

Vol 4 Issue 11 August 2015

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

Chief Editors

Ashok Yakkaldevi
A R Burla College, India

Ecaterina Patrascu
Spiru Haret University, Bucharest

Kamani Perera
Regional Centre For Strategic Studies,
Sri Lanka

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

Regional Editor

Manichander Thammishetty

Ph.d Research Scholar, Faculty of Education IASE, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Advisory Board

Kamani Perera Regional Centre For Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka	Delia Serbescu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Romania	Mabel Miao Center for China and Globalization, China
Ecaterina Patrascu Spiru Haret University, Bucharest	Xiaohua Yang University of San Francisco, San Francisco	Ruth Wolf University Walla, Israel
Fabricio Moraes de Almeida Federal University of Rondonia, Brazil	Karina Xavier Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA	Jie Hao University of Sydney, Australia
Anna Maria Constantinovici AL. I. Cuza University, Romania	May Hongmei Gao Kennesaw State University, USA	Pei-Shan Kao Andrea University of Essex, United Kingdom
Romona Mihaila Spiru Haret University, Romania	Marc Fetscherin Rollins College, USA	Loredana Bosca Spiru Haret University, Romania
	Liu Chen Beijing Foreign Studies University, China	Ilie Pinteau Spiru Haret University, Romania
Mahdi Moharrampour Islamic Azad University buinzahra Branch, Qazvin, Iran	Nimita Khanna Director, Isara Institute of Management, New Delhi	Govind P. Shinde Bharati Vidyapeeth School of Distance Education Center, Navi Mumbai
Titus Pop PhD, Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania	Salve R. N. Department of Sociology, Shivaji University, Kolhapur	Sonal Singh Vikram University, Ujjain
J. K. VIJAYAKUMAR King Abdullah University of Science & Technology, Saudi Arabia.	P. Malyadri Government Degree College, Tandur, A.P.	Jayashree Patil-Dake MBA Department of Badruka College Commerce and Arts Post Graduate Centre (BCCAPGC), Kachiguda, Hyderabad
George - Calin SERITAN Postdoctoral Researcher Faculty of Philosophy and Socio-Political Sciences Al. I. Cuza University, Iasi	S. D. Sindkhedkar PSGVP Mandal's Arts, Science and Commerce College, Shahada [M.S.]	Maj. Dr. S. Bakhtiar Choudhary Director, Hyderabad AP India.
REZA KAFIPOUR Shiraz University of Medical Sciences Shiraz, Iran	Anurag Misra DBS College, Kanpur	AR. SARAVANAKUMARALAGAPPA UNIVERSITY, KARAIKUDI, TN
Rajendra Shendge Director, B.C.U.D. Solapur University, Solapur	C. D. Balaji Panimalar Engineering College, Chennai	V.MAHALAKSHMI Dean, Panimalar Engineering College
	Bhavana vivek patole PhD, Elphinstone college mumbai-32	S.KANNAN Ph.D , Annamalai University
	Awadhesh Kumar Shirotriya Secretary, Play India Play (Trust), Meerut (U.P.)	Kanwar Dinesh Singh Dept.English, Government Postgraduate College , solan

More.....

FEMINISM IN PATRICK WHITE'S VOSS : COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES FROM AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE



Dr. S.P. Rajguru

Asst. Professor in English , Rayat Shikshan Sanstha's,
Laxmibai Bhaurao Patil Mahila Mahavidyalaya, Solapur.



ABSTRACT

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.

KEYWORDS : *Australian Literature , Patrick White's Voss , colonial history.*

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. 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 endeavors 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 after-math 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. 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 comprise the

primary theme of his early oeuvre. The writer throws the modern ego established in the Western world into his creation of the mythical Australian interior, and suggests its inefficacy and the possibility of transformation in the face of a whole new geo-graphic 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 socio-historical 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.

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 settler 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.

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 psycho-logical drama. 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.

History, Myth and Woman's Story

Laura's role as an interpreter of Voss's journey has been repeated by many critics, 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 interlocation 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.

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 is 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 homo-social 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.

WORKS CITED -

1. Arimitsu, Yasue. "Difficulty in Reading Patrick White: Voss." *The Southern Hemisphere Review* vol.3 (1986): 60-68.
2. Barthes, Roland. *Empire of Signs*. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Jonathan Cape, 1983.
3. Beston, John B. and Rosa Maria. "The Theme of Spiritual Progression in Voss." *Ariel* 5 July (1974): 99-114.
4. Bliss, Carolyn. *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*. London: Macmillan, 1986.
5. Brandy, Veronica. "In My End Is My Beginning: Laura as Heroine of Voss." *Southerly* 35.1 (1975): 16-32.
6. During, Simon. *Patrick White. Australian Writers*. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1996.
7. Dutton, Geoffrey. *Patrick White*. 4th ed. *Australian Writers and Their Work*. London: Oxford UP, 1971.
8. McAuley, James. "The Gothic Splendours: Patrick White's Voss."
9. *Ten Essays on Patrick White: Selected From Southerly (1964-1967)*. Ed. G.A. Wilkes. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1970.
10. Morley, Patricia. *The Mystery of Unity: Theme and Technique in the Novels of Patrick White*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1972.
11. Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1990.
12. Tacey, David J. *Patrick White: Fiction and the Unconscious*. Melbourne: Oxford UP, 1988.
13. White, Patrick. "The Prodigal Son." *Critical Essays on Patrick White*. Ed. Peter Wolfe. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1990. 21-24.
14. Voss. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957. New York: Viking, 1957. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960.

Publish Research Article

International Level Multidisciplinary Research Journal

For All Subjects

Dear Sir/Mam,

We invite unpublished Research Paper, Summary of Research Project, Theses, Books and Books Review for publication, you will be pleased to know that our journals are

Associated and Indexed, India

- ★ Directory Of Research Journal Indexing
- ★ International Scientific Journal Consortium Scientific
- ★ OPEN J-GATE

Associated and Indexed, USA

- DOAJ
- EBSCO
- Crossref DOI
- Index Copernicus
- Publication Index
- Academic Journal Database
- Contemporary Research Index
- Academic Paper Database
- Digital Journals Database
- Current Index to Scholarly Journals
- Elite Scientific Journal Archive
- Directory Of Academic Resources
- Scholar Journal Index
- Recent Science Index
- Scientific Resources Database

Review Of Research Journal
258/34 Raviwar Peth Solapur-413005, Maharashtra
Contact-9595359435
E-Mail-ayisrj@yahoo.in/ayisrj2011@gmail.com
Website : www.ror.isrj.org