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UTOPIANISM IN PATRICK WHITE'S *THE LIVING AND THE DEAD*¹

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White's fiction campaigns against false hopes of happiness, and the perils of seeking it in sex, power and possessions. [...] For him, intense happiness is to be found in marriage, work, integrity, even purity. [MARR, *Monthly* 32]

Throughout the war I seemed to exist on several levels: in the higher reaches a swinging trapeze set in motion by Spengler's predictions which I had been faced with in London as an idler of the Nineteen-Thirties, later my discovery of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* in a transport plane out of Jules Verne above the jungles and deserts of Africa, farther down there were the ironed-out press and radio announcements, while at the lowest level one clung to Judy Garland's Technicolor rainbow and, as the Stukas flew overhead in the desert, that other voice with the catch in it, assuring us that we'd meet again. [WHITE, *Flaws* 74-75]

Utopia rarely speaks its name in the novels and plays of Patrick White. However, White does explicitly use the word utopia in its traditional, Morean sense several times in one of his early texts, the modernist novel *The Living and the Dead*, published in 1941. With the question of the presence or absence of utopianism in White's body of work having been neglected in criticism, this essay is the first to focus on utopianism in a text by White.

Utopianism in *The Living and the Dead* takes diverse forms. The word "utopia" is used by the narrator to designate the social imaginaries of two dissident, Left-leaning working men whose thoughts wander off into fantastic other worlds. The text acknowledges goodness in these men, but critiques the activity of utopian social dreaming and the presumptive contents of the men's dreams. Two other characters are propelled by what I am calling here utopian impulses. They sense an interior process of "becoming" or "perfecting," preparing them for an undefined future,

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perhaps a mission to metaphorically awaken and enlighten fellow citizens. Utopian impulses also prompt projects of individual, aesthetic self-cultivation and artistic creativity, projects that may contribute to the betterment of a culture. Utopian energies manifesting themselves in social programs of a more public, tangible kind are also displayed. On the other hand, negative attitudes find expression in the novel's social satire and in the channelling of early twentieth-century cultural pessimism of the kind prompted by Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*, published between 1918 and 1923. Civilisational collapse is foreseen by characters demoralised by the dystopian condition of London.

Utopianism interested, and I suspect, irritated White in his early manhood. At this stage, he regarded himself as having thrown off his spirituality and his Protestant religious upbringing in the institutional Church of England. White recalled in his memoir *Flaws in the Glass*: "I threw it all off in my late teens. Then, and in my early manhood, I was too egotistical, too sensual, to consider spiritual matters. As an Australian, perhaps too materialistic" [143]. Yet the representations of utopianism in *The Living and the Dead* are inflected by the language and metaphors of belief and concomitant moral responsibility. When White wrote *The Living and the Dead*, he was attempting to formulate his own sense of vocation as a creative artist whose work might somehow improve a flawed human world. Spirituality and religion [terms White did not consistently distinguish between], along with utopianism and principles of moral integrity, contributed to that formulation and tended to be conflated in his discourse. Later, as White revived and admitted to his religious faith (in the early 1950s²) and published his greatest works, the utopianism was subsumed into the spirituality in his texts and became less apparent.

A streak of utopianism reasserted itself through White's increasing participation in public, socio-political campaigns in the 1970s and this activism fed back into his writing, contemporary conflicts blending with his pre-established formulae for representing struggling idealism. A character in the 1977 play *Big Toys* is based on a green bans leader, for instance. He reveals he read Marx and Dostoevsky as a boy and refers to "the gospel I was brought up on [...] The spirit which inspires human beings to rise above their human deficiencies."³

² MARR, *Patrick White* : 281-284, 683 notes 1-15. WHITE, *Patrick White Speaks* : 19.

³ MILNER & BURGMANN : 125-142. MARR, *Patrick White* : 510, 702 n. 60. WHITE, *Collected Plays*, Vol. II : 12, 46.

Literary critics tend to acknowledge White's socio-political stances and his philanthropic gestures to assist artists and the broader culture without invoking his early [or, arguably, continuing] utopian leanings. Bernadette Brennan is one critic who has remarked on a general lack of scholarly interest in White's concern with using his art "to effect change in Australian society"; she points to White's characters acting "for the betterment of their world" [41-42]. Brigid Rooney goes some way to addressing the deficiency in her *Literary Activists: Writer-Intellectuals and Australian Public Life* [2009] where she shows that White's writing and multi-cause activism complemented each other. While Rooney does not identify utopianism in White's career, she makes a couple of apposite observations. First, she notices that in his prose White frequently uses "conditional formulations," for example concerning that which *would have* occurred *had it not been for* some factor. These conditionals signify "suspended desires," Rooney remarks, perhaps implying that thwarted desires will find expression in other ways, including social and cultural imagining [Rooney 50-51]. Second, Rooney asserts that "White's disposition, both patrician and self-punishing [...] drove his desire to find an 'extraordinary' world within the ordinary one" [ROONEY 55].

The diminution of overt utopianism in White's fiction is noteworthy in *The Eye of the Storm*, published in 1973. I nominate it particularly because it is an ingenious rewriting of *The Living and the Dead*, a novel with which White was dissatisfied. *The Eye of the Storm* contains parallel characters and events, and even equivalents to minute details. Accounts of structural collapses and excessive materialism recur. However, the early novel's explicit references to utopian social dreaming have been eliminated. In place of sporadic socio-political speculation and hopefulness, spirituality is prominent from the opening page, in the person of a nursing sister who has "evolved, in the course of her working life, a [...] religion – of perpetual becoming" [11]. This character plays an influential role in regard to the moral self-scrutiny of the central character, the dying matriarch. And she is still present on the very last page, where she has an epiphany described in terms of becoming perfected, experiencing unmanageable joy, and being possessed by light, an equivalent to the Annunciation.

White's mature works are infused with metaphysical content, especially a sense of the sacred and mystical being immanent in the material world, in banal objects and humble service. Of course this has been described and analysed by critics, generally in an accepting manner. Bill Ashcroft, for example, locates White in a tradition of Australian art and writing that has "produced a sense of the sacred that seemed denied in cultural life" [ASHCROFT 95]. He cites revelatory moments in which White's characters

apprehend the sacred. Leonie Kramer posed an early challenge to such acceptance when she argued that while White's emotional attraction is to mystery and the irrational his intellectual outlook is humanist and sceptical and his fiction heads away from "transcendentalism, towards an assertion of secular humanism" [KRAMER 10]. A caution issued by Andrew McCann is also worth noting. The term "the sacred" is over-determined in Australian cultural and literary discourse, he asserts: it "circulates through a modern, disenchanted culture in order to name, often nostalgically, a broad experiential realm imagined as lying beyond that culture's limits," manifesting in highly aestheticized moments" that are often "loaded with political connotations" [MCCANN 152].

Few of the critics who discuss the sacred in White's writing also use the word "utopia" in relation to the author. Perhaps it is because White so frequently called himself a pessimist or was labelled one that generalist readers and critics alike have rarely characterised his fictions in terms of benign social vision. The opening decade of the twenty-first century saw a theoretical-critical return to acknowledging religion as a component of much socio-political thinking and literary production [DURING : 131-161]. The time is now ripe for the intersections of the utopian politico-social and the sacred to be examined in White's *œuvre*.

Veronica Brady is one critic who, on several occasions, has attributed utopianism to White's works. Of the author's characterisation of Australia in his first novel, *Happy Valley* (1939), she remarks that he made it "a place whose inhabitants had most frighteningly failed to take hold of life, a failed utopia of a sick civilisation" ["Dragon" 130]. Discussing White's subsequent novel, *The Living and the Dead*, in the same essay, Brady does not use the word utopia. Yet she assigns a utopian function to the aesthetics in the novel when, invoking the influence of E.M. Forster and philosopher G.E. Moore, she sees White's concern with art as "offering the only alternative to the miserable life that envelopes [the novel's] characters, a glimpse of plenitude and permanence in an aesthetic world complete in itself" [130].

Brady cites formalist literary critic Cleanth Brooks who argues that authors show hubris when they assume either that the solutions to humanity's problems can be obtained through their own privileged insights or that their own psychic disturbances are continuous with the disturbances of society at large. Asserting that White displays such hubris up to the time of *The Eye of the Storm*, Brady equates it with the "utopian impulse" [*Fringe* 140]. In his following novel, *A Fringe of Leaves* (1976), White renounces this impulse, according to Brady [BRADY : 140, BROOKS : 35]. In her view the renunciation is beneficial since White then concentrates on his art, of which utopia may be

a product: "White may well have moved us closer to that utopia, the only one that art can provide, the ability the better to enjoy, the better to endure the vicissitudes of things" [140]. Testing Brady's broad contention is beyond my scope here. It is worth noting, however, another critic's estimation of the value White gives to art in his later works. Simon During in his monograph *Patrick White* (1996) claims that "His later works, notably *The Twyborn Affair* (1979), begin to move away from the transcendentalism of modernist cultural criticism towards what is sometimes called a 'postmodernism', no longer confident of its ability to appeal either to art or the spirit as grounds for secure values or sanctioned insights" [37].

Before elaborating on the representations of utopianism in *The Living and the Dead* and discussing the novel's closing passage, I will clarify some terminology and sketch White's circumstances prior to the publication of the novel.

As my use [above] of the phrase "social dreaming" would suggest, I chiefly have in mind Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of utopianism as social dreaming when I discuss the two characters that mentally stray into socio-political imaginaries. In Sargent's terms, the men contemplate eutopias, a eutopia being "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived" ["Utopian" 15].

Ruth Levitas's definition of utopia is looser but also applicable to the two imaginers. In writing that "[u]topia expresses and explores what is desired" and that under certain circumstances utopia "contains the hope that these desires may be met in reality, rather than merely in fantasy," Levitas explains that this desire is "for a better way of being. It involves the imagining of a state of being in which the problems which actually confront us are removed or resolved" [191].

In his *The Principle of Hope*, Ernst Bloch supplies a massive compendium of exemplars of humans' striving toward that ideal condition which has not yet been attained or even clearly imagined. "Utopian impulse" is my favoured phrase in this essay for such cultural and other endeavours with the capacity to improve the human condition.

Sargent's notion of "utopian energies," summarised in an essay published in 2007, has a materialist orientation, making the term suited to the forces propelling those participatory and informative, Bloomsburyite programs encountered by the character Eden ("It was a name meant to be used" [WHITE, *The Living and the Dead* 186]) after her social conscience is sensitised.

For Sargent, “utopian energy” signifies energy which, while not being channelled into recognisably utopian texts and intentional communities, is displaced into other projects that have a tinge of utopianism. The energy, physical and mental, generates activity, instances of which include nation-building and movements advancing the status of sub-groups [SARGENT 309-310].

Literary theorist Fredric Jameson also calls up the notion of energies, likening utopian discourse to a process, “an *energeia*, enunciation, productivity” [80-81] rather than the static representation of a realised vision of a social ideal. As well as drawing on Louis Marin’s *Utopics: Spatial Play* [MARIN 196-197] he appears to be borrowing by analogy from philosopher-linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt’s description of language as not product (*Ergon*), but activity (*Energeia*), “the ever-repeated *mental labour* of making the *articulated* sound capable of expressing *thought*” [49, emphasis in original]. Humboldt’s dynamic understanding of language is a possible pointer to better appreciation of White’s career-long preoccupation with the cultural and spiritual contributions made by word-based artists.

The notion of “utopian propensity” should also be kept in mind when looking at utopianism in White’s writing. The term was proposed by Frank and Mitzi Manuel in emulation of William James’s recognition of “religious propensity” in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), a book which White read and re-read. The Manuels say “[t]here may even be a utopian vocation” [5].

Given that White was well read in at least three languages and had been learning Spanish, we should also note the influence of various philosophies’ and nations’ notions of moral energy and ethical effort on White’s thinking. Further, the idea of “moral injury” is helpful if we think of the mental and emotional wounds suffered by those participating in [or refusing to join in] the novel’s wars: first the Great War and then the Spanish Civil War.

In his own life, White’s reasons for attending to [or ignoring] the progress of the conflict in Spain were foremost personal. This connection informed the novel’s metaphors and political positions. After graduating from Cambridge, White had settled in London in 1935, intending to make a career as a writer. Having had a conservative upbringing and claiming he had no head for politics, he moved among sub-cultures in the theatre and visual arts worlds while remaining at arm’s length from the Left. Earlier he had intermittently travelled to Germany despite the rise of National Socialism. After White met a Francoist Spaniard, Viscount Mamblas, in France the two became lovers for some months. Mamblas spoke of the present in terms which White took into his prose: the sense of life being lived more intensely

in times pregnant with uncertain outcomes. It was not until early 1938 that White seems to have really absorbed the gravity of international developments. Writing chidingly to Mamblas after the bombardment of Barcelona, which coincided with Hitler's advance into Austria, he was solipsistic: "one sees what may be in store for all of us" [MARR, *Patrick White* 172].

White's first published novel was written between 1936 and 1937 in London and France. Its title *Happy Valley* (*Eden-ville* in the French translation) was to be read ironically. After his affair with Mamblas ended, White wrote his play *Return to Abyssinia*, a title echoing the final three words of Samuel Johnson's philosophical tale *Rasselas* [176]. The message of Johnson's fable for White at that stage of his life seems to have been that, while he had been seeking happiness in pursuits and relationships, it would be better for him to become "centred." As White's biographer, David Marr, asserts in the first epigraph to this essay, White's life and writing became a process of affirming those (stable and largely conservative) courses of conduct and commitments in which, in his estimation, "true happiness" is to be achieved. At the same time he would illuminate the perils of falsely hoping to attain happiness through ostentation, power plays and loveless sex, with the humiliating demise of the matriarchal Catherine Standish in *The Living and the Dead* being one of his first morality tales along these lines. This is not to say White always managed to align the living of his own life with the principles affirmed in his fictions. Those who fell out with him could speak sharply on this point. But he did appear to settle on a cluster of values, most of them acquired during the years of his childhood and youth spent in rural Australia. These he imbued with spirituality after his early investigations of secular utopianism had confirmed to him that he could not expel the spiritual other-worldly from his apprehension of the world and its possible futures.

The Living and the Dead was written between 1939 and 1940 as White, aged 27 to 28 and as yet unsettled in his spirits, moved about between England, Europe and the north and south of the United States. Within the US, he was moving on from one serious intimate relationship to another. Retrospectively White recalled being in a "cynical [...] dispiriting phase of life": those times were "disjointed [...] unpredictable," and he felt guilty for not yet having signed up for the war effort and for wanting to stay in America, where he felt more "alive" [WHITE, *Flaws* 77-78]. Early in *The Living and the Dead* a character serving in the Great War talks of going to Australia after it ends [86-87]; New Worlds offer utopian alternatives to the Old. Visiting Taos (where D.H. Lawrence had not long before attempted to establish a utopian creative community), White perceived the place to be

admirably high up “above the disintegrating world” [MARR, *Patrick White* 184]. But, like so many fictional visitors to utopia, he chose not to remain.

White was in America when the movie *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was released on the same day Britain declared it was at war. The storyline (particularly in L. Frank Baum’s original text) features an idealistic quest, agrarian longings and fantastic parallel worlds [CULVER 97-116]. As the second epigraph to this essay indicates, the film had a sentimental impact on White which lasted through the years of his war service (“one clung to Judy Garland’s Technicolor rainbow”). It perhaps also influenced the naming of the daughter character, Dorothy, in *The Eye of the Storm*.

The first explicit mention of utopia in *The Living and the Dead* appears in regard to the propagation of Socialism and Fabianism in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century England. This early part of the three-generation storyline is set in Norwich, a provincial city known for some non-conformity in Christian faith and radicalism in politics and social thinking. Elizabeth Fry, the Quaker prison reformer, and Harriet Martineau, who wrote on political economy and slavery abolition, were both from Norwich.

White’s fervent social dreamer is named Edwin Goose. Readers are likely to notice the similarity of his name to that of Edmund Gosse, who in *Father and Son* (1907) had represented his upbringing by his naturalist father, an adherent of a non-conformist church, and how that lay behind his own rejecting of Christianity.

Goose earns his living as a self-employed harness maker. His occupation is suitable for a fictional idealist of that socially transitional 1880-1930 period: humble Christ-like carpentry, boot making and bookbinding are other common trades in novels about utopia-minded would-be reformers and dreamy Little Men [WALTON 257]. Working late by lamplight in his premises “below the Castle,” Goose may be visualised as the subject of a chiaroscuro painting of a genre scene. His muscular hands are occupied while “the more essential part of him” [23-24] wanders into utopias. This activity goes beyond merely lapsing into a fantasy. It is about the spirit travelling elsewhere. White recycles many stereotypical traits. Goose is an enthusiast with burning eyes, smouldering convictions and a local reputation for being mad or monstrous; a selfless friend and family-man with a sense of justice and a store of indignation; a self-consuming malcontent so preoccupied with social theory that his physical existence is being exhausted; and a fiery force antagonistic to the clergy.

Goose reads unspecified books on socialism and economics. It remains unclear which variety of socialism he advocates when he insults his

customers with his aphorisms, for example, "To the privileged the poor are muck, to be scraped into heaps to hide their own" [23]. Possibly it is of a mixed, evolving nature. This would account for Goose's experience of "fresh utopias" in his recurrent social dreaming. However, Goose's faithful wife regards him as advocating a programmatic "system." [White hated systems]. We are told Goose's wife was reared as the daughter of a Church of England clergyman. This detail, combined with the language of belief associated with Goose, could suggest that White is interested in anticipations of the lingering "half-life" of nineteenth-century religiosity [LEWIS 23-51]. It is probable he is also reflecting Spengler's contention that in this late phase of the West's Culture, as it transitions into irreligious, intellectual, citified and rootless Civilization, Socialism is the Culture's "end-phenomenon," its "mode of spiritual extinction." "[T]he notion of a Socialist Nirvana," Spengler writes, "has its justification in so far that European weariness covers its flight from the struggle for existence under catchwords of world-peace, Humanity and brotherhood of Man" [356-357].

The novel's second explicit study of utopia-imagining comes when the narrative reaches the 1930s. The characterisation is again clichéd, the fantasised alternative again indeterminable and the vocabulary again that of integrity, gut feeling and desire. As a cabinet-maker by trade, Joe Barnett works in the carpenter's shop beside the Baptist chapel in his London suburb. "In his more thoughtful and expansive moments," the narrator states, "Joe Barnett started out for most extravagant utopias." However Joe cannot "formulate the details of his desired utopia." Nonetheless he is "conscious, inside him, of a strange, peaceable, physical sensation that persuade[s] him a state of rightness must exist, that rightness must predominate" [185-86].

Joe's politicisation is sketched through his dialogues with his better-educated girlfriend, Eden, who is the grand-daughter of the Socialist Goose. It is she more than he who has been reading Marx, walking about noticing contrasts between rich and poor, attending meetings to do with the Spanish war, and encountering those motivating ambitions and indignations of the Left that could be termed utopian energies. Joe and Eden's relationship draws two socially discontented people into a cross-class intimacy which in itself points to increasing egalitarianism and the possibility of a microcosm of sustaining mutual love resembling that of the harness maker and his wife. A loving, principled and self-denying relationship is productive because it is larger than the sum of its parts. As Eden reasons after learning Joe has left to fight on the Republican side: "there is the stock of positive acts and convictions that two people infuse into the dying body of the world, their more than blood" [293].

One course of conduct which may be propelled by a utopian impulse and may produce happiness for the individual and spin-off social benefits is the personal project of self-enhancement. The case of Catherine, the daughter of the Socialist Goose and the mother of Eden and Elyot, is illustrative. During the Edwardian period, Catherine upgrades her appearance and creates for herself a gilded interior chiefly reflective of nostalgia for a French aristocratic aesthetic, but with Art Nouveau traces. Art Nouveau is a style associated with turn-of-the-century utopian hopefulness invested in stylised organic beauty and new technologies. Klaus-Jürgen Sembach notes practitioners' attempts to bring about "a reconciliation between traditional expectations of art and the modern face of technology" yet concedes the truth of criticisms that while "great claims were made [...] far less was achieved" [9, 13]. In the decades that follow, Catherine remains in her tarnishing milieu, optimistically hosting weekly salons. Some resemblance to this character's ambitions for her entertaining may be detected in White's 1964 assertion that he hoped to make the Centennial Park house built in 1912 that he and his partner, Manoly Lascaris, were painting and furnishing "a meeting place for those who need encouragement" [WHITE, *Letters* 274]. Hospitality and artistic fellowship are common components of utopianism. For Catherine, the text intimates, elegance and ornamentation are emblematic of plenitude, improbability and human reaching for spiritual heights. But, for its critics, this sort of aesthetic is self-regarding and corrupted. They see the period as narcissistic in that it strove to surround people with aesthetic reflections of their own inner selves.⁴ As Walter Benjamin theorised the phenomenon, from the turn of the century rooms would mobilise inwardness, the interior becoming a sanctuary of art and a signifier of the solitary inhabitant. Closed off from the real urban world, such an interior conjures up an illusory world of art for art's sake and of self-satisfied aesthetic artificiality [WOLF 30].

Joe, Eden and Elyot perceive the local scene in images and metaphoric terms familiar to readers of the more bleak modernist texts, as well as readers of dystopias, satires and clerical warnings against decadence. We hear of crumbling brickwork, sour earth, society's sick heartbeat and gangrenous growth. Structures and chairs collapse, bodies fall. In underground nightclubs there are upside-down reflections. After having a déclassé affair, Catherine dies of cancer, a disease which seems to be shorthand for her own and London's moral illness. And Elyot falters in his scholarly profession of writing monographs on German and French literary and cultural figures of

⁴ WOLF 30. Wolf is drawing on Dolf Sternberger, *Über Jugendstil* 2nd ed. (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1977).

the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Georg Büchner, Gérard de Nerval, Eduard Mörike, Mme du Deffand, Heinrich von Kleist and Mme de Warens. It has been a "devotion to the dust" [20].

Countering this dystopian prospect of Western civilisation's downfall is the positive and potentially generous sense of "becoming," which mysteriously grows in Elyot and Eden as they critique their society and wait upon some intangible source of destiny or guidance. The influence of Spengler and Johann W. von Goethe is detectable in White's references to "becoming" and "the living and the dead." Although secularised, the siblings' consciousness of becoming and changing is reminiscent of Goethe's conception of the Godhead being "effective in the living and not in the dead," with humans' reason (*Vernunft*) "striving towards the divine through the becoming and the living."⁵ In its privileging of the dynamic of becoming over the achieved condition of "the become and the set-fast," Goethe's statement has affinities with those definitions of utopia that emphasise process. It fits with the siblings' sense that they should identify some appropriate action to counter what they deplore. While Eden's chosen action is "the protest of self-destruction," Elyot determines he must oppose "the stultifying, the living dead" by way of "an intenser form of living" [331].

Another likely source of White's choice of living versus dead contrast for his novel, which he initially conceived of as a portrait of London, was James Joyce's short fiction collection *Dubliners* (1914). The final paragraph of the story "The Dead" performs a memorable dying fall as it evokes snow falling "all over Ireland [...] faintly through the universe [...] upon all the living and the dead" [194]. But what was White's inspiration for the motif of the living dead? Mamblas was probably one source. Visiting London in 1938, he had regarded being entertained by members of the English Establishment like being in an unpleasant dream with figures performing gestures that were related to enthusiasms and had once meant something, but no longer did [MARR, *Patrick White* 177].

White's choice of living dead imagery also reflects the popularity of the zombie figure in Europe and America in the late 1920s and 1930s and the extension of the image of zombies from African-Americans to whites. As Marina Warner summarises, post-slavery the zombie became a vehicle to express a psychological state of personal alienation, moral incoherence, emptiness and degraded human sympathies [120]. In this respect, correspondence written in London by White immediately after he had finished the first draft of the novel is illuminating. Echoing Mamblas's

⁵ Quoted by SPENGLER, *Decline*, vol. 1, 49, footnote 1.

dislike of “this shadowy English existence,” he writes: “I’m more and more conscious, anyway in this country, of people being divided into two categories – the people who are aware and the people who are – well, just dead.” Ending with a chilling moment of dark humour, he says: “To-night I could go out cheerfully and kill off all the dead” [WHITE, *Letters* 27-29].

After his sister has left for the Spanish war, Elyot leaves his house where mortar is falling and brick powdering in the way they do in depictions of weakened imperial civilisations. Boarding a night bus selected at random, he sits bound for “nowhere in particular” [334]. This could be the “All stops to Nihilism” service, the reader may think. An optimistic close is abruptly produced, however, with Elyot discovering he feels like someone who has just woken and is ready to touch into life the nearby sleepers.

White’s struggle over whether to endorse or resist Spengler’s philosophy of history is detectable. Spengler closes the second of his volumes with an elegy for “high Culture – that wondrous world of deities, arts, thoughts, battles, cities,” the “bright imaginative Waking-Being” that submerges itself [507]. White’s Elyot seems to represent the desire to turn back from the prophesied “under going” and live to the fullest within Western culture. Another possible influence is Schiller’s letters on the aesthetic education of man, where man must be woken to his condition of thralldom: “Out of the long slumber of the senses he awakens to consciousness and knows himself for a human being – in the State” [SCHILLER, Letter III, 11]. Utopian reform, or at least aesthetic uplifting motivated by utopian impulses, can presumably begin as soon as the sleepers have woken. However, if we follow those Marxian theorists who see us as trapped within the late industrial-capitalist system and unable to imagine or realize utopia, the extent of the education and reformation will be delimited. A third possible influence worth mentioning is Hermann Broch’s *The Sleepwalkers* trilogy (1931-32). In this case the coincidence of themes is considerable. Broch is concerned with disintegration of values, gropings for truth, inklings of the divine and the oneness of all men as they are played out in ordinary lives in middle Europe at three time points: 1888, 1903 and 1918. Henrik Ibsen’s drama *When We Dead Awaken* (1899), H.G. Wells’ *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899, revised in 1910 as *The Sleeper Awakes*) with its prefiguring of Belloc’s nightmare of a Servile State, and Granville Hicks’s utopian novel *The First to Awaken*, published in 1940, are less likely influences.

White’s bus-borne sleepers can be said to constitute, in Terry Eagleton’s terms, a mute collectivity with utopian potentiality. Elyot has woken energised by that utopian impulse to “become” that was already at work within him. In metaphysical terms, Elyot may be regarded as blessed to have

been touched by a form of grace and readied to transmit that touch to others. And in literary terms he may be read as staking a claim to the role of the elitist Modernist-cum-Romantic artist-priest who presumes to possess the strength of talent and the right to enlighten and legislate for lesser mortals.

As author, White seeks to remain at a detached distance from his self-centred and maybe self-deluding protagonist and his intermittently ironic narrator. Yet a sense of the author's presence in the text is distinct enough for readers to wonder whether he endorses Elyot's Forster-style impulse to "connect." Considering the nature of the political agendas that had strengthened in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s, the question of what beliefs and actions Elyot will advocate is not a trivial one. Is the reader expected to empathise with Elyot's desire to reach out even though she is unsure what he believes in apart from his erstwhile respect for high culture and his sense that something is being cultivated inside him? To endorse such a vaguely expressed impulse coming from the mind of a character that until now has shown himself to be chillingly disdainful toward other characters and people in general would be tantamount to blindly endorsing a self-appointed messiah who proclaimed he could revivify "almost sentient" bodies. Through Elyot, and to a lesser extent other characters, White chiefly appears to be trying to work out his own sense of vocation, en route canvassing social dreaming, utopian impulses and energies, cultural pessimism, and his supposedly eschewed spirituality. The reader is entitled to feel indignant that, on the brink of a seemingly unstoppable pan-European war, utopianism has been invoked in the interests of would-be self-actualisation.

However, it must be conceded that White's narrative has previously addressed the demerits of self-sacrificial conduct: Elyot Standish holds out for waiting and thinking rather than fatalistically offering himself as a combatant. Further, the small extended-family cast of characters is to be read as a microcosm of London life and therefore what may appear to be ongoing selfishness in a single young man could transform into a positive momentum if multiplied: imagine many young men and women longing to reach out to their fellow citizens to freely assist them to live enlightened lives. And, as White commented in retrospect, *The Living and the Dead* was written too quickly and too early. With less self-imposed pressure to finish the manuscript and with greater resolution of his immediate existential uncertainties, White might have worked through to a conclusion that was less trite and derivative.

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