed , she walks alone in the garden of dead roses. Mother is supreme in the house, a reigning queen. When she smells a rival in a girl who worked for them, Pearl Brawne, she is quick to dismiss her.

On her twelfth birthday, Theo sees a big oak tree being struck by lightning, when she is only three yards away. She considers her survival an act of God. The same day a man with a big thick beard, one who looks prophet-like, wants to see Mr.Goodman and have dinner with him. Mother, twisting her rings, refuses to sit at a table where a tramp sits. Theo feels that mother is more terrible than the lightning that has struck the tree. Theo insists on giving the

man a dinner in the veranda. The bearded man, who used to be her father's mate in the past, says, 'You are more like your father—more like your father used to be'(p.40). When she goes out to see him off, he speaks of life on the mountains as against the life in the houses where life stands still. Theo says, "I would come if I could." The man says , "Yes ,you would," and he then says something very prophetic:

> " 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 will survive .No girl that was thrown down by lightning on her twelfth birthday, and then got up again, is going to be swallowed easy by rivers of fire." (p.45)

I have quoted this prophesy in full, because both The Man Who was Given his Dinner and his prophesy are significant in respect of her future life.

In Chapter 3 the girls are a little older and they are sent to Spofforths' for education. Theo doesn't like the pale gray house, where life becomes for her 'a ringing of bells'(p.49), but she is fond of the green hawthorne tree outside the window, which makes life tolerable to her. She makes friends with a girl called Una Russell, to whom she confesses; " I do not like my face .... I don't want to marry." Una asks, "Why ever not? there is nothing else to do ." " I want to do nothing yet," says Theo. "I want to see." Una warns her that if she is not careful she would miss the bus (pp. 51-52). She has another friend called Violet Adams, who reads Tennyson and writes love poetry, without experiencing it. Theo tells her, " I would like to write a poem about rocks, and fire. A river of fire. And a burning house. Or a bush fire"(p.53). Violet leaves

school to help her mother, and the headmistress asks Theo also to leave. The whole chapter is a criticism of the Australian school system, often run by spinsters who don't know how 'to unlock other people, because they have never really opened'(p.50).

We then see the Goodman girls as young grown up girls: Theo as a good understanding girl with a plain face, and Fanny as a pretty buxom girl. A young man, Frank Parrot, gets interested in Theo and likes her honest understanding ways. Once Theo and Frank go into the woods in search of rabbits. Theo is the first to spot a rabbit and kill one. Frank, with a vengeance, shoots six. When Frank is busy with his killing, Theo stands fascinated by a hawk's red eye. Theo tells him later something that makes him very uncomfortable and a little afraid: "I shall continue to destroy myself, right down to the last of my several lives"(p.71). At a ball at the Parrotts her father prompts her to dance by saying, "You look as nice as anyone." She dances with Frank and both of them go out on the terrace. Theo, for no reason, thinks of her swimming in the creek lying like a stick. On another occasion she tells Frank, 'I am content. I would like to die at Meroe.' Somewhere inside, she feels that 'Meroe is eternity and she is the keeper of it'(pp. 79-80). Frank, inevitably, proposes to Fanny and the mother is immensely pleased!

Father goes on reading Homer and dreaming of Greece, which he couldn't go to, because Mrs. Goodman didn't want to go there. At last he tells Theo, "I am going to die...No reason why I should go on living. I have

finished"(p.85). He dies with Theo's head on his knees, and she feels as if she has just died. Now, for her, Meroe is dead, too.

David Tacey has some insightful things to say about the Goodman family: " Mrs. Goodman is the agent behind the husbands disintegration."[8] She is the lightning which strikes down her husband! With the death of her father Theo feels totally lost and awfully alienated.

Fanny gets married to Frank. Mrs. Goodman sells the house and furniture, her land and paddock and everything. She and Theo move to Sydney, where they buy a modern house above the bay and start a whole new life. Meroe was Theo's bones and breath, and now she feels that any place is good enough . She takes up a job in a canteen, because the aching of the soles of her feet is 'preferable to the aching of darkness'(p.91). The crowd in the canteen helps her to preserve her solitariness. Her mother thinks that 'she is wearing herself to a shadow.' But mostly Theo does not care (p.95). She deliberately cultivates 'a vision of distance'(p.96). At this juncture Mr. Huntly Clarkson, their solicitor, who is a rich widower, shows great interest in Theo. But she tells him, " You will not find me very good company, Mr. Clarkson"(p.99). Mrs. Goodman calls Theo a fool and thinks, for a moment, of marrying him herself! Mr. Clarkson continues to have with Theo 'one of those relationships it is difficult to explain, a kind of groove in which minds fit, though not visible from outside'(103). This persists for some years. She makes him feel awfully inadequate. 'You are a most difficult woman, Theo', he says, to which she

replies, 'To myself I am fatally simple' (p116). At last he proposes marriage, which she thinks a supreme act of kindness, even for him! She prefers to remain a spinster.

During her stay in Sydney, she meets a Greek cellist named Moraitis, and likes his sad eyes, his talk and his hands, and his isolation. When she is with him she is reminded of The Man who was Given his Dinner, 'the moment on the bridge,' which was the same pure abstraction of knowing'(p.109). She attends one of his concerts, and she identifies herself with him and his music. David Tacey says, "At Moraitis's concert Theo undergoes an intensely erotic process of disintegration."[9] Theo has a strange feeling of contentment. She thinks, 'Now existence justifies itself' (p.112).

Theo goes for some time to Fanny's place to help her with her pregnancy. The children are very happy with her, especially Lou, and they consider her 'the Respected Aunt'. After her return, she once meets Pearl Brawne , who is now a call girl in Sidney. Pearl reveals to her that she had her father's baby, a son, who died. Theo sympathises with her, and doesn't tell her mother about Pearl.

Theo has an acute desire to destroy 'the great monster Self' and to achieve a state resembling 'nothing more than air or water'(p128). She feels she does not have the humility. Here we definitely feel that Theodora is in search of something beyond what normal life offers. It is interesting to see that she does not take resort in Christianity. Patrick White is aware of this and tells

us at some juncture that Mrs. Goodman was never interested in anything religious or spiritual, and never encouraged religion in her children. I think this is not an excuse enough for Theodara to think in terms of, say, Hinduism or Buddhism, about which she knows next to nothing.. Poor Theodora is let loose to seek her lonely path. Mrs. Goodman dies 'without her teeth'(p.129), and Theodora is free to go her own way.

The flashback is over, and we are at the point where the novel began. Theo tells Lou that she would go away, and Lou says, 'You will then have many stories to tell'. Theo says, 'No, there are people who do not have many stories to tell. They are as empty as a filigree ball. Even these would fill at times with a sudden fire'(p.131). It is probably of some significance that the filigree ball, with which Lou has been playing (cf.Chapter 1), is something got from India. The rest of their talk is important:

> Lou says, "I wish I was you, Aunt Theo.....Because you know things."
> "Either there is very little to learn, or else we learn very little," said Theo.
> "You will discover that in time."(p.131)

At this point Theodora is a wise, mature woman with, what Mark Williams calls a sensibility of infinite subtlety and responsiveness.'[10] She indirectly proves that the society in which she lives is materialistic and dull, with people 'who sense no abysm within the self' and live their lives on the surface.[11] Patrick White has so far done an excellent job, but he is not satisfied with it. He wants to stretch further and explore Theodora's consciousness to the point

of its fragmentation, in a new context of European socio-political and psychological chaos.

II

Part Two, 'Jardin Exotique', has an epigraph which is important, for it throws light on what we encounter in this part of the novel:

> "Henceforward we walk split into myriad fragments, like an insect with a hundred feet...All things, as we walk, splitting with us into a myriad iridescent fragments. The great fragmentation of maturity."
>
> - Henry Miller

By way of another introduction let me quote William Walsh with regard to the three phases of the novel:

> "The first phase, beginning and ending with Mrs. Goodman's death, is a reconstruction of Theodora's life up to middle age...The second phase pictures a mind and self burning fiercely away and melting even that ultimate distinction between 'I' and 'otherness' The third is a concluding, drifting phase of contemplation and detachment."[12]

I have doubts about the phrase, 'burning fiercely away', because Theodora's mind and self are anything but passive and serene, reminding us of the passivity and serenity of a seer. At the end of Part I, Theodora has reached a stage of passive acceptance of things with not many expectations from life. Probably there is no further development of her consciousness possible unless it is pushed down the abyss. That is exactly what Patrick White does in Part II:

he suddenly transplants the protagonist's self down into the smouldering cauldron of Europe, a virtual madhouse.

We now encounter our protagonist in Hotel du Midi in the south of France. She has consciously chosen this place after reading a brochure which calls the place 'Jardin Exotique'. The place turns out to be full of people who are, more or less, mentally deranged. A nature-lover that Theodora is, she loves the garden behind the hotel. 'The garden was untouchable', she feels, because 'this was a world in which there was no question of possession' (p.140). It is when we come to the people in the Hotel that we are faced with problems about what is objective and what is subjective. Mark Williams speaks of Theodora's 'incipient schizophrenia' and the novelist's Expressionism, resulting in 'violent distortion.'[13] He also speaks of Theodora's 'radically disoriented perception of the world'.[14] But J.F. Burrows, in his article," 'Jardin Exotique': the Central Phase of The Aunt's Story", asserts:

> "Yes, neurotic though she may be, this is not the endless, futile retrogression of insanity, but a determined and at last successful confrontation of old problems in new contexts."[15]

This approach is more acceptable than Mark Williams's or John Weigle's which is to consider the whole chapter as 'solipsistic'.[16]

Theodora meets people like General Sokolnikov, Madame Rapallo and Katina and develops tangible relationships with them. For instance, Katina wants her to be a kind of aunt to her.. General Sokolnikov makes friends with

her, and at one point he says, "I'll hand you my soul on the plate, if it would do either of us good"(150).

Most of the inmates talk of Hitler wanting to make a war, of Communists taking over or both. Theodora is asked by somebody: "What are you? A Communist or a Fascist?" An inmate called Wetherby, who is from Birmingham, a school teacher for a while and a poet, announces: 'I am a Communist'. Another inmate called Alyosha Sergei asks Theodora, 'Do you believe in God?' Theodora replies, 'I believe in the table.' He asks, 'Do you believe in Saints?' She answers, 'I believe in a pail of milk, with the blue shadow round the rim.' He then touches her moustache and it doesn't revolt her.(p.152) When Sokolnikov calls Mrs. Rapollo an impostor, Theodora says, 'Are we not all impostors, to a lesser or greater degree?'(p.154) At one point Theodora says, 'How many of us lead more than one of our lives?'(p.166) At another point, she makes a profounder statement, when she notices the immobility of leaves in the jardin exotique -

> " 'But only to wonder at', she noticed. The most one can expect from the led life is for it to be lit occasionally by a flash of wonder, which does not bear questioning, it is its own light." (179)

She observes everything; she listens to the doors closing, looks through the door way; she hears the exhausted springs of the arm-chairs; she sees the ash trays which have brimmed almost over with ash, and the exasperated gnawings of pale nails (p.192). She sits in a state of suspended will and treads quietly so as not to disturb any exposed dream. When the darkness settles

down, she begins to feel that she is lost and she touches the darkness for a sign. (p.195)

There are quite a number of apparently insane experiences and conversations as follows:

> "Theodora heard the many voices that were also one , and the faces one,the big dappled, half-genial half hostile face of firelight with a gaping nose ." (p.205)
>
> "Then I am dead," said Theodora.
> "You are quite dead," said Alyosha Sergei. (p.208)
>
> " Death is far less emotional", Theodora said
> The General vibrated steamily.
> " It is as simple as a bottle", said Theodora. " and so clear." It had pared down to this.
> " And as empty," she said
> " Then let us remove the bottle," said the General.
> Which he took, and pitched over his shoulder, at the wall.
> "Now there is nothing", he said. (p.209)

Peter Beatson, in The Eye in the Mandala, says: " In these relationships Theodora is making a commitment to the human world unlike anything seen in Part One... makes gestures of collaboration ...is aware of his own limitations and then of others ...has mature concerns of the kind of reality she inhabits ."[17]

Part Two ends with an accidental fire in the hotel which flares into a conflagration and reduces the Hotel du Midi into cinders. All the inmates escape from the burning building. Theodora, like some of them, thinks of going somewhere, but she does not know where.

Since the second part is problematic, critics have interpreted it in different ways: Laurence Steven, for instance, says that the novel ' presents

Theodora Goodman's solipsistic quest for wholeness through madness as an alternative to the intractable banality of the world she inhabits'[18] John and Rose Marie Beston consider Theodora as Patrick White's 'most repressed character,' 'as a woman of deep emotional disturbances, torn by conflicts born at Meroe and sustained throughout her adult relationships until in Part Three she opts for total emotional schizophrenia."[19] John Weigel thinks that ' the insanity may be the only refuge from the cruel rationality of others.'[20] He wonders 'if the events really occur or are no more than creations of Theodora's ebullient but untrustworthy mind .'[21]

David Tacey says that after the mother's death 'chronic alienation' sets in in Theodora's mind. He further says, '... the libido lost to consciousness, inevitably sinks into the lower realm, activating the imaginal world ....Her world is more psychic than real .... [She experiences] a perpetual nightmare.'[22]

Ingmar Bjorksten, who thinks that suffering as the path to insight is the central theme of Patrick White's novels, considers that Theodora's experience in the limbo-like world leads her towards humility, which is 'a pre-requisite for self-fulfilment and reconcilement'.[23] Carolyn Bliss says the same thing in a different way: 'The Hotel du Midi, then, is a kind of midpoint in Theodora's pilgrimage toward self-discovery, less a hell than a purgatory.'[24]

Thelma Herring, too, thinks that she is purged by fire in her 'journey of spiritual discovery'.[25]

Mark Williams, on the other hand, thinks that Theodora moves 'toward a more and more radical isolation',and that she 'lapses from fixed, pseudo-aristocratic forms into the ugliness and vulgarity of the modern world.'[26]

I have given all these different views to indicate that different points of view generate different interpretations, especially when the author chooses elliptical, expressionistic strategies. But my contention is, if we have a firm grasp of all the novelistic facts in Part One, and if we remember what White himself says about the novel being a celebration of the human spirit, you arrive at a simpler interpretation. White wants to demonstrate that the maturity of mind, with its attitude of acceptance and with its earned knowledge of things as they are, that she has achieved at the end of Part One, has the strength to help her survive any predicament, even that of the European madhouse. What she now requires is a 'Guru' who will show her the way to salvation.

III

Part Three, 'Holstius,' has the following epitaph:

> "When your life is most real, to me you are mad."
> - Oliver Schreiner

If Hamlet escapes from real madness by simulating madness, Theodora Goodman gets one of her selves fragmented, so that she retains the purity of

her 'higher' self. She survives life in a madhouse only by being mad, which gives her scope to get rid of her repressions, through a free exercise of her fantasies in the company of people who are, more or less, neurotic. Now she decides to go back to Australia via the United States. She writes a letter to Fanny about her intention:

> "My dear Fanny,
> I am writing to say that I have seen and done, and the time has come at last to return to Abyssinia...I'll be there sometime in the spring, that is, of course, your Abyssinian spring..." (p.256)

Fanny thinks that Theo is quite mad. She decides, against her husband's wishes, to make arrangements for her stay. Then there is a significant remark by the narrator, "Before Fanny could destroy these ['the dark mad letters of Theo'] they had torn her." This suggests that Theo's madness has affected her deeply. When Lou asks, "Why is Aunt Theo mad?" Frank says, "Stingy...The type that does not die." He then tells Lou, "She was both a kindness and a darkness" (p.258).

It is interesting to see that Theodora calls Australia 'Abyssinia'. David Tacey, the psychoanalyst-critic, says that Abyssinia is Meroe - the Meroe that she has lost and the other Meroe in Ethiopia . On the face of it, her letter has both madness and rationality in it, which means that her two selves, one mad and the other lucid, are coexistent. We see the same kind of coexistence in what she does in America.

Part Three begins with Theodora's journey through America. She is in a train going to California, and she is somewhere in the south-west, where she sees 'the trumpeting of corn.' She hears 'the difference between doing and being'(p.255).. She hears the American co-commuter's 'itemised life'--mortgages, phosphates, love, movie, indigestion, real estate and loneliness. This indicates that she has acquired a deep insight into things and people. The American speaks to her of hell being let loose in Europe. 'Then he sat back. He had done his duty. He had composed life into a small, white, placid heap [of popcorn]'(p.255).

A thin, dark Indian woman asks her where she is going. "I do not particularly want to go anywhere", she says, "though I have money in my bag." (p.262) Theodora just gets off with the Indian woman and her son, Jack, and goes with them. She gets off at a mountain road with her 'practical handbag - the last link with the external Theodora Goodman (p.263) - containing her tickets of railroad and steamship. As she walks along, she sees a dog and a woman trying to quieten it. The woman, Mrs. Johnson, asks her what she can do for her. "Well," says Theodora, "I don't know that there is anything in particular." Mrs. Johnson asks her whether she is lost, to which Theodora replies, "No." Theodora - she calls herself Miss Pilkington now - stays with them for the night. Theodora likes the children in the house, particularly Zack, who immediately develops a fondness for her, and wants her to stay with them.

When Mrs. Johnson says, "They say there'll be a war", Theodora's reaction is characteristic of her deeper vision of things. 'It would happen, she saw, to the ants at the roots of the long suave stalks of grass.' "Probably", Theodora said, "unless God is kinder to the ants."(p.270)

She leaves the house early morning and walks up the hill, where she finds a locked paddock, and she undoes the screws with her nails, opens the door and walks 'through her house with pleasure'(p.274). She walks to the foot of the hills and is overcome by the beauty of the scene. Suddenly she gets a hint of 'some ultimate moment of clear vision'(p.275). "Theodora experienced a fresh anxiety. She doubted whether flesh was humble enough."(p.275) Just then a man comes and says, "My name is Holstius."

Holstius, who reminds her of The Man who was Given his Dinner, is both detached and close, and he seems to talk to the very depth of her soul. He says, "Ah, Theodora Goodman, you are torn in two."(p.277)

> "What is it," she asked in agony, "you expect me to do or say?"
>
> "I expect you to accept the two irreconcilable halves. Come," he said... She rested her head against his knees
>
> "You cannot reconcile joy and sorrow", he said, "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)

Theodora experiences great peace from his words and also from the touch of his hands. "His hands touched the bones of her head under the damp hair. They soothed her wounds."(p.278)

The next day she wakes up with a feeling that she has had an intensely clear vision. When she is scrubbing the floor with an old brush, Mrs. Johnson comes with her dinner. She tells Theodora that the hut belongs to Mrs. Kilvert, who is now dead. Theodora insists on staying in the hut, because Holstius would come. Mrs. Johnson goes away after keeping a loaf of bread and an iron milk can. Theodora waits for Holstius and he comes wearing a Panama . He says, " True permanence is a state of multiplication and division."(p.284). As Theodora remembers all her lives in terms of all the persons who had come into her life in a significant way, including Lou and Zack, her selves enter into each other. Holstius asks her to go to the house, and says, " They will arrive soon."(p.284)

Now Theodora feels that Holstius's presence is superfluous. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson arrive with Dr. Rafferty, to whom Theodora says, " I am afraid that I have set you a problem . Actually I do exist"(p.287). Dr. Rafferty assures her that he would take her down to the town where there are folks who will make her comfortable. Theodora cracks a joke, " You Americans make life pneumatic. But how agreeable." And she goes out with the doctor.

It is clear that Holstius is her Guru, shaped out of her own mind, and both her father and the Man who was Given his Dinner have gone into the creation of Holstius. It is he who gives her illumination and the final vision of things. Actually it is the dramatisation of her higher self reaching a point of clarity of vision Douglas Loney in his article, " Theodora Goodman and the Minds of Mortals: Patrick White's The Aunt's Story," says, " She establishes her doctrine of spiritual acceptance by which ultimately she attains the prize of her soul's integrity and peace."[27]

There are some critics who think that in Part Three Theodora is totally regressed. John and Rose Marie Beston, for instance, say, "She opts for total emotional retreat into schizophrenia."[28] They totally ignore the spiritual dimension of the novel.

David Tacey thinks that Theodora does not achieve a fully individualized selfhood, 'because she is so far regressed'. "Her eternal realm cannot include the realities of time and form.....and she lacks the perspective to see the pathology of her situation."[29] Laurence Steven complains that "White appears to feel that significance exists only outside society", and also that White accepts the so-called transcendent moment as valid.[30] Peter Beatson speaks of White's dualistic vision "which consigns wholeness and, therefore, meaning, to a transcendent realm alone."[31]

William Walsh says that Theodora is mad, but 'she is seen to possess a lucid and simple wholeness, the condition of the soul, it is intimated, necessary

to appreciate the purity of being.'[32] Walsh is very sure of her lunacy, but not so sure about her lucidity and purity of being.

Ingmar Bjorksten, on the other hand, is very sure that Theodora is 'the first of those Patrick White's characters who are initiated in mystical knowledge'.[33] He describes her condition in the last part as 'closer to humility, to anonymity, to pureness of being.'[34] Holstius, he says, is 'a mild father figure who communicates a sense of security, because he has the answers....She is born again in a new form, which the world calls mad - when everything is explained, united and reconciled.'[35] Actually, 'Guru' is a better term than 'a mild father figure.....[who] has the answers.'

G.A.Wilkes gives a secular answer: "The Aunt's Story questions the values of life in the terms in which it is normally lived, and in the solitariness of Theodora at the end, implies a rejection of life in such terms."[36] Evidently it is impossible to ignore the mystical aspects of Theodora's experiences.

Through the character of Theodora, it is true that White criticises the limited, materialistic bourgeois life of the Australian middle and upper middle classes and also the European civilization of the thirties which had nothing to offer to a sensitive person. Both the worlds, Australian and European, fail to offer scope for any spiritual explorations. Theodora needs a real 'Guru', like, say, Sri Aurobindo or Sri Ramana Maharshi. Her intimations have echoes of Hindu and Buddhist philosophic ideas without her being initiated into those religions. One wonders whether, if she went to India or China, she would have

found her true self more easily than in her rudderless solitariness in search of illumination and knowledge. Yet she does very well in preserving the integrity of her soul, although she has to sacrifice a part of her self which gets fragmented and disintegrated. She has her moments of transcendental vision, but within the framework of suffering, alienation and madness. David Tacey is right, therefore, when he says that she does not achieve a fully individualized selfhood,[37] nor does she achieve it partially. She achieves it in some accidental moments. In a sense, it is a story of failure, not 'a necessary, redemptive or facilitating failure' as Carolyn Bliss suggests,[38] but an unnecessary, fragmented failure. It is a story of unnecessary 'fragmentation of maturity.'