

JUDAISM BETWEEN TORAH, HASKALAH AND KABBALAH: THE REVEALED IMAGINATION IN THE NOVELS OF PATRICK WHITE

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I

IT WAS INDEED gratifying to discover Hedda Ben-Bassat's article (*Literature & Theology*, November 1990) on the Kabbalistic and Hasidic elements in *Riders in the Chariot*. This kind of scholarship reveals just how densely woven Patrick White's novels appear to those of us who read them as part of an identifiable and inter-disciplinary tradition of discourse between literature, philosophy, and theology.

For while Patrick White often protested against the label of intellectual, and while he claimed to be an instinctive and untheoretical writer, the whole body of his works suggest otherwise, as each novel forcefully points to many theoretical systems. As one scholar has noted:

White is not only very intellectual, he is shrewdly so, and his works reveal a familiarity with an extraordinary range of philosophic, mystic, literary and theological systems, schools and traditions. To be faithful to all that is alluded to in his writings and suggested either directly or obliquely in the various metaphysical or other propositions put forward is no less than to journey through the whole morass of western man's cultural history.¹

White has alluded to this himself, through the autobiographical character of Alex Gray:

I was sitting writing in what I am vain enough to call my study, though I have studied practically nothing beyond my own intuition—oh, and by fits and starts, the Bible, the Talmud, the Jewish mystics, the Bhagavad Gita, various Zen masters, and dear old Father Jung who, I am told, I misinterpret.²

Such speculations from the scholar and the (perhaps tongue in cheek) allusions from the author, suggest that if we really want to understand the imaginative universes of discourse within White's novels, we need to explore those

diverse imaginative systems of philosophy and theology which move within them.

In approaching these universes of discourse, we should note from the authorised biography that White wrote with Modern enthusiasms,³ and note also that as a young writer he was profoundly affected by Spengler's *Decline of the West*.⁴ This left him, throughout his long life, with a fundamental belief that western civilisation was dying, that "all we value—society, relationships, even fortunes—is sliding into decay".⁵ His sense of why this was occurring had to do with the Modern idea that western civilisation failed to live in the present, being dominated by an ideological imagination which was locked in a solipsistic vision of a past which was "the refuge of so many Australians then and now".⁶ Those who adopt such intellectual enthusiasms stress the negative effect that the Enlightenment has had upon the western eye, and here White is united with the moderns and postmoderns who all share, as Habermas tells us, the belief that "the opacity of the iron cage of reason" is really a "glittering brightness of a completely transparent crystal palace". In this schema reason is a glassy facade which must be shattered.⁷

Those who write and think (and perhaps even pray) within this tradition tend to focus upon a critique of western metaphysical culture and its ideology. It is a critique which can be understood as a modern and postmodern reaction to the 19th century tension between the Classical and the Romantic imagination. Like several other writers who can be described as working within a similar tradition (and here I would include writers as diverse as William Golding, Iris Murdoch, Robertson Davies, Muriel Spark, A. S. Byatt, Anita Brookner and David Lodge) White's critique of the western eye reflects similar and ongoing movements within literature, philosophy and theology. I believe that such a critique is at the heart of all his novels from *Happy Valley* (1939) to *Memoirs of Many in One* (1986). Flowing from this critique are living speculations about being, knowing and language; speculations that reflect the three dominating themes which thread their way through the fabric of White's fiction, themes which the author himself has alerted us to: "the core of reality, the structure of reality, as opposed to the merely superficial",⁸ "the deep end of the unconscious";⁹ and "the relationship between the blundering human being and God".¹⁰

These themes all relate to White's aesthetic sense of life and imagination, and to his awareness that throughout the history of western civilisation, the evolution of its language, and the varieties of its religious experience, there have been many different cosmologies manufactured by the human imagination. Thus his concern with life and imagination falls within a particular literary, philosophical and theological tradition which understands that the history of consciousness is bound up with myth and metaphor, and that both of these elements compete and coexist within an analogical imagination.¹¹

As Soskice reminds us, in this largely imaginative universe "the intellectual world we inhabit is, to a great extent, of our own construction and that our medium of that construction is language".¹²

So it is possible to see the speculations of language-as-horizon at the heart of the author's narrative concerns, and once we acknowledge this we can see what White consistently attacks in all his fiction: that classical metaphysics which has, according to modern and postmodern logic, distorted the western eye with false conceptual language and exclusive philosophical categories. His study of Jewish and Christian mysticism gave him a sense of how the classical, and essentially linguistic, presumptions of the so called Enlightenment have undermined the 19th and 20th century western imagination.

In constructing his critique of the western eye, I believe that White gave each of his characters one of four imaginative (and essentially religious) horizons. Each horizon has its own distinctive myths, all of which still compete and coexist (as well as intersect and overlap) in the western imagination. I would suggest that these are the same matrices of myths explored by Paul Ricoeur in *The Symbolism of Evil*, and perhaps these are the same myths that Derrida refers to when suggesting that the metaphors of our language are actually encoded with *mythologies blanches*: the myths which underpin Primitive religion, Classical religion, Judaism, and that heterogeneous amalgam of all these, Christianity.

It is demonstrable that White gave one of these distinctive imaginative horizons to each character, sometimes explicitly so, at other times by way of allusion or background, and it is the involutions and interactions of these horizons which form the essentially modern and postmodern discourse within each narrative.¹³ Like others who write in a similar literary tradition, White is concerned with the imaginative boundaries that these horizons represent. He once said "characters interest me more than situations. I don't think any of my books have what you call plots",¹⁴ and this should be taken to mean that his central literary focus is on the imaginative horizon of each character, rather than upon the background or landscape against which the events of their lives unfold. Thus it can be argued that the universes of discourse within each novel contains some (and often all) of the mythical systems of the Primitive, the Classical, the Jewish and the Christian imagination, as the author interrogates the horizon of each system in his modern and postmodern way.

In the following passage from *The Solid Mandala* (1966), we can see a characteristic example of how the author worked with this quaternity of mythical horizons, and speculate as to how they might connect with his modern and postmodern discourse:

Once Arthur dreamed the dream in which a tree was growing out of his thighs.

It was the face of Dulcie Feinstein lost among the leaves of the higher branches. But Mrs Poulter came and sat on the ground beside him, and he put out his hand to touch what he thought would be her smooth skin, and encountered rough, almost prickly bark. He would have liked to wake Waldo to tell him. In the morning of course he could barely remember.¹⁵

In this passage we can see the scaffolding of White's discourse, and I believe that the questions which it begs are crucial to any comprehensive understanding of White's writing.

Why is it *the* dream rather than *a* dream? Why is the Jewish character lost in the higher branches of the tree? Why is the Christian character on the ground and within reach of the Primitive (dionysian) character? Why did the Primitive character think his encounter with Christianity would be smooth when in fact it was "rough, almost prickly bark" at the base of the tree? Why does the Primitive character dream the dream, and why does the tree grow from his sensual loins like an erect phallus? Why are the Primitive, Jewish and Christian characters all part of the dream, while the Classical (apollonian) character is excluded from the dream, even though he is the twin brother of the Primitive character who dreams the dream? These questions come to us from the heart of White's literary purpose where he addresses the question of language-as-horizon by interrogating the myths and metaphors of the western eye.

II

In addressing this kind of literary, philosophical and theological interrogation, consider how these *mythologies blanches* of the western eye are arranged around the tree in Arthur's dream, and consider why Dulcie Feinstein is lost (at least within Arthur's imagination) in the higher branches of the tree.

In pondering her lofty position, we should note that the Jewish horizon forms an integral part of the structural schema of four novels, or between a third and a half of White's *oeuvre*. In *The Living and the Dead* (1941),¹⁶ he tentatively developed the topological associations of the Jewish horizon as it related to his larger modern and postmodern interrogation of the Enlightenment. In that novel the character of Muriel Raphael is given a distinctive horizon which is meant to be compared and contrasted with the given horizons of the other central characters. The novel describes how all of these horizons have become denatured and distorted (according to modern and postmodern logic), thus making each character a distinctive representative of the "lost generation" in London during the 1930s, a generation which some once thought to be living through the death throes of western civilisation.

In three subsequent novels, *Riders in the Chariot* (1961),¹⁷ *The Solid Mandala*

(1966),¹⁸ and *The Eye of the Storm* (1973),¹⁹ White benefited from what he referred to as his "thorough investigation" of "a wonderful religion",²⁰ by including Judaism as a major part of the woof and weave of each novel. For White admitted to having studied Judaism quite thoroughly before writing *Riders in the Chariot*, and so the Jewish elements of that, and subsequent novels cannot be said to have irrupted from his unconscious.²¹ He must have been successful in his characterisation of Judaism, for we have already noted it has attracted Israeli scholarship, as well as praise from the common Jewish reader, one of whom has commented: "How does this man know it all? He has written what I thought nobody but me and my kind could possibly know and with the understanding of a god".²²

A distinctive theology, philosophy and spirituality are three important features of the Jewish imagination, as well as its unique history of dispersion and persecution. It is demonstrable that White studied each of these elements in detail, and integrated his findings in quite a dense way in his 'Jewish' novels. The most identifiable and consistent features of his treatment of Jewish characters are; firstly, his empathy with their unique perspective of reality, which comes from their theology, their wisdom, their suffering and their mystical tradition; and secondly, his sense of their folly whenever a Jewish character tries to abandon the *Kabbalah* or the *Torah* in order to embrace the illusions of the Enlightenment, whether that be the European Enlightenment, or the *Haskalah*, Jewish Enlightenment which grew from it.

Behind White's sense of the distinctive Jewish horizon lay those myths of being particular to the orthodox Jewish imagination, including a myth of person which sees the human being as an embodiment of flesh and blood and spirit given life when God breathed into *adamah* (the dust). We need to stress this because it has become fashionable in many circles to make a distinction, indeed to make a qualitative judgement, between the Jewish and the Greek myths of being. For the platonic and orphic myths which see the person as a duality of matter and spirit, or as an exiled soul trapped in a material body and waiting for release to some ideal transcendent realm, are myths which some think to be the source of western decline and decay. It is obvious to me that White was conscious of the distinction between Athens and Jerusalem, and it is through a reading of their different myths that we can better understand those Jewish characters of his. In doing so we may be better equipped to understand why Dulcie Feinstein is so placed in Arthur's dream, as she appears "lost amongst the leaves of the higher branches" of that tree which grew from his thigh, and to understand why Waldo Brown is not even part of the dream.

In *The Symbolism of Evil* Paul Ricoeur tells us that central to the hebraic mythical matrix is the Adamic myth, a myth which is not to be confused with the heterogeneous myths of the Fall and the Tragic Hero, or the hellenic

myth of the Exiled Soul (however much the western eye is tempted to see the four as one). One distinctive feature of the Adamic myth is how it represents the involvement of humanity in the condition of creation, making it a myth which "is the fruit of the prophetic accusation directed against man; the same theology that makes God innocent accuses man".²³ This myth locates a phenomenon of confession within the heart of humanity, and a sense of sinfulness that is both individual and communal, a sensual phenomenon which "unifies all mankind in an undivided guilt",²⁴ but which at the same time allows humanity to share in the fruits of repentance.

Perhaps this demonstrates a link between the Adamic myth and the *credo* given in the final sentence of White's last published work *Three Uneasy Pieces* (1987). In its last short story "The Age of a Wart", there is an autobiographical character who confesses, while lying on his deathbed, to the sins of the ego, the intellect and the solipsistic consciousness they both share. "Reason", he said "was always my trouble":

I who was once the reason for the world's existence am no longer this sterile end-all, As the world darkens, the evil in me is dying. I understand. Along with the prisoners, sufferers, survivors. It is no longer I it is we.

It is we who hold the secret of existence
we who control the world
WE.²⁵

Here we see that for White death is the end of evil, the kind of evil which has nothing to do with an abstract or disembodied idea, and everything to do with White's strong sense of evil as a living reality within each person and within each interpersonal encounter between self, other and creation. In this schema evil is always grounded, and becomes one existential choice between the I-thou or the I-it.

Such existential sentiments place any speculation about the existence and reality of evil within the human condition, and within in the realm of the interpersonal, in a humanistic way that is entirely consonant with the Adamic myth. However, these same existential or humanistic sentiments are more difficult to associate with the myths of the Fall, Tragic Hero or Exiled Soul, for those heterogeneous and hellenic speculations are essentially mechanistic myths which encourage a sense of predestination and discourage any sense of human involvement with the forces that control and change the universe. Thus White's sentiments reflect a sense of humanity's involvement with a future, projected as an unrealised eschatological hope, which is characteristic of the Adamic myth.

Of course, this more 'holistic' and humanistic sense which some attribute to hebraic cosmology is an imaginary one, and as such it must necessarily fall

within the author's larger modern and postmodern critique. The focus of such a critique are the solipsisms of consciousness, reason and enlightenment, and its allusions to the siren call of the unconscious, the irrational and the illuminating world of myth. In Judaism this takes the form of White's sustained critique of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment which grew out of the 18th century neo-classical Enlightenment, creating a false enlightenment that forms a major obstacle between many of his Jewish characters and their psychic wholeness. Reason is the *bete noir* of most of White's Jewish characters, as they struggle to assert the primacy of reason within their consciousness. It is a struggle which is never convincing or successful, for according to the writer's logic, these characters must live with an unconscious awareness that their myth, stirring within their psyche, calls to them from a quite different imaginative world. It is a world which is just as real as anything their conscious mind apprehends, a world which speaks with a mythical sense that cannot be easily shaken off, rationalised, abandoned or ignored.

When describing what is, for White, the folly of any Jewish character embracing the Enlightenment, he uses the words "reason" and "rational" with great regularity, and in a pejorative sense. He also makes a significant distinction between "illumination" and "enlightenment", the former belonging to the darker realms of the mythical unconscious as a repository of sacred truth, wisdom and mystery, and the latter belonging to the objective consciousness with its solipsisms and its self-illusions. If Habermas is right in saying that the common thread of modernity and postmodernity is an attempt to shatter the crystal palace of reason and enlightenment, then it is only natural that White's immanent critique should focus upon the *Haskalah*.

However, in spite of this modern and postmodern interrogation there is a definite hierarchy of mythical affinities and truths presented as the author compares the orthodox Jewish horizon with the other *mythologies blanches* embedded in his 'Jewish' novels. This may not be readily apparent to the reader until they explore the patterns of interactions between characters and discover why some characters, as tropes, can relate quite well to other characters with which they have a mythical affinity, yet these same characters fail to relate to other characters with which they have no mythical affinity. Muriel Raphael's lack of affinity with Elyot Standish, Mordecai Himmelfarb's affinity with Mary Hare, Dulcie Feinstein's affinity with Arthur Brown, and Lotte Lippmann's affinity with Flora Manhood, these are all examples of how the myths of characters, as tropes, are all arranged in a hierarchy which reflects the image of Arthur's dream throughout four novels. In structuring his 'Jewish' novels in this way White seems to be suggesting, in spite of his hermeneutic of suspicion, (and as some Jewish philosophers have suggested), that orthodox Judaism has a close affinity with 'natural' religion, and very little affinity with 'classical' religion.²⁶ Certainly in White's modern and

postmodern discourse, Jerusalem is much closer to Stonehenge than it is to Athens.

III

The pattern of relationships in *The Living and the Dead* show a striking sense of mythical and metaphorical design, with the denatured goddess Catherine Standish at the centre of the novel "as if she were the centre of the universe" like a "copper-coloured sun" with "so many subsidiary planets revolving on intricate paths around the orb" (p. 148). Part of this narrative and tropological design is the attempted relationship between Elyot Standish and Muriel Raphael, as tropes for the Classical and Jewish horizons. It is a relationship which is doomed, because Athens and Jerusalem are antithetical, and because their representatives have become a part of the 'lost generation' through their imaginative involvement with the Enlightenment.

White took great care in describing Muriel's transition to the *Haskalah*. As a child she was gifted with "hot palms, the sudden spasms of passion that came from looking at pictures or listening to music. She could not pour it out quickly enough, communicate her passion" (p. 292). But such an embodied, sensual and hebraic spirit is foreign to "the surprised and embarrassed English faces that translated Muriel Raphael into an uncomfortable fourteen" (p. 292), forcing upon her a denial of her Jewishness, and a longing for a secretive reformation: "because she had to form herself, and there is always a secretiveness to mask the process of conscious evolution" (p. 292). She adopts the unorthodox position of reason, and "took great pleasure in realising the rightness of her behaviour, the behaviour of a rational being" in forging a persona which "was, she felt, a triumph of the accomplished intellect" (p. 292). With this false persona her relationships become very much practical arrangements where "she took just as much as she needed. She did not choose to give very much of herself, perhaps remembering a door closed in her face, locking herself in the bathroom to cry as a child" (p. 293). By consciously embracing the *Haskalah* she becomes metaphorically disembodied and hellenised, but the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah* remain sublimated within her unconscious.

At their first meeting Muriel "found, she regretted, that [Elyot] interested her. To reach out and touch something she wasn't sure it was possible to touch" (p. 213). As the bearer of the *Haskalah* she is attracted to Elyot's myth, and conversely Elyot is attracted to hers. For he lives with a sense of the sterility of his own myth, and he wants the complement of a more fertile and embodied horizon to make up for his lack. However, the author recognises that Athens and Jerusalem are antithetical, and so the relationship between Elyot and Muriel is fated accordingly.

In a cabaret scene at the Cafe Vendome, all members of the 'lost generation'

meet, and here White demonstrates why they are lost and why western civilisation is dying. So Muriel sits at table while all around her are the signs which signify her failure to accept the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah*, signs which also speak of the deadness of the *Haskalah*. Oblivious to these she sits "over cold quail" (p. 263)—the food which sustained the Hebrews in the wilderness—while listening with amused incomprehension to the prophetic lyrics of the chanteuse, whose song parodies Muriel while lamenting the loss of the sacred memory of her salvation history:

No more love,
 It happens to be the fashion
 No more love,
 I've shot my bolt on pashun.
 Burn up the roses,
 Blo-how the noses,
 Look in the ice-box baby.
 No one supposes
 That fella Moses
 Was such a bulrush, baby.
 No more love,
 No more memoree.
 So take a chance on gin,
 A substitute for sin,
 With meee—.

Muriel has lost the ability to love, her passion for reason and enlightenment has burnt up the "roses" of her myth, making her as cold as an ice-box. In denying both the *Torah* and the *Kabbalah* she has substituted gin for sin and lost all sense of *hamartia* as a signpost for conscience and self-understanding. As such she becomes a striking example of what will emerge in the next two 'Jewish' novels, as the author's "Modern enthusiasms" continue to be densely woven into strong tropological patterns.

Ms. Ben-Bassat reminds us of the complexity with which the author portrayed Himmelfarb's journey through life, as he gradually comes to recognise and accept his vocation as a *zaddik*. It was a journey of atonement and illumination, a journey which became a lifelong and paradoxical movement away from the false horizon of enlightenment of the *Haskalah* to the mystery and illumination which awaits him when he once again accepts the *Kabbalah*. But Mordecai is only one of six significant Jewish characters in the novel, three men and three women, who combine to mirror the novel's sense of tension between the *Haskalah*, the *Torah* and the *Kabbalah*. They are all important to an understanding of how the author constructs the Jewish horizon in his modern and postmodern schema. With the notable exception

of Shulamith Rosenbaum, it is the women who represent, defend and hand on the *Kabbalah*, while their husbands are seduced by the *Haskalah*, and this pattern continues in *The Solid Mandala*.

Like Dulcie Feinstein and Lotte Lippmann, Mordecai is the child of an "enlightened" and "emancipated" father Moshe, "a worldly Jew of liberal tastes" (p. 97) who is described as "nothing less" than a reasonable man (p. 98). However it was Mordecai's mother Malke who "had given him her character", who insisted that he receive religious instruction in "our own tongue" (p. 101), and against Moshe's will. Thus Mordecai's childhood was a tension between the conscious (apollonian) world of his father and the unconscious (dionysian) world of his mother, as his mother pulls him towards the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah*, while his father pulls him towards the *Haskalah*. It is Malke's desire that in her son "God will recognize a good Jew", while Moshe's desire is that "the world should recognize a good man". His mother hopes that on the Day of the Lord "the Jews will remain distinct from men" while his father believes that Jews are no different to all mankind.

This tension is irreconcilable and places Mordecai in a no-man's-land between Athens and Jerusalem. He would like to be both "but sometimes wonder whether I am anything at all" (p. 111). His parent's constant arguing "involved him more deeply than ever in the metaphysical thicket from which he was hoping to tear himself free" (p. 112) and ensured that he remained lost somewhere between Athens and Jerusalem, while clinging to the hope that English literature, and an Oxford education, will deliver and save him. Of course, according to the novel's logic, they damn him rather than save him.

Following the death of his parents he meets and marries a girl named Reha who has the same characteristics as his mother. While Mordecai is still dominated by the rationale of the *Haskalah*, Reha tries to coax her husband towards orthodoxy, using a ruse to steer him into a bookshop where he will discover the Kabbalistic and Hasidic texts of Jewish mysticism. He reads them and is deeply affected by them, yet ultimately he discards them in favour of his research in English Literature, as an academic who is so engrossed in the myths of reason and enlightenment that he is oblivious to the signs of the times about to explode around him. During their (symbolically) childless marriage Mordecai is so absorbed by his own false humility, the egotism and solipsisms of his Cartesian consciousness, that he cannot see the signs of the times, the approaching clouds of *Kristallnacht*, Holocaust and *Shoah*.

Oblivious to the growing anti-semitism around him Himmelfarb chose to remain in Germany along with those so deluded that they "could not detach themselves from the ganglion of Europe" (p. 143), those who stayed "against the dying paper roses" of their myths of reason and enlightenment. At this time, "during the whole of this period of unreason", his mind "no more than fumbled after a rational means of escape" (p. 143). In this way he

became a participant in his wife's very death, and while he himself is delivered by divine providence, Mordecai must now live with the knowledge that he has been instrumental, not only in his wife's death, but in taking away her hope of salvation, having consistently undermined the *Kabbalah* throughout their marriage. Losing Reha plunges Himmelfarb into an abyss, a "whimpering, directionless" descent into darkness, "calling the name that had already fulfilled its purpose, so it seemed" (p. 153). Now that all his delusions of reason and enlightenment are destroyed, he is free to pursue his vocation as a *zaddik*, to gather the sparks.

Shulamith Rosenbaum lives to become, first Shirley Rosetree, then Sheila Wolfson, her life being "a series of disguises, which she had whisked on, and off" as circumstances demanded (p. 483). However, she never achieved the security of authentic being, evident in the splendid vignette within the novel's final chapter where Sheila (now married to a gentile and worshipping at an Anglican parish with social pretensions) lunches with her fellow socialites "in the depths of the obscure purgatory in which they sat" (p. 486). She will never be comfortable in this world for she can never convincingly pull off her Gentile disguise. She is always reminded that her past "dogs you like your shadow, but you get used to it at last, and a shadow cannot harm" (p. 483). While Sheila's shadow does not harm her it does haunt her, it "dogs" her in the sense that the God of Israel is still there within her, reminding her of what she has denied and continues to deny in her mythical unconscious.

By living out his denial of the *Kabbalah* through a Weberian work ethic, by substituting for the *Torah* an unconvincing conversion to Catholicism, Harry Rosetree remains unhappy and uncomfortable. For Himmelfarb's constant presence in his factory reminds Harry of the "one great archetypal face" (p. 377) of the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah* which he is trying to destroy by embracing the Enlightenment. This leads to his ultimate betrayal of Judaism in handing Mordecai over to be "crucified" on a day that happens to be both Passover and Good Friday, to protect Harry's new gods of reason and enlightenment: "If there was an enemy of reason, it was the damned Jew Himmelfarb, who must now accept the consequences" (p. 406).

When Himmelfarb is eventually killed by anti-semitism, Harry's conscience senses he is involved in the act: "Haim ben Ya'akov found himself abandoning the controls of reason, not to say the whole impressive, steel-and-plastic structure of the present, for the stuffy rooms of memory" (p. 443). His unconscious tells him that his own salvation now depends upon giving Himmelfarb *minyán* and a proper Jewish burial. But his efforts are too late, and when Mrs Godbold tells him Himmelfarb was buried "like any Christian" (p. 445), Harry senses his own damnation. Stripped of his false identity, cut adrift from the only myth which could give him a sustaining identity in

salvation history, Harry Rosetree hangs himself in the bathroom, his final revelation an image of self with bared teeth "and the least vein in his terrible eyeballs" (p. 448).

The tension between the *Haskalah*, the *Torah* and the *Kabbalah* in *The Solid Mandala* is as densely and carefully worked out as it is in *Riders in the Chariot*. Of course Dulcie Feinstein is the central Jewish character in the novel but she grows up, like Mordecai Himmelfarb, with the same archetypal struggle between a reasonable and enlightened father and a mother who will pass on the inherited codes of orthodoxy before she dies. In Sarsaparilla Mr Feinstein has built a palladian temple on a hill, named Mount Pleasant, which contrasts significantly with his inherited ancestral home in Sydney's exclusive Centennial Park, a home which is described as a medieval fortress with gargoyles and battlements. Both houses signify the author's sense of the modern and postmodern dilemma facing contemporary Judaism, whether to embrace the illusions and solipsisms of the *Haskalah* and its classical myths, or whether to remain within the medieval, exclusive and protective walls of the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah* with their mythical salvation.

As a secular Jew Mr Feinstein is a reasonable man as well as a lost soul, existing only in the life of his mind that is the *Haskalah*, at the expense of the life of his heart that is the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah*. Yet his gods of reason and enlightenment are challenged by the Great War, and the exigencies of history will create a dilemma for Mr Feinstein's Cartesian consciousness, beginning with his wife's matriarchal desire to take Dulcie to Europe, that she might discover her Jewish roots, to prepare her to become a Jewish matriarch. After the Great War he can no longer bear to remain at Mount Pleasant, and Dulcie explains his absence: "Daddy couldn't bear to come here," said Dulcie. "He's been so upset by everything. You remember all those intellectual theories about human progress!" (p. 130). So Mr Feinstein cannot bear to return to Mount Pleasant as a monument built for an enlightened vision.

His wife dies, and his daughter marries Leonard Saporta, an observant orthodox Jew, and the young couple move into the medieval protection of the "cracking and chipping" home in Centennial Park which "looked like a partly fortified cement castle" (p. 275), a home which symbolises "all such middle-aged ideas" (p. 138) that the "enlightened" Feinsteins of Mount Pleasant had tried so hard to shed. Following his stroke, Mr Feinstein comes to live with them in this "cracked and chipping" orthodox metaphor. But true to his classical principles, he chooses to live in a narrow *attic* room "taking refuge from what he referred to as the Jewish Reaction" (p. 277) occurring downstairs. Still rejecting the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah*, and still protesting his enlightenment, the invalid Mr Feinstein is nevertheless now

wholly within the metaphor of the medieval structure, and there he is cared for until he dies. After his death Dulcie explains his attic resistance to Arthur:

A complete surrender to love might have let in God. Of course, in the end, he did. When they were shut up together in a room, he couldn't avoid it. I saw. My father died peacefully (p. 278-9).

Stripped of any illusion of reason and enlightenment, Mr Feinstein comes to accept the subjective truth of the *Kabbalah* and the *Torah* and dies in the arms of the God of Israel.

Unlike her enlightened and reasonable husband, Mrs Feinstein is not a native Australian. She has a foreign accent and is steeped in a different kind of cultural ambience, a Jewishness whether secular or sacred that is more greatly influenced by a sense of community and tribal cohesion. While she is loyal to her husband's secular and 'enlightened' beliefs, Mrs Feinstein remains the matriarchal bearer of Jewishness, and it is at her insistence that, just before the outbreak of the Great War, Dulcie is taken to visit relatives, to be imbued with a sense of Jewish identity and self-understanding, "so that Dulcie can learn the languages" of her Jewish horizon (p. 123).

Described as "nothing very extraordinary" in appearance (p. 100) by Waldo, and "boring" by her own daughter, Mrs Feinstein seems to function as an prototypical Jewish mother, answering the door, putting guests at their ease (p. 105), showing Waldo to the toilet (p. 110) and most importantly, providing the sacred mystery of Jewish food: "Mummy lives to make us eat" (p. 98). It is Mrs Feinstein who produces "the cakes of enlightenment" (p. 108); it is she who provides food to eat, food which she believes to contain *prana*, "vital force" even if such a mysterious belief confronts her own nominal, rational and enlightened secularism. Of the idea of *prana* she reminds Arthur: "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?" (p. 241).

A further tension between her conscious acceptance of reason and enlightenment, and her unconscious link with the psychic and supernatural is revealed when she admits: "We have been working the *planchette* the other evening," she said, looking at her daughter, "and Dulcie asked it what she will become. Afterwards. In life" (p. 102). We suspect it is really Mrs Feinstein who guides the *planchette*, even if only unconsciously, for after her mother's death Dulcie realises that it was her mother who "predicted I would decide to marry Leonard Saporta", and notes that "it has turned out exactly as she always expected it to" (p. 254). Arthur Brown also senses that it was largely through the unconscious efforts of Mrs Feinstein that he came to realise that

"the Star of David was another mandala, and that Dulcie's marriage to Mr Saporta would be arranged" (p. 251).

On her return from Europe "events had aged Mrs Feinstein", her pseudo-Enlightened secular life in Australia confronted by the reality of Europe, war, race memories, family loss, personal tragedy and "so much Jewish emotionalism" (p. 138). But as a matriarch with a specific archetypal function she still keeps conducting the rhythm and tempo of her family's myth: "she was beating time, chasing the tail end of a tune, out of her fur sleeve" (p. 135). It is Mrs Feinstein who continues to call the family tune, to ensure that the *Kabbalah* and *Torah* survive. She does succeed in this, but not without paying the price, for unlike their Gentile counterparts, most of White's Jewish mothers and wives die before their husbands.

The character of Lotte Lippmann has a distinct function in the design of *The Eye of the Storm*, as one of four "acolytes"—each given one of the myths within Arthur's dream—who are arranged schematically around the aged Elizabeth Hunter. The *Kabbalah* and the *Torah* were both absent from Lotte's childhood, for her parents were "these liberated Jews who worship scientifically. Medicine you might say, is their religion, their rabbi a physician, when not a psychiatrist" (p. 145). This subtle allusion to Freudianism as an outcome of the *Haskalah* explains why the young Lotte was "enlightened" and idealistic, falling in love with a gentile, and becoming an actress. Her enlightened idealism obscured the real world of nazism and racial hatred around her in pre-war Germany. She was arrested for having an Aryan lover, but "the boy's family agreed to see her safely delivered into Switzerland—alone—And Mrs Lippmann had accepted for her lover's good" (p. 87).

Like Himmelfarb, Lotte travelled to Australia via what will soon become the Jewish state of Israel, and also like Himmelfarb her life becomes one of atonement for the sin of her pseudo-enlightenment, the foolishness of which is revealed to her by the Holocaust and her providential deliverance from it. Her devotion to Elizabeth Hunter becomes the focus of her atonement, and the death of Mrs Hunter takes away the last remaining subject of her atoning adoration. Without it she has no reason for being, because her own particular myth has no sense of an afterlife. Thus Lotte cannot see "beyond the handful of ashes" (p. 164).

Lotte senses Mrs Hunter's death before she is told, "you need not tell me. The whole house already knows" (p. 543), and its affect upon her is described in graphic and lengthy detail. In her sparse room she has put a towel over her mirror, as her identity has been destroyed and she can no longer bear looking at her reflection. Her reason for being is gone without Mrs Hunter as the human face of a God whom she can serve as a suffering servant. In describing her grief the images of sackcloth and ashes are present, her face "the colour of damp ashes (p. 543) and her dress rent by a "wilful, passionate

rending, downwards from the yoke" (p. 544). Feeling like Job in his worst moment of affliction, Lotte declares her intention: "I shall be with friends" (p. 587).

Lotte does join her friends, in death, and her suicide is performed with all the signs and symbols of the Holocaust around her, "the heater, with its permanent smell of gas and flames roaring", the sky outside her bathroom "was more convincingly on fire, the blaze smudged by chimneys of smoke" viewed from her "suffocating" narrow maid's bathroom (p. 587). As she slit her wrists they "were winking at her: all this time her fate had been knotted in her wrists" (p. 588). As she floats in the water her eyes are shut, but "if she cared to look, she was faced with a flush of roses, of increasing crimson" (p. 588), as the *nefesh* slowly ebbs out of her body.

IV

I have very briefly sketched an outline of how White has portrayed the Jewish imagination in four of his novels, and have suggested that he did this in a densely schematic way to highlight his modern and postmodern concerns as an author who wrote within an interdisciplinary tradition that embraces literature, philosophy and theology.

A reading of those four 'Jewish' novels will reveal just how densely their canvasses are constructed, not just to illuminate the struggle between Jewish life and imagination, but to convey the author's sense of how the western eye has constructed quite varied and different imaginative realities which remain within and without Arthur's dream. These are the imaginative realities of metaphor and myth which Patrick White believed it was the function of literature to explore, even if that meant, in his own words, "launching into that admittedly disturbing marriage between life and imagination". For White it was a marriage which was "like many actual marriages in fact—all the risks, the recurring despair, and rewards if you are lucky".²⁷ On reflection it can be judged, in his case, to have been a successful marriage indeed.

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- ³ D. Marr, *Patrick White: a life* (Sydney: Random House, 1991), p. 151.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ J. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991), p. 56.
- ⁸ P. Brennan, *Patrick White Speaks* (Sydney: Primavera Press, 1989), p. 21.
- ⁹ P. White, *Flaws in the Glass* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 104.
- ¹⁰ P. Brennan, op. cit. p. 19.
- ¹¹ J. Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), p. 75.
- ¹² *Ibid.* p. 76.

- ¹³ Postmodernity does not react against the discourse of modernity. Rather it contains and develops it. Habermas points out that postmodernity is not a 20th century movement, but began with Nietzsche in the 19th century.
- ¹⁴ P. Brennan, op. cit. p. 21.
- ¹⁵ P. White, *The Solid Mandala* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988), p. 260. All page references will be quoted from this edition.
- ¹⁶ P. White, *The Living and the Dead*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) All page references will be quoted from this edition.
- ¹⁷ P. White, *Riders in the Chariot* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) All page references will be quoted from this edition.
- ¹⁸ P. White, *The Solid Mandala*, op. cit.
- ¹⁹ P. White, *The Eye of the Storm* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987). All page references will be quoted from this edition.
- ²⁰ P. Brennan, op. cit. p. 19.
- ²¹ It seems impossible to me that there are some critics who seriously adopt the position that White's fiction welled out of his unconscious, like a kind of linguistic ectoplasm, and which he neither controlled nor understood.
- ²² C. Joyce, *Patrick White: a tribute*. (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 125.
- ²³ P. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 240.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 241.
- ²⁵ P. White, *Three Uneasy Pieces*. (Sydney: Pascoe, 1987), pp. 58-9.
- ²⁶ S. Ettinger, 'Jews and the Enlightenment' in *The Jewish World: revelation, prophecy and history*, (ed) E. Kedourie (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), p. 224.
- ²⁷ P. Brennan, op. cit. p. 83.