



Review of Literature



PATRICK WHITE'S *THE TREE OF MAN*: SYMBOLIZING HUMAN LIFE



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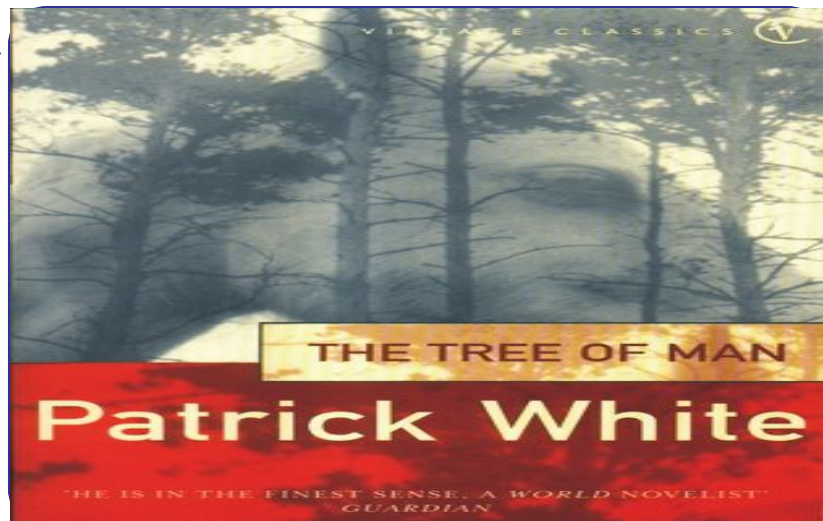
ABSTRACT

Patrick White is a well recognized Australian novelist, the recipient of Nobel Prize in Literature in 1973 for *The Eye of the Storm*. His other novel *The Tree of Man* (1954) is truly a great novel. It is about life but very personal and intimate novel. The scope of the novel is very large. With this large novel of rural life White first gained broad international fame. It is an impressive work that sweeps widely across three generations of a family of settler-farmers, in the bush outside Sidney – an area that is, by the end of the novel, largely absorbed into Sidney's sprawling outer suburban area.

KEYWORDS: The Tree of Man ,Australian novelist, The Eye of the Storm.

INTRODUCTION :

Patrick White has written *The Tree of Man* into a series of painterly scenes. Within each of these scenes there may be action, but there is little in the way of narrative progression. The story has the pictorial quality. Its background is chiefly based on the countryside. Almost from the beginning to the end, the story moves away from the land where the main characters, Stan and his wife, Amy, experience



their life through the four elements of the nature: land, water, fire and wood. The power of the land is just the opening scene; the conclusion is an affirmation of the continuity of earth's life. Throughout the novel there are commanding set pieces on the wind, on flood, on fire, making together a cosmology and biblical drama. The scope of the novel is enlarged by this cosmic sense that shows the writer's vision of human nature. People's life in that district is like a relatively a straight line -- the land where they root -- with several curves occurring, that is, the force of water and fire felling upon them and the wood (or tree) as the symbol of human life's beginning and ending.

Actually, the first element appears in the title itself *The Tree of Man*. Here the tree is not merely

the objective of Stan's cutting to make a clearance and construct shack; it has a symbolic meaning: the life of man has continuity and moves in the way of circulation. The whole book shows that man's life possesses the quality of trees: the new one springs up from the old one and when the old trunk i.e. man dies, the new branch of offspring will get life and grow, so there is no finality in the tree or man. The tree in the title and the intact bush in the earlier part of the novel show that human life, just like a tree, is a circle without terminal, going on and on with something spiritual inherited. Almost in the end of the novel Stan's grandson, recalling his dead grandfather, walks through the bushfilled gully that is all remains of the virgin land Stan cleared in the beginning.

The narrative of the novel begins with the second element in the nature, land. It is the land still unnamed and unpopulated, a total wilderness. Stan, here, is the representative of the inner life of essentially Man and he meets Nature at its most primitive. 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. While rescuing Madeline from fire Stan's soul opens and he is full of sparkles of thoughts.

The two storms and the fire in the house Stan undergoes are of significance to him, to his spiritual release. The flood and the fire gather Durilgai people onto one stage. Without these two events these people usually scatter under their own roofs and lead a trivial and insignificant life like ants. In this connection the writer says that Durilgai people are much like ants: industrious, laborious, intensely active, but not always clear. They think that their names are even not noteworthy; they, just living creatures in want of thinking and changing, that represents the characters. 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 novelist intends to stress the symbolic quality of the fire more explicitly than he does with the flood. 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. White's personality and his experience partly account for the reason of his eagerness to return and the great attention given to nature in this novel. Particularly Stan in the novel is like White in some way: 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.

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