

# The Isolated Mystic: Spiritual Self-Realization in the Vast and Violent Australian Landscape in Patrick White's Fiction

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**Abstract:** Patrick Victor Martindale White (1912-1990) is the celebrated Australian novelist of the 20th Century. He is awarded the Nobel Prize for his enormous contribution in the field of Literature. He is inspired by the modernist writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence et.al. who have glorified English Literature with their innovative thinking, uniqueness and powerful writing. His writing style is unique and complex. He is the only Australian to achieve the prestigious Nobel Prize in the year 1973 for his innovative writing, the intense psychological depth of his writing and his use of modernist techniques in English Literature. White's writings are pervaded with the characters' isolation, loneliness, incompleteness of human speech and communication, the deep inner thoughts and finally self-realization and spiritual awakening. The vast and uncontrolled nature is not a mere backdrop but a veritable dominating and domineering character that controls the story of the fictions. Isolation and a meditative silence amidst the backdrop of the untamed vast nature is a perfect ambience for self discovery and enlightenment.

**Key Words:** modernist, spiritual, isolation, vivid, selfishness, duality, diversity, unity, realization, enlightenment

## • Patrick White: His Unique Writing Technique

1. His writing is enriched with intense and profound psychological depth
2. He uses multiple modernist techniques like the Stream-of-consciousness, elaborate and intricate metaphors and shifting point of view to go in the depth of the inner lives
3. His writing is full of detailing, detail and vivid descriptions, use of metaphors is a unique feature of his prose.
4. He has achieved mastery over the use of metaphors and symbols
5. The search of the soul, the quest of the self is one of his specialties.
6. His works are mostly charged with spiritualism and to acquire peace in the modern time of unrest and isolation
7. Australian landscapes, nature and the ambience play as the leading characters in his novels. The mental condition of the characters comes in complete contrast with the physical nature. Therefore adding values and high standards of his unique writing.
8. Most of the characters are eccentric but he also introduces characters like saintly figures or socially misfit personalities. The disappointment and failure of the material world highlighted therefore.
9. His writing often uses irony, cynicism and sardonic and biting or dark humor
10. His writings are striking contrast from traditional writing styles

## Some of her Major Works:

• **The Tree of Man (1955)** - This is a unique literary creation of the renowned novelist Patrick White. Here in this text the Tree represents the vast nature. The Australian landscape, the bushes, the nature itself is not only a mere backdrop but it is a veritable character which with its vastness is nurturing humanity. The novel is inspired by the Australian traditions, culture and folk lore. When White begins to live in Sidney, he thought that there must be a divine purpose behind the monotony of the daily life.

"I felt the life was, on the surface, so dreary, ugly, monotonous, there must be a poetry hidden in it to give it a purpose, and so I set out to discover that secret core, and *The Tree of Man* emerged." The title is extracted from A. E. Housman's famous poetry cycle 'A Shropshire Lad'. The phrase Tree of man appears in the poem beginning with the line "On Wenlock Edge the wood's in trouble ;"( XXXI)

There, like the wind through woods in riot,  
Through him the gale of life blew high;  
The tree of man was never quiet:  
Then 'twas the Roman, now 'tis I. (XXXI)

The celebrated episodic novel pivots around the lives of Parker family. This is a journey of life of the married couple Stan and Amy Parker from Durilgai wasteland to the Australian bushes near Sidney. The novel is a search for meaning behind the everyday toil. The novel is a search for spiritual enlightenment and aesthetic beauty of everyday's monotonous routine wise life. Stan is an introspective farmer. He with his alienated and brooding nature wants to discover himself amidst the vast wildness of the world. He realizes that spirituality and divinity remain within the innermost core of him. Amy is a passionate wife. The characters often show loneliness and alienation and sometimes they cannot communicate with each other properly. There is a certain obstacle to know each other completely and flawlessly. They have gone through various experiences in their lives but remain together with love and endurance. The prominent difference between rural and urban lives is demonstrated in the novel. Through every tough and happy time they endure calmly and with grace. They have experiences several natural calamities like flood and fire and go through several upheavals of life but they have deal with all the circumstances with dignity and patience. This is a text which shows the silent human endurance and their devotion in work, love and empathy for each other in arouse spiritualism in them and leads to higher direction of life. So the ordinary toil can lead to extraordinary achievement if it is done with dedication and perseverance. Nature and human existence are intricately connected to each other. Human life grows and enlightens amidst the nurturing natural surroundings. Nature is not always the protector it sometimes becomes violent and by doing that it teaches the life lesson to people how to lead a life amidst fortunate and tough times with patience and endurance consistently accepting and embracing everything.

• **Voss (1957)** – It is another masterpiece of Patrick White. This novel describes the journey of Voss from his excessive ambition to the quest for higher spiritual realization. The setting is 19th century Australia. The Nietzschean heroic personality Johann Ulrich Voss is carried away by his unrestrained ego begins to think himself a super power like God. Voss's excessive indolence and self belief have become his hubris and he has grasped Australian landscapes ruthlessly. The novel demonstrates the necessity of humiliation, sorrow to achieve spiritual enlightenment. While his expedition in the deserts he can realize his limitations. The tremendous adversities, toil and hardships help him to recognize his human power of tolerance. This adverse experience has transformed him from the inmost core. The exploration of the remote and dense interior places of the Australian landscape serves as the intricate metaphor of the journey within, to explore the innermost divinity. The sufferings of the interior deserts help him to find the core essence of his self. Voss shares a profound and genuine connection for his lady love Laura Trevelyan. Despite of their physical distance he feels a telepathic and intense bond for her. It shows that human love can transcends places and help to bring out the original purity and divinity of the self and the soul. Sacrifice, suffering, detachment and isolation are mandatory in the journey of spiritual awakening. When Voss experiences total disconnection from the society and people in the interior of Australian landscapes he begins to explore his inner being. This detached alienation from everything is an essential way of self-realization. There is a constant allusion of Christ, the redeemer. Voss has to endure the ordeal and sorrow and to

get rid of his inmost mental obstacles for the sake of his own enlightenment and the welfare of people. He must get rid of his own ego which hinders him in the path of self –realization. The unchartered and untamed Australian landscapes serve as the obstacles divinely planned which help him to achieve higher goal in life. The vast and unyielding landscapes resist the unrestrained domineering and dominating nature of the Colonizers. Patrick White’s novels are fused with divine and spiritual current which help people to realize his core nature and teach him the power of endurance, sacrifice and patience in the face of great adversities and therefore achieve victory over his own lacunae. In White’s point of view nature is not a mere background but a controlling character and a potent tool of the divine to guide human beings to achieve their highest plane.

• **Riders in the Chariot (1961)** – This novel expresses the plight of four people who are in a chariot, they cherish same mystical vision in their lives. The novel is inspired by book of Ezekiel. The novel uses William Blake’s epigraph from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The backdrop is Australian society after World War II. Mary Hare, a lonely and eccentric heiress, Mordecai Himmelfarb, a Jewish immigrant and Holocaust survivor, Miss Alma Lusty – a poor washerwoman and Mrs. Ruth Godbold – a devout woman are the four central characters in this novel. The four passengers come from the different social backgrounds. All of them are social outcasts. They are -one recluse, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, a dedicated washerwoman and an artist. The novel shows empathy for the marginalized and subjugated human beings. The devastating after effect of holocaust has caused human suffering. They lack of faith in religion. Mordecai Himmelfarb exactly represents the condition of human after the Holocaust. He has suffered the most in this literary work. He is a Christ-like personality. Modern society has severely humiliated him .The four persons are in the divine chariot of Ezekiel and are in the way to spiritual enlightenment and self realization. The chariot Merkavah itself symbolizes divine light. The Australian Suburbs of the fictional Sarsaparilla the oppressive nature and dullness lack of energy. Mrs. Hare’s estate after the World War II demonstrates decay and destruction. She lives in Xanadu. The dilapidated mansion and the setting show the moral decay and degradation of the modern time after the devastation of World War II. The society is not sympathetic to the persons who are endowed with mystic power and visionary experiences. They are ridiculed and not regarded properly and become social outcasts. The modern and materialistic society isolates the spiritually inclined people. All the four characters are spiritually inclined and possess enlightened insight. They have seen the same vision of riding in a chariot. They are total misfit in the mundane, worldly and selfish modern society. The novel illustrates that human beings through suffering, repression and isolation can achieve self-realization and spiritual insight.

• **The Solid Mandala (1966)** - This is a unique literary work of Patrick White. The novel expresses the yearning for concrete completeness and tangible wholeness of things to create the solid Mandala. Arthur Brown and Waldo are the contrasting halves of a single person. Both of them are endowed with striking contrasts of characters. The opposition is between rationalism and emotion, logic and spiritualism, discipline and chaos, reason and affection, intelligence and intuition, and head and heart etc. Waldo represents intelligence, logic while Arthur stands for emotion, spiritual realization and affectionate nature. Waldo and Arthur may be completely the opposite and in absolute contrast to each other but are inseparable. They perfectly demonstrate the unity in diversity. The suburbs of Kikuyu, Australia represent the monotony of life. Arthur stands for the Solid Mandala, its four structures represents the completion of life, spiritual enlightenment and the circular structure stands for the complete cycle of life. Mandala symbolizes unity, solidarity and wholeness. It is a complete cycle. Waldo fails to grasp the core meaning. Silence has a grave impact in human lives; language has not the capacity to figure out the innermost realities and facts. People achieve enlightenment in silence. Solitude, alienation and deep silence help in better comprehension and realization.

Waldo	Arthur
1. Rationalism	1. Emotion
2. Dry Logic	2. Spiritualism
3. Judgment	3. Affection and harmony.
4. Fails to realize spiritualism	4. Spiritual enlightenment
5. Vulnerable	5. Solid
6. Ego, pride, superiority complex, snobbish	6. Innocence and simplicity
7. Self-centered	7. Intuitive, compassionate.

• **Vivisector (1970)**-The brilliant artist Hurtle Duffield is the pivot of this novel around whom the story of the novel rotates. The novel expresses the merciless analytical art of the artist-vivisection, and the quest for spiritual realization. Human relationships are mercilessly exploited for the selfish work of the artist. The artist observes keenly and analyzes the truth of his concerned object of art with his "thin skin, cruel hands and teeth like a tiger" ruthlessly. His art demand isolation, loneliness, completes detachment from emotion to bring out the best of his creation. Alienation, abandonment and meditative contemplation require for the birth of an excellent art, a masterpiece. The utmost sacrifice and detachment of the artist is need for the making of a masterful and mind-blowing art. Hurtle always search for the authentic entity and genuine essence of his art. The artist may have exploited people and relations, he may have multiple characteristic flaws but as an artist he is a genius and genuine creator. He is reliable as an artist not as an ordinary human being here lays the victory of art over her personal self. His professionalism as an artist gets the priority in his life. The novel also explores the dual nature of art – it creates illumination and enlightenment in the self within by sacrificing and pitilessly destroying human relations.

**Major theoretical Approaches:**

- **Existentialism** – The search for the self is a unique feature of the novels.
- **Ecocriticism**- Nature is not a mere backdrop but a prominent character that controls the plot and storyline and the destinies of the characters.
- **Psychoanalysis**-The characters go through various psychological affairs desire, ambition, depression etc.
- **Modernism**- The characters find solace in loneliness and isolation, the fragmented identity, uneasiness in communication are the prominent themes.
- **Mysticism** -Loneliness, contemplation, and solitude help in the enlightenment of the soul.
- **Postcolonialism**- Human ego to possess the unknown landscapes is distinct in Voss and to control the lands and to gain and reign in these lands.

**Conclusion**- Patrick White has contributed enormously in English Literature. He with his skilful writing and genius masterfully uses the metaphor and symbols. His most illustrated theme is that spiritual enlightenment can be achieved in the tremendous adversity, amidst the nature and in complete isolation. Loneliness, silence and alienation help to the path of meditation, insight and self –realization. Suffering and sorrow are essential element in the path of illumination and spiritual elevation. Divinity can be achieved while doing the daily activities.

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