

# THE PREDICAMENT OF WOMEN IN PATRICK WHITE'S *THE EYE OF THE STORM*

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## ABSTRACT:

Patrick White is one of the distinguished writers and has several laurels to his credit. His Nobel Prize in literature is the first awarded to an Australian. The quality of Australian literature in general and Patrick White in particular had long been recognized not only by Australians but also by others outside the country. To White's fellow-countrymen, the Nobel Prize confirmed his status as a major novelist whose fiction had, for more than twenty years, been regarded as an important contribution to the literature in English. He has created the Patrick White literary award to encourage the development of Australian literature with his prize money.

In *The Eye of The Storm*, the protagonist Elizabeth Hunter is a Venusian woman – she shares some of the traditional attributes of Venus, beauty, eroticism, and sexual love. Just as different qualities of Venus are unfolded in three graces, so various qualities are unfolded in her nurses, Mary Desanties, Flora Manhood, and Sister Badgery. Sister Mary embodies the attribute of chastity, and Flora Manhood, the attribute of pleasure or desire. The tension between chastity and pleasure, between love that is sex and the other love, is a major problem of the novel. There are many allusions in the novel to the goddess of beauty. Basil, her son, describes her as “extraordinary beautiful... exceptional... a great... an incredibly beautiful woman” (2021). Admiring her portrait, Flora Manhood reflects that her mistress must have been a passionate woman (Sathiaselan 158). There are numerous emblems of Venus in the novel. Patrick White makes use of the mirror, the swan, the rose, the pearl, and the emerald. Cupid holding a mirror to Venus is suggested in the gestures of the nurses at Morton Drive. She tells, “Bring me my looking glass, Nurse” Sister de Santis fetched the glass. It was of that same ivory set as the brushes with lovers' knots in gold and lapis lazuli. Holding it by its fluted handle, she tilted the glass for her patient to look. Mrs. Hunter has a passion for jewels, often calling for her jewel box when she is being dressed when Flora prepares Mrs. Hunter for her final scene. She brings a green wig and two emerald earrings, a typical Venurian jewel and colour to adorn the dying queen.

Lastly, the choice of the name Hunter suggests not only the protagonist's religious quest but also the pagan hunter Diana. White makes use of the Venus-Diana opposition in order to show conflicting urges in the heroine. She betrays her husband more than once with the politician, Althol Shereve, with her solicitor Arnold Wypurd, and later flirts with the Norwegian ecologist, Edward Phel. She gives into passion repeatedly, but later suffers from remorse for having deceived,

Alfred knowing the limitations of sexual love. She aspires a different sort of love in which she may find fulfillment. Flora Manhood, the 25 year old carefree nurse with their patterned dress, gyrating Perspex earrings and orange handbag, in the portrait of a sexually liberated young woman of the early 1970s is interested in yummy food, sleep and cosmetics. Dorothy sees in her a gaudy strumpet, an opinion shared by her Don Juan brother Basil. She is enraptured by passion. Her love is human and restricted to this world. She has only inklings of transcendence, the nurse remains a scatter brained potential breeder looked in the material world. Sister Mary Desantis is one of white's humble everyday saints devoted to the service of others. The author draws on traditional imagery that we associate with the Virgin Mary to emphasize her purity, sanctity and devotion. She is described as mild, pure, innocent immaculate and selfless. Like Flora Manhood she is also troubled and attracted by Basil's overt virility and to sexually tempted before fleeing Basil her lust and moral shame. Mary is able to restrict the passion which child Flora to the extreme. She tells Mrs. Hunter that she has only wanted to serve others, to love. This she puts into practice looking after the often nasty sick, smelly Elizabeth Hunter until her mistress dies and then by taking on another patient, the young girl Irene. This is a model of the love Mrs. Hunter is yearning to show but find difficult or impossible to express. The old woman confides in her nurse "There is this other love, I know. Haven't I been shown? And still I can't reach it. But I shall? I shall" (157). The other love can be identified with the Christian love. I loving serving her neighbor, Mary de showing her love for God. At the end White describes Mary de santis is Mrs. Hunter's garden feeding the birds with seed bathed in mutational light. She is symbolically receiving the holy spirit.

In *The Eye of The Storm*, both the 'Eye' and the "storm" symbolize the cosmic drama linked to the life of Elizabeth Hunter. It is observed that the hurricane like celestial bodies has two characteristic motions rotary and side ways. In its side, ways motion, shore is an intermediary point of absolute calm, the so called eye of the hurricane. For American aborigines it contains three elements fire, wind and water and it disturbs the fourth one earth. It was worshipped as the deity of the winds and waters and also of the heavens. This aspect brings us once again to the celebrated symbol of 'the hole' of Chinese Jade representing the concept zenith and void through which one may pass out of the world of space and time into spinelessness and timelessness. Mrs. Hunter has her moment of enlightenment by storm tossed sea. The relation of timeless spiritual reality is achieved at the still center of the storm she goes back to it at the moment of her death. It shows Patrick White belongs to the great tradition of novelists like F.Dostoe Vsky, Leo Tolstoy, D.H.Lawrence and James Joyce and has achieved world wide recognition for his novels.

Mary offers charitable love out of sympathy she activates the fear of god. She has been depicted as a perfect woman adhering to all the core qualities of a woman. Though Mrs. Hunter experience Mary as the genuine source of love and comfort she fails to make her children understand the meaning of true love. In the modern permissive society one cannot expect true womanly qualities from modern Australian women. To them adventurous life is not a sin, it is a kind of solitary experience but the realization comes only in the eleventh hour. Patrick White tells at one level that love does not come from known quarters but springs from unknown sources. It is the basic of all junctions of men, in the absence of love, life becomes a void. It is not something exclusive of Australian woman but it concerns every religion in the world at large.

To sum up, more than anything it is a pleasure to read White. His style solid, but also very daring – is captivating, and the reader can never be certain of what will come next. Willing to learn, adapt, and experiment, White's work continued to evolve, peaking not once but several times. According to Peter Craven, "It continues to scandalize me that cultivated English – language readers exist, in Britain and America, who have never read White and who don't realize that those who have taken the trouble to do so are inclined to rank him with Nabokov or Beckett – or indeed Faulkner". White is an eminently worthy Nobel laureate, he deserves a large audience. He is a demanding writer, but worth the effort.

### Work Cited

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