
UNIT 1 THE NOVELIST AND THE NOVEL

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 The Play of Dichotomies
- 1.2 Insider / Outsider
- 1.3 *The Solid Mandala*
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Questions
- 1.6 Glossary
- 1.7 References

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to introduce you to Patrick White, to give you some insight into the links between his life and some of the issues that colour his literary status, in general, and *The Solid Mandala*, in particular. This section will, thus, introduce some of the contexts within which a reading of *The Solid Mandala* can be made.

1.1 THE PLAY OF DICHOTOMIES

“The life and novels of Patrick White provide a classic example of the divided loyalties that have afflicted many sensitive Australian writers.”, wrote Geoffrey Dutton in *Patrick White* (1962: 5), a study that came out before White published *The Solid Mandala*. The formative years of White’s life and literary career were marked by cleavages in expectations and realities that coloured his decision to become a novelist as well as the initial reaction of the Australian reading and critical public to his work.

Patrick White (1912-1990) came from settler stock. His great-grandfather had come to New South Wales in the early nineteenth century and received a grant of Crown land. However, Patrick was born on 28th May, 1912 to Victor White and Ruth Withycombe in London. He grew up in Sydney and studied in Australia till he entered his teens. He writes, “When thirteen I was uprooted from Australia and put at a school at Cheltenham, England, as my mother was of the opinion that what is English is best, and my father, though a chauvinistic Australian, respected most of her caprices” (1990: 40). Near dichotomous pulls, such as these, were to leave their imprint on his sensibility at several junctures in his life.

Reminiscing about his youth, Patrick White comments, “Almost all the Whites remained wedded to the land, and there was something peculiar, even shocking, about any member of the family who left it. To become any kind of artist would have been unthinkable. Like everybody else I was intended for the land, though vaguely I knew this was not to be” (1990: 39-40). On his return to Australia after completing school, White worked for two years as a jackeroo to see if he could adapt himself to “life on the land”. His first year left him with the impression that the mountainous terrain of New South Wales was “the bleakest place on earth”. Nor did the rough life during his second year in the “flat, blistering north”, leave him enamoured of the wild Australian outback or the much celebrated camaraderie of the bush. He says, “The life in itself was not uncongenial, but the talk was endlessly of wool and weather” (1990: 40). During this time, he is said to have first tried his hand at the

novel. His sense of liminality was exacerbated when he found that, “after being a colonial at my English school, I was now a ‘Pom’ in the ears of my fellow countrymen. I hardly dared open my mouth, and welcomed the opportunity to escape”(1990: 40-41). White was thus caught between a family tradition that linked the career expectations connected with him to the land, and a proclivity that along with his upbringing made “the habit of writing novels” (1990: 40) a vocation that was less forced. The dynamic tension between his exposure to the ethos of the colonial centre and that of the antipodean margin made this situation even more fraught.

White went on to read modern languages at King’s College, Cambridge, graduating in 1935. The interest he had taken in the European tradition of Ibsen and Strindberg in his school years was supplemented by his introduction to French and German literature. After graduation, his father agreed to send him an allowance while he tried to make a living out of writing. His writing career started with the publication of smaller pieces in revues and literary magazines. *Happy Valley* (1939) was the first of his novels to be published in London. The novel was eventually accepted by the Viking Press in New York as well. *The Living and the Dead* (1942) like its predecessor appeared both in England and the United States. During the Second World War, White served as an R.A.F. intelligence officer in Africa, the Middle East, the Western Desert and Greece.

The Aunt’s Story (1948) was published before he finally returned to set up home at a farm in Castle Hill outside Sydney with his Greek partner, Manoly Lascaris. Interestingly, James Waites notes that White was, in his later years, to describe Manoly as his own “solid mandala”. His autobiography pays tribute to Manoly Lascaris as the “small Greek of immense moral strength, who became the central mandala in life’s hitherto messy design”. (in Joyce, 170)

This was a period marked by several displacements in White’s life and career. For a few years he stopped writing. He says of this period, “If anyone mentioned Writing, I would reply: ‘Oh one day perhaps.’ But I had no real intention of giving the matter sufficient thought. *The Aunt’s Story* ... had succeeded with overseas critics, failed as usual with the local ones”(1990: 14). He goes on to reveal what had precipitated this sense of stagnation. “Most of them [Australians] found the book unreadable. Just as our speech was unintelligible during those first years at Castle Hill, I had never felt such a foreigner. The failure of *The Aunt’s Story* and the need to learn a language afresh made me wonder if I should ever write another word”(1990: 42-43). However, the reconnaissance into amateur farming and animal breeding couldn’t hold him for long, just as his earlier stint as a jackeroo failed to help him develop conventional bonds with the land. He admits quite candidly, “[W]riting novels was the only thing I could do with any degree of success; even if my half-failures were some justification for an otherwise meaningless life”(1990: 15).

White also found himself coming into the open about some other choices, this time with respect to his attitude to Australia and how that would evince itself in his writing. His now famous words about seeing in “all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions... and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from the average nerves” (1990:15), resound with echoes of the modernist critique of philistinism. It was a critique of “the exaltation of the ‘average’” that was to lead to the conceptualisation of *The Tree of Man* as a book in which he wanted to suggest “every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman”. At the same time he wanted to “discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and the poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people, and incidentally, my own life since my return” (1990:15).

When *The Tree of Man* was published in America in 1955 and in England the following year, it won accolades on both sides of the Atlantic. Australian critics were not as forthcoming. With the exception of Kenneth Slessor who called it a ‘timeless

work of art', the reactions were negative. A.D. Hope went as far as to dismiss it as 'illiterate verbal sludge'. White returned the slight by referring to his detractors as 'howling dingoes'. *Voss* (1958) and *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) too drew hostile reactions in Australia and praise outside it. In the autobiographical essay written in association with the Nobel Prize, White reminisced on this trend which showed the first signs of turning with the *The Solid Mandala*.

Then about 1951 I began writing again, painfully, a novel I called in the beginning *A Life Sentence on Earth*, but which developed into the *The Tree of Man*. Well received in England and the United States, it was greeted with cries of scorn and incredulity in Australia: that somebody, at best a dubious Australian, should flout the naturalistic tradition, or worse, that a member of the grazier class should aspire to a calling which was the prerogative of school-teachers! *Voss*, which followed, fared no better: a newspaper printed its review under the headline *Australia's Most Unreadable Novelist*. In *Riders in the Chariot* it was the scene in which Himmelfarb the Jewish refugee is subjected to a mock crucifixion by the drunken workmates which outraged the blokes and the bluestockings alike. Naturally, 'it couldn't happen here' - except that it does, in all quarters, in many infinitely humiliating ways, as I, a foreigner in my own country, learned from personal experience.

A number of Australians, however, discovered they were able to read a reprint of *The Aunt's Story*, a book which had baffled them when first published after the War, and by the time *The Solid Mandala* appeared, it was realised I might be something they had to put up with. (1990: 43)

In 1964, as the Sydney suburbs began encroaching on the country, White and Manoly shifted to a house by Centennial Park in the heart of the city. This was to remain their home to the end of White's days. He writes, "Looking back, I must also have had an unconscious desire to bring my life full circle by returning to the scenes of my childhood, as well as the conscious wish to extend my range by writing about more sophisticated Australians, as I have done in *The Vivisector* and *The Eye of the Storm*" (1990: 44). Published respectively in 1970 and 1973, these two novels were to lead up to the Nobel Prize in 1973. Since then White published two more novels – *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976) and *The Twyborn Affair* (1979) – not to mention the plays, short story collections, verse collections and some of the other writings that constitute his oeuvre. White's participation in the 1972 rally to protect the Centennial Park too saw him emerge as a public figure who joined cause on many issues such as nuclear arms, the monorail and the Bicentenary celebrations. The tide had begun to turn.

1.2 INSIDER / OUTSIDER: SOME PERSPECTIVES

White had always felt the insider / outsider dialectic at play in his life – both as a man and as a novelist. His continental education and cultural exposure to the European tradition in modern literature left him out of synch with the cultural ethos and literary traditions evolving in Australia. His years abroad had rendered him, he says, "a foreigner in my own country" (1990: 43). There have been many attempts to analyze "the peculiar mixture of fascination and respect, of hostility and dislike which his work evokes amongst his country men; his own peculiar love-hate relationship with his native Australia" (Driesen, 119).

At times critics have diagnosed the source of the problem as being largely one of form and White's closer familiarity with European literary traditions in genre, subject and stylistics. "White's symbolic novels, with their sometimes slow openings, their many new starts, their frequent time and place shifts, their fastidious fascination with bodily functions and oddities, and their homiletic passages, took some time to gain

acceptance", remarks Ken Goodwin. He argues that White's familiarity with twentieth century French and German experimental writing set him apart from the mould of the social-realist writing that was in vogue during the 1930's in Australia (Goodwin, 167). However, in 'The Prodigal Son', White admits to being consciously "determined to prove that the Australian novel is not necessarily the dreary dun-coloured offspring of journalistic realism" (1990: 16). Joseph Jones also notes how White inspired others like Randolph Stow to depart thematically from an Australian literary tradition that concentrated on "The Spell of the Bush" and "The Great Australian Dream"; soon in their works, "adventures are subordinated to interiorized events" (Jones, 57). "White had offended against the unwritten law of Australianism", writes Geoffrey Dutton, elaborating, "stringy-bark and green-hide may have been the mainstay of Australia, but here was a man insisting that now it is time for imagination and humility to take their place; amongst those who laughed and gave it a fair go he cried out in agony and looked without sentiment at tragedy" (Dutton, 9).

Others see White's inability to capture the zeitgeist of Australia at the heart of the matter. "A vast majority of White's Australian readers would appear to be ambivalent in their acceptance of his work. On the one hand a sense of patriotism prompts them to embrace White as one of their own kind, while on the other their anxiety over the nature of his work gives them cause to be less than enthusiastic in hailing him as a genuine Australian writer" (Singh, 117). Kirpal Singh cites as factors contributing to this phenomenon the "strong influence of a European background" and a "lack of sympathy or lack of a fundamental rapport with the way of life of most Australians" (Singh, 117). He continues, "White's is not merely the case of the alienated artist. For him alienation takes on a greater meaning... White's problem springs from an excruciating dissatisfaction with the superficiality of existence around him... White suffers from an impoverished spiritual kinship with the society in which he lives; both artistically and spiritually White writes in a vacuum" (Singh, 117-8).

Paradoxically, White spelt out that he made it his literary credo, to not only consciously work against the Australian literary tradition that celebrated realism and naturalism, but also that he meant to continue "to people the Australian emptiness in the only way I am able" (1990: 44). What White saw as his oeuvre's greatest strengths were being vaunted as the very sites that undermined his acceptance with the reading and critical public. According to Adrian Mitchell, "White has never been really comfortable, imaginatively, with the local. He has worried at the fact of Australia, and tussled with its spiritual geography, but the strongest statements have again and again been negative" (Mitchell, 15). Who indeed, can forget White's caustic vignette in 'The Prodigal Son' of

the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the mind is the least of possessions, in which the rich man is the important man, in which beautiful youths and girls stare at life through blind blue eyes, in which human teeth fall like autumn leaves, the buttocks of cars grow hourly glassier, food means cake and steak, muscles prevail, and the march of material ugliness does not raise a quiver from average nerves (1990: 15)

Cynthia Vanden Driesen attempts to collapse this paradox by placing White within the Jungian framework of mapping the relationship between the artist and the spirit of the epoch. She sees White as being sharply divided from the life of his contemporaries because he purports to respond to what he diagnoses as a deep spiritual need for the 'average' Australian to break free of the hold of materialism and superficiality. Quoting Erich Neumann's elaboration of Jung she posits, "Compensation for the cultural canon means opposition to it – that is opposition to the epoch's consciousness and sense of values. The creative artist whose mission is to compensate for consciousness and the cultural canon is usually an isolated individual who must destroy the old order to make possible the dawn of the new" (Driesen, 121).

How plausible these positions are remains for you to decide. What is even more interesting is how these positions tap into thematic veins in *The Solid Mandala* as it maps the equally paradoxical love-hate relationship between the twins, Waldo and Arthur and obliquely delves into the nature and purpose of art. "The tension in White's relationship with his own country is a revealing facet of that profound quarrel with himself (to adapt Yeats' phrase) out of which his fiction comes" (Barnes, 3).

1.3 THE SOLID MANDALA

"In tracing the development of a major writer one perceives continuity as well as growth: each new work is organically related to its predecessors, yet this does not preclude the possibility of surprise.", comments Thelma Herring. She goes on to point out these links when she opines, "Presenting, with a compression equaled only in *The Aunt's Story*, two lives as simple and ordinary to outward view as those of the Parkers in *The Tree of Man*, *The Solid Mandala* uses them to explore further the theme of man's potential divinity already treated on a epic scale in *Voss* and *Riders in the Chariot*" (Herring, 72). However, even as the novel marks continuities, the points of departure remain significant. Peter Craven notes, "From the late 1960s there was a drift away from the mythopoeic, away from the symbols of the bush country. This is discernable in the later work of Patrick White. *The Solid Mandala* (1966) is a story of two brothers, one cosmically inclined and 'mad', the other schizoid yet 'sane'. The book displays not only White's interest in the ideas of Jung, but his willingness to experiment with black comedy and kitchen-sink realism. After *The Solid Mandala* White never again sounded the biblical note of *The Tree of Man*." (Craven, 46)

One finds in this novel no synoptic vision trying to encompass expansive macrocosms. In the sense that on the surface of it, the novel does not try to hold within its narrative canvas extensive timeframes, an enormous cast of characters or an extremely convoluted widespread narrative. It is concerned with two twins and their consciousness that defines the world they live in and colors their interaction with people. *The Solid Mandala* is about two twins - Waldo and Arthur. However, in a strange and poetic journey, we realize that it can transcend the bounds of their microcosm to envelop more cosmic strains. Into the ostensibly simple tapestry of the lives of two nondescript men from the suburbs of Sydney, are woven threads linked to questions such as the nature of artistic creation, the search for spiritual and emotional wholeness, the holocaust and an impinging ethos of materialism.

The narrative is divided into four unequal parts. Brief opening and closing sections have Mrs. Poulter as the principle actor. According to Thelma Herring, these sections "form a frame which puts the timeless theme in a contemporary context" (Herring, 73). The expository section introduces the bachelor twins through the perspectives of Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun as revealed in a conversation that they have as they ride the bus between Sarsaparilla and Barranugli. The exterior sections impose the outside world's perspectives on the narrative even as it subtly critiques that world's materialistic values and narrowness of vision. The two central parts recount the lives and thoughts of Waldo and Arthur from Waldo's perspective first and then more briefly from Arthur's perspective. These sections deal more extensively with two seemingly antithetical approaches to life in that society, which through the device of the twins, are shown to be also almost inextricably linked.

The narrative takes off with a bus journey in which Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun are introduced directly and the Brown brothers obliquely through their conversation. In this section called 'In the Bus', the Brown brothers are shown stumbling along the road between Barranugli and Sarsaparilla with their blue terriers, Runt and Scruffy. There is a combination of the omniscient narrator commenting on the thoughts and nature of the two women, the women being characterized through their overt actions

and words, as well as the women indirectly characterizing the Browns through their observations.

The narrator hints repetitively at the narrow and materialistic perspectives Mrs. Dun and Mrs. Poulter are able to bring to bear on the things they talk about. For example, when Mrs. Poulter comments that some women end up spending a shilling in order to save the occasional half-penny, the narrator reveals to us how Mrs. Dun mentally fixates on this piece of information. Having made the appropriate calculations for the half-penny, she is fascinated that some women may actually be losing one-and-eleven on a shopping trip between Sarsaparilla and Barranugli. The significance of these minute details in their lives is underscored time and again, throughout this first section. Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun had met for the first time only recently on a similar bus ride, in spite of them both having lived on the same road for years. As they discuss what brought them both to Terminus Road, Mrs. Poulter mentions her neighbours, the Mister Browns. Mrs. Dun is simultaneously put off by the possibility that the Browns may be her social superiors and pacified by the fact that they are from England. The pettiness of her focus is evinced when she picks out for negative comment things like the strangeness of Waldo's name and the fact that the two aged brothers are holding each other's hands. The former is to her indicative of snobbish elitism and the latter of the possible perversity of the two men. Her observations reveal her insecurities and the limited nature of her mental horizons. This section also presents through these two women the socio-cultural frame within which the story of Waldo and Arthur unfolds.

The Brown brothers are concretized by these two ladies as at once repulsive but intriguing, almost hideous and pitiable to the outsider or onlooker. On Mrs. Dun the impression is totally negative. She 'resentfully' notices 'the two old men, stumping, trudging' almost 'tottering' along worn down by 'their age and infirmities' and 'holding each other by the hand' (18-19). The sense of repulsion she feels, but cannot quite quantify, has been echoed earlier in Mr. Poulter's contemptuous dismissal of them as a 'couple of no-hopers with ideas about themselves' (18). Their only demotic ally, Mrs. Poulter, too finds herself unable to go on defending them and disowns them reiterating Mrs. Dun's 'They're nothing to me' (19). The exposition sets the dismal tone for a narrative which reveals, as William Walsh puts it, that the two brothers, "are handcuffed, as they grope down the path negotiating the irregular bricks, by love and hate, memory and genes, horror and misery" (Walsh, 86).

The second and third sections, named 'Waldo' and 'Arthur' respectively tell the same story through two perspectives. Here again the characterization is through a combination of the omniscient narrator commenting mostly on the brother used to focalize the text, direct characterization of the brother concerned through his thoughts and actions and his indirect characterization of the other players in the drama of his life. As in the other sections, even when the author privileges a particular point of view by giving it almost complete say in 'telling' the story, he also uses the omniscient narrator to balance that point of view by revealing its own biases.

Relationships form the thematic content of the two intermediate sections. Thelma Herring points out that one can read the predominant emotion dominating the 'Waldo' section as hatred born of deep seated insecurity and increasing isolation (Herring, 75). Waldo has a deep sense of being chained in a disadvantageous relationship to his twin brother. As a result of this, he either has to suffer being excluded when Arthur is patronizingly preferred over him because of his disability or the equally strong sense of mortification of constantly being associated with Arthur. His greatest sense of humiliation and anger however, is to see Arthur actually doing and surpassing him in the areas he deems his territory. Thus, that Arthur manages to capture and hold Dulcie's affection, that Arthur reads literary classics and is disturbed by the larger questions of life they raise and that Arthur actually writes, are blows that quite devastate Waldo's construction of a superior self-image in relation to his brother. The loss of this image, both gradually throughout his life and more suddenly

towards the close of his narrative infuse his being with palpable abhorrence for things and people, springing from personal despair as the success and place in life he had envisaged for himself slip further out of his reach.

If hatred for others and an incipient self-hatred are part of Waldo's constitution of himself, then the third section devoted to and entitled 'Arthur' is infused with the thematic concerns of positive relationships and an almost religious spiritual search for wholeness. Most of the episodes that figure in the Waldo section are reinscribed here through the mellow perspective of Arthur. What were sources of humiliation for Waldo, become sources of affection and part of a continued process of personal enlightenment for Arthur.

Although they are twins, and although "the lives of the brothers fused by consent at some points"(81), they are opposites, physically, mentally and spiritually points out Thelma Herring. Waldo is depicted as a pseudo-intellectual, who excels at writing English essays and becomes a librarian. He assumes a sense of superiority that fuels and legitimizes his hatred of and scorn for the people around him. Waldo, however, has aspirations to be a novelist when he eventually hopes to find something to write about. The elitist and esoteric view of art and himself, he holds fails to keep him in touch with the realities that could have nourished his aspirations into fruition. Arthur is portrayed as an alleged simpleton, who is a failure at school except for a surprising flair for figures, becomes a grocer's assistant and humbly accepts the realities around him. He loves and is loved by people (and dogs) and seeks to share a redemptive totality with the lives of those he touches. "Their experiences, however often coincide: they love the same woman (after their different fashions), both write "poems" and read books, each acquires a dog, both on occasion play the woman, both give Mrs. Poulter a "child"(Waldo in the form of a plastic doll, Arthur by accepting the relationship himself), each is accosted by a whore on the night that the Second World War ends, each becomes in a sense the other's murderer." To Mrs. Dun, watching from the bus as they walk hand in hand, "It was difficult to decide which was leading and which was being led. But one was the leader, she could sense"(19). Waldo, of course, believes himself to be the leader, and the protector of Arthur; Arthur feels from the beginning that he is protected, and is the protector of his whole family. (Herring, 73-74). The denouement reveals that both visions of life though seemingly at odds with one another interpenetrate one another, constituting parts of a whole.

The final section, like the opening section, imposes the perspective of the outside world onto the narrative. As in the opening section, the closing section entitled, 'Mrs Poulter and the Zeitgeist' combines negative impressions of the fate of the Brown brothers and a more positive apprehension of the same by Mrs. Poulter. Only this time her perspective holds sway over the denouement giving it a stronger sense of thematic coherence.

To touch upon some more autobiographical and personal notes that impinge upon the book: "White testifies in *Flaws in the Glass* to his own anxiety at the time he was writing *The Solid Mandala*. He and his friend Lascaris had decided to move from "Dog woods," their home of many years, because the suburban nuisances were becoming oppressive. He feared that the uprooting might be fatal to his writing, that *The Solid Mandala* might be his "swan song". Inevitably the novel "was infused with an amount of fatality and f eeboding." For those interested in the sources of White's inspiration and possible prototypes of his characters, he identifies the twins as "my two halves," with Waldo as "myself at my coldest and worst." Mrs. Poulter "grew out of" a neighbor lady, and Dulcie "has both the goodness and the smugness of a fulfilled Jewish acquaintance"(Jones, 72-73). Patrick White counted the novel as one among his favorites. "I like *The Aunt's Story* and *The Solid Mandata* best – the first because for so long nobody would pay attention to it,...and *The Solid Mandala* because it's a very personal kind of book, I suppose, and comes closest to what I've wanted."(1990: 21-2)

1.4 LET US SUM UP

Patrick White's life and career as an Australian novelist are marked by paradoxes and tensions that are subtly evinced in his novels in general, and *The Solid Mandala* in particular. The tension between tradition – be it familial or literary – and the proclivities of his individual talent that consciously strove against more rigidly defined horizons of national and literary expectations lead to the paradox of accolades abroad and ambiguity in reception in Australia. *The Solid Mandala* taps in on these ambiguities in its portrayal of the twins –Waldo with his abhorrence of the society in which he lives and fear that it will contaminate his art; Arthur with his love that seeks to open the eyes of people to the potential for redemption and totality.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What were the dichotomous pulls that were in play during the formative years of Patrick White the novelist that have a bearing on *The Solid Mandala*?
2. Discuss what you think of some of the positions that have been taken to account for White's paradoxical reception in Australia.
3. Give a brief analysis of the structural and narrative paradoxes in *The Solid Mandala*.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Antipodean margin:	Parts of the British Empire on the opposite side of the earth, used to refer to New Zealand and Australia
Black comedy:	A type of comedy that employs black, cynical or wry humour
Colonial centre:	The centre of colonial power, England
Denouement:	The outcome or unraveling of the plot of a narrative
Dialectic:	Oppositional ideas or that pervade and unify an argument, work or system
Dingoes:	Australian wild dogs, used here metaphorically
Expository section:	The initial part of a literary work that explains the situation at the beginning of the narrative action or establishes the context for the action
Jackeroo:	Colloquial Australian term for a man arrived from England to gain experience in the bush often as a novice at a sheep or cattle station
Jungian framework:	A psychoanalytical framework of criticism that places emphasis on how a work embodies archetypes, the collective unconscious and the spirit of the age

Kitchen-sink realism:	A genre of realism that focuses on the mundane realities of daily existence, having as its setting areas in the home, often the kitchen
Liminality:	The state of being on the border of two conditions and as a result not fully a part of either
Outback:	The sparsely settled flat arid inland area of Australia
Pom:	A derogatory term for an immigrant from Britain still snobbishly clinging to the cultural values of the mother country
The bush:	The Australian wilderness raised to the status of a national myth related to the pioneering ethos of British settlement on the Australian continent
Zeitgeist:	The spirit of an age or the trend of thought and feeling in a period

1.7 REFERENCES

- Barnes, John. 'Introduction' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 1-4.
- Craven, Peter. 'Australia' in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*. Edited by John Sturrock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. p39-50.
- Driesen, Cynthia Vanden. 'The Artist and Society: Jung and Patrick White' in *Australian Literature Today*. Edited by R.K. Dhawan and David Kerr. Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1993.p 119-132.
- Dutton, Geoffrey. *Patrick White*. Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1962.
- Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Herring, Thelma. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly(1964-1967)*. Edited by G.A.Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.
- Jones, Joseph. *Patrick White*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.
- Joyce, Clayton ed.. *Patrick White: A Tribute*. North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1991.
- Singh, Kirpal. 'Patrick White: An Outsider's View' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p117-122.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.
- White, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait*. New York: Viking Press, 1981.
- White, Patrick. *Patrick White Speaks*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.

UNIT 2 OPENINGS AND PREOCCUPATIONS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Opening Gestures
- 2.2 Thematic Preoccupations
- 2.3 A Sense of Place
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Questions
- 2.6 Glossary
- 2.7 References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This section attempts to suggest the significance of the epigraphs to the text and briefly go over some of the themes evolved in the text. It also looks at the way Sarsaparilla is evoked as a setting to the text's themes and narratives. The aim is to introduce you to some of the textual frames of reference relevant to making a reading of *The Solid Mandala*.

2.1 OPENING GESTURES

Patrick White places four epigraphs as pointers to chart the course the narrative will take en route its odyssey of exploration. All four of them weave together a similar thread of thought. They are the opening notes to a concerto of the soul that sees the possibility of mandalic totality in putatively mundane marbles, and intimations of salvation in a supposed simpleton. Below I have juxtaposed the epigraphs and some of the observations they have evoked to help you capture the ambience White wished to evoke at the threshold to *The Solid Mandala*.

There is another world, but it is in this one
Paul Eluard

"Patrick White is pre-eminently a novelist of consciousness. Whatever the archetypal metaphors of the unconscious, whatever the structures of image, symbol or theme from which he or his critics might claim his novels are constructed, they find their meanings outside these closed systems - in the world. The epigraph to *The Solid Mandala* - "There is another world, but it is in this one" - does not necessarily mean that there is some magic or archetypal or even unconscious reality behind these appearances. All possible worlds are immanent to consciousness" (Ashcroft, 124).

"The essential insight, without which all endeavour will be in vain, is that the metaphysical is recognized as illusory. There is no "other world", "no beyond", no "real" world: the "apparent world", our world, transitory, meaningless, continually becoming, never reposing in being, is the only world. ... White's elected characters act out White's struggle to find transcendence which occurs within the world....The god that Arthur sees is...in the world" (McCulloch,32-33).

It is not outside, it is inside: wholly within.
Meister Eckhart

"A whole universe is summoned up in the novel's slim beginning, a world which includes the clotted paddocks of Terminus Row, and the world in which people lived, belonged to Fellowships and Lodges, and are not afraid of electric gadgets. That world is the context for the tragedy of the Browns, parents and children, which is itself a comment on the words of Meister Eckhart quoted as an epigraph, 'It is not outside, it is inside: wholly within'" (Walsh, 86).

*... yet still I long
for my twin in the sun...*
Patrick Anderson

"*The Solid Mandala* dramatizes a search for Divinity in the art form itself; it is a quest for wholeness which seeks to contain an energy or power that may ultimately give expression to another world that White perceives as being "inside" and "wholly within" the visible one" (McCulloch, 27). According to McCulloch, the novel postulates "the question of whether or not art is able to constitute the religious activity of man" and that White envisages the "pursuit of the perfect art form, in quest of the marriage between Apollo and Dionysos ("...yet still I long for my twin in the sun")" (McCulloch, 28).

*It was an old and rather poor church, many of the
ikons were without settings, but such churches are
the best for praying in.*
Dostoyevsky

Carolyn Bliss posits that in the denouement Arthur becomes a type of Christ-figure. This motif is gradually built up in the text with references to 'The Grand Inquisitor' and the central finale of Arthur's mandala dance that reenacts the Passion of Christ. "Subsequently, he sets Waldo's death on a Thursday and Arthur's reappearance at Mrs. Poulter's on the Saturday. Thus Arthur is absent for the traditional three days, although the timetable of the Passion has been slightly skewed" (Bliss, 112). Bliss reads echoes of the epigraph from Dostoyevsky into the evocation of the police sergeant's memories "of a boyhood smell of cold, almost deserted churches, and old people rising transparent and hopeful, chafing the blood back into their flesh after the sacrament" (313).

2.2 THEMATIC PREOCCUPATIONS

The Solid Mandala, is densely overlaid with thematic interpretations and readings of the narrative. Most of these themes are textually worked out through the twins, Waldo and Arthur. As a result, much overlapping of thematic possibilities takes place. As a framework to explore the possibilities this novel lays open, several of the thematic preoccupations of this novel have been listed. It is for you to add to or take away from this list as your own reading breathes life into this thematic skeleton and fills it out with the flesh and blood of the character's actions and thoughts.

- **The human sense of isolation and the search for meaning.** This constitutes an abiding thematic concern in White's oeuvre. Waldo and Arthur embody an almost Nietzschean theme of the lonely agnostic's agonized quest for the capacity of insight into the very nature of things. Waldo's futile struggle to exert his sense of identity leads him further and further along the path of alienated isolation. Arthur takes up the pursuit of meaning against the enervating rationalism of his family and reaches for a greater understanding of mankind, the nature of existence, pain and totality. He manifests a longing for truths beyond material knowledge - the nature of redemption, the large meaning and design of life. The semi-mystical vortex of the narrative

climaxes at a final epiphany that leaves them both tormented by their vision and humanity.

- **The malaise of empty materialism.** Emotional incapacity, unrequited desire, spiritual numbness, an analysis of social pretensions, the startling human capacity for savagery and hollow narcissism are thematically explored through Waldo and other denizens of Sarsaparilla. Thelma Herring comments about White, "He is still concerned with the necessity for love and humility in human relationships, with the inadequacy of reason and the superiority of the mystic's intuition of reality, but the division into the elect and the damned no longer seems so drastic" (Herring, 72). This is especially seen through White's portrayal of Mrs. Poulter who inhabits the spheres of the enlightened Arthur, as well as the narrowly materialistic and judgmental spheres of Mrs. Dun and her husband. However, McCulloch is of the opinion that the divisions are clearly marked especially in the case of the two protagonists. "Arthur is presented as authentic man, that is archetypal man cleansed of the illusion of culture. He is more truthful than Waldo who represents civilized man. The contrast between the truth of nature and the pretentious lie of civilization can exist as an analogy of contrast between the eternal core of things, and the phenomenal world" (McCulloch, 34).
- **Religion.** "Religion. Yes, that's behind all my books.", averred Patrick White, "What I'm interested in 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 open up to him" (McGregor, 218). In a letter to Beatson, White explained, "I suppose what I am increasingly trying to do in my books is to give professed unbelievers glimpses of their own unprofessed factor. I believe most people have a religious factor, but are afraid that by admitting it they will forfeit their right to be considered intellectuals" (Beatson, 167). He adds elsewhere, "In my books I have lifted bits from various religions in trying to come to a better understanding; I've made use of religious themes and symbols. Now, as the world becomes more pagan, one has to lead people in the same direction in a different way" (1990, 19). *The Solid Mandala* is suffused with a confluence of religious motifs drawn from across the spectrum of Oriental tantric mandalas to Occidental allusions to Judeo-Christianity. This theme of religious responsibility is played out in the relationship between the two brothers. "White works out an intimate connection of transcendental and rationalistic attitudes in the twins Arthur and Waldo. The intimacy and inescapability of the relationship between them produces a constant and destructive collision of viewpoints, and confronts Arthur again and again with his responsibility toward a temperament hostile to the values his mysticism has led him to cherish. He cannot voluntarily renounce his brother ...because he has not voluntarily taken him on. And it is from this agonizing, tense contiguity of opposites that the book derives part of its disturbing power" (Edgecombe, 62).
- **Failure.** This theme manifests itself variously – as Waldo's sense of failure as a writer, his failure to win Dulcie – quotidian and worldly failure. To this Carolyn Bliss adds, "The failure of love to be strong enough to save is a familiar vehicle for the theme of failure in Patrick White's fiction" (Bliss, 110). Arthur feels this sense of failure when he finds his love fails to integrate Waldo fully into the mandalic dance, to negate the consuming power of Waldo's hatred – spiritual and cosmic failure. White's preoccupation with failure as a theme draws on his belief that, "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming" (in Joyce, 47).

- **Literary creation.** “The recurring subject in *The Solid Mandala* is literary creation. Arthur’s experiences are an enactment of life’s essence, its joy and its suffering which ideally could be the source of Waldo’s creative literary capacities. But Waldo turns from the source and is left with dry empty form” (McCulloch, 30). McCulloch sees the novel as using Waldo and Arthur as “plausible embodiments of the Apollonian and Dionysian duality” (McCulloch, 28) where Apollo is the god of individuation, dream and illusion, and Dionysos is the god of intoxication and the forces of nature. He goes on, “Waldo is potentially the provider of Apollonian form. Arthur is the source, the wild inebriated Dionysian force that requires form. Waldo must accept Arthur’s love, his source, before he can create and become one with the universe. The goal is unity” (McCulloch, 28).

2.3 A SENSE OF PLACE

The imaginary suburbs of Sarsaparilla, which appears also in *Riders in the Chariot* written just before the *The Solid Mandala*, acquire the status of the fictional landscape of Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha, Joyce’s Dublin, Hardy’s Wessex or Arundhati Roy’s Ayemenem. The role of the everyday folk in Sarsaparilla, like Mr. Poulter or Mrs. Dun, is to represent the dull, commonplace, ignorant averageness that made for ‘the Great Australian Emptiness’ as White saw it. Sarsaparilla inscapes or captures the sterility and materialism of White’s vision of a spiritual wasteland. According to Ken Goodwin, the place is modeled on the Castle Hill suburb, which used to be the home of White and Lascaris before they moved to the heart of the city (Goodwin, 169).

When the narrative opens it is in a “a place once a village now a suburb, in which the remnants of the country die in the suburban landscape”(Walsh, 85). In this mildly caustic idyll of suburban life, Australia is center stage. The larger world impinges in the form of the Jewish question and the allusions to the World War and the holocaust. But these are worked into the lives of the Brown brothers in such a way as to condense the macrocosmic upheavals – such as the holocaust or the Peace – into the microcosms of their personal failures, tragedies of rejection or acceptance. The narrative keeps them within the perspective of the lives of the twins. The Jewish question becomes coalesced with attempts to establish a relationship with Dulcie Feinstein, and the end of the Second World War is marked for both brothers by encounters with prostitutes.

According to Walsh, White evokes “not only the exact registration of the physical appearance of the place, but also a sense of the community’s reaction, its ethos and feeling. There is a considerable stress on the rougher and more abrasive elements of Australian common life. The names of the people and places, for example, are redolent of a kind of truculent glumness: Wally Pugh, Mrs. Purves, Mrs. Musto, Mrs. Mutton, Norm Croucher, the dogs Scruffy and Runt, O’Halloran Road, Ada Avenue, Sarsaparilla, Barranugli, Shadbolt Lane, Gippa Gunyan, Mungindribble. The ugliness these names stand for is confirmed by the half aggressive idiom which is the common idiom of communication and the two together convey, negatively and positively, the feeling of a society which is both traditionally and visually uneducated, and possessed of an openness and freedom untrammelled by the weight of an oppressive inheritance” (Walsh, 88). As Mr. Brown said once to Waldo and Arthur, ‘There’s too much you boys, reared in the light of an empty country, will never understand. There aren’t any shadows in Australia. Or discipline. Every man jack can do what he likes’ (161).

Sarsaparilla is debunked in the final section when the modern idea of comfort and material progress in the suburbs is reduced to “the electricity...the phone...the electric frying-pan...the telly”(295). It’s a closed world, where human relationships

become just habits and the television is a substitute for friends. Mrs. Poulter muses, "If she didn't have any friends without the ones she yarned with over fences, in buses, or the street, she didn't need any. She had the telly, the nice announcers, and world figures in your own lounge. She could afford to mind her own business, without Mrs. Dun reminding her of it"(295). The outer socio-political reality barely impinges on this microcosm of self-complacent containment. The real world is transformed into a hyperreal source of diversion from moments of unpleasantness in local life – for example when Mrs. Poulter's pigs are butchered. Mrs. Poulter waited most for "the real programmes, when they let off one of the bombs, or an aeroplane caught fire at the moment of crashing, or those guerillas they'd collared, of course they were only Orientals, and once it showed you the bodies they'd shot....the news items so real, you only sometimes overheard the squeals of a stuck and bleeding pig"(299). Only after she sees the dead and mutilated Waldo, at the end of the narrative, do these become realities she can connect with; even if in her imagination they metamorphosize into a kind of armageddon. "She knew now. All the films, all the telly, all the black-and-white of the papers was turning real, as the great clouds, the great tanks, ground up groaning over Sarsaparilla....Hope was faint. She knew now. The flat faces of all those Chinese guerillas or Indonesians, it was the same thing, dragged out across the dreadful screen. All those Jews in ovens, that was long ago, but still burning, lying in heaps. Lone women bashed up in Mosman, Marouba, Randwick, places you went only in your sleep"(302).

Veena Noble suggests that "Perhaps the most common theme of Australian literature is the lack of intensity, passion and spiritual consciousness in middle-class life"(Noble, 31). However, this is a theme that has begun to wear thin and sit uneasily with an Australian audience. Adrian Mitchell traces this phenomenon with reference to "that collective state of mind or mindlessness, called Sarsaparilla. When White first began writing of this social territory, his readers shared his savage delight as he slashed his way through the values, the speech patterns, the affectations of mid-suburban Australia. The consensus is that he was wickedly accurate. He had the mannerisms down...and he knew just how to expose the private vulgarities. The public vulgarities were easy game....He had discovered the subtleties of the demotic, he knew the vulnerable spots...he understood the true function of gossip in a social group, the definitions that small talk established.... Sarsaparilla has become a convention"(Mitchell, 14-5). While admitting that White's work has put Australian literature on the world map, Kirpal Singh says that he would not add "that White's work gives us the Australian character or, indeed, is even a representative of Australian society! Even Sarsaparilla which appears to be firmly located as some recognisably Australian suburb could just as well have been situated in any of the big European cities. Subtle nuances and cadences aside, there is nothing particularly Australian in an ethos whose chief characteristics are a vulgarity of living and an emptiness of soul"(Singh, 119).

2.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been given a textual frame of reference within which *The Solid Mandala* can be approached. The epigraphs point towards the leitmotif of a spiritual quest within the quotidian and the themes play upon variations of this leitmotif. The wasteland-like setting against which this narrative is plotted, however, has been a site of criticism of White's vision and presentation of Australia.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of the epigraphs to the main narrative.
2. Elaborate on the thematic strands that frame the characters of the twins.

3. Discuss White's comment on the effectiveness of evocation of Sarsaparilla.

2.6 GLOSSARY

Apollo:	God of music and light in classical mythology; the symbol of reason and culture manifested in writing as a serene orderly quality
Archetypal:	Referring to the concept of recurring archetypes or cross-cultural images, figures or narrative patterns that reflect the collective unconscious
Contiguity:	The relation of belonging to the same or associated group
Dionysos:	God of wine and revelry; signifying impulsiveness, irrationality and passion in writing
Hyperreal:	A term used by Baudrillard to speak of a condition in which the distinctions between real and imagined, reality and illusion are eroded
Leitmotif:	Recurring image that subtly unifies a text
Oriental tantric mandalas:	Symbols of auspicious wholeness in tantric oriental belief systems such as Buddhism and forms of tantric yoga
Passion of Christ:	Suffering of Jesus Christ after the Last Supper and during the Crucifixion

2.7 REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, W.D.. 'More Than One Horizon' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 123-134.
- Beatson, Peter. *The Eye in the Mandala: Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*. London: Paul Elek, 1976.
- Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Herring, Thelma. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly (1964-1967)*. Edited by G.A. Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.
- Joyce, Clayton ed.. *Patrick White: A Tribute*. North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1991.

- McCulloch, A.M. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.
- McGregor, Craig ed.. *In the Making*. Melbourne: Nelson, 1969.
- Mitchell, Adrian. 'Eventually, White's Language: Words and More than Words' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 5-16.
- Morley, Patricia. *Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972.
- Noble, Veena. 'A Study of the Hermaphroditic Element in Patrick White's *The Solid Mandala*' in *Australian and Indian Literature: Studies in Mutual Response*. Edited by D. Kerr and R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1991. p 30-35.
- Singh, Kirpal. 'Patrick White: An Outsider's View' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p117-122.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.
- White, Patrick. *Patrick White Speaks*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.

UNIT 3 DENIZENS OF THE AUSTRALIAN EMPTINESS

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Characterization
- 3.2 The Core of Reality
 - 3.2.1 Waldo
 - 3.2.2 Arthur
- 3.3 Circles of Existence
 - 3.3.1 The Inner Circle
 - 3.3.2 The Outer Circle
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Questions
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This section will look at some of the premises and practices that underlie White's mode of characterization on a theoretical and pragmatic level. It will also deal with some critical perspectives on White's techniques of characterization and the characters in *The Solid Mandala*. The delineation of characters in the novel will be examined at length.

3.1 CHARACTERIZATION

"Characters interest me more than situations. I don't think any of my books have what you call plots.... I always think of my novels as being the lives of the characters. I have the same idea with all my books: an attempt to come close to the core of reality, the structure of reality, as opposed to the merely superficial. The realistic novel is remote from art. A novel should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience; it shouldn't set out what you already know."(1990: 21)

In 'The Prodigal Son' while Patrick White decried "the Great Australian Emptiness", he explains that it "was the exaltation of the 'average' that made" him panic and feel impelled to write. So when he began writing his next novel, *The Tree of Man*, his mode of characterization drew on an epistemological stance with reverberations of the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. "Because the void I had to fill was so immense, I wanted to suggest...every possible aspect of life, through the lives of an ordinary man and woman. But at the same time I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary, the mystery and poetry which alone could make bearable the lives of such people"(1990: 15). He concluded the autobiographical piece he did on the occasion of the Nobel Prize with the words, "Here I hope to continue living, and while I still have the strength, to people the Australian emptiness in the only way I am able"(1990: 44).

This aspect of White's characterization holds true also for *The Solid Mandala*. The Brown brothers, on the surface of it, are far from extraordinary. And it is this almost nondescript aspect of the brothers that White first presents to the readers in the opening section of the book, where they are apprehended through the eyes of an

'average' suburbanite, Mrs. Dun. The central sections unfold the interior drama of their lives, paradoxically plumbing the mystic depths of Arthur who to an outsider's perspectives seems well below 'average'. Yet it is he who is "the keeper of mandalas"(240).

This is a paradox – of extraordinary ordinariness – that Adrian Mitchell too notes. "White's characters are an extraordinary set of figures, not at all (initially) prepossessing. Most of them ...are awkward, angular, uncomfortable, brittle, though some of the lesser figures may be big, billowy, wheezy...". Mitchell however penetrates this surface reality to ascertain the way character functions in White's novels and comes up with some interesting observations. "My interest is in the nature of character in White's novels. Character, as I read it there, is a "given"; it is fixed right from the beginning. There isn't change in character itself, but change in understanding. The protagonist discovers by painful experience something about the nature and extent of his spiritual resources....But the character of the protagonist does not in itself change. ...Arthur and Waldo Brown dance around each other; they don't evolve, they revolve. White...conceals a relatively simple sense of character within the complexity of his patterns of symbols and metaphors, the literary allusions and the enigma of his mandalas"(Mitchell, 6-8).

Mitchell argues that because of this static characterization, the visionary status of his illuminati or enlightened characters becomes just a verbal artifact. Spiritual perception is rarely reciprocated or acted upon, according to him. "Mrs. Poulter appears to understand Arthur's dance, but that is something we have to take on trust because it doesn't seem to accomplish much. Unless to say that Arthur is sometimes comprehensible. *The Solid Mandala* (1966) measures not only the difference between the twin's knowledge of each other, but perhaps too easily sets up the inadequacy of Waldo's knowledge, the misunderstanding that his kind of intelligence precipitates" (Mitchell, 9). Continuing about White's mode of presentation of his characters Mitchell notes, "We discover that beyond what we might call the poetic excitement of these privileged moments of perception, White will frequently insert his moral visions into the fabric of the story, to explain what the characters cannot explain. Their visions ultimately lack conviction, because they can only be communicated by assertion"(10).

Others too have commented on the forced nature of White's characterization. "His novels tend to move from outer reality into the disturbed or fragmented mind (a process influenced in later works to some extent by his reading of Jung), and, for a few central characters, the unsuccessful spiritual impulse to understanding. Despite the jerkiness of parts of the narrative, the thematic construction is always carefully molded, sometimes seeming to be imposed on the characters irrespective of their natures"(Goodwin, 167). One major reason for this is that the dramatis personae have to function humanly as well as symbolically. Besides which, narrative is filtered through the minds of characters revealing their nature. While Kirpal Singh agrees that White's characters seem "flat, pre-fixed and pre-determined to act out a certain sequence of events" he places this within the classical Aristotelian frame of reference where action has precedence over character. "Like the tragic heroes of ancient Greeks, White's protagonists are consistently exploring and bursting through their hubris to arrive at a newer, fuller, richer, revelation of themselves"(Singh, 120).

3.2 THE CORE OF REALITY

3.2.1 Waldo

Born with his innards twisted, Waldo is emblemized by the taw with a knot at the centre. Tense and rigid, he is an involuted misanthrope marked by a self-enclosed fastidious disgust for people and things. He rejects love and relationships as a sort of threat to his personal identity as a potential artist. Besides a guilt-ridden obsession for

the necessity of loneliness, he is unwilling to yield to sensuousness. His is a retreat into isolation. His powerful egocentricity is not open to compassionate treatment. In the end there is no redemptive transfiguration for him. He strives towards an indelible individuality but ends up with obscurity. His self-limited interest makes him remote and self-absorbed, even callous. "Waldo carries this fierce sense of his own identity and his resistance to the intrusion of others to a point where it is pathological and, since it is invariably connected with self-love, evil. ...he is a spiritual and emotional solipsist. Life and experience seem to him a violation of his enclosed perfection, an assault on his privacy"(Walsh, 93). Moreover, Waldo is even as a youth aware of the malaise that condemns him to anomie. The narrative voice in the novel reveals, "On the whole, though he would only have confessed it to himself, he did not understand people, except those he created by his own imagining. If it hadn't been for his own visions he might have felt desperate"(98).

He resents, but is sustained by his bondage to Arthur. Putatively superior, he fails and ends his life hating Arthur, his only contact with real life. He and Arthur are presented in Manichean opposition. Waldo's is a quest for personal identity while Arthur's is for insight into the very nature of being. Waldo's ego imprisons the spiritual sense as materialism can do. His relationships breed frustration and a sense of inadequacy. Arthur with his open display of affection, his intuitive irrationalism is a constant repudiation of his failure. "Waldo is disappointed in love and in authorship and is increasingly resentful of his half-witted, incomprehensible brother" (Goodwin, 173).

Waldo's rationalist approach to life was a legacy his parents had left him. "Waldo had not been taught to pray, because, said Mother, everything depends on your will, it would be foolishness to expect anything else, we can achieve what we want if we are determined, if we are confident that we are strong"(77). As a substitute to the apotheosis of a transcendent entity, Waldo places himself on an imaginary pedestal and from his vantagepoint presumes to look down on all else. "If any, his religion had become a cultivation of personal detachment, of complete transparency – he was not prepared to think emptiness – of mind. In this way he suffered no immediate hurt"(177).

He had a taste for the intellectual life and had literary aspirations. His fragmentary attempt at writing a novel - *Tiresias a Youngish Man* - became the stigma of his anemic sterility. "I want to, and am going to write about *myself*"(94) he wants to tell Dulcie when she enquires about his writing. His writing achievements include several articles, a fragment of a novel, membership of the Fellowship of Australian Writers, and reading a paper on Barron Field to the Beecroft Literary Society. In old age he imagines that a fragment of Tennyson's "Fatima" that he has copied out, is the product of his own muse. "Waldo is the sterile artist without a source, without connection to the source of life. He is a representative of twentieth century intellectual man who has cut himself off from love and the mystery of the universe"(McCulloch, 50).

McCulloch points out how Waldo's relationship with his brother is paradoxical. Waldo's need, hatred, love and jealousy of Arthur distort and twist his perspective of the world. Superficially, he lives and acts out a life nourished by the belief that Arthur is an idiot, an inferior being. But the closeness he has with Arthur draws out from within him admissions: "Perhaps he dreaded Arthur most of all, because of something Arthur might tell him one day"(167) (McCulloch, 40). Even Waldo muses at the ineffable and yet inextricable interpenetration of their existence; "With Arthur it was different. There was no escaping Arthur. At best he became the sound of your own breathing, his silences sometimes consoled....Life as he began in time to see it, is the twin consciousness, jostling you, hindering you, but with which at unexpected moments, it is possible to communicate in ways both animal and delicate"(76). Arthur would remain an inescapable taunt to Waldo's very existence. "He has hated Arthur for everything he is: for his ability to love people, for his capacity for

experiencing, for his insight into the truth of things, for his appearance, and most of all for the fact of his existence" (McCulloch, 52).

Narcissism and insensitivity become a response to Waldo's failure to love. The fullest expression of his self to the world is consequently superficial and egocentric. His self-absorbed belief in his greatness leaves him in silent competition with Arthur. "Waldo didn't believe it was possible to have more than one genius around"(35). When Mrs. Brown doesn't allow Waldo to squeeze the butter and knead the dough because Arthur has according to her "a particular gift for it", Waldo is piqued, all the more so, when Arthur calls these homely occupations his "vocation".

"Waldo was more jealous of that word than he was of Arthur's privilege. He wondered where he had got it from. Because words are not Arthur's line. It was Waldo who collected them, like stamps or coins. He made lists of them. He rolled them in his mouth like polished stones. Then Arthur went and sprang this vocation thing of his."(35-6)

This jealousy also manifests itself as a defense to keep a part of him inviolate. When Arthur asks him if he can act in Waldo's play, Waldo refuses. He realizes his creative life "was something he could not bear to share with his brother, whose breathing he used to listen to whenever he woke in the night, the brother who looked almost right inside him when they opened their eyes on twin pillows in the morning"(39). This resentment ossifies into hatred as the fear of being upstaged resurfaces when he finds Dulcie and Arthur together, finds Arthur reading *The Brothers Karamazov* in the library and reads Arthur's poem. It envelops him in hatred. "He hated his brother Arthur, although, or perhaps because, Arthur was the thread of continuity, and might even be the core of truth"(186-7).

"Waldo's is a polished, metallic surface, impermeable to others, whether in the community or the family"(Walsh, 93). He can't commune with his father, "Sitting in the train Waldo suddenly looked straight into his father's face....Waldo might have leant back to continue the escape he had made, if his clothes tightening hadn't constrained him, together with the fear that freedom might be the equivalent of isolation. So that in the end he would have liked to touch his father's goodness, but could only be touched by it"(79). Similarly, "Mrs. Poulter was one of the fifty-seven things and persons Waldo hated"(58). His passionate loathing becomes in White's prose a laughably precise and constrictive tabulation that lumps inanimate things and people in a way that imbues the comic with pathos. Even his curious relationship with Arthur as a child was half histrionic, half natural - "So they moved through the landscape of boyhood, two figures seen at a distance, or too close up... he learned to give them what they wanted. Occasionally, in passing, after returning the scones to the table, he would very carefully brush the crumbs which had fallen on Arthur's knees, with a candid though ostentatious charity which moved the observer - as well as the performer"(75-6). Even when he contemplates marriage to Dulcie just prior to anticlimactically finding her with Arthur, he figures most prominently in his considerations:

Waldo went over the way in which he would benefit by marriage with Dulcie. On the financial side they might have to skimp a bit at first, because he would refuse to touch anything Dulcie brought with her until he proved himself as a husband. Nobody would be in a position to say theirs was not an idealistic marriage....Then the home. Undoubtedly he would benefit by having a home of his own. A bed to himself....But it was his work which would benefit most. The atmosphere in which to evolve a style. The novel of psychological relationships in a family, based on his own experience for truth, illuminated by what his imagination would infuse. One of the first things he intended to do was buy a filing cabinet to install in his study. (149-150)

His colleagues - Miss Glasson, Cornelius and Parslow - at the library too are repulsed - as he keeps up the pretense that marks the dichotomy of his split existence:

**Denizens of the
Australian
Emptiness**

Because Mr. Brown of the intellectual breathers in the Botanic Gardens must never be confused with the subfusc, almost abstract figure, living on top of a clogged greasetrap, and the moment of creative explosion, under the arches of yellow grass, down Terminus Road. Waldo Brown, in whom these two phenomena met on slightly uneasy terms...looking out from behind his barricade of words and perceptions... his less approachable self.... So Waldo, who was in frequent demand, continued to refuse, on principle, by formula. To submit himself to the ephemeral, the superficial relationships might damage the crystal core holding itself in reserve for some imminent moment of higher idealism. Just as he had avoided fleshly love - while understanding its algebra, of course - the better to convey eventually its essence.(183)

Thelma Herring feels, "The novelist systematically undermines all Waldo's pretensions, and his final judgement on him, conveyed through the dog's symbolic mutilation of his corpse, could not be harsher: yet the reader who remembers the all-too-human embarrassment of the young Waldo, writhing under the physical protection of his imbecile brother, the diffident warnings of his unworldly father, the patronage of the wealthy Mrs. Musto, is likely to retain for him, even in his desiccated and self-cherishing old age, some grains of sympathy that may soften without fundamentally changing the verdict that White clearly invites us to make"(Herring,75).

3.2.2 Arthur

The intensity of Arthur's vision creates for him his own mystical drama, until he is lost in its many rich moments. He lives out a vivid individual life. White attempts to show the failure to combine two ways of seeing and hence of life into one complete whole through Arthur and his brother. Failure to reconcile and integrate their differences results in an intense love-hate relationship. Even though the twins are, as the blurb says, "two people living one life. ... They shared everything - except their view of things. Waldo, with his intelligence, saw everything and understood little. Arthur was the fool who didn't bother to look. He understood." Arthur is vignettised as a holy fool that is judged by all, save perhaps Dulcie and Mrs. Poulter, as a madman. Paradoxically, Arthur's outer seeming derangement bespoke of mystical intimation within.

Presented as a sort eccentric seer that sees into the heart of the matter, his inner life merges memory, creative memory and the present in a soft-edged shifting pattern in which the motif of the mandala stands out. His character is developed by sacramental images and sibylline language redolent of a luminous vision. Wordlessly, because he finds that language can be a menace alienating even those whose lives are interwined inextricably.

'Words are not what make you see.'

'I was taught they were,' Waldo answered in hot words.

'I dunno,' Arthur said, 'I forget what I was taught. I only remember what I've learnt.'(56)

He smiled, though for all those pairs of twins with no word between them to express the truth. (280)

But language and its reified form of art do have meaning and immense potential in his schema. During his encounter with a piqued Waldo who feels threatened to see his 'dill' brother at the library encroaching on what he has come to deem his domain

of words, language and literature, Waldo asks in jealous exasperation of Arthur who has been explaining his difficulties with *The Brothers Karamazov*:

What will it do for you? To understand? The Grand Inquisitor?....

'I could help people,' Arthur said, beginning to devour the words.(199)

Knowledge is not a source of self-congratulation or for superior perception for Arthur, but a means of altruism and selflessness, of responsibility. This perception also defines what Arthur considers the purpose of writing and its subjects. When he tells Waldo he should write about Len Saporta the reason he gives is that, "simple people are somehow more...transparent...you can see right into them. Then you can write about them....it doesn't matter what you write about, provided you tell the truth about it"(29). According to Rodney Edgecombe, Arthur's is not an esoteric closed notion of literature like his brother's, but a more mimetic view, utilitarian and socially relevant as opposed to self-justifying culture or egoistically self-expressive aesthetics (Edgecombe, 75).

He seems to be positing a transparent nature in opposition to a nature that contrives to be opaque with screens of privacy and pride. After Waldo's gruesome death, Arthur returns to the Library in the course of his confused ramblings and realizes that life has taught him more than literature can.

he squared his shoulders, he put on the cloak of an air, and swirled inside the Public Library, squelching over the polished rubber, trailing his identity round the room in which he had begun the struggle to find it. If he no longer felt moved to take down a book, it was because in the end knowledge had come to him, not through words, but lightning. (307)

White in *Flaws in the Glass*, admits he has come to believe that truth may be "the property of silence – at any rate the silences filling the space between words", over which he only "sometimes" has control (1981: 42).

Through understanding and identifying with others he shows a capacity to love which is not mawkish as the hieratic elements in his character are emphasized. The spontaneous and unaffected profound inner tranquility of the supposed 'imbecile' rejoices in the palpable actuality of common life and communicates the intimations of other realities which lie locked within quotidian experience. William Walsh notes that the societal response to Arthur's simplemindedness, varies between the horror of worried parents when Arthur is young – 'I warn yer, Mr. Brown,' Mr. Haynes was saying, and his usually jolly chins were compressed, "you'll have to restrain him. Yer don't realise a big lump of a boy like that can turn violent. In his condition. It's hard, I know, for the parents to see.'(47) – to the exaggerated bonhomie of the men hiding their embarrassment at the Speedex Service Station when Arthur is old – 'Hi, mate! Hi, Arthur! How's the Brown Bomb?'(59)(Walsh, 88-89). Arthur has as his creed the trust of everyday tangibles:

Arthur eventually added Mr. Allwright to what he knew as truest: to grain in wood, to bread broken roughly open, to cow-pats, neatly freshly dropped. If he did not add Mrs. Allwright it was because she did not fit into that same world of objects, she never became distinct, she was all ideas, plots and tempers. In myth of life, he never ever took to Hera. (227)

His is the arena of simple, down-to-earth practical abilities – milking the cow, making bread, and enjoying his work as a delivery boy with the Allwrights. He is good with animals, has a prodigious gift for sums, an openness and unaffected candor which enamour him to Dulcie Feinstein, Mrs. Poulter and his mother. He empathizes and emotes with others genuinely. William Walsh comments, "Arthur passes almost effortlessly into the lives and feelings of others, but he is entranced by the images of

these as he is infatuated with the glints and clouds and lights in his glass marbles”(Walsh, 92-3).

Ken Goodwin feels that Waldo’s “sterile, jaundiced view of life is balanced by Arthur’s. Confused and inarticulate, he nevertheless has a radiant goodness and insight that are represented by his four mandala-like marbles. He realizes that most of those around him cannot appreciate them or their meaning, that ‘It was himself who was and would remain, the keeper of the mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light.’ The struggle to guess their meaning is symbolized by the ‘red gold disc of the sun’, which he strives to hold, but also by the icebergs, that ‘moaned and jostled one another, crunching and tinkling... to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands’” (Goodwin, 173). Arthur’s solid mandala is a symbol or image for his insight and need for an encompassing totality. Walsh remarks, “Arthur contemplates his marble almost in a religious sense, seeing in it mysteries, realities, symbols and significances – an endless range of reality enclosed in a miniature universe”(Walsh, 92).

After seeing a performance of *Gotterdammerung*, he wonders “Who and where are the gods? He could not have told, but knew, in his flooded depths”(217). The question of god is one of the thematic preoccupations of the book worked out extensively through the persona of Arthur at several narrative junctures. Thelma Herring notes, “Brought up by parents who are conscientious unbelievers, Arthur is untroubled by religious questions until in old age he becomes perplexed by the problem of pain and the Christian emphasis on “the blood and the nails”, and begins the search for his identity, which he finds, however, “not through words, but by lightning”. To Dulcie Feinstein, with whom he experiences spiritual union, he is the instrument through whom her dying father is reunited to God; and to Mrs. Poulter...he becomes the object of faith when her God is brought crashing down by the shock of the discovery of Waldo’s defiled body”(Herring, 78). Mrs. Poulter is restating the message of the text’s epigraphs and perhaps of Arthur’s very persona when she declares, “This man would be my saint...if we could still believe in saints. Nowadays...we’ve only men to believe in. I believe in this man”(214). McCulloch concurs, “Arthur the Divine fool, the holy idiot, is developed to bring forth, by means of contrast with Waldo, the concept of the sterility of the intellect when it is divorced from the spirit and from love” (McCulloch, 39).

His faith and love however cannot redeem his alter ego. He realizes, “Waldo had always hated people, but always rather, well, as a joke. Waldo had done his block at Arthur, but always more or less as a brother. Till it was made plain as a bedstead that the life, the sleep they had shared, must have been jingling brassily all those years with the hatred which only finally killed”(305). Waldo’s death is a revelation about their relationship, but it also cuts Arthur loose. “All his family gone, he was threatened with permanent manhood”(306).

McCulloch argues, “It is important to realize that neither Arthur or Waldo can exist as a whole individual without the other. Consequently there is a logical reason for Arthur ending up in a “nut house” at Waldo’s death.... Waldo should not be viewed merely as a character who exists as a contrast to the true seeker, Arthur. It is through the form and structure of “Waldo’s section” that we can understand “Arthur’s section”. Although structured separately the two parts interact, and the interdependence of the two sections reflects the necessary interdependence of the two brothers” (McCulloch, 50).

3.3 CIRCLES OF EXISTENCE

The other denizens in the world of *The Solid Mandala* constitute the web of interactions that frame the lives and thoughts of the Brown brothers. They are

sparingly etched and our perception of them is deeply colored by the personas that filter through the consciousness of the two brothers. White, in this novel, employs a combination of indirect and direct modes of characterization. In the indirect mode of characterization, the traits and thoughts of a character are revealed through an omniscient narrator who seems to have complete access to the thoughts and actions of the character or through what other characters in the novel think or say about the character concerned. In the direct mode of characterization, the reader is allowed to draw his own conclusions from the concerned character's actions and words. Thus the characters are constructed, as much by their actions or words as how those actions are perceived by the slightly veiled omniscient narrator. For the sake of analysis, I have divided some of the remaining characters in the text into two categories – the inner circle of Mrs. Poulter, Mrs. and Mr. Brown who have the most direct contact with the twins; the outer circle of other people who appear in the novel and frame some of its perspectives.

3.3.1 The Inner Circle

Mrs. Poulter is revealed as an ordinary suburban housewife in the first section, 'In the Bus'. Portrayed with a degree of condescension reflected off the perceptions of the supercilious Waldo and patronizing Mrs. Brown in the second section, the final two sections filtered through the consciousness of Arthur and the narrator add dimensions of unsuspected mysticism to her portrayal.

She is initially established as a sympathetic character when she defends the twin brothers from Mrs. Dun's disapproval of their holding hands and Mr. Poulter's denigrating references to them. "Attempts on herself seldom hurt Mrs. Poulter; it was the attacks on other people. The Mister Browns, for instance. Unable to decide how they might be protected she would take them a baked custard. And return the better for it"(18). Though no intellectual, her unaffected simplicity and openness allows her to comfortably talk to and enlighten Arthur. Filtered through the disdainful perspective of Waldo, this translates differently – "Arthur...loved to talk to Mrs. Poulter. He loved to ask her questions, and Mrs. Poulter, curiously enough, although an inalterably stupid creature, usually seemed to find an answer"(61). Thelma Herring comments on the function of such focalization within the text. "That Mrs. Poulter, through her simple humanity that enables her to find answers to Arthur's questions and respond to his goodness with affection, can earn a mandala and burn with Arthur "in a fit of understanding or charity"(p. 310) seems to imply that a measure of illumination is attainable by most people"(Herring, 81).

Her portrayal oscillates between the mundane and the quasi-mystic. She is the lonely, sixty-seven year old housewife "who still liked a bit of colour" and takes great pleasure in her new "watermelon cardigan" (296). When she remembers that she had not seen the Brown brothers, curiosity and subterfuge coalesce in her special brand of good naturedness. "It was a Saturday afternoon, when Mrs. Poulter, trying to mind her own business, failing to outstare the hedge opposite, decided to bake a nice custard. After all, someone could be sick, and the neighbourliness was another thing to curiosity"(301). Thus, it is that she discovers the sordid and mutilated corpse of Waldo which shakes her faith and sense of secure distance.

Until then she had clung to "faith, which her husband Bill didn't altogether approve of, but it was what she was brought up to, if she didn't always understand, but hoped to in time, not through the ministers, she would never of dared ask, but somehow. She had her Lord Jesus"(298). However, after she sees the desecrated Waldo, Armageddon is unleashed and her iconization of Christ is shown to be insubstantial, "And He released His Hand from the nails. And fell down, in a thwack of canvas, a cloud of dust"(303). Arthur becomes the testament of a more vital faith. "Since her Lord and master Jesus had destroyed himself that same day, she had been given this man-child as a token of everlasting life"(312). Her discovery that "we've only men to believe in", echoes the sentiment of the epigraphs to the novel. The novel closes with

her laying out tea for her husband just as it opened with her conversing with her neighbor. However, White reveals that her quotidian reality has changed permanently – “Then she turned, to do the expected things, before re-entering, her actual sphere of life”(316). Geoffrey Dutton comments “the mandala of wholeness is given to ... Mrs. Poulter at the very end of the book, who performs the ordinary expected things, and then re-enters that inner life which the exterior world cannot destroy”(in Edgecombe, 87).

The parents of the twins are largely narratively mediated by the gossip exchange between Mrs. Poulter and Mrs. Dun in the first section, and then by their sons' points of view in the central sections. We learn their social value for the gossiping women comes from their being bonafide English in origin - having “come out from Home...when the boys were only bits of kids”(15), - and the material wellbeing indicated by their house having a veranda. The hint of class superiority connoted at by Mr. Brown being a white-collar worker who works at a bank and reads books in his spare time is neutralized for them by Mrs. Poulter's, “Mr. Brown senior was a gentleman...[b]ut not any better than us”(15). It's an introduction that tells us as much about the speakers as the spoken.

A shy bookish bank clerk and renegade Baptist, Mr. Brown, is described as a man of principle and kindness by his wife on his demise. He had a taste for, but not the circumstances for an intellectual life. He insists on having a Greek pediment in the classical style on his roof and attempts to learn Norwegian to read Ibsen in the original. The image Waldo paints of him is of a conscientious bank clerk dulled by entrapment in a life of mechanical alienation.

It was, he thought, the occasion of their last visit to the bank as children, that Waldo noticed his father looking out from the cage in which he stood.... Their father's eyes were brown, which Arthur had inherited. Their father's stare was at that moment directed outward, and not.... Suddenly his shoulders hunched, to resist it seemed, compression by the narrow cage, his eyes were more deeply concentrated on some invisible point. More distinctly even than the morning he found their father dead Waldo would remember the morning of their last visit to the bank. (54)

The effete and pallid character of Mr. Brown is drawn with a measure of delicate compassion. Enervated he lives a life of silent disappointment and mild self-deception.

After he retired, Dad would sometimes recall...his escape by way of Intellectual Enlightenment, and the voyage to Australia, ... but in the telling, he would grow darker rather than enlightened, his breathing thicker, clogged with the recurring suspicion that he might be chained still. (145)

Anne Brown, is the product of a colonial upper-class milieu. Mrs. Poulter in describing the Browns says, “Mr. Brown was a good man. Now Mrs. Brown...she was always doing a favour. Even to her husband. She was good too mind you, but she never stopped letting you see she had thrown herself away”(16). Proud of her Quantrell heritage she proves an indelible and mildly baleful influence. Having “Married Beneath Her”(35) she manages to cling to vestiges of bygone days and mores even as she copes with the realities of working class life in Australia. There is in her the aloofness of gentility bruised, a screen for the humiliation of her simpleton son, decline in status and polite poverty. Self-deception is another psychological defense she employs. Waldo recounts, “Mother never grew disappointed to the same extent, because if she wanted to, she could dare the truth to be the truth. For a long time after everyone else realized, she persuaded herself Arthur was some kind of genius waiting to disclose himself. But Dad was not deceived” (35). Even when her husband dies and she has to deign to use Mrs. Poulter's phone to call the doctor, divested of spontaneity there is sense of put on theatre in her reaction, an emotional legacy she leaves Waldo:

Waldo followed her because she was technically their mother. Whereas their mother crossed Terminus Road because she was their father's widow.

....
'It's my husband, Mrs. Poulter. I should like to ring for the doctor. If you will allow me. Though we must realise nothing can be done.'

Her pure, inherited voice erected a barrier not only between herself and Mrs. Poulter, but those she had conceived in an adulterated tradition. Though Waldo could imitate voices, even adapt himself to situations, if they didn't threaten to extinguish his individuality.... After briefly rehearsing the part, he was running springily in, ignoring Bill Poulter in his own house. (72)

As she aged, sinking into querulous and at times imperious inebriation, the pinched gentility barely softened. Decrepit, in a tipsy moment, she asks Arthur if he feels she has failed him, only to turn back from the moment of revelation. 'No!' she said, quickly in her own defense. 'Don't tell me! Nobody normal ever enjoyed settling their accounts... Nobody likes to be told. That they have got a spot. On their nose. On the night of the ball' (271).

Assessing them William Walsh concludes, "Nourished by the most anaemic of abstractions of high-minded rationalism and genteel socialism the Brown parents live a dumbly desperate life, balancing in the air – just – their hopeless aspirations, their painful memories, their present disappointments, their insoluble problems with the twins. ... Each in his limited way is a good person, each is a failure, each inadequate for the strains put on them" (Walsh, 91).

3.3.2 The Outer Circle

The outer circle of characters in *The Solid Mandala* holds an assortment of people. Most of them are marked as inhabitants of 'the Great Australian Emptiness'. Mrs. Dun's is a mundane existence untouched by the need to seek meaning and vitiated by concerns of society and the flesh. The narrator comments on her relationship with Mrs. Poulter: "The private life of other parties act as the cement of friendship. The Brother's Brown could be about to set the friendship of the friends" (14-15). In the text, she is early established as an unsympathetic character when she disapproves of the Brown brothers holding hands and predicts something horrible will happen. Curiously throughout the opening section, she dwells on the possibility that "they could come and murder you in broad daylight" (14) or that a hedge like the Browns have might be a hindrance "when someone's got you by the throat" (15) almost prefiguring the gory denouement of the narrative.

The pragmatic quotidian existence of Mr. Poulter too eschews the need for seeking deeper meaning in life. He is portrayed as a representative of the phlegmatic dailiness of life. Going by his wife's account, apparently the war changed and hardened him. He describes the brothers as "A couple of no-hopers with ideas about 'emselfes" (18). He functions as a foil and context for the delineation of Mrs. Poulter. Just as the Feinsteins, who with their Jewish cultivation and intelligence, allow White to generate superb social comedy from the encounter between the callow twins and the sophisticated but gentle family. Others like Waldo's colleagues at the Municipal Library, the Allwrights who kept the shop Arthur worked in, and the rich eccentric Mrs. Musto form the backdrop of humanity against which Waldo and Arthur are delineated and live out their destinies.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have been shown that White's characters function within a narrative paradigm that seeks to rise above realism. As a result, at times they seem flat and

forced by certain modes of critical assessment. This however, can and has been defended by using alternative frames of reference. The narrative agenda to reach at the core of human reality and White's mythopoeic conceptualization of the nature of that core, frame and determine the light in which he depicts his characters, as does the perspective through which they are focalized.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is your assessment of Patrick White's characterization with reference to *The Solid Mandala*?
2. Compare and contrast the characterization of Waldo and Arthur Brown. How does White use his characters as vehicles for the novel's themes?

3.6 GLOSSARY

Armageddon:	A Biblical reference to the scene of the last deciding battle between good and evil
<i>Brothers Karamozov:</i>	The final novel of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, it presents a search for faith, for God as its central idea. The famous 'Legend of the Grand Inquisitor' embodies and dramatizes Ivan's repudiation of God. In <i>The Solid Mandala</i> the novel becomes a signifier of Arthur's ability to appreciate literature of this calibre and the questions it raises
Dill:	Slang for mentally retarded
<i>Götterdämmerung:</i>	A music drama by Wagner, which concludes with the end of the gods being marked by the crashing of the beams and rafters at Walhalla. The drama is used in the novel to bring to the fore Arthur's first inklings of interest in spiritual questions.
Greek pediment:	An ornamental triangular roof structure over a doorway; in the text it is symbolic of Mr. Brown's slightly misplaced taste for what is classical and intellectually superior.
Manichean opposition:	binary opposition between two quantities seen as being in complete contrast to one another
Mythopoeic:	Relating to the creation of myths or a mythic framework for a literary work

3.7 REFERENCES

Ashcroft, W.D.. 'More Than One Horizon' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 123-134.

- Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Craven, Peter. 'Australia' in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*. Edited by John Sturrock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. p39-50.
- Dutton, Geoffrey. *Patrick White*. Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1962.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Herring, Thelma. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly (1964-1967)*. Edited by G.A. Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.
- Lawson, Alan. *Patrick White*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- McCulloch, A.M. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.
- McGregor, Craig ed.. *In the Making*. Melbourne: Nelson, 1969.
- Mitchell, Adrian. 'Eventually, White's Language: Words and More than Words' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 5-16.
- Singh, Kirpal. 'Patrick White: An Outsider's View' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p117-122.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.

UNIT 4 MESSAGES IN MOTIFS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Androgyny Motif
- 4.2 Mandala Motif
- 4.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.4 Questions
- 4.5 Glossary
- 4.6 References

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will discuss in detail two motifs that are central to the narrative. It will examine the occurrence in the text of the androgyny and mandala motifs and some implications they have for the interpretation of the novel.

4.1 ADROGyny MOTIF

The allusions to Tiresias and the hermaphrodite Adam are the strongest manifestations of the androgynous figure in the text. A weaker version of this motif is seen in textual representations of transvestitism. "The union of opposites, a distinctive feature of many of White's novels, here takes the image of androgyny, the attraction-repulsion relationship of the twins for each other" (Goodwin, 173). Androgynous figures in the novel can be read as symbols of wholeness and inextricable connection.

When Mr. Brown asks the young Arthur if there is "any character, any incident, that appeals" to him from his reading of Greek Myths, Arthur answers 'Tiresias' but knows he can not explain the full intensity of his feelings.

They would laugh to be told how shocked he was for Tiresias when Zeus took away his sight at the age of seven – *seven* – for telling people things they shouldn't know. So Arthur kept quiet. He was only surprised they didn't notice how obviously his heart was beating when Zeus rewarded Tiresias with the gift of prophecy and a life seven times as long as the lives of ordinary men. Then there was that other bit, about being changed into a woman, if only for a short time. Time enough, though to know it wasn't all that different. (224)

To Arthur, then, Tiresias is a motif of the visionary who 'sees' and is confusingly punished for it. There is a measure of personal identification implied in the palpitation he experiences. Tiresias points to the fate of the visionary for the young Arthur. At another level, the Greek figure, who had been both a male and a female in his lifetime, plays on the unifying potential of androgyny, one that is elaborated in Arthur's apprehension of the significance of the hermaphrodite Adam.

A.M. McCulloch points out that Waldo borrows Arthur's love for Tiresias for the title of his work, 'Tiresias: A Youngish Man'. However according to him, it is the more sordid aspects of Tiresias that Waldo finds a personal analogy with. "Tiresias is the character in Greek mythology who, having looked upon the lovemaking of the gods, becomes wise but blind. Waldo is given a window view of Mrs. Poulter at her

ablutions and about to be seized by her husband". Furthermore, McCulloch opines, it is not the androgynous potential for understanding or totality that rubs off on Waldo, but the figure's sterility. "Waldo, in projecting his identity into the Tiresias figure, does so with a rigidity that curtails any possible passionate expressions of life. His "creative" concerns are arid areas of grammar" observes McCulloch.

On one occasion he wrote: In the extreme of his youth, which was fast approaching, Tiresias suffered difficulties with his syntax and vocabulary, he found that words, turning to stones would sink below the surface, out of sight"

He did not care for that, but kept it. He kept everything now, out of spite for Goethe, or out of respect for posterity. (211)

McCulloch goes on to say that in contrast to this, Waldo recognized that Arthur's poem contained "warmed stones of words"(213) and that Arthur was capable of touching the essence of tragedy that his unresolved syntax could not reach. However, this is a realization that Waldo could not admit openly; instead he calls Arthur's poem a "disgusting *blood* myth"(213). Waldo attempts to accept the rationalist viewpoint towards mythology expressed by his father when reading the Greek myths to his children: "None of this is real, none of this is true"(223). He denigrates the liberating potential of myth even further by convincing himself that he'd known, right from the beginning, that "All this reading from Greek myths was really for Arthur"(33)(McCulloch, 38-9). In the end, after the near cataclysmic realization that was brought on by Waldo's discovery of Arthur's poem, Waldo becomes the cursed and doomed Tiresias of his plagued imagination as he prepares to burn his writing – "About four o'clock he went down, Tiresias, a thinnish man, the dress-box under his arm, to the pit where they had been accustomed to burn only those things from which they could bear to be parted".

Thus the same motif has almost dichotomous implications for the two brothers whose lives are marked by two ways of seeing the same thing. At this level the Tiresias motif becomes yet another structural element used to reinforce the paradoxically linked dichotomy of sensibility manifested by the two brothers. The other variation of this motif, the hermaphrodite Adam, emphasizes the interpenetrating destinies of the two, as opposed to their incomplete and almost impossible union.

Once while in the library as Arthur 'wrestled with the Books', he came upon the other motif that was to portend wholeness for him. The passage has been identified by Thelma Herring to have been taken out of Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* (Herring, 80).

On one occasion, in some book, he came across a message. Pinned to the back of his mind, it rattled and twitched, painfully, hopefully, if obscure:

As the shadow continually follows the body of one who walks in the sun, so our hermaphrodite Adam, though he appears in the form of a male, nevertheless carries about with him Eve, or his wife, hidden in his body.

...And if one wife, why not two? Or three? He could not have chosen between them. He could not have chosen between them. He could not sacrifice his first, his fruitful darling, whose mourning even streamed with a white light. Nor the burnt flower-pots, the russet apples of his second. Or did the message in the book refer, rather, to his, third veiled bride? (281)

According to Carolyn Bliss, "The implication is that Arthur, like the hermaphrodite, could embrace within his single life and being these conflicting opposites, that he could bring quaternity and sexual duality into controlled but dynamic juxtaposition which the mandala symbolizes. Arthur nearly does this, if only briefly, in the mandala dance he performs for Mrs. Poulter. In this ritual celebration of his fullness,

he dances the essence of the four beings who shape his life.” (Bliss, 109) The first wife is identified with Dulcie, the second Mrs. Poulter and his veiled bride is revealed to be Waldo when the motif is repeated as Arthur leaves the library, “his shadow following him in the sun, as he carried away inside him – his brother.”(285)

That both Tiresias and the hermaphrodite Adam are linked motifs with shifting emphasis is indicated when Arthur answers Waldo’s accusation that he thinks nothing and has no worries in his head thus:

‘If you want to know, I was thinking about Tiresias,’ Arthur said to interest him. ‘How he was changed into a woman for a short time. That sort of thing would be different, wouldn’t it from the hermaphroditic Adam who carries his wife about inside him.’(282-283)

Transvestitism is yet another manifestation of the androgynous motif. It does not however, signify a genuine wholeness but a kind of put on identity, a shadow of reality. When Waldo puts on his mother’s old dress, it is an attempt to connect with a “sense of moral proportion” and of a heritage he feels he can take pride in. He is imaginatively transformed into a personification of Memory: “although memory is the glacier in which the past is preserved, memory is also licensed to improve on life”(191-3). This trope can also be an oblique pointer to the position that identity itself is a construct. This may be significant in the light of *The Twyborn Affair* which has been described as “the fictional swan-song in which White mythicized his homosexuality” (Craven, 50) and employs the motif of transvestitism to denote more explicitly themes of sexual ambiguity and narcissism.

4.2 THE MANDALA MOTIF

“In its simplest form a mandala is a circle enclosing a square. While the outer circle constrains, the inner square seems to strive to escape. A solid mandala is three-dimensional; in its simplest form it is a sphere enclosing a cube. The cube, however, may add striations of color or become a randomized shape, such as one finds in glass marbles and paperweights.”(Jones, 66)

The mandala, the eponymous motif of the novel recurs throughout the narrative as a symbol of totality and wholeness, especially in a spiritual sense. The way it is used in the novel, places added emphasis on the accessibility of this completeness and its presence in the simplest and most mundane aspects of life. This is quite a displacement from its conceptualization as an esoteric and exotic Oriental religious motif. The mandala is first mentioned in the text in a typically abrasive exchange that brings out some of the tensions between the two brothers at the centre of the narrative.

‘Oh,’ cried Waldo Brown in anguish, but I have not expressed half of what it is in me to express!’

‘Don’t worry,’ he blubbered. ‘There’s time, Waldo, isn’t there? ... You can write about Mr. Saporta and the carpets, and all the fennel down the side roads.’

Just then that Mr. Dun straightened amongst the stakes up which he had been coaxing up his peas. He looked away quickly though, from what he saw. Waldo Brown saw a small mean face recognizing.

.... ‘One of the carpets had,’ Arthur whimpered, ‘right in the centre, what I would say was a mandala.’

Waldo could not walk too fast. He had hoped originally for intellectual companions with whom to exchange the Everyman classics and play Schubert after tea.

‘Come on!’ he mumbled

He hated his brother. (30)

The sterile and subjectless Waldo excludes Arthur from intellectual equality with him and Arthur's suggestions are only met with bitterness and the discontent. Waldo feels he is being made a spectacle of in public and as a result responds to Arthur not with quietude but taunting asperity. In many senses this passage is a capsule of the text's tensions. The tension between the intellectually inaccessible or aloof and the inspiration immanent in quotidian realities as well as mundane personalities. The motif attempts to hold both these in one entity, resolving the tension into a wholeness.

The motif appears or is chronologically prefigured in the narrative in the child Arthur's fascination during their cruise from England with "the red gold disc of the sun". Arthur ran to the rails only to be pulled back and told he might fall into the sea and "be lost forever" by his mother.

He looked at her and said: "Yes. I might. For ever."
Feeling the cold circles eddying out and away from him. (215)

The words describing the waves evoke a vignette of receding mandalas, as if symbolic of the possibility for totality reflected in everything. Again they reappear in his desire to see the icebergs which appear only in his dreams:

Only in sleep the icebergs moaned, and jostled one another, crunching and tinkling. The moons of sky-blue ice fell crashing silently down to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands.
Somehow at least he knew from the beginning he was protected.(218)

When he is a schoolboy, Arthur finds solace in the marbles which become central mandalic motifs in the novel. Once again, the ordinariness of this motif is underscored in being linked to the marbles and to Arthur to whom it would easily be assumed the finer things in life were inaccessible.

He was different then, in several ways. But did not mind since he had his marbles.
However many marbles Arthur had – there were always those which got lost, and some he traded for other things – he considered four his permanencies. There were the speckled gold and the cloudy blue. There was the whorl of green and crimson circlets. There was the taw with a knot at the centre, which made him consider palming it off, until, on looking long and close, he discovered the knot was the whole point.
Of all these jewels or touchstones, talismans or sweethearts, Arthur Brown got to love the knotted one best, and for staring at it, and rubbing at it, should have seen his face inside. After he had given two, in appreciation recognition, the flawed or knotted marble became more than ever his preoccupation. But he was ready to give it, too, if he were asked. Because this rather confusing oddity was really not his own. He seemed more the coil of green and crimson circlets. (228)

The emphasis on permanence is significant. As also the knot in the marble meant for Waldo that indicates the knot of opaqueness in his nature which makes him inaccessible to others, while Arthur manifests a nature of complete openness. At times the iterative symbolism seems intrusive. Dulcie and Mrs. Poulter are given one marble each, the flawed or knotted one is intended for Waldo, rejected by him and finally lost in a dark alley after Waldo's gruesome end, the one with whorls in it is kept by Arthur. According to Ashcroft, "Arthur sees that the "flaw", the "knot" at the centre of his marble, is the "whole point". The mandala shows that man is "surrounded" by perfection in the sense that it remains the ultimate horizon of his existence, and while wholeness is unenclosable by consciousness, man "obtains" infinity when he becomes aware of its intimation in ordinary experience"(Ashcroft,

126). Waldo's mandala lost in a back alley the night of his death thus, becomes an image of unrealized hope.

There are also variations on the mandala motif that interpretations have thrown up. For example, William Walsh posits, "Waldo sees himself as a crystal core to be held in reserve. Arthur's favourite glass marble, susceptible to light and touch, the image of the depths and contradictions of human nature, as it exists in the community, in the family, in a pair of friends, or lovers, or brothers, or in the single individual and stricken soul that Waldo and Arthur together compose" (Walsh, 96). Similarly, Ken Goodwin comments, "His sterile, jaundiced view of life is balanced by Arthur's. Confused and inarticulate, he nevertheless has a radiant goodness and insight that are represented by his four mandala-like marbles. He realizes that most of those around him cannot appreciate them or their meaning, that 'It was himself who was and would remain, the keeper of the mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light.' The struggle to guess their meaning is symbolized by the 'red gold disc of the sun', which he strives to hold, but also by the icebergs, that 'moaned and jostled one another, crunching and tinkling... to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands'" (Goodwin, 173). The realization that the nature of the mandala he held made them open to misinterpretation as 'simply marbles' and him as just 'simple' was not lost on Arthur who strove to protect the mandalas and their observers from the crassness of such observations. He realizes he cannot force his vision upon others, least of all his own brother. The mystery and magic of the mandalic marbles were safeguarded by him, preserved for people and relationships that would honor their value and be touched by their totality.

Sometimes ... he took out those marbles left over from the school yard. Not to play with. It had developed into something more serious than play. For the circle of the distant mountains would close around him, the golden disc spinning closer in the sky, as he contemplated the smaller sphere lying on the palm of his hand.

He would put it away quickly, though, on hearing anyone approach from behind. He was less afraid of theft, or even total destruction, than he was of damage by scorn. (233)

To Arthur the marbles become symbols of momentary centrality and meaning that keep gaining significance with time. "Arthur contemplates his marble almost in a religious sense, seeing in it mysteries, realities, symbols and significances – an endless range of reality enclosed in a miniature universe." (Walsh, 92) This is reinforced by the text's allusions to Jung's concept of mandalic totality. Arthur stumbles upon this textual validation of what he had always known when he is visiting Mrs. Musto's house. Arthur read from the encyclopedia of Mrs. Musto's husband Ralph:

'The Mandala is a symbol of totality. It is believed to be the "dwelling of the god". Its protective circle is a pattern of order super-imposed on – psychic – chaos. Sometimes its geometric form is seen as a vision (either waking or in a dream) or –'

His voice had fallen to the most elaborate hush.

'Or danced,' Arthur read. (238)

This brings out the validity of this personal vision to mankind at large and prepares us for the dance which has like Jung's mandala four corners to himself. He asks his father what the meaning of totality is, and Mr. Brown can only fumble with a dictionary meaning which made Arthur realize "Dad would never know, any more than Waldo. It was himself who was, and would remain, the keeper of mandalas, who must guess their final secret through touch and light" (240). The motif is brought to a sort of climax in Arthur's mandalic dance.

So Arthur Brown danced, beginning at the first corner, from which he would proceed through stages to the fourth, and beyond....

In the first corner, as a prelude to all that he had to reveal, he danced the dance of himself. Half clumsily, half electric. He danced the gods dying on a field of crimson velvet, against the discords of human voices. Even in the absence of gods, his life, or dance, was always prayerful. Even though he hadn't been taught, like the grocer, to go down on his knees and stick his hands together. Instead, offering his prayer to what he knew from light or silences. He danced the sleep of sleep, their secrets locked prudently up, safe, until their spoken thoughts or farts, gave them away. He danced the moon, anaesthetized by bottled cestrum. He danced the disc of the orange sun above icebergs, which was in a sense his beginning, and should perhaps be his end....

In the second corner he declared his love for Dulcie Feinstein, and for her husband, by whom, through their love for Dulcie, he was, equally possessed, so they were all three united, and their children still to be conceived. Into their corner of his mandala he wove their Star, on which their three cornered relationship was partly based. Flurries of hydrangea - headed music provided a ceremony of white notes falling exactly into place, and not far behind, the twisted ropes of dark music Waldo had forced on Dulcie the afternoon of strangling. There she was the bones of her, seated on the upright chair, in black. And restored to flesh by her lover's flesh. The inextinguishable, always more revealing eyes....

... In Mrs. Poulter's corner he danced the rite of ripening pears, and little rootling suckling pigs. Skeins of golden honey were swinging and glittering from his drunken mouth. Until he reached the stillest moment. He was the child she had never carried in the dark of her body, under her heart, from the beat of which, he was already learning what he could expect. The walls of his circular fortress shuddered...

He had begun to stamp, but bitterly rigid, in his withering. In the fourth corner, which was his brother's, the reeds sawed at one another. There was a shuffling of dry mud, a clattering of dead flags, or papers. Of words and ideas skewered to paper. The old, bent, over-used aluminum skewers. Thus pinned and persecuted, what should have risen in pure flight, dropped to a dry twitter, a clipped twitching. He couldn't dance his brother out of him, not fully. They were too close for it to work, closest and farthest when, with both his arms, he held them together, his fingers running with candle-wax. He could not save. At most a little comfort gushed out guiltily, from out of their double image, their never quite united figure. In that corner of the dance his anguished feet had trampled the grass into a desert.

... Till in the centre of their mandala he danced, the passion of all their lives, the blood running out the backs of his hands, water out of the hole in his ribs. His mouth was a silent hole, because no sound was needed to explain.

(265-6)

The varied symbolism of the mandala dance - the Chinese woman under the wheel tree, the evocation of the dying gods, the moon, the orange sun, the Star, the pears and pigs and goldenhoney, the blood of the Passion points to the truth not of any one creed but of a perennial philosophy "offering his prayer to what he knew from light and silences"(265) - are narrative resonances that make divinity seem immanent in Arthur's very being.

According to Edgecombe, the dance begins with a Walt Whitmanesque paean to an inclusive encompassing self that brings together the formative influences in his life and conceptualization of religion. "His religion is one that transcends all religions" (Edgecombe, 84). The dying gods of *Gottterdammerung* are reduced to a theatrical rite, the dogmatic and formulaic creed of Mr. Allwright, the sterile and forced agnosticism of his rationalistic family and the solar and lunar portents symbolic of the mandalic wholeness. The "androgynous trinitarian unity" which includes Dulcie, her

husband and Arthur are connected by love to the former's children yet to be conceived. Thus the second corner presents the "representatives of the continuity of life" (Edgecombe, 85). The Star of David, two triangles inverted upon each other becomes a mandalic symbol choreographing religion and unity into the dance. Mrs. Poulter's corner "is a Keatsian hymn to ripeness" (Edgecombe, 85), it enacts and through childlike simplicity rectifies the childlessness of its medial figure. It also recalls the sterility of Waldo's plastic doll that engendered only negative emotions of vulnerability in Mrs. Poulter. Waldo can't be integrated as easily. "The tragedy of Waldo's life, its meaninglessness and vacancy, is contained in the imagery of skewered words and of language crumpling up in sterile self-enclosure" (Edgecombe, 86). Arthur experiences a sense of failure and responsibility. Finally, there is "the coda in which the sacrifice of Christ is reenacted, fixing and steadying the four corners of the dance by its centrality, and exorcising the misery woven into the pattern, not by evading it but by transfiguring it" (Edgecombe, 86).

Edgecombe connects this to the poem of Arthur's that precipitates the novel's denouement. "It is finally this search for a transcendent, passional significance in suffering that Arthur tries to convey through his poem" (Edgecombe, 86). The dance encompasses in its choreography his insights, knowledge and experience, the poem encapsulates his vision of the place of pain in human reality.

my heart is bleeding for the Viviseckshunist
 Cordelia is bleeding for her father's life
 all Marys in the end bleed
 but do not complane because they know
 they cannot have it any other way(212)

Thelma Herring comments, "The main device for linking characters is, however, the central symbol of the novel, Arthur's four marbles or "solid mandalas" which signify the integrity of the self. (The Sanskrit word "mandala", denoting the ritual or magic circle used in Lamaism and in Tantric yoga as an aid to contemplation, is used to signify the self or totality.) ... But the mandala symbolism extends much further. Jung points out ... that lamaistic mandalas are based on a quaternary system (hence the number of Arthur's marbles and the four corners of his mandala dance) and that the figure of the square often gives the idea of the house or temple – which surely explains the insistence on the shape of the Brown's house with its Greek pediment. ... In fact, by imagery and allusion White constructs a network of mandala symbols"(Herring, 79). The wheel, the lotus, the rose (it is perhaps significant that Arthur refers to a wreath of roses framing Waldo when he puts on his mother's dress, since this cryptically described incident seems to suggest a vain search for totality through family heritage), the Star of David which Len Saporta gives to Dulcie, the central design in Saporta's carpet, the rock crystal, the sun, the orange colored ju-jubes which the orange-haired Arthur asks for are all part of this constellation of mandalic totems according to Herring.

Some like Joseph Jones have extended the motif to the structuring of the novel as well. "The novel is divided into four parts, the first and the fourth parts framing the second and the third parts. The body of the novel consists of two long flashbacks in which the histories of the other main characters, twin brothers are explicated and dramatized both together and individually. The four-part structure and the central search for the meaning of the novel, which the novel self-consciously pursues, make it resemble a solid mandala"(Jones, 67).

4.3 LET US SUM UP

The androgyny and mandala motif recur in the novel, either directly or obliquely. Both point mainly to the theme of wholeness and the possibility of totality in this world.

4.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the use of Tiresias as an archetypal motif with special reference to the antithetical implications the same motif has for the two brothers in the novel.
2. How does the mandala motif work in different ways, at the level of theme and structure, in the text?
3. Discuss the effectiveness of the use of Arthur's mandala dance in the text.

4.5 GLOSSARY

Androgynous:	Possessing the underlying potential to develop both traits thought of as masculine and those thought of as feminine
Hermaphrodite:	an entity in which the male and female rgans are found simultaneously
Lamaism:	A form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet and Mongolia
Star of David:	A six-pointed star formed of two overlapping equilateral triangles; a symbol of Judaism
Transvestitism:	The act of cross-dressing or dressing in the attire of the opposite gender

4.6 REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, W.D.. 'More Than One Horizon' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 123-134.
- Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Buckley, Vincent. 'The Novels of Patrick White' in *The Literature of Australia*. Edited by Geoffrey Dutton. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964. p413-426.
- Craven, Peter. 'Australia' in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*. Edited by John Sturrock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. p39-50.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Herring, Thelma. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly*(1964-1967). Edited by G.A. Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.

Jones, Joseph. *Patrick White*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.

McCulloch, A.M. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.

Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.

UNIT 5 TECHNIQUES

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Narrative Strategies
- 5.2 Language and Imagery
- 5.3 Myth, Symbol and Allegory
- 5.4 Humor and Satire
- 5.5 Voices
- 5.6 Time
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Questions
- 5.9 References

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you briefly to some technical aspects of the novel. It is hoped that this will make you more conscious of how the text is structured and introduce you to some stylistic interpretations of the novel. It will also help you note how White alters his techniques to achieve different effects for different characters, especially for the twin protagonists.

5.1 NARRATIVE STRATEGIES

"The narrative manner of this novel is, as in all White's major work, thick with explicit particulars. Everything is embodied and illustrated. Each shade of feeling or quirk of action is solidly realised. ... The narrative technique... swoops and turns and flicks from point to point, with a logic different from simple sequence.", comments William Walsh. He goes on to draw comparisons between White's narrative technique and D.H. Lawrence's formulations on "the movement of the emotional mind" which speaks of how "...the mind makes curious swoops and circles. It touches the point of pain or interest, then swoops and circles, coils round and approaches again the point of pain or interest..." In the text, for example, the frame narrative for the 'Waldo' section is constituted by a walk the brothers take on Waldo's suggestion. The same walk during which Mrs. Dun and Mrs. Poulter had seen them in the opening section. Arthur proposes that if they hang around they might meet Mrs. Poulter and walk together to the bus. Waldo refuses the suggestion but the reference to Mrs. Poulter sets off a train of reminiscences that go back to his childhood memories. The narrative from there moves back and forth between the walk and snatches from the past – for Waldo, mostly memories tinged with pain and humiliation. Walsh continues, "In *The Solid Mandala* the procedure is one of shading and emphasis, of varying the point of entrance and sweeping backwards and forwards in a way which impresses the reader as a composition rather than a linear progress." (Walsh, 86-87)

Walsh's observations apply more to the 'Waldo' section which constitutes the bulk of the text than to the 'Arthur' section which is more linear in its narrative progression. In fact Arthur's narrative opens with an "In the beginning there was the sea..." (215) with its Biblical intonations echoing the opening words of the book of Genesis. Carolyn Bliss too discusses White's technique of producing an "evocative blending of a novel's themes and motifs in a single scene, a practice which seems to owe as much to music as to literature." She cites one of the best examples for this as coming

“from *The Solid Mandala*, for, in Arthur’s mandalic dance, imagistic motifs associated with each major character and with several thematic concerns are counterpointed in a comprehensive pattern which centres the novel’s meaning in a possible order, harmony and wholeness”(Bliss, 198-9). To bring out the hieratic nature of Arthur’s apprehension of reality, White infuses the narrative with religious allusions, quasi-sacramental motifs and a heightened sense of poetry. This is however juxtaposed with the demotic nature of the icons through which this apprehension of reality is purveyed. The demotic and hieratic, the mundane and the elevated are shown to be part of one whole.

5.2 LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

White’s style and content bespoke a new voice in the Australian canon. It was both ironical and whimsical; not to mention almost surrealist in the ‘Arthur’ section. The novel, *The Solid Mandala*, is a minor epic about common life infused with the mystical lyricism and pulsating prose poetry of the ‘Arthur’ section. The thick texture in the idiom is evocative of character and social ambience in the narrative framework. William Walsh discusses White’s use of language in the context of the rest of his oeuvre: “To go from *Riders in the Chariot* to *The Solid Mandala* (1966), is to move from a novel which is spacious and inclusive to one in which the field of action is confined, in which the language is more abstinent, the metaphorical habit less florid, the manner altogether trimmer and sharper.... This spare novel – spare by Patrick White’s standards, that is – is one of the most beautifully organized of White’s works and one marked by an unusual blend of inwardness and control, life and impersonality” (Walsh, 85).

The use of alternative techniques to portray the twins at the centre of the narrative’s dialectic continues at the level of the stylistic and figurative use of language as well. A.M. McCulloch notes how “White describes Waldo with a language that matches the character’s primness, neatness and love of order”(McCulloch, 48). Waldo is etched, with limpid precision of the prose, as a man whose “thin, male steps crunched. He walked primly, in the sound of his oilskin, planning in advance where to put his feet”(27). When he had worked at the Sydney Municipal Library for a while he consciously projected the image of “the neat, the conscientious type, tie knotted rather small, the expanding arm-bands restraining the sleeves of his poplin shirt”(69). He is repetitively described in strong olfactory imagery as being aware of the smell of mucus in his own nostrils, rotting wood and cold fungus (26-7, 56) and in the library of decaying, aged flesh (121).

Thelma Herring warns against seeing the recurrent mordant imagery of the ‘Waldo’ section as all pervasive as “in Arthur’s part the prose is free of it but is rich in images of religious associations”(Herring, 74). She notes however, that “Traversing most of the twins’ life-span of seventy-years, from the time when their parents bring them from England as small children, the story is from one point of view a chronicle of senescence and decay. Both parents die, the weatherboard house that George Brown has built for himself on arrival begins to disintegrate, the young quince trees become wormy and woody, the sea of grass encroaches more and more, the young dogs, like the brothers themselves, grow old and feeble: in Waldo’s part, startling images of squalor and decay (mice nesting in burst leather chair, mutton fat curdling in skeins, and so on enforce the impression of lives petering out in sterile loneliness (but also reflect the mental obliquity of Waldo)” (Herring, 74). This is shown to be a matter of Waldo’s perspective and the point of view he brings to bear on life. The images are indicative of Waldo’s spiritual decay and enervation.

McCulloch commenting on the sensuous imagery used in association with Arthur says, “Arthur seems to be the essence of the senses themselves. White communicates this by descriptions of Arthur which are markedly different in texture from those

reserved for Waldo." Arthur is able to hear and "see in advance the splashes of sound"(232); he "would roll on his seat in time with the buggy long before its motion called for it"(234); can "smell the smell of cold mud"(246) and "sing shapeless songs"(251). "The language used for the "Arthur section" succeeds in interrelating the senses when touching the world" (McCulloch, 34). As in the case of Waldo, these images reflect Arthur's character and the way in which he frames reality.

Moving to a more general apprehension of how the book uses figurative language, Carolyn Bliss offers an interesting intervention on the subject. "White sometimes fashions a continuum of imagery, from the ant on the pavement to the sun in the sky, which sets man as a middle term and suggests that all share the same vital impulse. Alternately, actions may illuminate each other by their contiguity. For example, in *The Solid Mandala*, Mrs. Feinstein tells Arthur and Waldo about visiting her European relatives:

'I don't know what Daddy would have to say to so much Jewish emotionalism. I was thankful we did not have him with us, either in Paris or Milan. Poor things, *they* are devout.' Mrs. Feinstein smiled for the sick, though it could have been she enjoyed the illness. 'Of course we did whatever was expected of us while we were there. We did not have the heart to tell them we have given up all such middle-aged ideas, to conform,' she said, 'to conform with the spirit of progress. Daddy, I am afraid, who is more forceful in his expression, would have offended.'
After that she disappeared, trailing the outdoor coat she was wearing. It was so out of place. It was so shapeless it might have been inherited. (p. 132)

Simply by appending the trailed, 'inherited' coat to Mrs. Feinstein's smugly modern point of view, White comments ironically on her hope that the inheritance of faith may be discarded. At the same time, the repetition of the word 'conform' suggests that her modernism reflects nothing more than capitulation to a new kind of pressure"(Bliss, 198). Such subtle use of imagery infuses the text with nuances that can be picked up only with multiple and careful reading, as well as creative interpretation. As in the case of Arthur's marbles, it involves seeing the possibilities of the putatively mundane.

5.3 MYTH, SYMBOL AND ALLEGORY

Patrick White's avowed desire to rise above realistic writing and discover the poetry and mystery encapsulated in ordinary lives has made him extensively use mythopoeic elements in his works. His works embody a structure or framework linked to myths and parallel motifs. *The Solid Mandala* is no exception, though how exactly he has employed these elements and to what effect remains a matter of interpretation. He has drawn on Christian motifs, beginning with the Adam and Eve motif in *The Tree of Man* right through to the crucifixion motif in *Riders in the Chariot*. Marshall Best sees a continuation of this trend in his interpretation of the relationship of the two brothers. "In *The Solid Mandala*, still absorbed with aspects of the problem of personal identity, he tried out his own version of the Cain and Abel legend in a story of two contemporary brothers"(Best, 692). Patricia Morely interprets that same relationship as allegory. "On the allegorical level there is the further connotation of the mystery of the relationship between man's body and soul, identified with Arthur and self-will, identified with Waldo"(Morley, 5).

Equally significant is White's ability to invest an ambience of myth and cosmic symbolism replete with allusions to many kinds of religions - ancient, modern, Eastern, Western around the most mundane of situations. Life itself becomes a series of epiphanic moments for Arthur. For example, when Arthur delivers groceries, Mrs. Feinstein offers him lemonade and asks him to "drink it slowly and concentrate" so

he can “extract the *prana* from this lemonade”(241). Some of this is again a matter of interpretation and having an eye for details. For example Walsh says, “The bus journey has in it a certain ritual quality, as though the two ladies were not only beating the bounds of the terrain of the novel but defining its sensibility”(Walsh, 85). Similarly, Thelma Herring comments, “The symbolic use of physical characteristics is in fact a marked feature of the novel. Arthur’s brown eyes link him not only with his gentle father but also with Dulcie, Len Saporta, and their children... while Waldo with his “inherited eyes”, pale and cold, is linked with the mother whose aristocratic connections fascinate him, and feels an affinity with other blue-eyed people”(Herring, 79).

5.4 HUMOUR AND SATIRE

In dealing with the serious themes he has in hand Patrick White lapses into the humorous mode very subtly and across a wide range, if at all. There is the social satire of the portrayal of the petty materialism and shallow perspectives of ordinary Sarsaparillites like Mrs. Dun. There is the homely humour of the lesser local characters like the eccentric Mrs. Musto or the snobbish Miss Dallimores when they come to tea with the Browns. There is the element of social comedy in the awkward visits of the brothers to the Feinsteins with Waldo desperately trying to maintain a façade of pseudo-respectability and Arthur’s childish candor spoiling the intended effect. There is the confluence of rhetoric and mantric utterance, as in the lemonade-*prana* episode when Mrs. Feinstein just afterwards adds the rationalist caveat “Of course we don’t know exactly if this is a practice which has been *scientifically approved of*, but it’s a nice idea, don’t you think?” The dark, almost pathetic comedy of Mr. Brown inadequately trying to tell Waldo about the facts of life and ending up telling him about precautions he should take with public lavatories.

Andrew Riemer puckishly points out that the religious intensity of Arthur is at times played out against a backdrop of suburban satire. “White spoke with many voices. What has been difficult for some to recognize is that strain of mordant comedy that accompanies many of his metaphysical peaks, enriching rather than diminishing the intensity of those moments. When Arthur Brown’s concentration on the mystery of things in *The Solid Mandala* is momentarily diverted by a *farling* dog, the indecent and the indecorum somehow allows us to accept the validity of this outrageous fable, an account of the quest for salvation in the pedestrian outer suburbs of Sydney” (in Joyce, 158-9).

5.5 VOICES

White, in the novel, employs a patois of voices and narrative points of view. The range extends from omniscient focalization, where the narrator can focalize the point of view of any character, to narration through internal point of view, presented in terms of the feelings and perceptions of characters. So most of the time, the voices are of intradiegetic narrators like Waldo, Arthur and Mrs. Dun who are personally involved in the action being narrated. This is laced with the barely distinguishable extradiegetic omniscient narrator with no involvement in the action but comments on it from the outside. The interpenetration of both points of view acts to establish balance in the composite narrative point of view. It reveals that there are ever so many stories or perspectives that emerge from an ostensibly simple single story.

Carolyn Bliss notes how shifting modes of focalization bring about shifts in our perspectives as well. “The opening section, ‘In the Bus’, consists of nervous small talk which Mrs. Poulter makes while riding the bus with her new friend Mrs. Dun.

We approach the Brown brothers as these women do, at the distance of gossip and by way of a quick glimpse from a bus window. Even the excruciatingly painful and personal events of the final section come to us filtered through the responses of others: horror and nausea of the police sergeant and his young assistant, the terror of Mrs. Dun, the ribaldry of the drunks in the alley, and the unfeeling officiousness of the librarians.... In both outer sections, the reader is kept at a certain remove"(Bliss, 101-2). For the inner sections, Caroline Bliss notes, he uses "indirect discourse, in which the narrator's voice speaks in phrases and cadences which would be used by the character, thereby disclosing feelings, values and reactions...one of White's favorite methods for maintaining an ironic perspective on character and one of the sharpest weapons in his satiric and comedic arsenal" (Bliss, 102). There are constant shifts between authorially endorsed narrative and indirect discourse. Bliss argues that the use of indirect discourse is strategic for there is no other way to penetrate Waldo's reserve and Arthur's ramblings. "Because Arthur is born to his visionary status, he is subjected to very little of the irony White trains on his protagonists. Waldo, on the other hand, is treated with satire more biting and a contempt more unmitigated than any previous protagonist has undergone"(Bliss, 114).

White also reproduces the speech and thought of characters, using the colloquial idiom. The novelist's cool ironic mocking voice is heard in comments like "The girl Dulcie was probably poor. In her pink, as opposed to white, dress. Not that he doesn't despise Dulcie as well. In his crusade of bitterness there was only room for one ardent pauper."(89) or "Nobody remembered her husband, or knew whether she had ordered him out of existence so that she might enjoy a breezy widowhood"(85). White never attaches himself to the flow and pulse of his character's lives as a result of which he seems to mime their thinking at times making his explicit commentary seem even more supercilious and lacking in magnanimity especially in the case of Waldo.

In the novel, White lends Waldo his caustic wit to make judgements that characterize Waldo's vindictive malice more than the person on whom the judgement is passed. As when Waldo finally realizes he has lost out on Dulcie and envisions her as Saporta's wife.

He did look back just once at Mrs. Saporta, increasing, bulging, the Goddess of a Thousand Breasts, standing at the top of her stairs, in a cluster of unborn ovoid children. This giant incubator hoped she was her own infallible investment. But she would not suck him in. Imagining to hatch him out. ...So much for Dulcie Feinstein Saporta and her lust for possession."(157)

Adrian Mitchell says that these shifts in narrative focus can be read as having a rather postmodernist effect of undermining the 'truth' claim of any one perspective. "Ambiguously, the story *is* the set of events, at yet another level the story is only a record of the set of events, an interpretation. Hence White's fondness for alternative versions or accounts of central events - most obviously in *The Solid Mandala*"(Mitchell, 13). This perspective bring into play a combination of voices and points of view allowing the reader to make his or her own assessments, if at all.

5.6 TIME

"The novel swoops backwards and forwards in time... with the fleeting but severe logic of poetry or life."(Walsh, 86) Time shows an element of repetitive frequency by which same events are narrated several times in the novel. This also falls within the postmodernist contestation of time as linear and unitary.

Carolyn Bliss offers an in-depth analysis of the deployment of the time factor in *The Solid Mandala*. "The 'Waldo' section is told largely as a series of flashbacks

stimulated by incidents that occur while the elderly brothers take their daily constitutional. This walk, which occupies nearly two thirds of the book, takes place probably only a few days or weeks before the murder attempt, with which the 'Waldo' section culminates. White accomplishes two things by organizing Waldo's section in this manner. First, he gives us a sense of the stagnation in Waldo's life: so much time, so much talk, so little motion. Waldo lodges himself in the imagination, endlessly plodding but never progressing. Secondly, because chronology is utterly disrupted, we sense the incoherence and anarchy which Waldo's nihilism has wrought.... Narrative method here effects a kind of mimesis of the inner being....

Where the 'Waldo' section was disjointed, its events standing isolated and discrete, 'Arthur' is cohesively chronological. Even in the case of the occasional brief flashback, the relationship of events to time and to each other is preserved" (Bliss, 106). She continues, "Structurally, the novels tend towards episode and epiphany... The episodic progress of plot, interrupted by frequent and sometimes unexplained gaps in time, suggests a world in which human actions are rarely attuned to nature's rhythmic constancy... his tendency to disrupt chronology (as in *Riders in the Chariot*, *The Solid Mandala* and *A Fringe of Leaves*)... support a view of human experience as discontinuous and fragmentary" (Bliss, 197).

5.7 LET US SUM UP

This section, it is hoped, has given you some indications of the technical finesse that has gone into the effective presentation of themes and characters. White employed a range of devices and techniques making the text a rich quarry for stylistic analysis. Most of the technical aspects used are directed towards simultaneously comparing and contrasting the twins even as it is shown that they are inextricably linked.

5.8 QUESTIONS

1. Elaborate with examples how the text uses language and imagery for characterization.
2. Is the use of myths and symbols convincing in *The Solid Mandala*?
3. Discuss critically Carolyn Bliss's views on how White has used time as the structuring principle.

5.9 REFERENCES

Best, Marshall A.. 'White, Patrick (Victor Martindale)' in *Contemporary Novelists*. Edited by James Vinson. 3rd Edition. Surrey: Macmillan, 1982. p691-692.

Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.

Craven, Peter. 'Australia' in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*. Edited by John Sturrock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. p39-50.

Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.

- Herring, Thelma. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly (1964-1967)*. Edited by G.A. Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.
- Joyce, Clayton ed.. *Patrick White: A Tribute*. North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1991.
- McCulloch, A.M. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.
- Mitchell, Adrian. 'Eventually, White's Language: Words and More than Words' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 5-16.
- Morley, Patricia. *Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972.
- Singh, Kirpal. 'Patrick White: An Outsider's View' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p117-122.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.

UNIT 6 PERSPECTIVES

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 The Twins as a Structuring Principle
- 6.2 Points of Criticism
- 6.3 Counterpoints of Defense
- 6.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.5 Questions
- 6.6 Glossary
- 6.7 References
- 6.8 Consolidated Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will look at the twins as a structuring principle in the novel and at certain critical positions on *The Solid Mandala* and Patrick White's art. Diversities of interpretative perspectives have been presented to encourage you to arrive at your own assessments.

6.1 TWINS AS A STRUCTURING PRINCIPLE

The twins have been used as a structuring principle in the narrative of *The Solid Mandala*. The tension between the brothers is comic and grave and brilliantly sustained. White at one level attempts to show the failure to combine two ways of seeing, and hence of approaching reality. The twins are as the blurb says "two people living one life. ... They shared everything – except their view of things. Waldo, with his intelligence, saw everything and understood little. Arthur was the fool who didn't bother to look. He understood." First, we see things from Waldo's point of view, and then Arthur's. Both these perspectives are further sandwiched between the outer framing perspectives of society. There is a virtuoso use of polyphonic techniques that allow the interaction of multiple voices and perspectives and dramatic structures which brilliantly juxtapose clashes of color and dissonances of tone - the dryness of Waldo and the mystical lyricism of Arthur.

William Walsh comments, "The twins are themselves divided parts of one person, and the tension which divides and unites them dramatizes the disturbance within man and within the single person. They act out that impure mixture of love and hate which is both the condition of the relationship of every human being to another and the condition of the attitude of the individual within himself to himself" (Walsh, 86). Thelma Herring concurs when she posits that "Waldo and Arthur, in fact are not ordinary twins, but rather a device for dramatizing the concept of the antithetical self.... From the technical point of view the device is handled brilliantly: the twin narratives do not ask of the reader the kind of imaginative co-operation demanded by *Voss*, but Arthur's account is a check on Waldo's, showing how his apparent blunders are deliberate (as when he calls to the dogs *after* seeing Waldo in their mother's dress, to warn him of his presence) (Herring, 74).

This antithesis pervades the structuring of the central sections of the novel, according to Edgecombe. "For if Waldo's section is longer and more discursive, less reliant on symbolism, it tends to reflect the intellectual precedence he has always assumed over his brother and the rationalism that will seek meaning through statement rather than

through sacramental imagery. The events common to both narratives... articulate most acutely the points at which the temperamental and philosophical divide between the two brothers declares itself" (Edgecombe, 62). He continues, "the twinning is one of emotional warmth to rational coolness, of approach to recession, of extra - to introversion, of inclusiveness to fastidious rejection, indeed of centrally antithetic tendencies of human nature" (Edgecombe, 64) .

Even as the text, uses the twins to personify dichotomous pulls, it also employs them at the level of structure to reiterate the inextricability of the connections. Kirpal Singh points out, "It is a mistake, I feel, to see White as an anti-intellectual. Waldo's knowledge in *The Solid Mandala* may be faulty, bigoted, narrow and perverse, but it is as necessary to a complete grasp of reality as is Arthur's morbid and childish fascination with his orange marble. Waldo and Arthur are twin manifestations of a whole that is out of joint"(Singh, 120). McCulloch too notes, "It is important to realize that neither Arthur or Waldo can exist as a whole individual without the other. Consequently there is a logical reason for Arthur ending up in a "nut house" at Waldo's death.... Waldo should not be viewed merely as a character who exists as a contrast to the true seeker, Arthur. It is through the form and structure of "Waldo's section" that we can understand "Arthur's section". Although structured separately the two parts interact, and the interdependence of the two sections reflects the necessary interdependence of the two brothers"(McCulloch, 50).

6.2 POINTS OF CRITICISM

Patrick White has been no stranger to criticism. We have had a look at some of the negative positions on him that have emerged as a result of his deviations from what was seen as the Australian literary tradition. Others have focussed more specifically on the epistemological premises that go into his world view as presented in his books. Vincent Buckley, for example found fault with his penchant for infusing cosmic implications into the quiddity of things. It is a critique that can easily be applied to a novel where marbles carry the weight of the central motif mandalic totality. "He is, I think, a victim of a mysticism of objects – or, better still, a mysticism of sensations. Far too many objects are presented as revelations; and it is through an unremitting concern with sensations that they are so presented.... This is unmistakably fine, but only a rigid control keeps it from inanity"(Buckley, 417).

Veena Noble comes out with a more pointed attack. Like Marshall A. Best who felt the novel was "stimulating but not convincing in its arbitrary re-shuffling of the brothers"(692), Veena indicates the forced thematic and character positions in the novel. "When we find ourselves not liking characters as much as the author wants us to (like Arthur and Mrs. Poulter in this novel) and liking a character more than he wants us to (like Waldo) there seem to be two factors especially at work; the author's values are too arbitrary and his presence is too obtrusive. It is the author's obligation to demonstrate to us through his portraiture and his selection of significant incidents that his values are acceptable. But White's values are too ambivalent for us to be in definite agreement or disagreement with them; and his attempts to sway us into agreement or disagreement with his mood of the moment by intrusions of his personal judgement give us small credit for an ability to arrive at our own perceptions"(Noble, 32).

She critiques the novel on the grounds that the characters are too weighed down by moral significance and mysticism which are not given foundations in acceptable human values and hence fail to be convincing. "One of White's less successful works, *The Solid Mandala* is a curious melange; an unhappy blend of mysticism and satire, it preaches the values of love but is prone at times to mockery. It holds up as saint figures a physically gross idiot and an unthinking suburbanite, and it damns a poor paranoid"(Noble, 33). She accuses White of adopting Mrs. Allwright's crotchety

stance of “Human beings are all very well”(217) by using shallow mysticism and dispensing salvation and damnation arbitrarily.

perspectives

6.3 COUNTERPOINTS OF DEFENCE

Bliss is aware that the design of the novel can be critiqued for being “too patent” and of such a “programmatic quality that undercuts any sense of ‘felt life’”(13) in it. But she also opposes a defense to this allegation that reads the novel as an allegory and argues for a middle ground which allows for both humanistic impact and allegorical or symbolic implications. This call to reconcile, if not collapse opposites seems very important to an appreciation of White’s work. To move from thesis and antithesis to synthesis. Interestingly, *The Solid Mandala* attempts to show the stultifying effects of not doing that on a thematic level.

More positive responses to White have ranged from hyperbolic positions such as, “Patrick White remains the one who showed the way to understanding that comprehension is ubiquitous and that goodness is fragile.”(Carolyn Van Langberg in Joyce, 124) to positions that attempt to account for the ambiguities in his work. “White’s talents as a novelist were paradoxical in many ways: melancholy yet excitingly powerful; controlled yet furious; there was a dazzling vision and yet the most exact and precise eye for detail. It is an art prolific with symbolism and images and yet hardly concealing a palpable anxiety, sometimes a loathing for human kind.”(Clement Semmler in Joyce, 105)

Ken Goodwin writes, “White’s corpus deals in every style from farce to tragedy, with a small number of themes but a vast number of characters. He has conducted a continuous literary protest against materialism and the dullness of realism. His positive values are an integration of the divided soul, receptiveness through genuine goodness to moments of illumination, and the struggle for creative forms capable of expressing these ideas. Novels, stories and plays tend to alternate between identifiably placed social satire and commentary and more timeless and placeless settings. No other Australian writer has displayed such capacity to hate and to love humanity or such capacity to create comic and tragic character. He has always, as he says in *Flaws in the Glass*, been, ‘embarking on voyages of exploration which I hope may lead to discovery’.”(Goodwin, 179) Thus perhaps the best thing about the paradoxes, dichotomies and dualities that pervade White’s work is that they force you to read and to critically arrive at your own position. “Patrick White, thought-provoking and entertaining, sets us, speculating, adrift – forcing us to think for ourselves”(Elizabeth Jolley in Joyce, 138)

6.4 LET US SUM UP

Patrick White and *The Solid Mandala* are replete with dual pulls but the idea is to reflect on them, to let them make you think.

6.5 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the use of the twins as a structuring principle.
2. Is the novel programmatic in your opinion? Give reasons and examples for your positions.

3. Discuss the play of dualities at various levels in the interpretation of *The Solid Mandala*

6.6 GLOSSARY

Epistemological premises:	Assumptions that underpin a framework of knowledge or point of view
Quiddity:	The real nature or essence of a thing that makes it what it is

6.7 REFERENCES

- Best, Marshall A.. 'White, Patrick (Victor Martindale)' in *Contemporary Novelists*. Edited by James Vinson. 3rd Edition. Surrey: Macmillan, 1982. p691-692.
- Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Buckley, Vincent. 'The Novels of Patrick White' in *The Literature of Australia*. Edited by Geoffrey Dutton. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964. p413-426.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Herring, Theima. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly (1964-1967)*. Edited by G.A. Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.
- Joyce, Clayton ed.. *Patrick White: A Tribute*. North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1991.
- McCulloch, A.M. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.
- Noble, Veena. 'A Study of the Hermaphroditic Element in Patrick White's *The Solid Mandala*' in *Australian and Indian Literature: Studies in Mutual Response*. Edited by D. Kerr and R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1991. p 30-35.
- Singh, Kirpal. 'Patrick White: An Outsider's View' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p117-122.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.

6.8 CONSOLIDATED SUGGESTED READINGS

- Ashcroft, W.D.. 'More Than One Horizon' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 123-134.

- Barnes, John. 'Introduction' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 1-4.
- Beatson, Peter. *The Eye in the Mandala: Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*. London: Paul Elek, 1976.
- Best, Marshall A.. 'WHITE, Patrick (Victor Martindale)' in *Contemporary Novelists*. Edited by James Vinson. 3rd Edition. Surrey: Macmillan, 1982. p691-692.
- Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Buckley, Vincent. 'The Novels of Patrick White' in *The Literature of Australia*. Edited by Geoffrey Dutton. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964. p413-426.
- Craven, Peter. 'Australia' in *The Oxford Guide to Contemporary Writing*. Edited by John Sturrock. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. p39-50.
- Dutton, Geoffrey. *Patrick White*. Melbourne: Lansdowne Press, 1962.
- Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. *Vision and Style in Patrick White: A Study of Five Novels*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.
- Goodwin, Ken. *A History of Australian Literature*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
- Herring, Thelma. 'Self and Shadow: The Quest for Totality in *The Solid Mandala*' in *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly (1964-1967)*. Edited by G.A. Wilkes. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970. p72-82.
- Johnson, Manly. *Patrick White*. New York: Ungar, 1980.
- Jones, Joseph. *Patrick White*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1983.
- Joyce, Clayton ed.. *Patrick White: A Tribute*. North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, 1991.
- Kiernan, Brian. *Patrick White*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980.
- Kuiper, Kathleen ed.. 'White' in *Merrian-Websters Encyclopedia of Literature*. Springfield: Merrian-Webster Inc., 1995. p1197.
- Lawson, Alan. *Patrick White*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- McCulloch, A.M. *A Tragic Vision: The Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983.
- McGregor, Craig ed.. *In the Making*. Melbourne: Nelson, 1969.
- Mitchell, Adrian. 'Eventually, White's Language: Words and More than Words' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p 5-16.
- Morley, Patricia. *Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972.

- Noble, Veena. 'A Study of the Hermaphroditic Element in Patrick White's *The Solid Mandala*' in *Australian and Indian Literature: Studies in Mutual Response*. Edited by D. Kerr and R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1991. p 30-35.
- Sadawarte, R.S.. 'Occult Symbolism in *The Solid Mandala*'. in *Australian and Indian Literature: Studies in Mutual Response*. Edited by D. Kerr and R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Indian Society for Commonwealth Studies, 1991. p 36-42.
- Shepherd, R.E. and Kirpal Singh eds.. *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978.
- Singh, Kirpal. 'Patrick White: An Outsider's View' in *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*. Edited by R.E. Shepherd and Kirpal Singh. Adelaide: Flinders University Centre for Research in the New Literatures in English, 1978. p117-122.
- Walsh, William. *Patrick White's Fiction*. Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1977.
- White, Patrick. *Flaws in the Glass: A Self-Portrait*. New York: Viking Press, 1981.
- White, Patrick. *Patrick White Speaks*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1990.
- Wilkes, G.A. ed.. *Ten Essays on Patrick White Selected from Southerly (1964-1967)*. Sydney and London: Angus and Robertson, 1970.