

A Role of Woman in Australian Colonial History: Patrick White's *Voss*

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Introduction

Voss (1958), Patrick White's fifth novel, is arguably the highest achievement in the middle phase of his writing career. First published in the US and UK, the book has now been translated into fifteen languages, including Japanese and Chinese.¹ Winning the Miles Franklin Award with *Voss*, White firmly established his reputation in Australia as well as overseas.

In *Voss*, set in the middle of the nineteenth century, the German explorer Johann Ulrich Voss endeavours to cross the Australian continent with a party of men with diverse backgrounds and professions. At the end of the exploration, he is decapitated by an indigenous boy in the middle of his project, but the story goes on to narrate the aftermath of his death. It is true that *Voss* is a historical novel in appearance, inspired by the journals and contemporary accounts of actual explorers of the nineteenth century.² On the other hand, an allegorical reading of the text has been dominant among critics, regarding Voss's journey as an exploration of the psyche of modern man. Yasue Arimitsu argues that White sums up his "ontological pursuit as an Australian as well as European living in the twentieth century" (62), which comprises the primary theme of his early oeuvre. The writer throws the modern ego established in the Western world into his cre-

ation of the mythical Australian interior, and suggests its inefficacy and the possibility of transformation in the face of a whole new geographic and climatic entity. Indeed, it is easy to find Faustian aspiration for knowledge and its failure in the megalomaniac protagonist, as James McAuley correctly places *Voss* in the affiliation of “German Romanticism” (41). Furthermore, it is no coincidence that the protagonist is of German origin, for White projected Adolf Hitler upon the failed conqueror as widely known today through his essay (White, “The Prodigal Son” 23).

Behind the epic grandeur narrated in his symbolic style, the writer carefully depicts alternative modes of human existence and relations. Besides its sociohistorical significance, the text embodies the dialogical process of self-discovery performed in the mind, which best describes Voss's relation with his female counterpart, Laura Trevelyan, a niece of a sponsor of the expedition.

Early critics often devoted themselves to the study of Christian symbolism, which abounds in the text, and their analyses contributed to elucidating its complex metaphysical development. Patrick White is indeed a religious writer; however, it is erroneous to regard him as a Christian mystic; Geoffrey Dutton flatly refuses such a claim: “White has simply used Christian symbols to help him in his exploration of the nature of man [...]” (25-26). In reading *Voss*, we find that the clairvoyant communion between Voss and Laura over a great physical distance has been a subject of discussion; by temporarily putting aside mystic arguments, we will discover what the writer embedded in the text, that is, female instinct and insight to counter the masculine urge to conquer, which drove “civilised” Western nations to colonialism.

This paper aims to clarify that *Voss* is partly an endeavor to rediscover the position of woman in Australian colonial history, which has been predominantly told and written from a masculine point of view. One may point out that the narrative of the expedition phase excludes female existence except for dream communion between Voss and Laura. However, it will be shown in the following pages that Laura's role throughout the text is not at all secondary, but primary. In fact, she is the one who sets the goal of Voss's journey; survives a mental crisis, which is the equivalent of Voss's physical affliction; and conveys her discovery to the Sydney society. Furthermore, her metaphysical theory manipulates the reader's understanding of Voss's expedition. At the end of this paper, we will discuss why the focus of the narrative is centred upon Voss and what the effect is.

An Adopted Child

Significantly, the novel begins with Laura Trevelyan receiving an uninformed visit from a stranger, who turns out to be Voss, on a Sunday morning in the house of Mr. Bonner, a successful Sydney merchant and a primary sponsor of Voss's expedition. Skeptic Laura is staying home alone with a servant while other family members attend morning church services. Their conversation gradually reveals Laura's ambiguous position in the family: born in England, she was left to the custody of her uncle Bonner in Australia as an infant upon her parents' death. As a result, she cannot convince herself of her British lineage or her position in the colonial society of Sydney. Unlike the conceited Bonners, who never doubt their authentic existence in the set-

tlar colony endorsed by their material success, her marginality has a potential to reassess the validity of European occupation of the country. If Voss represents the modern Western ego, Laura's position in her foster family acutely reminds the reader of the adoptive position of colonial Australia in its relation with Britain.

The servant Rose Portion, an ex-convict, announces Voss's arrival to Laura, referring to him as "a kind of foreign man."³ Thus, at his first appearance in the text, his foreignness is impressed upon the reader. Because of his shabby appearance, German accent and determination to be unwedded to social conventions, Voss is explicitly regarded as a stranger by Sydney residents who are mostly of British descent. It is immediately clear from this opening that Laura and Voss share otherness in common. In the course of their conversation, in an attempt to disguise her vague fear of the Australian continent about which she has little understanding, Laura wears the mask of a submissive woman and tries to flatter Voss's masculine pride:

"A pity that you huddle," said the German. "Your country is of great subtlety."

With rough persistence he accused her of the superficiality which she herself suspected. At times she could hear her own voice. She was also afraid of the country which, for lack of any other, she supposed was hers. But this fear, like certain dreams, was something to which she would never have admitted.

"Oh, I know I am ignorant," Laura Trevelyan laughed. "Women are, and men invariably make it clear to them." (11)

At this stage, she is wearing the persona of a conventional woman, suppressing her inquisitive nature in accordance with social codes,

which is a means to get along with materialistic Bonner, who by and large represents the colonial society. Furthermore, she disguises unspoken fears for the uncharted centre of the continent, which is shared among white Australians.

Not allowing such superficiality, the fiercely self-reliant Voss penetrates Laura's respectability and helps to release her suppressed self. Although Mrs Bonner relates her impression that Voss is "already lost" even before his departure for central Australia, their dialogue reveals that Laura is also lost in a psychological topography, which is symbolised by her vague fear of the vast geographical stretch. It follows that not only Voss but also Laura is an explorer, struggling to establish her psychological and physical position in the adopted country. By assigning a psychological journey to the heroine, White gives voice to "her story" as opposed to the masculine "official history" of Australia.

Laura projects her inner self upon Voss, which is symbolised by the motif of a mirror. In the opening scene, she looks into a glass hung in the living room while waiting for the visitor. She is satisfied with her surface "flawless" image, which appears convincing in the world of reticence: "There was in consequence no necessity to duplicate her own image, unless in glass, as now, in the blurry mirror of the big, darkish room" (9). The immaculate image of the woman, seeming like a mirror itself, stresses its fictitiousness. Then, Voss offers himself as another mirror to reflect her inner self and fulfill her repressed desire to "share her experience" (9) as they are depicted, sitting face to face, as a mirror-image: "They were in almost identical positions, on similar chairs, on either side of the generous window" (11-12). Thinking of

their symmetrical position, it is possible to say that Laura is engaged in a self-reflexive dialogue with her unconscious mind on the occasion of their first encounter, which is mostly narrated from Laura's point of view. Her letter to Voss reveals that she is aware of his role as her double, who shares a self-destructive pride of hers: "can two such faulty beings endure to face each other, almost as in a looking-glass?" (185).

During their meeting, surrounded by the tranquility of the deserted house, Laura lapses into the past. Her early memories consist of a collage of fragmental voices:

Already she herself was threatening to disintegrate into the voices of the past. The rather thin, grey voice of the mother, to which she had never succeeded in attaching a body. She is going, they said, the kind voices that close the lid and arrange the future. Going, but where? (12)

It is significant that her conversation with Voss summons her primordial consciousness. The foreign man who serves as a mirror reminds Laura of her origin as a rootless child and guides her to review her unsettled self kept beneath her well-composed appearance. The moment when "herself was threatening to disintegrate" is the beginning of Laura's reexamination of the self, and from then on she strives to answer her rudimentary question: "Going, but where?" Her charting of the mind obviously runs parallel with the geographical exploration. For example, when she admits that Australia is "so foreign and incomprehensible" and that it is not her country although she has lived in it (29), the "Australia" as an unknown, geographic entity is interchangeable with "herself." Then, Laura grapples with the existential question

of who she is through her mainly spiritual interaction with Voss.

Synchronically, Voss drifts back to his German past:

So the past now swelled in distorting bubbles, like the windows of the warehouse in which his father, an old man, gave orders to apprentices and clerks, and the sweet smell of blond timber suggested all safety and virtue. Nothing could be safer than that gabled town, from which he would escape in all weathers, at night also, to tramp across the earth, running almost, bursting his lungs, while deformed trees in places snatched at his clothes [...].
(13)

Voss's obsession to "escape" apparently signifies his fiercely independent mind. Besides, he repeats his ambition to verify "potentialities of self" (22). However, behind his aspiration for self-search, one can also detect his instinct to efface himself by running away into the future and a vast landscape, a solution Eddie Twyborn resorts to in *The Twyborn Affair* (1979). His destructive urge is symbolised by his clothes threatening to be torn by trees. The "deformed trees" also imply his psychological uncertainty. Then, Laura provides a religious cause for his covert inclination for self-annihilation with her theological thesis, what she calls the "three stages" of man (386), in which she mentions that man is God decapitated.⁴

Making a stark contrast with intense physical and psychological struggles experienced by explorers in the outback, the Sydney bourgeoisie is caricatured as superficial and spiritually barren. Mr. Bonner is more like a type of materially-oriented person than an actual man, who thinks of Australia only in terms of an opportunity for economic success. For him progress means "homes and public edifices [...]" and

the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land” and even “the good dinner” (29). Whereas Voss simply escapes from the conventional society inhabited by the likes of Bonner, Laura stays there to transmit the wisdom that she learns from her relationship with Voss. Then, it follows that it is not Voss but Laura who has a potential to challenge social conventions and norms.

Laura as a Victor of the Expedition

On the occasion of a party organized by the Bonners to celebrate the enterprise and departure of the expedition, Laura and Voss shed their decorum in the garden and vehemently dispute the issue of faith, which betrays their undisguised selves and determines the course of their relationship. The garden, which is a border of the public and the personal, is a place of exposure for White's female protagonists. It is a window to their psyche and invites the voyeuristic gaze of male protagonists. Decorated with camellia and bamboo bushes, the Bonner's garden is presented as a *jardin exotique*, foreign to the native soil, thus a suitable location for the couple feeling alien to Sydney society, and simultaneously a *jardin théâtral* where they enact their psychological drama.⁵

Laura claims that her instinct, which she believes is a superior faculty of women, enables her to “enter into the minds of most men” (86), using an entomological metaphor: “An advantage we insect women enjoy is that we have endless opportunity to indulge the imagination as we go backwards and forwards in the hive.” The text suggests that insight and imagination are other paths to reach the secret of the

mind as well as of the country as opposed to a "scientific" approach that Voss's party adopts. There is an ornithologist in his party and Voss himself was a medical student. Besides, cartographic devices play crucial roles in the development of the plot. For instance, the lost compass signifies the wandering consciousness of the Western men in alien environments and causes the dissolution of the party into the visionaries and the practical. The explorers drag Western civilization all the way to the central desert, so to speak. On the other hand, "imagination" gives us a hint in interpreting Laura's clairvoyance during the expedition phase: it is possible to argue that the journey itself takes place in her mind to some degree, as a result of her internalisation of her mirror-image, Voss. Shedding light on the psychological aspect of the expedition, the following design emerges: the feminine self orientates the masculine self at a loss. This may have some relevance to White's sexual identity, who attributes his artistic gift to the feminine dimension in him. In consideration that Voss embodies the inflated ego of an artist, it is also possible to say that he listens to a woman in him to be led towards the realm of the unknown. Although Voss shows an aversion to female flesh at first, afraid of contaminating his masculine self, he meekly obeys Laura's spiritual guidance and is "humbled" in the end. This pattern that the masculine ego surrenders to the actual/internal woman continues till White's last novel in which, David Tacey argues, the writer psychologically assimilates into a mother archetype.⁶

Voss's self-appointed apotheosis becomes visible through their heated exchange: he worships his inflated ego as God. Denouncing Laura's atheism, Voss cries out: "I worship with pride. Ah! the humility, the

humility! This is what I find so loathsome. My God, besides, is above humility” (89-90). His excessive self-reliance is alarming, for it can disintegrate his psyche. His faith in the self has its origin in Western modernism and could easily lead to colonial desires by justifying its superiority over indigenous peoples. To prove it, Voss regards himself as the king and indigenous peoples as the subjects of his kingdom.

Recognising the omen of self-destruction in his pride, part of which she shares, Laura recovers her faith and love through pitying him. They are thus complementary to each other: Voss needs Laura to appease his ego, whereas Laura needs Voss to recover her faith. The goal of Voss's journey is fixed by Laura prior to his departure, that is, to achieve humility. However, in spite of her apparent humility, the authorial voice implies Laura's instinct to control the man with an irony: “the passionate but bewildered soul of the woman that had flapped and struggled in the dark garden in its attempt to rescue (let us not say: *subdue*)” (91, my emphasis).

Once Voss launches on his expedition, the narrative goes back and forth between the continental interior and Sydney society. In spite of the geographical distance, Laura is aware of Voss's well-being, while Voss recognises her shadow in landscapes and sees her in dreams which recur throughout the expedition phase of the text. Their spiritual communion is sometimes referred to by critics as telepathic, but instead, each carries the other inside as an inner interlocutor in their synchronising journey of self-search.

Voss's dreams, which are filled with corporeal and sensual images, bring his unconscious yearnings to the surface. Especially, matrimonial and coital images disclose his repressed longing to accept the femi-

nine self in him, which is externalised by Laura. One of his early dreams presents a corporeal landscape:

At once the hills were enfolding him. All that he had observed, now survived by touch. So he was touching those same hills and was not surprised at their suave flesh. That which would have been reprehensible, nauseating, frightening in life, was permissible, even desirable, in sleep. And could solve, as well as dis-solve. (139)

In the conscious world, he shows a strong aversion to human flesh, which first caught him as a medical student in Germany. We can observe twofold implications in this dream. On the one hand, the “enfolding” landscape represents the process in which empirical knowledge engulfs his swollen ego, or the process of unmaking the self by direct negotiation with a whole new geographic entity. On the other, the dream illustrates his desire to dissolve into the feminine self because the fleshy hill has an undisguised feminine implication. By doing so, his unconscious attempts to complement his aggressive masculinity which is manifest in his aspiration to conquer the land.

Yet another dream shows an explicitly copulatory image. In the early stage of his expedition, while he is still in touch with civilisation by way of the outposts in the bush, Voss proposes to Laura in a letter and she gives her consent. In spite of his euphoria, he is tormented by ambivalent desires in the following dream:

Then Voss began to float, and those words last received. But *Together*. Written words take some time to thaw, but the words of lilies were now floating in full summer water, whether it was the water or the leaves of water, and dark hairs of roots plastered on

the mouth as water blew across. Now they were swimming so closely they were joined together at the waist, and were the same flesh of lilies, their mouths, together, were drowning in the same love-stream. I do not wish this yet, or *nie nie nie, niemals*. (187)

Thus, he resists linkage with the lily woman. The basic motif of this dream is drowning. Once again, it symbolises his fear to be engulfed by a feminine existence. Furthermore, their unity is curiously sexual and asexual at the same time. The lily usually symbolises virginity and Immaculate Conception but here sensuality of the flower is emphasised and they even share “the same flesh of lilies.” It seems that Voss does not seek mere physical consummation with Laura but totality through androgynous union. In White’s fiction, heterosexual love and marriage occupy secondary significance; instead, he develops the theme of imaginative, asexual/unisexual procreation by male characters and the inheritance of artistic spirit by a spiritual child in his later oeuvre, which disclose his desire to incorporate a womb, a source of creation, into a male body.

Concerning sexuality represented in *Voss*, Simon During offers a renovating view, which sheds a whole new light on the meaning of Voss’s expedition:

There is a sense in which Voss’s journey is an excuse for White to imagine a highly sexualised community without women, and the expedition’s tragic end can be read as an expression of his internalisation of homophobia as guilt. Yet this community also seems like a community of homosexuals traveling, if this were possible, both away from and further into the closet.⁸ [...] It is the shape male sexuality takes when men make contact with their

primordial, quasi-unconscious nature (which is what their quest into Australia's interior signifies). (75)

Benefiting from Lesbian/Gay studies and Queer theories, During's interpretation represents a recent trend in the White study. Certainly, the text implies homosexual desires among the members of Voss's expedition and his argument seems valid in that the party stands for a microcosm of homosociality. It is also true that women are outwardly absent in the expedition, but it should not be overlooked that Voss always carries a woman in him throughout his exploration and that feminine self finally tames his masculine self. Voss internalises his sexual conflict.

As many critics point out, the Australian interior in *Voss* functions as the arena for trial. Arimitsu concludes that the validities of science and Christian faith represented by Palfreyman, art by the intellectual poet Le Mesurier, and practicality by the ex-convict Judd are all tested there and dismissed (66). The first two lose their lives on the course of the expedition: Palfreyman is speared by Aborigines and Mesurier cuts his throat. Judd is the only one who returns to the civilised world but his mind has grown dim. The modern ego of Western origin is also verified through Voss and renounced in the end.

The continental interior also functions as "purgatory" (392) to appease Voss's hubris with the help of his inner voice, which echoes Laura's thesis that a human being acquires divinity by learning humility (387). Towards the end of Voss's journey, the imaginary Laura rides alongside him in the desert plain:

Then they were drifting together. They were sharing the same hell, in their common flesh, which he had attempted so often to

repudiate. She was fitting him with a sheath of tender white.

“Do you see now?” she asked. “Man is God decapitated. That is why you are bleeding.” (364)

As his physical force is reduced to minimal, he renounces his aggressive ego and allows the feminine self in the guise of Laura’s image to enfold him. Then, Voss declares his abdication from the illusory status of the godhead to the remaining members: “I have no plan [...] but will trust to God” (379). Therefore, it is not the official aim of the expedition, that is, to cross the continent, but the conditions set by Laura that Voss finally achieves. In short, Laura is the designer, guide and victor of their spiritual exploration. At the early stage of the expedition, Voss wonders “how much of himself he had given into [Laura’s] hands” (268), and the final status of his psyche is a complete surrender to his internal woman. It is suggestive that the imaginary Laura whispers in his mind: it is “the woman who unmakes men” (188). Veronica Brandy’s argument that Laura stands for the central values of the novel (17) seems precise. More to the point, Laura is the manipulator of Voss’s journey and the reader’s understanding of it; she provides a religious framework for his self-annihilating desire, whereby she wins her control over him.

Following her religious scheme, Voss finally learns humility and loses his head to complete *her* illusion. An Aboriginal boy, Jackie, who used to be attached to the expedition as a guide, performs the beheading with the knife Voss gave him earlier.

The boy stood for a moment beneath the morning star. The whole air was trembling on his skin. As for the head-thing, it knocked against a few stones, and lay like any melon. How much

was left of the man it no longer represented? His dreams fled into the air, his blood ran out upon the dry earth, which drank it up immediately. Whether dreams breed, or the earth responds to a pint of blood, the instant of death does not tell. (394)

His decapitation has several connotations. First, it suggests the disintegration of the Western ego and the possibility of its assimilation into the Australian environment, where the assumed supremacy of Western civilisation is overturned by the ritualistic death. In this climax, Jackie embodies the force of Nature. The representation of indigenous people in *Voss* is largely mythologising, turning them into spirits of the earth. Second, it indicates that the will surrenders to the unconscious, the internal nature, which overlaps Laura's engulfing image. In both cases, the status of "authentic" colonial history of Australia, structured upon the faith in Western values characterised by enlightenment, reason and material achievement, is put under fresh reevaluation.

McAuley considers Laura to be "the Jungian *anima* or the Blakean Emanation" (44), whereas David Tacey finds her mythological counterparts in Circe, the Sirens and the Lorelei, according to his assumption that the *Voss*/Laura relationship is based on the *puer*/Mother myth (73). In consideration of *Voss*'s violent death as well as his ambivalent resistance to, and longing for, a collective female image incarnated by Laura, Tacey's argument appears more convincing.

History, Myth and Woman's Story

Laura's role as an interpreter of *Voss*'s journey has been repeated by

many critics,⁹ but she seems to play a more active role than that. The text depicts the aftermath of Voss's death in the remaining three sections. Towards the end, Laura, now a headmistress, speaks about the meaning of Voss's journey at a party to the select members of Sydney society who are willing to explore the unknown territory of their minds: "knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite a reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind" (446). Brandy contends: "in giving her the last word, White shows his concern to translate the highly charged symbolic world he has created back into terms of human significance [...]" (31). To complement her observation, the knowledge that Laura conveys chiefly derives from her self-reflective interlocution with the imaginary Voss in her mind rather than from her actual acquaintanceship with him, as she admits to Captain Hebden, the organizer of the rescue party for Voss's expedition, that she hardly knew Voss at the factual level. Earlier on the occasion of their dispute in the Bonner's garden, she reads aloud her version of Voss which her "imagination" created: "as she read, or spoke, it became obvious to both that she had begun to compile her record from the first moment of their becoming acquainted" (87). I argue that Laura is rather an imaginative writer and her final remarks are part of her narrative of Voss.

While Voss is away in the desert, Bonner's maid, Rose, gives birth to an illegitimate child. Laura names the girl Mercy and adopts her after the mother's death by childbirth. Dutton and Tacey regard Mercy as an unnecessary addendum to the Voss/Laura relationship,¹⁰ but her involvement in the narrative is rather meaningful in considering

White's view of family and the thematic development of his later fiction. Laura thinks of Mercy as a "visible token of the love" (236) of her "true marriage" (217) with Voss. It is known that Laura imagines an alternative family based on asexual and genetically-unrelated ties, which could substitute, in her mind, the normative status of a biological family. The fact that the motif of adoption recurs across two generations draws our attention. White's fictional families reflect his equivocal feeling towards his own. While he rejects genetically-related family as a chance assembly of dissimilar souls, he constantly yearns for one to substitute it. From a biographical point of view, as a homosexual and spiritual outcast in his own family, White cannot depict a normative, heterosexual family as a solid basis of identity for his outcast protagonists. As a result, whatever his intention was, White was able to depict partnership, which transcends conventional matrimonial bonds.¹¹ From a sociohistorical point of view, he equates the psychological position of European Australians who hold a latent anxiety for the lack of authenticity with that of an adopted child. Australians of Anglo-Celtic origin in particular have been excruciated by the historical fact that colonial Australia started as penal colonies and their lack of faith in their origin was fostered by the great geographical distance from Britain and alien environments of the new continent.

Focusing on Laura, it becomes clear that *Voss* is essentially a narrative of woman's independence, where a female protagonist struggles to win spiritual and physical independence from a patriarchal family. Laura at first appears as a self-sufficient but superficial person who is submissive to her materialistic foster uncle. Then, she manages to depart Bonner's world of apparent safety through her spiritual

involvement with Voss, who encourages her to face her true self with his relentless search for the infinite, and eventually achieves economic independence as a school teacher, then headmistress. It is no wonder that little attention has been paid to this aspect of the novel, mainly because readers and critics are mesmerised by the epic grandeur of Voss's expedition, just as Voss hypnotises his party members. Even so, there are a few critics who refer to Laura's principal role in the text. For example, Brandy stresses her view that Laura embodies "an absolute value" of the novel (23), and John Beston observes: "Laura is a dominating character, she nevertheless does not succeed in shifting the focus away from Voss to herself" (112). As Beston points out, White manipulates the reader's focus away from his female protagonist. In fact, the urban life of Laura decorated with sociality lacks intense physical struggles with harsh terrain and climate, threats from native tribes and violent deaths which Voss undergoes, even though her psychological experience to look into the abyss of the mind is as lethal as physical risks, as is externalised by her delirium when it reaches its climax towards the end of Voss's expedition. Furthermore, the writer depicts Laura as the same priggish woman in the post-expedition part of the narrative, which makes it hard for the reader to sympathise with her. White even changes his styles between the two poles of lives, and the expedition part appears more "literary," filled with metaphors, symbols and allusions to preceding literature.

Then, what does such manipulation signify? I argue that the text itself mimics the fallacy of the "official" history of colonization, which covers up female contributions behind the "grand" endeavors of men. Two years after the explorers were lost, Voss is publicly celebrated

with his monument raised: "[Voss] was hung with garlands of rarest newspaper prose. They would write about him in the history books. The wrinkle of his solid, bronze trousers could afford to ignore the passage of time" (440). He is thus turned into a legendary as well as historical figure to satisfy the public need of a national hero and myth. Although aware of fictitiousness of the event, Laura is ready to accept it in order to keep her personal experience intact. She contradicts Hebdén:

"Mr Voss is already history."

"But history is not acceptable until it is sifted for the truth. Sometimes this can never be reached."

She was hanging her head. She was horribly twisted.

"No, never," she agreed. "It is all lies. While there are men, there will always be lies. I do not know about myself, unless sometimes dream it." (413)

It is obvious that White is skeptical of national myth/history fabricated by men. Hebdén's obsession with historical "truth" to be reached by gathering facts and information is de-authorised by her way of exploring truth, that is, through dreaming. Laura accuses the fallacy of "history" and her speech in the party opens up a way for "her story" to be delivered.

Conclusion

Our examination leads to the conclusion that Laura plays a leading role in her relation with Voss throughout the narrative in that she determines the goal of his psychological exploration and transmits its

meaning to other members of society, but her superior status is disguised by White's manipulation of focus. By doing so, the writer reenacted the process in which women's stories are buried in men's history/myth making.

Australia as a Western nation appears to have been established upon a masculine paradigm, as its history is adorned by conquest, settlement and exploration into the uncharted territory. White took up the motif of expedition, a most characteristic phase of the masculine tradition, and disclosed a feminine instinct inherent in homosocial society. Furthermore, he suggests the role of women in charting the nation. Geographical 'conquest' of the continent may be outwardly carried out by men, but the creative instinct of women, acquiring knowledge which "overflows all maps," may also contribute for Europeans to spiritually assimilate into their adopted country.

Notes

1. Voss is one of the few Australian novels that attract moderate, not to say sufficient, critical responses in Japan, where no systematic study on White has yet been carried out. Among his twelve novels, only three have been translated into Japanese, one of which is discontinued indefinitely.
2. White names Edward John Eyre (1815-1901) and Ludwig Leichhardt (1813-48) as a source of direct inspiration ("Prodigal Son" 23).
3. Patrick White, Voss (London: Penguin Books, 1960) 7. All future references to the primary text are to this edition.
4. In her delirium, Laura says: "How important it is to understand three stages. Of God into man. Man. And Man returning into God" (386).
5. Roland Barthes's summary of Western theatre applies well to White's garden:

Its function is essentially to manifest what is supposed to be secret

("feelings," "situations," "conflicts"), while concealing the very artifice of such manifestation (machinery, painting, makeup, the sources of light). The stage since the Renaissance is the space of this lie: here everything occurs in an interior surreptitiously open, surprised, spied on, savored by a spectator crouching in the shadows. This space is the-ological--it is the space of Sin: on one side, in a light which he pretends to ignore, the actor, i.e., the gesture and the word; on the other, in the darkness, the public, i.e., consciousness. (61)

6. Tacey consistently discusses White's fiction in terms of *puer*/Mother relation. *Puer aeternus* means "eternal youth" in Latin. It is a psychological term referring to the ego sustained in the childish stage of development. Mother here is an archetypal personality instead of an actual person.
7. White projects the worst megalomaniac of his time, Adolf Hitler, upon his protagonist as mentioned earlier. So the novel deals with the illness of the times as well as the writer's own artistic solipsism.
8. For a detailed discussion of the closet and its application to literature, see Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).
9. See Brandy 18, Patricia Morley 125, and Carolyn Bliss 63-64.
10. Dutton thinks that "[to] the marriage of [Voss and Laura's] true minds, this child is an impediment" (27). Likewise, Tacey doubts its literary effect: "The whole episode involving Mercy is an ugly and unnecessary literalization of the 'fruit' of the Voss/Laura marriage" (75).
11. We can easily come up with such partnership in White's novels: Arthur and Mrs Poulter in *The Solid Mandala*; Hurtle, Rhoda and Kathy in *The Vivisector*; and the homosexual couple Eudoxia and Angelos in *The Twyborn Affair* to name a few.

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