

## Realisation through Suffering in the Select Novels of Patrick White: *Voss*, *The Eye of The Storm* and *Riders In the Chariot*

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Suffering is an experience that God is having in and through us. It is the result of our limited consciousness. When unlimited consciousness operates, we see the result in the form of joy and delight. The human in us will see suffering as something horrible and undivine, but the divine in us will see it as God's experience in the process of cosmic evolution. The higher we go, the clearer it becomes to our human mind that all the incidents that have taken place on earth are the experiences of God in and through each human being.

Suffering is in the human mind and in the earth - consciousness. When we go beyond the earth - consciousness, when we offer our very existence to the supreme and become part and parcel of His cosmic Will on earth, we see that there is no such thing as suffering. We see only an experience, a divine cosmic experience which God himself is having in and through us. If we go through suffering then our system will be purified, and we human beings cherish suffering, unconsciously or consciously. As long as we cherish suffering, "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope". According to Lesley Hazelton, "It requires more courage to suffer than to die". For Oscar Wilde, "suffering is part of the divine idea". It is this suffering which helps in the purification of our 'self' forms the basis in the works of the Australian author, Patrick White.

White himself had stated, "*I always like to write three versions of a book. The first is agony and no one would understand it. With the second you get the shape, it's more or less all right . . . The third gives some enlightenment out of that suffering . . . They are largely something that arise out of my unconscious . . .*" According to White, the purpose of any work of art must not be simply pleasure giving it must preach something to the individuals. White, in his novels depicts, man in his struggle to escape that emptiness which surrounds and envelops him. He not only portrays the qualities of characters but also the inner urges, aspirations and drives. He makes clear through his novels, pain leads to spiritual growth.

The novels *Voss*, *Eye of the Storm* and *Riders in the Chariot* taken into study, each explores the sufferings of the central characters, not merely the sufferings, but a kind of vision or realisation achieved through that sufferings. *Voss*, White's most demanding and most impressive novel is about an exploration in general and as much an exploration of the territory of the mind in particular. Patricia Morley sees *Voss* as a modern version of the *Divine Comedia*: "*As in Dante's great epic, Voss's literary journey is both an allegory of the progress of the individual soul towards God, and a vision of the absolute towards which it strives*". *Voss* is a tragic story of a terrible journey and it clearly portrays throughout, the individual's struggle to find self, his search for a deeper understanding and a realisation of his potential. The hero of this novel is exploring, in an Australian environment, a mind, a way of thinking that is foreign territory to most Australians. He, in his mad ambition to become God, is busy cutting himself off from all that is merely human, or rather, personal and that is his pride in imagining himself as God he is blind to the reality. As the novel progresses, he was left in a desert for exploration of the land and there, the desert becomes the place of salvation. The desert

defeats Voss's claim to be God and awakens in him a knowledge of the true God who is not merely a projection of Voss's image of himself but something totally other from the world, cruel to the extent that he is absent from the world, leaving it instead of the rule of necessity but kind in that he thus releases Voss at last from self - seeking. The potential to endure torture, the author infers, is a virtue. Courage, apart from the character of the man who possesses it, is a good thing in itself and Voss, on whom the whole novel revolves around, is endowed with courage to bear that suffering and in the end he successfully achieves the realisation of the vision. Though, spiritual progression is the main theme of the novel, Voss is able to achieve that vision of the spiritual only by tormenting that suffering.

*The Eye of the Storm* presents the dialectical struggle between the two sides of the self, in the protagonist's life, which forms the fundamental rhythm of existence. The quest for meaning must occur within a person and the interplay between different sides of a person both confirms the fluidity of existence and promotes self-unity. David Kelley saw the "central concern" of the novel as "the varieties of spiritual experience", while Veronica Brady went as far as to claim that White was writing "a kind of wisdom literature, seeking to demonstrate the rule of powers beyond human comprehension and to lead the individual to worshipful submission to them". The "self" and the "pride" of the protagonist, Mrs. Hunter, are shunned away when she was allowed to face the terrible storm in the 'Warmings Island'. It is that physical / natural disaster brings in her, the peace for her restless soul. By being hurled into the still center of the storm that tore and hammered her, she realises universal parity of existence. That moment of oneness joins her to creation; in both thought and feeling, she identifies with the surrounding wreckage. Later, on her deathbed, she refers to "that state of pure living bliss she was now and then allowed to enter". That consciousness relaxes her will and lets her blind woman's inner eye take charge. Surrendering ego, Mrs. Hunter has transcended judgment and division and has merged with the world spirit, having achieved exalted state where all divisions vanish, even those governing life and death. She no longer needs to impose herself. But by silencing the will, she strengthens and sharpens the will. As Voss realises his vision of reality through his sufferings in the desert, Mrs. Hunter achieves the realisation, through the suffering she undergoes in the storm. Mrs. Hunter is the victim of her own valuating ambitions and White uses the storm, as suffering, to form the integral part of the novel's strength and meaning, its design and vision. The protagonist's early defeat is transformed by a spiritual triumph, she becomes conscious of the changeless divine presence and her 'self' is refreshed and redeemed by encountering the other. But she could achieve that vision of the realisation of the other not by intuition but by real suffering, which in the end helps to rest her soul in peace.

*Riders in the Chariot* is White's most comprehensive achievement, which digs deep and gives the imagination a vision of transcendent love with, more impact on the inward eye. It symbolises an identity of humanity and divinity. Manfred Mackenzie rightly calls the four central characters as "the sides of the soul of a giant Everyman, which is seen here as a divine quaternity". It is the boldest novel that traces the personal and spiritual histories of the far lost souls towards the moment they meet and recognise their shared same vision. All these four visionaries has a unifying vision of the reality, with the help of the suffering they undergone and by giving importance to the other individuals, which brings in as an outcome the vision of the chariot or the vision of other. The chariot itself represents God as divine grace as well as destructive terror and judgment. Himmelfarb, the first protagonist, sees God in the table and feels that allocation encapsulates sparks of divine fire. Mary Hare, the second, identifies herself

closely with the earth she loves and becomes part of it in the end. Mrs. Godbold, the third, sees wholeness in the service of others. To Dubbo, the fourth, his paintings are his acts of worship. All these four seek the truth - the chariot of Redemption at the edge. White was here able to convert defeat into triumph and regression into spiritual enlightenment.

Betrayal, guilt and failure dog the four riders. Mary Hare accepts the blame for the death of her father as does Ruth Godbold, for that of her brother. Haunted because he was seduced by the minister who helped raise him the aboriginal artist Alf Dubbo goes to Sydney, the city of dreadful night, where he sleeps in a rubbish tip, gets beaten up and becomes infected with tuberculosis and venereal disease. The fourth rider Mordecai Himmelfarb, also knows pain, as Berg has shown: "*His road to deeper spiritual insight is so severe that in a sense it destroys his chances of leading a meaningful life. He acquires humility and acceptance but loses something that is so important that he can never really recover from it*". This crushing loss comes in several stages. The dangers of being a Jew in Nazi Germany culminated for him in the discovery, after dining with Christian friends, that his wife was arrested and killed by Hitler's storm troopers. To mortify himself, he sheds the privileges and honours he had won as an academic to work as a menial in Australia. His penance proves even harsher than he had expected. Exhausted by traveling across greater Sydney, he is denied the traditional hospitality extended by Jews to each other at Passover; his house burns; he is crucified by some co-workers as an Easter Joke.

The last torment shows how White's visionaries often bring out the worst in others. Like Himmelfarb, the other three riders suffer at the hands of those close to them. Mary Hare is mistreated by both her father and her housekeeper - companion; Dubbo is sexually exploited not only by his mentor - minister, but also by his land lady; after surrendering his pay check on booze and whores, Ruth Godbold's wife-beating husband dies, leaving her to support herself and her six daughters as a washer woman. All the four visionaries suffer in their personal life but, in the end successfully attain the vision of the chariot, which is the symbol of God's elect.

There is a general movement towards a centre representing wholeness, psychological and religious and, the protagonists of all the three select novels discovers by painful experience something about the nature and extent of his spiritual resources. Life for White's eccentrics, or visionaries, is a matter of unrelenting travail. But, White firmly believes that self-transcendence is a basic duty. The surrender of ego encircles the ego. Though uniqueness is to be cherished, it can also be enhanced or overcome; loss of self leads to the discovery of hidden aspects of self. Voss's recognition that he is not divine shows him ways to develop his divine potential. Mrs. Hunter's being petted and wrung by a cyclone achieves human revelation. Similarly, in *Riders in the Chariot* the sufferings undergone by the visionaries mould them and help them to achieve the vision of the divine.

In all the three novels, for his elect White chooses the most unlikely characters and then places them in situations that heighten the inherent improbability of their final salvation. While the obvious intention is to demonstrate that, by a certain mysterious grace, good can be wrested from evil, beauty from ugliness, salvation from apparent damnation, sanity from supposed madness; yet the preoccupation with the dark extremes of man's nature and the intense relish with which these paradoxes are explored combine to create a striking sense of unresolved conflict and duality.

The ultimate ability to discover meaning and truth comes from the individual, from a realisation that the power and will found within oneself that, one gained through self-knowledge and acceptance of one's capacities as well as limitations. In all the three novels, *Voss*, *Eye of the Storm* and *Riders in the Chariot*, the purely materialistic and rationalistic attitude which is at the root of the contemporary rejection of the religious experience is established in precisely themselves - as spiritually stultifying and moronic, precluding the attainment of true vision. True vision is reserved for all the protagonists; Voss, Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter and the four riders, who live by the promptings of faith and intuition, recognising the primacy of spiritual values. But, they realise the true vision only with the help of the sufferings each undergone.

The main concern of all these novels is the varieties of spiritual experience which gives spiritual enlightenment but, only through the sufferings of the protagonists. In each of these novels White attempts to arrive at what he calls "the core of reality . . . as opposed to the merely superficial". This core of reality is nothing but, the inner world of man, the dwelling place of the soul. In all the three select novels, there is a successful portrayal of the vision, which the protagonist yearned for but, they can attain it only by using suffering as a means. 'Suffering' though itself a negative concept brings in the positive result of quenching the spiritual quest.

If the individual is able to co-operate with the rebellious indwelling soul then he may attain real life. Transformation is achieved not by the soul alone, but by the soul in co-operation with the conscious mind of the individual and that is what clearly represented in all the three novels. In weakness lies strength. In suffering lies realisation. Here is a truth that defies both reason and vanity and it is that which helps the protagonists to shed their pride and achieve the 'real'. The protagonists in the select novels, through their sufferings not only transcend themselves into the vision of realisation of their quest, but also, puts self - transcendence within everybody's reach.

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