CHAPTER III

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Voss is not dead, but a living legend

"[...] true knowledge comes of death by torture in the country of the mind" –

These are the last few words in Voss voiced by Laura Trevelyan

Voss is a historical novel set in the 1840s. The germ of the idea was presented to White by contemporary accounts of Leichhart’s expeditions across the Australian Continent. It is the product of years of brooding on the history and significance of his own country. It is also an expression of White’s panic at what he saw as the Australian exaltation of the average: “In all directions stretched the Great Australian Emptiness, in which the rich man is the important man, in which the schoolmaster and the journalist rule what intellectual roost there is [...] and the march of material ugliness does not raise a shiver from the average nerves” (White38-39). The Tree of Man borrows into the commonplace; Voss reconstructs the extreme. The wilderness which was to be domesticated in The Tree of Man, in Voss is to school the hero.

Voss is simply organized into three parts: The preparation for the expedition, the journey in 1845 across the continent itself, and the aftermath which consists of a second minor expedition to investigate the calamity of the original exploration and what follows from it.

The first part is a remarkable composition in its own right, which gives one the opportunity to notice a gift of Patrick White’s, namely his sensitive historical imagination. Nineteenth century Sydney, is an English provincial city set down on the Pacific shore. White is engaged with the mercantile part of this society. Patrick White
catches exactly the whiff of this plum – cake world of colonial gentility, strangely surrounded by mysterious gardens. Massed in the middle is the Bonner family, the complacent husband, his comfortable wife, their creamy daughter and the niece Laura Travelyan.

At each end of the scale of intelligence of which the Bonners are, as it were, the norms, are murmurous reminders of different possibilities. At one end is the squat, pregnant maid Rose, whose baby Laura Trevelyan will eventually adopt as her own, an elemental being, close to the animals and the instinctive organic world. At the other is Laura Trevelyan, isolated in her small circle by her cool, ‘cambridge’ intelligence and taste for the things of the mind. She meets Voss at a time when she is tortured by the possibility of losing her religious faith. Voss is a totally new experience for her, alien both to her conventional connections and to her own preference for moderate rationality. He was like lightening or inspiration, and inspiration, the uncalled for, the unearthed experience, is important in a novel which is to be devoted in a major way to exploring the pure and abstract will important, that is, as another possibility or dimension in human experience. The will causes its consequences but “inspiration descends only in flashes, to clothe circumstances; it is not stored up in a barrel, like salt herrings, to be doled out” (42). Voss, the extraordinary, German, affects her like poetry, so that she deserted when she was with him “that rational level to which she was determined to adhere” (68) and her thoughts became natural and passionate. The passivity of her existence flares into intensity in his presence. She appreciates him in a way that no others in her circle can but she is also still sufficiently ‘rational’ to understand his nature.
Patrick White is seldom able to keep within the limit of what is strictly necessary to his design. He loves the pure creative play or flourish. And yet by the end of this first movement - a considerable amount of the work of the novel has been completed and the rest set in train the dowdy town and the easy country around it, against which the harshness of the desert will be measured, are clearly in the reader's mind: the decent average of the population against which the harshness of the desert will be measured, are clearly in the reader's mind: the decent average of the population against which the extreme nature of Voss can be tested has been established; the relationship of Voss and Laura has been initiated, a relationship which, since they never meet again, is carried on in the imagination of each and opened up to the reader by their correspondence. The members of the group accompanying Voss have been delineated with first that right degree of definition to mark them off as separate persons and yet to keep them united in a single party. Above all the preliminary work on the gigantic figure of Voss is carried firmly through.

There is the first glimpse of Voss after he is announced by the puzzled maid as a kind of foreign gentleman - squirming in a social encounter with Laura, but it is rapidly borne in on the reader that his unease is not by any means a mere discomfort at unfamiliar modes of decorum. Voss is one whose powers are concentrated with ferocious intensity upon an inner life.

The outer world is either a nuisance or a menace "All that was external to himself he mistrusted, and was happiest in silence, which is immeasurable, like distance, and the potentialities of self" (24). His general seediness and frayed clothes,
his contempt of social niceties, clothe the arrogance of an unnatural confidence. He was capable of simplicity and sincerity although it was very hard for a stranger to recognize these feelings in him. The approach of these was a threat, much more destructive to his personality than thirst or fever or physical exhaustion. The impulse of Voss’s actions was not any general belief or idea but the pure shape of the will which has no content – only force and direction. The compulsion he felt to cross the continent came from the desire to fulfill his own value or correctly and more narrowly, came from the force of his will. He was placed in a situation in which the conquering of the desert might seem natural to others for reasons of economics or geography or knowledge itself, and Voss is willing to make an outward accommodation to such nations. In reality, for Voss, the expedition was a personal wrestling with the continent, the only opponent his pride would acknowledge as adequate. “Desserts prefer to resist history and develop along their own lines” (67); they have, that is, a natural hostility to submitting to the will of man and they are, therefore, a proper target for Voss’s colossal pride. “‘Yes’ answered Voss, without hesitation, “I will cross the continent from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it with my heart. Why I am pursued by this necessity, it is no more possible for me to tell than it is for you, who have made my acquaintance only before yesterday” (36).

In the second phase of the novel two lines of narrative are sustained. In one, the expedition is conducted through more and more difficult, and finally brutal, country towards its disastrous end, in the other the relationship of Voss and Laura is developed in a series of meditations and (unreceived) letters, it is suggested, offers in
the end a possibility of salvation to the former. There is a passage at one point in the journey in which this touching of two orders of existence is itself used as an image of the land. “Over all this scene, which was more a shimmer than the architecture of landscape, palpitated extraordinary butterflies. Nothing had been seen yet to compare with their colours, opening and closing, opening and closing. Indeed, by the addition of this pair of hinges, the world of semblance communicated with the world of dream” (277). Not only in the architecture of landscape, but also in the architecture of people the two worlds of semblance and dream, communicate with each other.

Each member of the party obeys the logic of his own nature and responds to the sufferings of the Journey in his own way. But all the physical horrors are subservient to the monstrous Marlovian figure of Voss. He is more intent and successful than any harshness of geography or disease in searching out the weaknesses of his companions. In a situation in which life itself depends upon the naked force of will, he is seen, terrifyingly, to concentrate in himself an essential part of everyone else’s humanity. Everyone’s will is fused into Voss’s. The question posed is whether any human situation can be just the realization of a pure abstraction like the will. Each member of the party clings to something else, to some other standard supplied by a different life – the young Frank Le Mesurier to his poetry, Judd the ex-convict to the common kindness of a family man, Palfreyman to his science and his religion, Turner and Angus to a protective selfishness. But all in the end are consumed by the violence of Voss’s burning will. “By some process of chemical choice, the cavalcade has resolved itself into immutable component parts. No one derived that Mr.Voss was the first, the burning element, that consumed
obstacles, as well as indifference in others” (258). The Aborigines are the one form of humanity which evades the absoluteness of Voss’s control. Their existence is purely a passage from moment to moment, hardly directed at all by the conscious will. They drift as easily as smoke and are as responsive to the play of the physical life about them. They cannot in fact be positively separated form it, they never take on sufficient antagonist force for Voss to meet and overcome. It is ‘right’, in keeping with the nature of the fiction itself, that it should be these, surviving as they do by the negation of active will, who in the horrifying end, when the party has split into two fragments, destroy Voss.

If in the first narrative life has to do with the world of ‘semblance’ or reality, the physical progress of the expedition itself, the second has to do with the world of ‘dream’ and the life of the spirit; and this as it is focused in the relationship of Voss and Laura (Not that the Voss – Laura relationship is the sole subject matter: there is also much sharp, and comic, social observation of the colonial scene). The only physical substratum, for the relationship is the few brief meetings of Voss and Laura before the expedition leaves. On this the imagination of each, moved by deep emotional hunger, constructs a pattern of feeling of great richness, delicacy and conviction. The fact that the relationship evolves by means of an intense and reciprocal empathy causes the reader no incredulity or discomfort because he senses is an essential propriety between the nature of the experience and its poetic treatment. If a writer has the creative strength, the sincerity and the tact in realization which Patrick White shows himself abundantly to possess, he can, and the reader accepts that he can allow himself a considerable degree of freedom from the logic of a
straight-forward representational method. The relationship of Voss and Laura, as William Walsh states in his *Patrick White's Fiction* progresses from its simple beginning by means of a sympathetic parallelism into a fearful symmetry. William Walsh uses this famous phrase advisedly to suggest that blend of love, terror and harmony which the relationship achieves in the moments before Voss and Laura are finally destroyed, he by the journey, she in resonance, by a total collapse of mind and body.

The novel concludes quietly in the third section in a muted repetition and reminiscence of the positive vision – never too firmly or abstractly formulated – generated by the substance of the novel. Patrick White uses the psychology of the explorer as a metaphor of man. The explorer lives at extremes, on borders and edges; he is always pushing back the frontiers of suffering, and suffering is the universal experience of extremity uniting man. Voss is the purest example of the explorer’s psychology, but he is saved from unconvincing super-humanity by a grubby stain of back sliding man. There is a touch of malignancy of Hilter, in the way he treats his companions. This, paradoxically, makes his illumination –conversion, which is religious in its source and derived from the acceptance which is part of his love for Laura possible, and when it takes place, convincing. Only the sinful man can become the redeemed man. Voss embodies the belief, or rather perception, of the novelist that simplicity and suffering are the conditions for the re-making of man. The suffering is sustained and terrible; the simplicity only barely and painfully achieved at the point of dissolution.
In the scene set at the Misses Linsley's Academy several years after Voss's death, Laura is now a teacher, Laura is instructed by the headmistress to take a pupil to the garden party given by Mrs de Courcy to celebrate the return of Colonel Hebden, who has been searching the bush for Voss and his party. Laura meets the colonel, who makes her suffer in questioning her about Voss. He tells her that Dugald is dead, but that Jackie comes to Jildra sometimes, and that some aborigines had enacted a massacre of horses at Jildra. Colonal Hebden sets off again to search for Voss and narrowly misses seeing Jack who has become possessed by the spirits of the dead white men. Hebden turns back, passing close to bodies of Angus and Turner, who died of exposure in the desert. Jackie is dying in a swamp on the day Hebden sets off for home.

Twenty years later Belle rents her old family home from its new owners and gives a party, to which she invites Laura, Sanderson and Colonel Hebden. They have all been present during the day at the unveiling of a civic statue to Voss. Judd, who had been found living with the aborigines, was also there. He tells Laura that his family are all dead and his property gone. He is confused; he says he saw Voss dead with a spear in his side, but also says that Voss was a Christian. At the party Laura and Mercy gather a fascinated group of people round them, and Laura tells them that she believes true knowledge comes of death by torture in the country of the mind, and that some of her hearers will learn to interpret this knowledge artistically. She says Voss is not dead, but a living legend.

Patrick white has not only put a new continent into the world of fiction, he has given a new meaning to human existence. His man is no derelict creature in a godless
universe as often in the novels of Jean – Paul Sartre; nor white is concerned, as Alberto Moravia often is, with the absurdity of a reality insufficient to persuade one of its real existence. A sublime explorer of the psyche, he has discovered new depths of the spirit. He has no interest in the superficialities on the mental plane and can never bring himself to believe that the human soul has its true basis in hedonistic principles. He can have nothing but contempt for the privolous interpretation sometimes offered of the ancient Greek myth which figures the human spirit as a young maiden with butterfly wings. The Essential loneliness of man and the inevitability of human suffering move him deeply, and he is moved to compassion, not cynicism. White never minimizes suffering; he rather suggest that ‘the law of suffering’ is the one indispensable condition of human experience. To quote the words of the epigraph preferred to his own novel, Happy Valley, Progress is to be measured by the amount of suffering undergone.

According to Peter M.Knox – Shaw, Sidney Nolan, to whom Patrick White dedicated his hunstler – roman The Vivisector created in his series on Kelly a pictorical emblem that can readily be identified (alongside the documentary accounts of Leichhart and other explorers ) as a source of inspiration for Voss. In Voss white repeatedly presents his hero, like Ned Kelly, as a frame to the space through which he advances. Voss’s eyes of an ‘infinite blue’ (122) provide a disconcerting lack of resistance to the gazer. To Mr. Bonner who “would never stray far beyond familiar objects” Voss remains unfathomed, “lost to sight in his (eyes), as birds are in the sky” (20), while to Laura who “might have sunk deeper than she had at first allowed herself into the peculiarly pale eyes” (21) surrender to the unfathomable consist as a
potential from the start. Even as narrator White succeeds in sustaining the pictorial emblem without any noticeable loss of realism, Voss is seen to hold the landscape in his eyes, either by reflection or through the fullness of his gaze: "Seated on his horse and intent on inner matters, he would stare imperiously over the heads of men, possessing the whole country with his eyes, In those eyes the valley lay still, but expectant, or responded in ripples of leaf and grass, dutifully, to their bridegroom the sun, till all vision overflowed with the liquid gold of complete union." (Voss 165)

Through this double exposure of mind and landscape, White points to that equation of spatial and psychological exploration which generate the form of Voss and finds a compressed statement towards the novel’s close knowledge comes of torture in the “country of the mind.” (475) That the narrative of Voss’s exploration serves as an analogue to inner disclosure has been noted by several critics. In an early but perceptive monograph R.F. Brissenden observed that it was White’s intention to “out through to the spiritual centre [...] just as [...] his hero struggles towards the geographical centre of the continent” (203). Brain Kiernan has commented on white’s deployment of the romantic voyage of discovery as an exploration of the self; and called attention to the structural metaphor of the novel by tracing the correspondences that develop between the experience of the expeditionary party, and of those who remain behind in Sidney, principally Laura, but also Willie Pringle and Belle. What this paper will propose to concentrate on are the semantic rather than the formal aspects of White’s exploratory metaphor.

Laura one is told at the novel’s start, has been suffocated by “the fuzz of faith”: “She did believe, however, most palpably, in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water” (Voss 11). She provides a valuable guide to the
text itself when in the closing pages she counsels the group of aspiring spirits gathered about her “to interpret the ideas embodied in the less communicative forms of matter, such as rock, wood, metal and water” (475). One has only to recall one of the textural pre-occupations of the novel – the metamorphosis of stone into flesh, and of living forms into vegetation – to realize that mind and matter are rendered inextricable in Voss. White sees to it that what begins as a tidy metaphor with vehicle and tenor decently distinct soon ramifies into endless entanglement; and with good reason. The mind of man is not only mirrored in the universe but also moulded by it. Those who half-create as well as perceive can hope to discover themselves in the external world. Less discernible are the imprints left by the external world, even by the character of a particular place. Were it not for the veins of crystal quartz that run through the Australian desert, broadcasting rays from the sun, would a precondition for prophecy among the Avanda be the ‘signing’ of a crystal into the breast.

At the start of Voss White establishes the co-ordinates of the exploratory metaphor through a series of muted comparisons relating inwardness to space. Hence Voss is reported “happiest in silence which is immeasurable, like distance and the potentialities of the self, or again coaxed into social response, he gestures out of that great distance to which he was so often withdrawn” (24-34). The contrast between the silence that Voss shares with Laura (also “happiest shut with her thought” (9), and the stupor of material satisfaction that prevails at the Bonner’s meal is paralleled by the opposing attitudes towards the landscape displayed at the table, where indifference to Voss’s quest is associated with an insouciant neglect of inner reality:

“of course”, said Mrs. Bonner, who loved all golden pastry – work, and especially when a scent of cloves was rising from it. “Nor did we
really have time to understand Mr. Voss”. “Laura did”, said Belle. 
Tell us about him, Lolly. What is he like?”. “I do not know”, said 
Laura Trevelyan. I do not know Laura Mrs. Bonner realized. The 
Palethorpes coughed, and rearranged their goblets out of which they 
had gratefully sipped their wine. Then a silence fell among the flakes 
of pastry. (31)

Although it is at Laura’s expense that the first equation of dreams with the 
intention is ventured, “She was afraid of the country […]. But this fear like certain 
dreams, was something to which she would never have admitted”. (13) She at least is 
ready, after her first meeting with Voss, to admit to her fear of the interior and to 
generalize from it. “Everyone is afraid, or most of us, of this country, and will not say 
it. We are not yet possessed of understanding ”(31). Defending Voss, Laura affirms 
the value of introspection and in doing so offend the company gathered at the 
Bonner’s table who retaliate with parochial complicity: “She was of the same base 
metal as the German” (32).

Voss’s commitment to the desert and Laura’s equivalent commitment, her 
willed intimacy with Voss and after his departure with her emancipist servant Rose 
(each of whom holds up to her the challenge of a desert ; (94) represent diverse if 
convergent quests, yet they provoke from Sydney society a similar reaction since both 
involve the realization of an uncovenanted self. At the Pringle’s Picnic where Laura 
and Voss are identified as “sticks” there is little to choose, in the eyes of their 
mercenary host, between dreams and intolerable land:
There may, in fact, be a veritable paradise adorning the interior. Nobody can say. But I am inclined to believe, Mr. Voss, that you will discover a few black-fellers, and a few flies, and something resembling the bottom of the sea. That is my humble opinion.

My. Pringle’s stomach, which was less humble rumbled “Have you walked upon the bottom of the sea, Mr. Pringle?” the German asked. ‘Eh?” said Mr. Pringle. “No”. His eyes, however, had swum into unaccustomed depths. “I have not”, said Voss “Except in dreams, of course. That is why I am fascinated by the prospect before me. Even if the future of great areas of sand is a purely metaphysical one.” (67)

Alienation from such a society carries the possibility of grace.

Voss himself is never wholly exempt from the play of White’s satiric comedy and one intermittently views his self confidence as a blank but unhonorable cheque – notably at the moment that Mr. Bonner produces the scarcely charted map: “The map?” said Voss “It was certainly a vast dream from which he had wakened” (26).

But Voss’s desire to “attempt the infinite” holds the promise of a life richer than one ‘choked with the trivialities by daily existence”, and the social contest delineated in the first part of the novel accordingly enforces an ambivalent estimate of his arrogance, one side with Laura’s view that arrogance is the quality that saves him, terrible though it is” (78). The “simplicity and sincerity” that underlie it (26) are evident in the reasons he gives Le Mesurier for joining him: “Everyman has a genius, though it is not always discoverable[...] But in this disturbing country so far as I have become acquainted with it already, it is possible more easily to discard the inessential
and to attempt the infinite [...] you will realize that genius of which you sometimes suspect you are possessed, and of which you will not tell me you are afraid " (38-39). The expedition is founded on a faith in undisclosed resource of human potential; and the desert is the symbol of this dream before it proves its actual setting. Among the visionary jottings in the notebook that represent Le Mesurier’s fulfillment White distills the most concentrated statement of the exploratory metaphor. “We do not meet but in distances, and dreams are the distance brought close ”(315).

Patrick White may not uphold any systematic belief in the collective unconscious but this statement does point to the way in which the movement through the desert is accompanied, on the part of the control characters at least, not only by a growing awareness of what has been hidden but also by a progressive disclosure of unanimity. The almost clairvoyant relationship that develops between Laura and Voss provides White with one means of dramatizing this “meeting in distance”, his application of a fairly homogeneous symbolic scheme. The correspondence between geographic and psychic penetration accounts for the growing dominance of an expressionistic mode in which the “world of dream” weights equally with “the world of semblance”. The image in which White expresses this “escalation between the internal and external - the opening and closing of a butterfly’s wing” (277) - lends itself to the narrative switches which prevail in the later part of the novel, not only to the alternation of Sydney with the desert but also, within each of these settings, to the party bestowed by the narrator on the hallucinatory and the real. Voss’s recreations of Laura’s presence, for example, are given the same status as the events of the present.“Voss, Palfreyman, and Laura continued to walk towards the cave. The selflessness of the other two was a terrible temptation to the German ” (308).
The novel becomes, to put it crudely, more modernist, as the narrative proves; and White, if perhaps only unconsciously, reinforces the stylistic shift, with a chronological succession of literary reminiscence. So the first chapter of the novel shares its situation with the first chapter of The Europeans: the young lady of the house while her family are at church offers a glass of wine to the young man who arrives unexpectedly from afar. Rose portion's story in chapter four has been transported after being convicted of the murder of her illegitimate child recapitulates Hetty Sorel's history from Adam Bede (1858). Reminiscences of Henry James and George Eliot yield, however, to something closer to Tennessee William's The Glass Managerie (1945) in the account of Palfreyman's deformed sister who cherishes images of crystalline perfection, an account that leads to the heart of Voss's torment.

Again, in accordance with a trajectory that simultaneously penetrates outer and inner space the narrative increasingly transcends the historical distance of its setting. It is possible to trace Voss's discovery of the "Country of the mind" by examining both the sequence of his presented dreams and his creation of Laura for it is through these allied expressions that his development is chiefly made manifest. But to appreciate the significance of the gradual animation of landscape through which Voss's self-recognition is effected it will be necessary to begin with some further account of the alienation to which Voss is subject at the novel's start.

The claustrophobia which repeatedly overwhelms Voss in the opening chapters testifies in part to the constraints of the Sydney ambience. Under bombardment in the Bonner's drawing room, swaying on his legs and "almost crazed by people" Voss represents a desire for release which one can partly respect. "Deadly
rocks, through some perversity, inspired him with fresh life. He went on with the
breath of life in his lungs. But words, even of benevolence and patronage, even when
they fell wide, would leave him half—dead. (21)

That asylum from unmentionable realities, the padded carriage from which
Voss tears an exit on returning from the Pringle’s picnic again legitimates his need for
escape. One learns, however, that Voss’s claustrophobia is more deep—seated than,
this, that it constitutes in itself a retreat. His revulsion from the “palpitating bodies of
men” determines his change from medicine to botany as a student in Germany (16). It
is a suspect notion of freedom that prompts him to “treat with his boots upon the
trusting face of the old man, his father” (16) and turn his back on the home whose
image continues to threaten him across the world. “He smelled the stovy air of old,
winter houses and flesh of human relationships, a dreadful, cloying tyranny, to which
he was succumbing” (120).

Voss’s mission is inspired by a dread of intimacy. The compensatory nature of
his venture into the interior is partially signalled in the align phrase: “I have every
intention to know it with my heart. In common with Palfreyman who it later
transpires, has sought the desert to escape the recognition that he cannot save his
sister, Voss seeks the oblivion as well as the challenge of the unknown” (35). Like the
Ned Kelly depicted by Sidney Nolan, he looks both forwards and back, he is
propelled as much by his recoil from palpitating flesh as by his ambition to realize
his genius in the desert.

The element of pathological flight is concealed from Voss by the trappings of
transcendental philosophy with which he clothes his quest. His utterances on the
supremacy of the will have been ascribed (despite obvious anachronism, (for the novel is set in 1848) to the influence of Friedrich Nietzsche but they belong rather to the romantic currency of German idealism). Voss’s belief that the gratuitous act of will can disclose a source of Divine Power (95-6) and his concomitant contempt for unbelief (“Atheism is self murder”) are consonant with Fichte who in his *Vocation of Man* identified will as key to the noumenal world, and celebrated its autonomy:

> the sensuous life of every finite being points towards a higher life, into which the will, by itself alone, may open the way ... my will, directed by no foreign agency in the order of the supersensual world but by myself alone, is this source of true life, and of eternity […]. The will rejects absolutely all earthly purposes, all purposes lying outside itself, and recognizes itself, for its own sake, as its own ultimate end. (210)

The maxim, “To make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself” that Voss addresses to Le Mesurier who excuses himself by disclaiming “such heights as you” – “I shall wallow a little in the gutter, I expect, look at the stars from a distance, then turn over” (38) -- is in keeping with Fichte’s pronouncements on dying into life through a sacrifice of “the sensous and all its objects”, a sacrifice undertaken as a categorical act of will.

By this renunciation of what is earthly, faith in the Eternal first arises in our soul, and is there enshrined apart, as the only support to which we can cling after we have given up all else, as the only animating principle that can elevate our minds and inspire our lives. We must indeed, according to the figure of the sacred doctrine, first “die into
the world and be born again, before we can enter the kingdom of god.

(211)

In this ascetic greed of aspiration, Voss masks his dread of human relationships. His ideal of self-sufficiency, his creation of an unassailable identity, that of the explorer attempting the infinite, derives from weakness as much as from intransigence of will. Given the limitations of the milieu in which Voss finds himself, his refusal to compromise constitutes a strength, but it amounts to no more than a preliminary condition of his development. For, as Laura recognizes, "if Voss is saved by his arrogance he is also damned by his pride" (Voss26). In terms of the theological scheme propounded towards the novels' conclusion Voss's self-exaltation comprises merely the starting point of "the three stages": "of God into Man. Man. And Man returning into God" (411). His notion of dying into life, appropriated from the zeitgeist, receives a broader and more traditional treatment at the hands of Patrick White. "It is through recognition of his frailty that Voss will ascend" (411), through failing the terms on which he enters his quest that he will experience "the mystery of life" (289). What Voss the romantic isolate discovers, even if that discovery takes place largely in solitude, is the self in relation. It is through the erosion of the adamantine egocentricity that inspires and continues to inspire his advancement, that Voss finds grace.

Almost from the start Voss images his intransigence as crystalline and mineral, and the association is reinforced by his contrastive alignment of love with all that is soft and yielding, "easily hurt and thus to be evaded" (45). In his first recorded
dream one sees him seeking assurance that the identity he has elected for himself is proof against the claim of others:

It was not possible really, that anyone could damage the idea, however much they scratched it. Some vomiting words. Some coughed up their dry souls in rebounding pea-pellets. To no earthly avail. Out of that sand, through which his own feet, with reverence for velvet, begun to pay homage, rose the idea, its granite monolith untouched. Except by Palfreyman .. was it? He could not distinguish, the face, but the presence was prevailing the whole dream. And now Voss was stirring on his straight bed. It was a humid night. His hands were attempting to free his body from the sweat with which it had been fastened. (48)

To Voss who compares his strength to “the power of rock or fire” (47) “the igneous monolith, combining homogeneity with the utmost recalcitrance is the apt symbol of his willed identity. The self dependence of Laura and of Judd are by contrast those, respectively, of marble and colitic stone” (145). Palfreyman whom Voss had identified as an apostle of humility figures accordingly in his dream as an appropriate challenger to the supremacy of the idea, to the extent that Voss is stirred from his sleep and, as the self–reflexive construction indicates, vainly attempt to free his body from self–induced bondage.

The debate between pride and humility is first fully joined when Voss, flinching again at the “soft and defenceless”, fends off Laura’s solicitude at the Bonner’s party:
"And, the humility, the humility! This is what I find so particularly loathsome. My God besides, is above humility". "Ah", She said, "Now I understand". It was clear, She saw him standing in the glare of his own brilliant desert of course. He was himself indestructible. And she did then begin to pity him. She no longer pitied herself, as she had for many weeks in the house of her uncle, whose unfailingly benevolent materialism encouraged the practice of self pity. Love seemed to return to her with humility. (96)

Hectic in isolated quotation, this statement evolves out of the sensuous details of a minutely realized scene in which "shifting states of mind are dramatized through the perceived textural contrasts between the crystalline and the yielding, between stone and flesh. A dish of jellied quinces hardens under Voss's gaze into an assembly of garnets and pale jade lozenges" (89), while the reverse transformation is effected through the eyes of Laura:

"Miss. Hollier's garnet brooch... edible like quinces" (88-89). Mrs. Bonner's concern to preside over rather than to liberate her guest provides a parody of Voss's obsession with fixity: Mrs. Bonner, however, was creating groups of statuary. This was her strength, to coax out of flesh the marble that is hidden in it. So her guests became transfixed. Then Mrs. Bonner, having control, was almost happy. (90)

Her daughter Belle is released from her statuesque pose by Tom Radclyffe who sighs with a fervor that sets the glass ornaments rattling, and through his song
declares his desire for her. Belle embodies that capacity for merging what is a precondition of love: "Now (she) was neither flesh nor marble. She was enveloped in, and had herself become, a cloud of the most assiduous tenderness" (91).

In Voss Laura's half-sister inspires a brief infidelity to the desert, a nostalgia for the German summer with its luxuriant fruit and ripe fields; but Laura alone is sufficiently akin. She has torn the camellias as if they were not flesh- to challenge Voss's containment.

The dreams of which Voss remains largely unconscious on awakening to his first morning at Rhine Towers provides the only transition between his perfunctory leave-taking of Laura on the Sydney quay and the letter, written before he leaves for Jildra, in which he makes his proposal of marriage. Since it epitomizes his condition before setting out into the desert and discloses the decisive forces in his subsequent conflict, this the first of Voss's dream to be presented in any detail, requires close attention.

Going to bed in the best room the Sandersons could offer, between exquisitely clean sheets and lingering scent of verbena, Voss was not long with his body, and those thoughts which had been buzzing like blowflies in his head. 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 dissolve. He took the hand to read it out aloud, whatever might be
printed on it. Here there were hills too. They would not be gone around. That is the hill of love, his voice said, as if it had been most natural. That, she pointed, was burnt in the fire of the kiln as I pushed the clay in, and, insignificant thought it is, will show for life. Then, roughly, he threw away the hand, which broke into pieces. Even in dreams he was deceived by the appearance of things, and had taken the wrong hand. Here it is, she said without grudge, and brought him another, which had not been baked. It was of white grain. It[...] but what else? (149)

In Voss’s dream, Laura materializes however disjointedly, and displaces the landscape. The prevailing metamorphosis of stone into flesh manifests a capacity for love that Voss has suppressed, and hints too at the element of compensation in his exploratory quest. His sudden surrender to sleep recalls the earlier occasion on which he “fell, straight, deeply into himself, “to find comfort in his dream of the idea as a granite monolith untouched”. The sense of secure possession imaged there is now held at risk by a transferal of agency, “At once the hills were enfolding him”: but his confidence survives the change into flesh, “so he was touching those same hills and was not surprised at their suave flesh”. Voss in his sleep is relieved by the expression of a desire which remains “nauseating, frightening” to him in life, and protected too by the censorship that is available to him even in his dream: it is in this sense that reprehensible desire can “solve, as well as dissolve,”. Voss accepts the offered hand only conditionally, “to read out aloud whatever might be printed on it”; and finds on the palm untoward evidence of an independent destiny. The language of palmistry
affords a latent pun (on mons) that enables him to distance with threat by relegating the hand once more to the realm of the natural: "Here there were hills too. They would not be gone around". But the restatement only proves what Laura has already implied: love is more recalcitrant than landscape. Yet Voss proves himself unwilling to evade the hill of love. He allows Laura to offer him two further hands. Composed of fired clay, the first of these is in keeping with the texture of the landscape and with Voss's taste for the vitreous, but like the pottery of the Sandersons. "distorted by the intense heat in which (it) had been tried" (140), the hand disturbs Voss with the poignancy of its imperfection, and is accordingly shattered. Though this hand is officially of day and syntax, suggesting some doubleness in the image of the dream, allows us to register the real scars caused by Voss's preoccupation with the mineral. The hand of grain that testifies, both in its ready succession and substance, to Voss's need for love, elicits what is simultaneously a gesture of rejection and acceptance. "It still had, most terribly, most poignantly, its semblance of flesh. So he shut it up in his bosom. He was afraid to look at it again" (141).

The hand shut in his bosoms accusing evokes the actual scene of leave-taking in which a distracted Voss holds Laura's extended hand without passing a word while "he watches a woman brushed on the mouth by a horse--tail in the melee" (125). This woman, stuffed with horse-hair in the dream, now stands in for the hollow men of Sydney society against whom Laura and himself remain united in conspiracy. The contrast between their affinity and the distance at which they are set prompts reflections on the tenuousness of memory. Words and names, the vanishing points of identity are set against the unfinished stuff of experience ("raw jugs") until Laura,
retiring behind a mist of white muslin, turns back into the landscape from which she came.

Voss's conflict is brought into the open by the letter from Laura in which she accepts his proposal on condition that they both struggle to subdue the arrogance that blinds them to their frailty. With the word "together" from Laura's parting injunction still resonating Voss questions Palfreyman about his latest botanical acquisition, a lily with seeds, like testes attached to the rather virginal flower, before he dozes off into a dream. Then Voss began to float, and those words last received. But together [...] is filled with little cells. And cut open with a knife. It is a see seed [...]. All human obligations are painful, Mr. Johan Ulrich, until they are learnt, variety of variety [...] you are in no position to accept. It is the woman who unmakes men, to make saints. Mutual. It is all mutual. (200 -201)

The extensive association that characterizes the opening sequence is in keeping with the desire for merging embodied by the dream. In the previous dream stone turns to flesh. Voss now envisages his surrender in images that are suspended between the vegetable and fleshly. Joined at the waist Laura and he participate in the organic Unity, the "same flesh" of the single flower. Through the visual presentation of the word "together" as a lily pod "filled with little cells" Voss who has formerly rejected "the voluptuous transports" of selflessness as feminine is now brought to recognize that merging and fertility are also the preserve of the male. The intimation is sufficiently disturbing to be instantly suppressed: he refuses to see--although, in the
word “seed”, the imperative continues to stare him in the face. The dream proceeds to resolve itself into an internal colloquy between the self dedicated to Laura and the old obdurate Voss, who fails to maintain the upper hand. “The weaker is stronger, O Vooos.” (201)

Through a typographical device reminiscent of James Joyce (cf. the description of Stephen’s ashplant: “My familiar, after me, calling Steeeephen”) given particular force by the visual vehicle of the dream, Patrick White signals a decisive turning point in the development of his hero. Voss who savored his own name “as a crystal in the mouth” (45) now finds it metamorphosed into a seed-pod that serves as an emblem of strength through humility. But the battle is scarcely begun.

The image of the woman choked with horse-hair, though only latent in the dream – “dark hairs of roots plastered on the mouth” – reasserts itself in protean forms that continue to testify to Voss’s fear of entanglement. After delaying his departure from Jildra to await Laura’s letter Voss reflects bitterly on his dependence: “he could blame no one else for his own human weakness. He had delivered up his throat to the long, cold, glittering braids of her hair, and was truly strangling in them” (191). Judd’s humility is later to provoke the essential formulation of his conflict.

But when the fellow had gone away, he continued to suspect of him of exercising great power, though within human limits. For compassion, a feminine virtue, or even grace, of some sensual origin, was undoubtedly human, and did limit will. So the German was despising what he most desired: to peel the whale-bone off the lily
stem and bruise the mouth of flesh [...]. He lay thinking of the wife from whose hands he would accept salvation, if he were intended to renounce the crown of fire for the ring of gentle gold. That was the perpetual question which grappled him as coldly as iron. (227)

Like the lion and the unicorn in D.H. Lawrence's doctrinal essay which support the crown by each fighting for its possession, the values represented in Voss by the crown of fire and the ring of gold exist in a necessary tension. Though he initially enshrines an extreme, even pathological, ideal of independence, Voss humbles himself sufficiently to realize his capacity for love, and accordingly epitomizes two passions that are at war in every individual—the itch for self-exaltation and the thirst for self-transcendence. In place of a stable resolution the novel offers the prospect only of perpetual struggle. Voss who will both kill and have, and kiss as well as kill, is torn between the crown and the ring, and suspended between those symbolic presences that extend them, the "x-ray" like spirits of the dead and the warmly pigmented figures of the living, painted on the surfaces of the cave in which the explorers winter. A skeletal Voss shoots Gyp and callously scrutinizes Palfreyman on way to his death while a being who "had taken human form, atleast temporarily "(277) "submits to the ministrations of Judd and nurse LeMesurier through his illness. The supernatural powers that preside over the action of the novel are at once creative and destructive. God crucifies his son, and the Rainbow serpent of Aboriginal mythology, manifest in the comet, descends through the heavens intent on swallowing what it had created" (403). The great Snake comes to rest in the Southern Cross shortly before Voss is betrayed by Jackie; but both
snake and cross symbolize the idea that suffering leads to renewal, a motif that recurs constantly throughout the novel in compressed images such as “green lightening” or in extended episodes of symbolic action. Suspended between Jacob and the medicine man Frank Le Mesurier proves at a far remove Fichte’s notion of dying into life:

Towards morning, Le Mesurier was wrestling with the great snake, his king, the divine powers of which were not disguised by the earth-colours of its scales. Frictions of days had worn its fangs to a yellow-grey, but it could arch itself like a rainbow out of the mud of tribulation. At one point during his struggles, the sick man, or visionary, kissed the slime of the beast’s mouth, and at once spat out a shower of diamonds (299-300).

Humility quickens Le Mesurier’s engagement in the stark realities of struggle and leaves him in possession of the crystalline.

Voss ends his last letter to Laura with the words: “this is the true marriage, I know, we have wrestled with the gristle and the bones before daring to assume the flesh”. (Voss 232). One of White’s triumphs in Voss is to make us aware of relationships as acts of creation. The dreams in which Voss discovers the extent of his desire for Laura yield to a series of hallucinatory scenes and images through which he expands his conception of her. (Some sixteen such episodes are presented, in the last three of which Laura is given her own point of view). A maximum of Nietzsche’s applied with particular force: what we do in dreams we also do when we are awake: we invent and fabricate the person with whom we associate—and immediately forget, we have done so.
Laura's physical absence isolates that unconscious work of the imagination that underlies all relationships, allowing us to observe the stages by which she assumes predominance in Voss's mind. Out of stone, at first a hooded figure, masked by her hair, by the collar of her coat, or with her back turned, Laura in the desert is slow to gain distinct human form. Her growth in Voss's mind is dependent on his relationships to the other members of the expedition, and controlled by the success of his struggle against pride.

It was M.C. Broadbrook who referred to the epic dimension and the open-mind myth in the novels of Patrick White in which "the mind of Australia merges with the Australia of mind" (141). In Voss, the most important novel in his major phase, the central character is an explorer, a metaphor of the mind of man in search of its infinity in the emptiness of the Australian desert symbolizing the human soul before the descent of the divine, "I try to write on two planes the immediate detailed one, and the universal" White said of this novel:

Even though critics such as Patricia Morley and Joan Newman have referred to the allegoric dimension of the journey of Voss in Christian terms, an attempt here is made to show that this journey is more universal than simply Christian as it has also affinity with the Indian concept of the identity of Atman and Brahman, (44-53) stated Dr. K. Chellappan and adds that, this how-ever does not deny the Christian pattern in the novel, but suggests that it has resonance beyond the Christian framework and becomes a Universal parable of the soul's quest for the Absolute. Voss in seeking a kind of identity between the creator and created seems to be closer to the Upanishadic --- "Tatvamasi" meaning "thou art that". Though in the beginning
Voss seems to symbolize only a sublime egotism, finally there is a progress to a kind of self which is characterized by love for all life. Australia is the objective correlative to the unconquerable mind as well as the greater self and also enables him to discover the Divine in himself by discovering his humanity through descent, into the demonic depths. Dr.K.Chellappan concludes saying that the relationship between the hero and Australia is one of love-hate and Voss finally achieves knowledge of the self as inseparable from the landscape.

The journey of Voss across Australia from Bonner's world is very much like that of the Ancient Mariner who is ship wrecked in the pacific as he commits a crime against God, nature and man but at the end learns that "he prayeth best, who loveth best. All things both great and small". Voss thus has affinity with the romantic creed in its religion of nature and also in linking God with creativity and love.

The story seems to enact a cosmic drama as it were in the Australian landscape in which we see a kind of the eternal triangle of love: here Voss seems to be pursuing the infinite in the Australian landscape though it is only a reflection of the infinite in him. Laura who is pursuing him through his journey though in absence has been associated with Christ and Beatrice. We would consider her as his epipsycshe where as Australia is the greater soul. But Laura seems to be concerned with humility and making amends for others when she says, "I am not in the habit of setting myself limits" (90). Voss seems to be seeking an identity between himself and God, the infinite and the finite. And this identification is like the Upanishadic Aham Brahmasmi. But he being an inverted seeker is also like Hiranya who does not want his son to accept any God but himself. Australian landscape, more particularly its emptiness suggests the grater soul, but it is also a correlative to his own soul.
The horizontal movement is paralleled by the vertical journey deep down his soul. Only his mind seems to be real. "All that was external to himself he mistrusted, and was happiest in silence, which is immeasurable, like distance, and the potentialities of self" (21–22) to him. As William Walsh puts it "Voss is one whose powers are concentrated with ferocious intensity upon an inner life. The outer world is either a nuisance or a menace" (44). The landscape seems to be an extension of his consciousness whereas his consciousness becomes an interior landscape. In the early phase of the journey "he observed all things as if for the first time. It was a gentle, healing landscape in those parts. So he was looking about him with contended eye, drinking deep draughts of a most simple medicine" (124). He preferred "short cuts instead along the brush tracks walking on leaves and silence" (124). White adds "It was not the volcanic silence of solitary travel through infinity. The German had experienced and had been exhausted by its, winding deeper into himself, into blacker thickets of thorns" (124). Significantly he describes "The world of gods was becoming the world of men"(277). In another context, White says that the world of semblance communicated with the world of dream.

Where as McAuley sees Voss as story organized around the contrast between the urban society of Sydney and the unexplored Bush, to William Walsh, Voss does not rely on this too simple contrast. "The world of Sydney for example is the Bush, the country of the mind. He adds that the Bush itself pictures an inner world and the conquest of a continent was an outer aspect of Voss's inward expedition"(48). Australia is the objective correlative to the unconquerable mind as well as the greater self and also enables him to discover the Divine in himself by discovering his
humanity through descent into the demonic depths. The relationships between the anti
hero and Australia is one of love hate and Voss finally achieves knowledge of the self
as inseparable from the landscape. There is something of the sublime both in Voss
and the landscape Caroline Bliss has referred to “Laura being the mirror of Voss and
a Mediator between Voss and us” (62). In their Platonic love we see the longing of
the divided parts for each other. Australia does to Voss, what Voss does to Laura and
vice versa. Laura helps Voss to recognize his limits and humanizes him just as Voss
humanizes her though in different ways. There is something of the marriage of the
finite and the infinite all the time. Again Voss understands Australia through Laura
who has a better understanding of Australia after having suffered with Voss.

The main focus in this expedition is on Voss’s determination to wrestle with
the rock, to bleed if necessary to ascend and he tells Laura that he does not intend to
stop short of the throne for the pleasure of grovelling on lacerated knee in company
with Judd and Palfreyman who have the orthodox faith. In this he is a
heretic and a Gnostic who pits himself against the God of conventional Christianity
and Gnostic versions of the God head as suggested by Mark Williams.

The imagery of light penetrating each and water is very significant in this
earth-dominated novel. Laura is associated with air whereas Voss is linked with earth
and fire. Voss recalls “how they had never spoken together using the truly humble
words that convey the inner most reality; bread for instance, or water” (190). But
when he looks at the landscape now “we shall understand each other” he said (190).
Then follows the description of the birds, and "shadow in the infinite distances of that
dun country of which he was taking possession, all, finally, would be resolved" (190).

There are two other passages which are also concerned with something like
nature mysticism. The first is from the journal of Le Mesurier who also symbolizes
creativity and grace and deals with his descent from arrogance to humility, from divinity to humanity. "I pray that you will take my spirit out of this my body’s remains, and after you have scattered it, grant that it shall be everywhere, and in the rocks, and in the empty waterholes, and in true love of all men, and in you, O God, at last." (Voss 297).

He wants to be dissolved in the rocks and waters, we are reminded of Wordsworth’s Tintern Abbey which talks of one spirit in the setting sun and in the mind of man. Here, “there is a linking of nature with true love of all men and in you”(294). Laura also while talking of the impact of Rose’s death says,

As I stood there (I hesitate to write you all this, except that it is truth), as I stood, the material part of myself became quite, superfluous, while my understanding seemed to enter into wind, earth, the ocean beyond, even the soul of our poor, dead maid. I was nowhere and everywhere at once. I was destroyed, yet living more intensely than actual light, so that I no longer feared the face of death as I had found it on the pillow. If I suffered, it was to understand the devotion and suffering of Rose, to love whom had always been an effort! (Voss 239)

Both emphasise the unity of all life as well as unity with nature. Laura seems to suffer while trying to understand the devotion and suffering of Rose and later she also suffers while Voss who is killed also through suffering recognizes his oneness with humanity which leads to a kind of divinity.

Carolyn Bliss has suggested that in Voss “the periphery of self coincides with infinity.” (76) But both she and Patricia Morley see Voss exclusively in Christian
terms. She makes a distinction based on Eckhart between unitive mysticism which aims at a complete union of soul with the divine and the oriental mysticism which aims at the marriage of a soul to God and which therefore maintains an essential distinction between East and West and calls these two forms of mysticism as Eros and Agape (12).
If we look at *Voss* from this perspective, Voss signifies the dynamic male world, that of quest and conquest and Laura signifies the static female world of love and dreams. Here again the land is central to the human drama and the main event is journey. The heroine recreates the hero in her consciousness and the hero’s journey takes place both in the Australian desert and in her consciousness. Where as the desert brings out the hero’s heroic qualities, it brings out the heroine’s tenderness.
The mind is extended as it were into an objective universe and discovered through it, the desert is Voss himself and his mind partakes of the quality of the desert, just as the desert becomes a correlative to his own isolation. The epic novel shows the convergence of the mind of Australia and the Australia of the mind. Finally, the hero is made to live as a myth, both in Australia and the minds of the people, as a tale which serves to perpetuate his heroic memory, from trauma to triumph. Thus Voss is not dead, but a living legend.