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# THE VISION OF THE AUNT'S STORY

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**Abstract:**

*In "The Aunt's Story" deals primary concern the symbolic representation of a vision which encompasses Theodora Goodman's quest for the inner self and its ultimate resolution. Some of the unifying images of the novel are Meroe, hawk, rose-garden and the garnet ring. Meroe, for Theodora spells out peace and completeness. It is akin in shape and purpose to the Mandala. Theodora identifies herself with the red eye of the hawk. In shooting it she destroys a part of her own self. The disintegration of the self takes place in the Jardin Exotique section and from which Theodora comes out triumphantly in the third section. She puts on her hat with a black rose trembling and glittering on it. She leaves the hut and goes down to the brown circles of spring water. The rose is a mandala symbol which indicates her newly won wholeness.*

**The Vision of the Aunt's Story:**

*The Aunt's Story* is about Theodora Goodman's story. The novel begins with the death of her mother, finally freeing Theodora, who had been caring for her long-time. Theodora's life contrasts with that of her sister, Fanny, who is married and has some children. She is entirely happy with her aunt. Particularly she loves her niece Lou and she is very important figure to the girl in comparing with her parents. Theodora decides to take advantage of her new-found freedom to go abroad. Before continuing in the present, however, White has her revisit the past, describing her childhood and how she came to know her inner self.

Fanny is immensely loved by the girls. The domineering mother is always pleased by the plain and simple Fanny, while Theodora is too complicated for her to embrace. Theodora is more ambitious and her safety is not at all easy to find. Her role as an aunt will be sufficient. So she sets out for Europe to find a world and herself.

The first section of the novel is called Meroe, after the house in which the Goodman's lived. The second part is Jardin Exotique, after the odd refuge, the exotic garden; she is drawn in a French hotel. She spends considerable time there, and White ignores most of the rest of her travels, by focusing on her experiences and the characters she encounters. Among the guests at the hotel there is Katina Pavlou, a teenage girl looking for love, to which she can also be an aunt. There is also General Alyosha Sergei Sokolnikov, who winds up by seeing her sister, Ludmilla.

The exotic garden is completely static, rigid, the equation of a garden. It is ultimately surplus for Theodora, as her imagination overpowers reality. Then this dreamy reality becomes unnatural and disaster. The concluding section Holstius, finds Theodora in the middle of the United States. She has almost completely lost touch with reality, and in the final scenes she gets off a train in the middle of nowhere and wanders aimlessly. She is brought out by a family by allowing her to reprise her role as aunt but she wanders off again. She has become mentally unbalanced and at the end she is taken away to be institutionalized surviving but unable to find her place. Finally she will submit but without being taken in.

White effectively portrays Theodora's descent into madness. She is a rich and sympathetically drawn figure. The story progressing in the large jumps, doesn't always flow as neatly as one might wish, but it does work well enough. It is a very economically

toldtale that there is no excess of either language or of incidents. Some of the time White still seems to be feeling his way, seeing what he can do with language, how far he can go. Throughout, there are short sentences, White compressing an incident into a few words before expanding it again.

White is certain in his description, overextend on occasion and always managing to convey the image, the thought he has in mind. In *The Aunt's story,* he begins the novel in the present and then swing to the past and it is a pendulum movement between the past and the present. Flashback techniques in this novel, includes various instances of the protagonists memories of the past, thus it truly explicit the craftsmanship of White in this novel.

The novel begins with the wild and mad Miss Hare, awaiting the arrival of a new maid to assist in the maintenance of her house, Xanadu, a large and sprawling structure that is slowly falling into decay because of a lack of care. The climax is a mock crucifixion of an old Jewish refugee one of the four main characters in the courtyard of the factory, where he works. The owner of the factory fears to interfere, and a young aborigine says three times, that he does not know the victim.

This is a novel about liberty and the entire plot consists of Theodora Goodman's life in Australia from childhood to her mid-forties. The independence of Theodora's mind is revealed in the unconventionally of her character and her refutation of the time's standards, refinement, vanity, domestic accomplishments, marriage or motherhood. White's one of his best novels, *The Aunt's Story* is the story of Theodora Goodman, a spinster. Its chief concern appears to be the symbolic representation of a vision which encompasses the protagonist's quest for the inner self and its ultimate resolution.

It opens on a note of dissociation. Immediately after her mother's death, Theodora embarks on the quest for self. She feels that any desirable spiritual state is only achieved by stripping one-self of all vestiges of the material world. The existence of this core of being is hinted at by the image of the Indian filigree ball which Theodora and Lou roll over the carpet. Her hands protected not only the Indian ball, but many secret moments of reflected fire.

In many ways, the central problem facing Theodora Goodman is the same as that which faces Schreiner's heroine, Lyndall, whose inability to communicate with others derives from an intense preoccupation with self, and results in her destruction. But whereas Lyndall, immediately before her death, asks for a mirror, Theodora Goodman is afraid of mirrors because they are an intolerable assertion of the self from which she must escape. Patrick White traces, in *The Aunt's Story*, the stages of the journey toward fulfilment. As in*The Story of an African Farm*, the physical settings are only a small part of the solitary land of the mind. The individual consciousness encompasses all, and makes no distinctions: the reality and the illusion threaten constantly to become one, and the self struggles in vain toimpose order. No help can be forthcoming from others. Moreover the solitary process goes on until the individual has absorbed by all that constitutes the outer reality.

Throughout *The Aunt's Story* the inner and outer realities seek to become identified; no distinct line is drawn between what actually happens to Theodora and what happens within her. Perhaps such distinctions are unreal, and deliberately intended by White. At the same time, however, that other part of the self which seeks to establish integrity and order within the stream of experience, to wrest from its significance and spiritual or physical pleasure, is vitally concerned with identity, its own and that of the outside world. Yet identity implies fixity and restriction, from which the

self struggles to escape, and from this struggle emerge tension and conflict. Thus, at the deepest level, alienation of the individual from the outer reality is seen as alienation within the individual himself, as he struggles to reconcile that part of the self which seeks to impose identity, constancy, with that part which seeks to escape it. It seems as though thedeciding factor in the struggle will be the inner spiritual and emotional resources of the individual. In the case of Theodora Goodman, the outcome of her journey to the solitary land in which no fellow footfall is ever heard is ambiguous, but in order fully to understand the nature of the ambiguity, close attention must be paid to the progressive stages of the journey.

At the beginning of the "Meroe" section of the novel, Theodora is introduced immediately prior to her departure for Europe. Free at last from the restricting influence of her mother, she begins subconsciously to apprehend the dangers inherent in such a situation.

At this stage Theodora is prevailed upon by her niece to tell her the story of Meroe.The house and landscape in which Theodora was born and grew up are imbued with a feeling of primal and sometimes terrifying antiquity, the antiquity of rock, earth and fire, the beginning and end of all life. Only Theodora and her father sense the power of the black, gaunt hills which are older than Australia and all measured time, and which contain within them the mysteries of preservation and destruction.

In defence against this country and its terrors which they but dimly perceive, Mrs Goodman and Fanny, the other daughter, lead lives of containment within four walls—Mrs Goodman bitter, cruel, withdrawn, and Fanny, bathed in the pink light of roses, adept at the piano and the waltz. Theodora, unable and unwilling to impose on the chaotic depths of Meroe the tinkling artificialities, of social grace, moves, in her ugliness and angularity, ever closer to the centre of this disturbing world.

Theodora, as White depicts her in this first part of the novel, is on the surface an unlikely character thus to be linked with the dark and the elemental. She is self-conscious to thepoint of misery, aware of her physical unattractiveness, and hopelessly inarticulate. There is nothing other-worldly about Theodora-her physicality is perhaps the most effective counterbalance to Romantic vagueness that White employs. Physically, she is part of the black and yellow and tawny world around her, and her response to it is complete.

Relationships with other people are battles to be fought; Meroe has taught her, as the Marabar taught Mrs Moore, that conventional human relationships are in the end of no very great importance. But Theodora lacks also the ability to face herself: she turns away from the sallow, hated image in the mirror, to her a green sea at the end of the passage. The depths of her own being threaten to engulf her as much as the soughing pines on the north side of the house.

The elements of violence and destruction, implicit in the trees and rocks and fire with which she is identified, are likewise present in Theodora herself, most notably in her predilection for going out on her own with a rifle, despite hermother's pronouncement that "it was unseemly for a girl to traipse about the country with a gun." A crucial incident occurs when she comes upon a hawk at work on a dead sheep.Theodora's momentary identification with the hawk is remembered some considerable time later, when she is out shooting with her brother-in-law and the hawk reappears, along with the same terrible impulse to destruction.

Theodora is trapped within the prison of the self. Like Moraitis, she stands in a room with two opposed mirrors in which the image of the self is repeated, unchanging, to infinity. She has realized that to do violence to her mother, who is not only an

unbearable present but also a corruption of the past, would not break down the walls. And other strategies seem likely to be equally irrelevant. Theodora is too inadequate to be either a saint or anascetic. Rather than attempt to follow any eight-fold way to Nirvana, all she can do is let time and distance gradually break down the barriers. The long journey, usually a search for the self, is for Theodora an escape from it.

**Conclusion:**

The novel is the story of the lives of four loosely connected people, whose common link is the mystic experience of the chariot of the title described in the Ezekiel. It also traces their lives towards the point where they realize the same vision. We are introduced to each character in turn, and their personal struggles are explored against the backdrop of Sarsaparilla in Australia, often thought to be based on White's place of residence of that time, at Castle Hill, Sydney in New South Wales. The novel combines literature, mysticism and suburban life in 1950s Australia.

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