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Self-Revelation through Eco-Psychological Study of *Voss* by Patrick White

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Abstract:

The paper is about the idiosyncratic revelation experienced by the characters when they are with the natural setting in the novel *Voss* written by Patrick White. The study is an eco psychological re-reading of the text which will allow readers to witness how the environment becomes an inevitable part of human life that reflects the interconnectedness of all that nature has created. Eco psychology is a modern social and intellectual movement aimed at recognizing and harmonizing the relationship between people and the Earth. The emerging field of eco psychology is showing how our human psyches are closely bound to the elemental earth. Earth centred faiths strives to honour the strength of nature's consoling power. This eco psychological study shows how the text demonstrates the character's harmonious and balanced eco human bonding. It shows how far identities of characters are shaped by the surroundings in which they live. Scholars and activists have started exploring facets of this neglected inner realm in recent years. The study describes how the ecological lifestyle is an encompassing transformation that touches every facets of an individual's life. The experiences encountered by the characters in the novel shows how the experiences in life with the natural environment move them towards a greater appreciation and concern for the natural world. Thus *Voss* studied as an ecological writing remains a literature of hope. In the novel, Voss's sufferings in life get consoled as he gets along with nature. When he remains in both wild and domesticated environments, most often in places of natural beauty, there are revelatory experiences that awaken his wisdom and modesty. Revelatory moments of experience with the natural environment, where one's vision is mysteriously expanded. The depth in which he depicts the landscape of the Australian nation, real encounters with nature thereby resulting in idiosyncratic revelations makes his works stand apart from the other writers. Patrick White's *Voss* evokes a diversity of landscapes that often enter into the texture of the novel's narrative. This paper thus discusses the idea of idiosyncratic revelation in the

characters' psychological aspects when involved in the ecology mentioned by Patrick White in the novel "Voss."

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecopsychology, Idiosyncratic revelations.

“Yet know those moments you have when you enter a

Silence that's still and complete and peaceful? That's the

Source, the place where everything comes from.

In that space you know everything is connected, that there is an

Ecology of everything. In that place it is possible for people

To have a change of heart, a change of thinking, a change

In their way of being and living in the world.”

- Linda Hogan (*Listening to the Land*)

Ecocriticism is the study of depictions of nature in literary works. This reveals the relationship between literature and the environment. Ecocriticism as an academic discipline originated in the 1990's, though its origins date back to the late 1970's. The term ecocriticism was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*". An ecocritical re-reading of a text allows readers to see how the environment is an important part of human life that reflects the interconnectedness of all that nature has created. The ecocritical study shows how the text demonstrates the character's harmonious and balanced eco-human relationship. It shows how far the characters' identities are shaped by the environment they live in. Many people have a strong belief in the truth of science and technology, but do not consider the need for the ecological beliefs and ethical values that shape the inner ecology. Turning to earth requires turning back from many of the modern society's thoughts and beliefs. Environmental analysis of a text focuses on science and philosophy, spirituality and psychology within the characters that influences environmental values and practices. Scholars and activists have started exploring facets of this neglected inner realm in recent years. The emerging field of ecopsychology is showing how our human mind is closely bound to the elemental earth. Ecopsychology is a modern, social and intellectual movement aimed at recognizing and harmonizing the relationship

between people and the Earth. Earth centered faiths strives to honour the strength of nature's consoling power. Ecopsychologists are studying the psychological processes that bind us to nature as well as that alienate us from it. The human mind and world are intimately tied because they represent both life and consciousness. Ecological lifestyle is an encompassing transformation that touches every facets of an individual's life. Experiences in life with the natural environment move them towards a greater appreciation and concern for the natural world. Through the ecological commitment, individuals are giving up scientific realities and practice new beliefs and activities. Ecological writing therefore remains a literature of hope. The pain of one's life becomes consoled as one gets along with nature. The origins of this field of study are unclear, but it is said that Willy Hellpach was the first to discuss "environmental psychology." *Geopsyché*, one of his books explains subjects such as how human activity is influenced by the sun and moon. Among the other major scholars in the history of environmental psychology are Jakob von Uexküll, Kurt Lewin, Egon Brunswik, and later Gerhard Kaminski and Carl Friedrich Graumann. Dr. Theodore Roszak, in his book *The Voice of the Earth*, explores the relationships between psychology, ecology, and new scientific insights into systems in nature. Other notable contemporary academics are Dr. Paul Shepherd and Dr. David Abraham. According to Shepherd, human nature is a consciousness shaped by our evolution and our environment. David Abraham has done various studies on our perception of the natural world stating the deep relationship of inseparable human psyche and the natural environment.

The present paper deals with the concept of ecopsychology described in the novel *Voss* by Patrick White. Patrick Victor Martindale White was born in London in 1912 of Australian parents, and educated in New South Wales and at Chettenham, England. After a short period, he continued his studies at King's College, Cambridge in 1934. He remained abroad for about 14 years, travelled in Europe and America and was for five years with the intelligence section of the Royal Air Force during operations in Greece and the Middle East. Patrick White had won International reputation.

Voss is about a megalomaniac explorer named Johann Ulrich Voss and at the same time the story of a girl called Laura Trevelyan, the niece of a Sydney merchant named Edmund Bonner, one of the patrons of Voss's expedition. Throughout the novel Voss is the central character. Voss can be related to the traditional hero's like Odysseus or Don Quixote who have learned many from the environment they had come across. Voss gathers around him a motley crew of explorers including Palfreyman, Le Mesurier, two aboriginal guides,

Dugald and Jackie, and Angus, a rich man, join them later on the road. To each of these characters the journey means something different. Voss is distinguished by extraordinary struggles and the decline and rebirth. Voss undertakes an expedition in which it is possible to get lost in the undiscovered place. Having grown to love the humbling unpredictability of wild setting, Voss sought them throughout his life till the end. Voss finds the natural world soothing through the experiences he faces. Voss seek to immerse himself in the greater environment, blurring the lines between self and the world. He believed that identity could be transformed by engaging in the ecological culture. As the team move deeper into the bush, Voss becomes less of a superman. At first, the expedition was fairly uncomplicated, but as they move further and further into the desert, the travel was threatened by weather, terrain and increasingly hostile aborigines. The expedition of Voss was not a failure. Even though he did not find a new pastoral land, lost all the specimens collected by his party and failed to reach the sea on the far side, Voss conquered his pride through his sufferings he faced in the desert.

Voss's ecological practice is nourished by his sensual immersion in the natural world. By harmonizing with his environment, Voss gains revealing insights into a wider spiritual phase. He discovered the complexity of psychology from his experiences with nature and the potential power of visions and intuitive insights. The body of a person gets involved with nature. We sense the world through the body, both its suffering and its beauty. In Voss, the main concern of Patrick White is the desire for understanding, life realisation and accomplishment which he derives from nature. Man learns a lot from the experiences he encounter with the environment he live in. The physical connection between individuals and nature allows him to have a physical bond with nature. This helps him to develop a spiritual bond in which soul, body and mind meet the spirit and matter of the natural world. The solitary moments an individual experiences with the nature brings a lot of revelations. At that moment one can listen to their inner self. One can experience the art of listening to the inner mind hearing the many voices of earth. Exploring the environment helps one to develop empathy for fellow beings.

“Such a fusion of self and environs can profoundly affect an individual identity providing a revelatory sense of continuity. An individual can relate his own nature with the gorgeous nature of the world”(46 Schauffler)

Ecological interactions can improve a person's moral sensibilities. The sores of one's inner self are consoled by confrontations with nature's humbling and comforting dimensions. In the novel *Voss*, nature holds great power to evoke inner transformation. The character's experiences in the nature gives a sense of mystical relation with the environment. Revelations measuring one's moral and spiritual evolution often seems as flashes of insights that do not easily fade into the deep hollows of memory but it becomes standards by which one can measure their moral and spiritual evolution. Revelatory insights are the ongoing source of inspiration that reaffirms one's trust in a mystery that exists within. During difficult times, individuals often rely on the experiences and memories they have with the natural world.

“Revelatory moments can be critical junctures in a turn to earth because they reconstitute relations between inner and outer ecology, transforming perception and identity. Experiencing the sacredness of the world in vivid moments of insight can move one to take moral action. It grounds their morality and theology in the heartfelt experience of ecological interconnection rather than in philosophical theories or religious doctrines.”(89 Schauffler)

Experiences with the destructive sides of nature can test the commitment of ecological followers to provide a powerful reminder that a turn to earth is not peace, safety, or limitless abundance. In its natural cycles and changing ecology, the environment offers great stability, but this constancy is not fully chaos-free. Those who spend extensive time in the environment observe to respect the extreme spontaneity of nature. Humility becomes an indispensable ability to live. Painful times of relinquishment can prompt individuals to reassess their life purpose and deepen their commitment to earth. Painful times of withdrawal can cause individuals to re-evaluate their purpose in life and deepen their commitment towards earth. Voss's expedition shows the power of what Kazimierz Dąbrowski calls "positive disintegration," a demanding period of surrender that precedes the restoration of confidence and identity . Psychological tension and anxiety are necessary for growth . Patrick White writes about Voss, “Voss would have liked to retire into his own thoughts and did to a certain extent. He looked rather furious in his self absorption.”(58 White)

Physically , he is tall and “sinewy”, a man of obvious strength. He is often referred to as “ rock” and stone indicating his power.(29 White).

In the beginning of the novel, Voss came from Sydney to meet Edmund Bonner by walking . After the stressful events in life, this nature walk would have lowered his negative

thoughts about life resulting in good emotional and psychological health. In the novel, White describes Voss's mind while he takes a walk in the nature.

How much less destructive than people, He remembered how, in a mountain gorge , a sandstone boulder had crashed, aiming at him , grazing his hand , then bounding away , to the mutilation of trees and death of a young wallaby. Deadly rocks, through some perversity, inspired him with fresh life. (18 White)

Gritty winds tended to free him. A wind off the sea, even off the calmed baywater and sea lettuce, was stirring his beard as he descended the hill. So the foreigner came into the town past the cathedral and the barracks and went and sat in the gardens beneath a dark tree, hoping soon to enter his own world of desert and dreams. He began to gaze his hands , upon twigs, and stubble of grass and the stones of his humiliation.(26 White)

For Voss, it was an escape from the gabled town, from which he escaped in all weathers, running almost where sometimes the deformed trees snatched his clothes. The memories of Voss's father swelled in distorting bubbles, an old man who gave orders to apprentices and clerks. Voss in search of freedom that he imagined in the natural environment , moving away from his protesting parents where he wondered at the meaning and essence of that freedom at certain moments.

“You must see the garden”(15 White). Believing that gardens are good for the soul, Laura Trevelyan decided to open her garden for Voss after his arrival at Bonner's house, so that he can enjoy her lovingly-created space. Laura found herself much relaxed in the garden more and more adding new flowers and experimenting new ideas. She believed that being in her garden made her feel better. Miss Trevelyan's uncle had once made it a hobby ,where he placed a collection of shrubs at his Botanical garden. ‘Voss would frequently be lost to sight in his , as birds in the sky.’(17 White).

In the novel White has focussed on the healing power of gardens. Nature calls to something very deep in us. Biophilia, the love of nature and living things, is an essential part of the human condition. Dr. Sacks in his famous writing ‘*Everything in its place*’ suggests that all of us have had the experience of wandering through a lush garden or a timeless desert, walking by the river or an ocean , or climbing a mountain and finding oneself simultaneously calmed and reinvigorated, engaged in mind, refreshed in body and spirit. Many writers have described the importance of these physiological states on individual and community health

which is fundamental and wide ranging. In the novel *Voss*, White describes that the garden's have a powerful cascade of positive impacts.

'Palfreyman and Voss spent some time together , in fact walking in the Botanic gardens, talking , or in silence, accustoming themselves warily to each other, and considering some of those questions that would arise out of a partnership of many months.'(45 White)

'Such peace and goodness as was apparent in the earthely scene in the light and shadow, and the abundance of fragrant , wilting hay, might indeed have emanated from the soul of the old quietiest.'(49 White)

Laura Trevelyan was a person who enjoyed the moments she spend in garden. She always wanders into her own thoughts the time she spends in the garden, and sometimes she goes deep into self-absorption. Most days she walked in the garden, amongst the camilliabushes. Voss and Laura's walking in the garden were treasured moments they had together.

'The man and woman were walking over grass that was still kindly beneath their feet. Smooth, almost cold leaves soothed their faces and the backs of their hands.'(87 White)

Throughout the narrative, natural environment determines the goal of Voss's psychological exploration. Voss witnessed his dynamic divinity in the natural world, prompting various forms of revelation. In the natural world, Voss experienced his complex divinity, inspiring various forms of revelation. Voss appreciates the wisdom of natural world which he inherits. Revelations have the power to break the conscience barrier which an individual has build according to his specific mindset. Revelatory experiences may carry a sense of destiny, calling one to possibilities that are not yet envisaged. Those who travel and enjoy the moments with nature often report that the world's complimentary diversity undermines their capacity to act selfishly and has build empathy towards other fellow beings. Voss's encounters with nature's destructive sides provides a thought that a turn towards earth gives a stability, security and an endless bound with nature. The entire expedition team could feel the intangible connection that unites all life. Revelations have the potential to enhance an ecological event by revealing the exceptional within the usual which reconfigure one's existence. Revelatory observations question the limits of logic. In a change of mind, their transformative capacity is embodied. When one remains in both wild and domesticated environments, most often in places of natural beauty, there is revelatory experiences that can awaken one's wisdom and modesty. Revelatory moments of experience with the natural

environment, where one's vision is mysteriously expanded. When you experience a new dimension of being, the ordinary seems incredible.

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