

**SYMBOLISM IN THE ‘THE EYE OF THE STORM:’  
A THEMATIC STUDY**

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**Abstract**

Sign and symbols, pictures and images are the basic organs of any writing. A writer speaks in his voice through letters and literatures with the help of images and pictures so called Signs and Symbols. This article argues to analyze the thematic and stylistic concerns associated with Symbolism as used by the Australian Fiction writer Patrick White in his novel ‘The Eye of the Storm’. While focusing on ‘The Eye of the Storm’, the article shall examine the characters and their practicality in terms of symbolism as to how and what White wants to suggest through his characters and the theme of the novel.

**Keywords:** Symbols, Metaphors, Themes and Motifs.

Patrick Victor Martindale White, one of the greatest literary figures in the world of English Literature, has been an ostentatious novelist and a travel writer. He is the only writer of Australia to be honoured with the Noble prize (1973) for his authentic voice that carried him across the world and also the recipient of gold medal of the Australian literary society in 1941. He is among the most acclaimed and admired contemporary novelist today. His novels are mainly set in Australian outback, demonstrating the wrath and anguish of amazing society of Australia.

White seems very sober but his work reflects opposite in as they are full of complex and confused. He wanted to present his both Australian as well as European concerns. His Australia may not be the true Australia but it serves his fiction extremely well in novels such as Voss, A Fringe of Leaves, Riders in the Chariot and The Eye of the Storm. His works serves for self reflexivity, symbolism and imagery. The purpose of this current article is to attempt and analyze his fiction The Eye of the Storm on the ground of symbolism.

Number ninth novel of White 'The Eye of the Storm' is dedicated to Maie Casey, the wife of the former Governor General of Australia. Lady Casey is a close friend and has much in common with white. She is a writer (of biography and verse) and shares White's interest in painting. Novel seems to be a dense network of symbols. It opens with the scene where an old lady lying on bed and trying to feel comfortable, the protagonist and the leading leader of the White's fiction 'The Eye of the storm', Mrs. Elizabeth Hunter, a dying, sensual, proud, vain, selfish, almost blind and a greedy lady who is now under the supervision of medical assistants. The very opening scene through the letters has been presented very symbolically and significantly between the nurse De Santis and Mrs. Hunter.

'Oh dear, will it never be morning? Mrs. Hunter got her head as well as she could out of the steamy pillows.

It is said the nurse: can't you—can't you feel it? While working around this almost chrysalis in her charge, her veil had grown transparent; on the other hand the wings of her hair, escaping from beneath the lawn, could not have looked a more solid black.' (p.9)

White's use of symbolism lays stress upon the significance of understanding of his treatment with natural images with the concept of divinity, as in the opening scene of the novel mentioned above represents the significant symbolic expression through the mouth speaker; Mrs. Hunter who is now unable to see and feel anything (the morning), whereas it is a morning, but now Mrs. Hunter can only hope for morning which she had seen a long ago when she was young, but now she is only experiencing the death in her eyes, so it is all dark for her. Elizabeth Hunter is a wealthy former, socialite and apparently senile. She has turned eighty-six and has recently suffered a stroke, but still full of boast of her ego and remains a controller one those around her. Her mind remains formidable enough to terrorize her attendants so that they are torn between affectionate admiration for their generous and helpless charge and contempt for a vain, self-indulgent, cruel old woman. She also knows about her effects and impacts on others. She has got the ability to impress others easily and make them accept her concepts and concerns. She has been referred to as "a wealthy senile woman and a very passionate woman" (p.545). Her two nurses represent the opposing poles she recognizes in her personality, roles they accept with varying degrees of good grace. White presented this nurse like Laura Trevelyan in Voss. This article elaborates on the affective dimensions of natural images and symbols in White's writings. He wanted to establish a beautiful relationship between words and symbols, as the title of the novel itself is very suggestive, significant and symbolic.

Susan (1982) reported "Our attention is drawn to the pivotal symbols of this novel by the title and as with all symbols, the calm at the centre is open to many levels of interpretation. The eye of the storm can be understood as an allusion to the bed ridden Elizabeth Hunter, who is the still centre in the tempest of emotions she rouses in those around her: her nurses, children lawyer and friends. On a more obvious level, reference is being made to the calm at the centre of a typhoon. Both the Dutchman, whom Dorothy Hunter recognizes but fails to accept as possible spiritual guide and Elizabeth Hunter experiences such a moment of peace at the heart of the storm, If we consider the novel's many reference and similarities to Shakespeare king Lear, a subject that deserves an essay in itself. We must recognize that the storm Mrs. Hunter experiences on Brumby Island has a parallel significance to that of the storm which Lear endures on the heath. Elizabeth, too, suffers a storm she learns that the power her wealth and beauty have afforded her is ultimately insignificant. But just how is the reader to understand Elizabeth Hunter's experience during the typhoon?"

White beautifully presented modern urban life as ugly, banal and meaningless, as when Basil Hunter walking on a Sydney beach sees an aimless bobbing of corks which have served their purpose and scum, and condoms, and rotting fruit, and rusted tins, and excrement (352). White parallely went by his novel *Riders in the Chariot* and it shows the disgust. It is about families, sexual betrayal, love, sickness, and death. It tells of the life of a beautiful lady. White again presented the psychological structure of the heterosexual family as innately pathological, devouring individuality and difference. The marriage of Elizabeth and Alfred Hunter, like Catherine and Willy Standish, is more of a disaster than a success. Their children, Basil and Dorothy, escape their parents as soon as possible and, like Elyot and Eden, can lay claim to a string of disastrous heterosexual relationships. Clearly, *The Eye of the Storm* is loosely based on White's own relationship with his mother Ruth, and her protracted death 'attended by acolytes and besieged by heirs who wished this opulent convalescence would end, either with death or a bare room at the Blue Nuns' (Patrick White: *A Life*, p. 494). Elizabeth Hunter is, at one and the same time, a devouring but careless mother, a disrespectful wife, and an independent woman - all potentially explosive characteristics. She is manipulative and controlling, and the parallels with White himself, as well as with his mother, are striking, directly or indirectly, Elizabeth Hunter activates all the tensions in the novel, tensions which are made all the more potent as they come from a dying woman confined to bed. The most tangible tension is of sexuality. Almost all the characters, from the nurses, to Basil and Dorothy, have bizarre, or destructive, or highly complex sexual relations. As there is no space to go into all of them, and about the relationship angle presented in the novel of its characters, Elizabeth, Basil and Dorothy and two nurses. Elizabeth and Alfred fall into the mould of White's upper class married couple. Rich, egocentric, and frivolous, they marry predominantly for the sake of convention: as the narrative relates in parentheses. Their whole married life they had spent trying to encourage each other's uninteresting interests (p. 33). Their attempts to make each other happy are upheld by the novel, highlighting the value placed in the White oeuvre on respect for difference, and reconciliation: And what about her own betrayal of Alfred.

Elizabeth Hunter shields herself behind her role as Grande dame, gracious hostess, and legendary beauty. She is shown as self obsessed and frequently cruel. Love to her has always meant possession, both of things and people. She is much as her daughter describes her: sensual, mendacious, materialistic, and superficial. She merits little love from anyone. To her good and gentle husband Alfred she has been occasionally unfaithful and always unreachable- always that is until his slow death by cancer reduces him to childlike dependence on her. From this position of power and controls she comes close enough to positive the pain she caused by taking herself and their children off to a house in Sydney.

The metaphoric use of symbols by white shows the personal experience of his life and significantly he relates his own experiences to the story of the novel by sandwiching the storm between past and present; time frame of Elizabeth life. The title of the novel is thus can be correlated when Elizabeth was caught in storm.

“It was the island I loved, Dorothy. After you left I got to know it. After I had been deserted-and reduced to shreds not that it nattered: I was prepared for my life to be taken from me. Instead the birds accepted to eat out of my hands what saved me was noticing a bird impaled on a tree.....I think I was reminded that

one can't be escape suffering. Though it is only human to try to escape it..... (p.379)

Ashok Kumar (2011) finds that the title suggests to a climactic moment in her life when she was left alone on an island and was caught in a tropical cyclone. The experiences indicate suffering and humiliation, closeness to death, but also a moment of incredible grace and stillness. To her, as to Hurtle Duffield (Vivisector) the eyes come to stand for the core of reality, the centre of our true existence inside all the layers of appearance. In the end, both protagonists and become obedient instruments of the divine eye. Their will is wholly concentrated on reaching the eye of truth and infinity, a process that ultimately implies the destruction of that same will. They both make the act of dying a work of art and the novel ends on a positive note by combining the fundamentally human aspect with the concept of divinity.

Cotter(1978) reported "Elizabeth Hunter's Life after the storm is devoted to the attempt to regain the clear sense of herself that has been granted to her in the storm: an awareness of herself as being a conscious functioning being, sharply distinct within a universal order."

White's characters have been presented as sufferings from physical world in the hands of spiritual world. As Hunter facing a real storm in life in her mind symbolizing the human suffering which is inescapable and inexplicable. White opens up a subjective world to us fully and convincingly. But the sensibility he explores is surrounded by ironies. Hunter now is more spiritual than physical union.

"She was no longer a body, least of all a woman: the myth of her womanhood had been exploded by the storm. She was instead a being, or more likely a flaw at the centre of this jewel of light: the jewel itself, blinding and tremulous at the same time, existed, flaw and all, only by grace..... (p.424).

White has made it very clear that Death is the last and best degree in the world which everyone has to attain as Hunter's eyes are experiencing. Hunter feels relaxed and calm in the centre of storm which it signifies clearly that Eye stands for the God himself always seeking for spiritual emancipation from the physical world which everybody passes through as Shakespeare's king Lear had to go from the very similar storm in the end as here hunter but on the ground of practicality and physicality an Eye may represent the evilness when it is opened as they can see the both the evil and good as Hunter used to see her own world only the physical world when young but when they are closed it shows and seeks the spirituality and purity in the divine process of life. Now she is going to close her eyes fully and realizing about the realistic pattern of life which she is meeting finally. It is very clear or the title of the novel itself speaks very symbolically and significantly that White wanted to lead his characters towards the divinity with spirituality and purity from evil.

### **Conclusion**

Really, White in The Eye of the storm proved himself as the best representative of symbols with beautiful imagery and pictures. Thematically and critically it is a true testament of his original and first hand writing. He uses both religious and natural symbols. His works give food the readers for thought. The Eye of the storm is modeled on sensibility and symbolism. It is a combination of heart and mind and soul and body. White has created a beautiful world beyond words.

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