



The Pilgrimage and the Atonement In the works of Patrick White

Amita Malhotra(Kalra)

Associate Professor, Department of English, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru Govt. P G College, Faridabad, Haryana

ABSTRACT

The award of the Nobel Prize to Patrick White in 1973, although not quite expected, gave the formal seal of international recognition, not merely to the novelist, but to Australian Literature as well. He was the first writer in English in eleven years to get the award, and this was no small thing White was committed to unveil the whole truth behind the existence of man. He looked beyond the appearance and explored the dualities within. The immediate result was Riders in the Chariot. He hinted at the resurrection beyond the crucifixion. The Riders in the Chariot, The Solid Mandala, The Vivisector, the Eye of the Storm and A Fringe of Leaves are the novels which take the readers onto a journey of the self. His characters traverse a path of pain, humility and suffering. They trod the path Christ engraved for them, the path of mysticism. The present paper is an attempt to take an Eagle's eye view of the message behind most of White's novels.

KEYWORDS: Search for Truth, Materialism and Spiritualism, The Pilgrimage of the Soul, The Atonement.

In each of his novels, Patrick White attempts to portray the reality within. His portrayal of characters signifies the purpose of his writing. He wants to make his readers aware of the fact that the pilgrimage his characters are undertaking is in fact the pilgrimage to attain the truth behind their existence in this world. His understanding of the characters increases as they progress. He becomes more and more sympathetic towards them because he himself passes through the same experience and realizes its significance. His characters traverse a path of suffering. It is a path of humiliation as well as self-sacrifice. It is the path of mysticism. The potential divinity hidden in the outward appearances of his characters is unveiled slowly and progressively. His faith in mysticism is passed onto his readers who also start believing in the same mysticism which changes their outlook towards life and death. The spiritual lameness that engulfs our society can be removed and destroyed only if every individual starts believing in facing the spiritual life and death, instead of escaping from it. White believes that man must shed his outer layer of materialism, in order to achieve the heights of spiritualism. The divinely mad Mary Hare, one of the four main figures in Riders in the Chariot, thinks, "Eventually I shall discover what is at the center, if enough of me is peeled away".

Like Dostoevsky, Patrick White considers suffering as an essential part of the path towards spiritualism. The Purgation of the soul is what is desired. Salvation or moksha can be achieved through the purification of mind, that is, the soul of man. A. P. Reimer in Ten Essays on Patrick White writes: "Man must be destroyed materially before he is able to ascend to a visionary height of achievement which liberates his soul; which allows him that initiation of infinity that is the clue to life".

White realized that man's life is very miserable because he has been betrayed by the religion, and its rules, the morals and the society. He is drained and alienated because there is no depth whatsoever in the relationships around him. This shallowness is gradually killing him. Religion is not providing any shelter to his parched soul. It is growing oppressive and superfluous. The characters like Mrs. Goodman, who exchange their capacity to feel, to experience love, kindness and compassion, for a role of seemingly calm exterior give a complete picture of the diversities in characters when they are compared to those characters who are not persona-ridden and who, like Theodora, retain their powers of feeling and their ability to grow inwardly. Beneath it, there is consciousness and beneath that there is the perplexing maze of the unconscious in which desperate, but interconnected, functions surge and ebb. As we find in D.H Lawrence and Faulkner, the unconscious in White is neither the dark nexus of instinctual motivations nor the sink of repressed experience. As early as his short story "The Twitching Colonel", White's fiction has contained reiterated images of fire, the brass ball containing fire, or shreds of glass, of marbles or chandelier. All the images symbolize the explosive potential of the character to burst forth to realize the truth.

In The Aunt's Story, Theodora, whose symbols are the volcano and the rolling filigree ball filled with fire, creates an image of a woman, who begins with emphatic understanding of animals, shows a capacity to

feel at one with the humans, develops a power to share imaginatively in the lives of others and finally creates an ideal male image who consoles and advises her. The final stage may represent a collapse into madness, as some of White's critics have thought. It may be termed an 'assertion of 'supreme self-transcendence', as many have agreed. In Voss, Voss sets out to cross the Australian Continent. He and his party head inland from the coast only to meet endless adversity. The explorers meet with draught plagued deserts which stretch out endlessly. The vegetation has withered, followed by waterlogged lands until they retreat to a cave where they lay for weeks, waiting for the rains to stop. On one hand, the journey shows the forlornness of the poet, but on the other hand, this dreadful journey is almost accomplished. His journey starts in the Garden of Eden and ends in the mystic garden, near the tomb where Jesus resurrected from the dead.

In Riders in the Chariot, Mary Hare and Alf Dubbo are both given a pre-classical horizon and because of that, White allows them to be riders in the chariot. Mary has an affinity with the Australian landscape and is highly intuitive. Her existence is a disappointment and a challenge to her father, since she represents a reality he has spent his life trying to ignore. She inherits her father's neo-classical romantic folly, Xanadu, but in fact her own horizon has always been the landscape on which the mansion is built and on which it will slowly decay while in her possession. Apart from the fellow riders- The Jewish and Christian horizons, which she recognizes and respects- the other residents of Sarsaparilla regard her as mad. Alf Dubbo is half Celtic, half aboriginal. He's fostered by an Anglo-Catholic priest and his sister who consider him their Great Experiment. He continues to paint great moral visions although he remains anonymous and on the fringe of society. In The Solid Mandala, The Dionysian Arthur Brown has a pre classical representation which allows him to dream his dream and decide who shall receive one of his mandalas, or marbles, which symbolize wholeness. He is intuitive like Mary Hare, and has a gift of math. His spirituality allows him to establish a relationship with others. In The Eye of the Storm, Flora Manhood becomes one of the 'acolytes' who ministers to Elizabeth Hunter. She's Elizabeth's favorite 'acolyte' because Elizabeth sees something of herself in Flora. The entire novel revolves around the powerful intuitive and manipulative Elizabeth Hunter. The novel closes with Mary performing the 'rites' after Elizabeth's death, which includes planting seeds in the garden. These seeds grow in a 'prism of dew and light'. Through that same prism, Mary is 'amazed and not a little frightened by what she saw in Elizabeth Hunter's looking glass'.

White believed that if one wants to have a meaningful life, simple living is not the answer. There is intelligence to be involved, there is a mystery to be solved and there is the urgency of a desire to transcend the physical, simple life. The insight into life has to be sought. The rational intelligence, however, is not successful in gaining this insight. White believed that collected words never led to spiritual upliftment. He continually shows his dislike for the inadequacy of language. He mentions meaningless words which "trickled from the mouths of the inhabitants in an untainted stream". As Mary Hare says "clever people are the victims of words". Waldo Brown in Solid Mandala says, 'Words are not what make

you see... You don't have to understand words to feel happy'.

White's meanings are conveyed very effectively through the use of images, symbols and archetypes. The art that connects us with the archetypes brings them to our conscious mind again and we understand the meaning without many efforts. The unifying archetypal symbol for the mythic number four and the symbol of totality, the Mandala, the "magic ring" in Sanskrit, represent the Buddhist concept of the universe, of completeness in the form of a square with circles inside or outside it. In the Solid Mandala, this symbol for completeness for peace and order, for a meaning in life, continually appears especially by the divinely mad twin Arthur, with his four marbles, his four Mandalas.

Patrick White, through the use of symbols, is trying to help us find refuge. He directs himself to those who are 'godless'. God in White represents what his characters have learnt through tradition, striving for Totality. His gaze is not directed upwards but inwards. He believes that it is by means of universally accepted understanding of the individual that can help us achieve a deeper knowledge about ourselves. His characters are divinely 'dissatisfied' with themselves. This dissatisfaction urges them onwards. White's 'elect' are those who have the possibility

of achieving clarity of vision concerning their destiny. They don't exist only in the consciousness; they also have free communication with their unconscious. Their longing for freedom and conciliation of the spirit, "the transcending function of the psyche", as Jung calls it is the force that urges them on. They are recognized by their well-developed powers of perception, thought, feeling and foresight. These qualities set them apart from the simple, common man.

It is not until a person frees his individual personality through self-fulfillment that he attains the highest aim of his existence. When man attempts to achieve this, his whole life is devoid of materialistic pleasures. But that is what is required to attain salvation. White's characters pass through lots of pain, suffering and loneliness but at last, achieve the mystic powers. After that, life becomes easy for them. They traverse the path of thorns, only to achieve the reward of understanding their real goals in life. They free themselves from the bondages of life and find solace in the final hours of life. Each participant seeks his own destiny or salvation. The man who fights dies a victorious death. He is reconciled, reborn. Dostoevsky writes "perhaps the truth about man's efforts on earth lies only in creation, in other words, in life itself and not the goal".

REFERENCES

1. Patrick White- A General Introduction by Ingmar Bjorksten, 1976, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland. | 2. Patrick White Within the Western Literary Tradition by John Beston, 2010, University of Sidney Library, Sidney. | 3. In Search of Secular Sacrament: Strategies for Salvation in Five Novels by Patrick White by Edward Cooney, 1988, Master's Thesis, Concordia University.
4. Voss by Patrick White, 1957, the Penguin Classics Edition (2009), Introduction by Thomas Keneally. | 5. Riders in the Chariot (New York Review Books Classics) by Patrick White. | 6. The Vivisector (Penguin Classics) by Patrick White. | 7. Arthur's Dream: The religious imagination in the fiction of Patrick White. By Michael Giffin, 1996 Spaniel Books, Literary Criticism. | 8. Patrick White by R.F. Brissenden, British Council, Longmans, Green, 1996. | 9. Flaws in the Glass: A Self Portrait by Patrick White. Jonathan Cape, London, England. | 10. The Solid Mandala by Patrick White, Vintage, 1966. | 11. The Essays on Patrick White by A.P. Reimer. | 12. Patrick White: The Mother and her Son' by David J. Tacey, Journal of Analytical Psychology Vol.28. |