



IMAGERY IN PATRICK WHITE'S NOVELS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Harsh Verma

Assistant Professor, Khalsa College for Women, Civil Lines, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Abstract

Literature is termed to be the indispensable part of the modern society which relates every minute particle of life with compassion, pain, struggles and disputes. In spite of so much advancements in technologies, literature still replicates the reservoir of knowledge, meditation and entertainment while it mirrors the human self-identity. The study of this paper is centralized on the ushering form of literature i.e. Australian Literature, which is infused with culture and cultural identity. Australian literature was not truly inspired through the notion of mateship and empathy but emergence of prominent writers who took the lead to flourish their literary canon. Patrick White, one of the most influential writers, was the first Australian writer to grab the Nobel Prize in literature. The research is highlighting the essentials of his writing especially in the field of Imagery and Symbolism used in his works. His forte of writing psychological narrative and related concerns of societal development led to receive a Nobel Prize in 1973. There is an exploration of major patterns of imagery and symbolism used by White in *The Tree of Man* and *Voss*. The characteristic feature of his imagery does not only fall under reaching out the religious and psychological narrative but also targeting every minute expression of etymological reading.

Keywords

Imagery, Symbolism, Religion, Alienation, Identity, etc.

Full Article

Many of the preoccupations of his writings are beyond the human realities and it baffled many of his critics to understand his epitome of transcendent writings. The symbols he deployed, the colloquial language, the devices of literary canon like irony and ambiguity consequently marches towards the depiction of metaphysical reality. The characterization of his novel goes through the divulgence of rarity and the development of thoughts which showcases the complex psychological processes in their entire life. Such kind of imagery directly links the characters to mysteries. Being in the cliché of psychological narratives of White, this study encounters the involvement of characters more to the divinity than to the isolated aspect of Almighty (God). Consequently, the end results to the protagonists of the novels are usually the mortality or death. The experiences of the characters gleaned out are typically evasive.

While a broad interpretation of White's major tropes is necessary, his images are often highly particularized and their significances deeply embedded in the text. A specific pattern of imagery may also be so ubiquitous that its various functional manifestations may often pass unnoticed. For example, in *The Tree of Man* the principal image is that of the tree. Apart from the numerous images which may appear to be minor but are nevertheless actively employed as part of the arboreal trope (such as twigs and tendrils, bark and roots), the tree is also meaningfully presented in less immediately recognizable form (in imagery of matchsticks, paper, sawdust, and so on). Equally in *Voss*, in which key tropes draw heavily on Christian imagery, the ubiquity of biblical motifs is demonstrated through attention to apparently incidental detail.



In the wholesome of White's literary canon, *The Tree of Man* and *Voss* pair well together. Apart from their chronological proximity, both emerge from the renewal of White's creative output and constitute different approaches to similar questions. The protagonists of both novels emerge with different personalities as Stan Parker's desire of immortality is nurtured by the spiritual development turned out to be a passive character whereas Voss in contrast is a complex one and the epitome of action, pursues his vision of his own apotheosis through constant movement. Yet there are similarities and, when viewed together, several elements of each of the novels suggest that aspects of the one contain the seeds of the other. Both, shortly before their deaths, are shown staring in wonder at a leaf. With all these considerations in mind, the pair of novels together take on a kind of unity which forms a useful framework for critical interpretation.

Hence, while the overall movement of central patterns of imagery is always to be kept in mind, the fact that White's image motifs are often deeply submerged in the text, and that these motifs function in support of major tropic patterns, often entails the investigation of minutiae. And occasionally the full significance of an image is only arrived at through an etymological reading. The primary image of the novel, which determines its title and with which it begins and ends, is of course that of the tree. Like others, this trope manifests, as has been stated in the introductory remarks relating to White's imagery, in a great variety of forms from obvious references to arboreal anatomy to those which are less clear. Moreover, the tree represents vacillating simulacra with diverging meanings in *The Tree of Man*. Generally speaking, however, the tree either represents or mediates the notion of permanence, as it does in this early excerpt: "To stay put was, in fact, just what the young man Stanley Parker himself desired.... In the streets of towns the open windows, on the dusty roads and rooted trees, filled him with the melancholy longing for permanence" (TM: 13). The equestrian notion, on the other hand, typically exemplifies motion, and is immediately juxtaposed with the "rooted trees" of the above extract:

... But not yet. It was the struggle between two desires. As the little boy, holding the musical horseshoes for his father, blowing the bellows, or scraping up the grey parings of hoof and the shapely yellow mounds of manure, he had already experienced the unhappiness of these desires (White, *TM*, 13-14).

The dilemma of being and becoming one that persists in the younger Stan, is a representation of the paradoxical elements used in the imagery. This manifestation of paradoxical aspects forms the theme of the novel. The initial lines of the novel depict:

A cart drove between the two big stringy barks and stopped. These were the dominant trees in that part of the bush, rising above the involved scrub with the simplicity of true grandeur. So the cart stopped, grazing the side of a hairy tree, and the horse, shaggy and stolid as the tree, sighed and took root (White, *TM*, 9)

This paradoxical union which typically arises in key images where contraries closely juxtaposed can be understood in terms of an enantiodromia or play of opposites, in which opposing impulses ultimately affirm their counterparts. The novel closes with a similar paradox when Stan's death and his grandson's awakening to his own daemon coincide in the book's shortest and most densely imagistic chapter:



So that in the end there were the trees. The boy walking through them with his head drooping as he increased in stature.... So that, in the end, there was no end (White, *TM*, 480)

The imagery of tree shifts between these two poles of death and regeneration, or being and becoming. It is the way in which White employs his images to elaborate this tension or suggest its resolution itself. The narrative of the novel begins with the second element in the natural imagery, land. It represents a land that has no name to call upon and depopulated. Stan being the explorer of nature comes out to be a Man of life and interacts the nature to the core.

The opening of the novel offers a vision of man's unmarred simplicities, of a life before the unavoidable decline of civilization into gesture, abstraction, the separation of inner and outer life, and language. The land becomes a place; the place supports the family encourages a community. The place which is originally and habitually called "the Parkers'" eventually gets its official name, Durilgai, and there occupy a store and a post office. More and more neighbors move in there, yet the place still remains a natural landscape. After Parkers' settlement they encounter with the second and third elements, the water and the fire, that highlights the man's nature. The two forms of water, the storm and the flood, mean differently to Stan and other Durilgai people. The storm opens the soul of Stan, whereas the flood provides a wider arena for his neighbors to play on with their inner nature exposed.

The same thing goes with the fire scenes. The fire in the house of Stan implement a great significance where in the process of saving Madeline's life in fire, Stan's soul goes on purgation due to amalgamation of thoughts resulting in his spiritual release. Without these two events these people usually scatter under their own roofs and lead a trivial and insignificant life like ants.

The scenes of the flood and the fire are noteworthy. One incident shows the significance of the things that is Stan and other volunteer row in the floodwater to rescue Wullaya people and rush to the fireplace. Another is the waiting and speculating gathering on the side of water and around the firing house. These scenes show, on the one hand, their extraordinary crackle: optimism, unity, courage, and a little selfishness when they take the disowned properties away from the ruined house and other ordinary Australian pungency: the striking unanimity on the other. The symbolism of fire with its extreme nature is more emphasized by the novelist as compare to the elements of floods. It soon becomes clear that the purpose of the fire is to destroy more than trees, houses and the vanity of the men who fight it. The fire consumes identity that it depends upon the assurance of having a fixed place in an ordered social world, a place signified by possessions.

Patrick White's return to Australia and his writing of *The Tree of Man* related to his emotions towards nature. In the novel Stan replicates the author White where they both are aloof and close to nature. The in-born nature on the one hand explains it, yet on the other, the postnatal experiences are important in the formation of White's personality. Briefly, Stan in *The Tree of Man* acts as the spokesman for White to avow his own thoughts including his preference for simplicity and humility which, he thinks make an artist and a man, as well as his idea that man and nature are inseparably integrated and man's awe and respect towards the overwhelming power of nature.

A vast field of imagery has been explored with greater significance attached to it through the close reading of the novel *Voss*. The deep interpretations of the novel provides the collaborative function of the images used as an integrated whole. In *Voss* the last category achieves greater prominence than in *The Tree of Man* through the explicit deployment of Aboriginal images.



The alienation effect can be vividly seen in the scenes of Voss through the characters like Belle and Harry Robarts as well. Undoubtedly, the degree may vary according to their living and the preferences they have in their lives. The level of variation can be seen to experience moments of isolation and the desire for greater understanding. Rather, White makes clear the way in which 'higher reality' appears differently to each of those who grasp it.

The protagonist of the novel and Laura suffered from the alienation which gives them a reality check of disconnection with the spiritual world or mortifying faith in the supreme power God. This detachment somewhere led them to isolate them from the community as well.

Despite recognition of their shared marginality and isolation, each initially challenges rather than affirms the other's self-perception, so that all their [defensive] gestures had ugliness, convulsiveness in common. Ironically, Voss's conception of Laura's atheism as a result of her so lacking in magnificence [that she] cannot conceive the idea of a Divine Power, is set in stark contrast to his arrogant assurance of his own absolute magnificence, to the extent that he has a contempt not only for all humanity but particularly God.

The most embellished elements in the novel can be these alienated characters who delved into the deep sea of quest for the ultimate truth specifically of their self-realization which is metaphysical to the alienated world they are dwelling in at that time. And these characters are the central pursuits to the further reading of the novel. The novel is certainly characterized by a multiplicity of voices and the dissolution of previously stable entities. This, however, does not represent destruction but an intermingling — the ultimate communion of all physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual 'matter' — so that the totality of human experience is contained in the 'air'.

This study has attempted a response to these questions in an exploration, in as much detail as possible within given spatial constraints, of White's use of imagery in *The Tree of Man* and *Voss* with a view to elucidating the spiritual development of mainly Stan Parker and Voss and offering an interpretation of White's vision of transcendent experience as presented in these novels.

An imaginative antithetical view points on his imagery can be related on the fact that White's thought process relies on paradox as he represented the tree in both senses as the tension and the reconciliation. Similarly, a detail which would ordinarily be passed over turns out, on closer consideration, to be working in harmony with the broader intentions of the novel. In this way the name of Voss's ship, the *Osprey*, at the outset of the expedition depicts in microcosm the spiritual trajectory of Voss's journey, which will return him to a transforming acknowledgement of the mortality he has always, on some level, been trying to evade.

On the whole, White is interested in what he can illustrate through dramatising the individual's response to mortality. Though all his fiction depicts the conflict between spirit and matter he does not, however, endorse a view of spirituality which is divorced from the body. White's chief concerns are of course metaphysical, but a more suitable description for the transcendental experience he attempts to portray through his characters might be conveyed by the sense of eternity.

White's argument is not for a transcendence of alienated or marginalized individuals above this unsatisfactory state of affairs, but for its very transformation through the transcendence of those personal limitations which prevent social relationships and the genuine intersection of society, faith and fulfilment in every moment that we live and breathe, and love, and suffer, and die.



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