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THE ARCHETYPE OF OUR TOGETHERNESS WITH THE NATURE

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ABSTRACT

The paper is an ecocritical rereading of the text *Voss* written by Patrick White. The protagonist of the novel Johan Ulrich Voss is the great figure who is an archetype of our oneness with the natural environment. The story revolves around a group of men with a strong attitude, setting out on a journey to cross the continent of Australia. Johan Ulrich Voss is considered as a wandering man, in search of knowledge or experience for which he has no name. The study of the text will allow readers to witness how the men confront the crisis circumstances in life in the forest that becomes an inevitable part of their life. The confrontation of sufferings experienced in the nature has another appeal besides its beauty and tranquillity. The team which sets out for the expedition faces a lot of trouble from which they learn the meaning of life.

The ecological interactions touch each character's physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological facets of life. Nature is open to all as well as masculinity is present in the poor as well as in the rich. The paper also discusses the power of Ecomasculinity which suggest men's role in challenging the thought and practices towards nature. It explores how men perceive their relationship to the physical environment and how the environment can help shape and define their masculinity. How men live in their environment as not only as an extractor but for his livelihood, as a protector and a defender. Gender variation in ecology which brought the two concepts, Ecofeminism and Ecomasculinity perceives both men and women's approach towards natural environment. The two characters in the novel Johan Ulrich Voss and Laura Trevelyan are taken for the detailed study. Thus the paper discusses the relationship between gender, environment, stating that men have more exposure to the natural world whereas women have different concerns and experiences because of gender roles. The study also examines men as 'men' through the prism of gender as well as listening to some male voices. The present study is organized around specific themes that define ecomasculinity and the issues the team of men confront over the course of their expedition. The study is an exploration of psychological aspects of men. The mental satisfaction men gets from the adventure they experience within the nature is reflected in the novel. It is observed that experiences gained from the encounters with the nature increases self-efficacy, mindfulness and subjective well being. For Johan Ulrich Voss, form of ecomasculinity is courage and display of physical strength while

undergoing an expedition as well as strong belief in one's will power. The major component of the rational, normative definition of masculinity is independence. Voss is sufficient with himself and the expedition he undertakes is tied to his identity. He gained sense of fulfillment from the idea of this great expedition.

Key words – Ecocriticism, Ecopsychology, Ecomasculinity, Biophilia

"There is a man here, miss, asking for your uncle", said Rose, is the first sentence in the novel *Voss* written by Patrick White. The protagonist of the novel Johan Ulrich Voss is the great figure who is an archetype of our oneness with the natural environment. The story revolves around a group of men with a strong attitude, setting out on a journey to cross the continent of Australia. Johan Ulrich Voss is considered as a wandering man, in search of knowledge or experience for which he has no name. The story is originally based on Ludwig Leichardt, a nineteenth century German explorer who died during an attempt to cross Australia from east to west. The ecocritical re-reading of the text will allow readers to witness how the men confront the crisis circumstances in life in the forest that becomes an inevitable part of their life. The confrontation of sufferings experienced in the nature has another appeal besides its beauty and tranquility. The team which sets out for the expedition faces a lot of trouble from which they learn the meaning of life. The ecological interactions touch each character's physical, spiritual, emotional and psychological facets of life. Nature is open to all as well as masculinity is present in the poor as well as in the rich. The paper also discusses the power of Ecomasculinity which suggest men's role in challenging the thought and practices towards nature. How men deal with the power they have over the surrounding they live changes from person to person. It explores how men perceive their relationship to the physical environment and how the environment can help to shape and define their masculinity. How men live in their environment not only as an extractor but for his livelihood, as a protector and a defender. The novel is a beautiful description of ecology by Patrick White. Men's studies, often called men and masculinities in academic settings, is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to topics concerning men, masculinity, feminism, gender, culture, politics and patriarchal power. Gender and attitude towards nature has been identified by academics as a central feature of social life which is the core social values that our lives revolve around. Gender variation in ecology which brought the two concepts, Ecofeminism and Ecomasculinity perceives both men and women's approach towards natural environment. The two characters in the novel Johan Ulrich Voss and Laura Trevelyan are taken for the detailed study. Thus the paper discusses the relationship between gender, environment, stating that men have more exposure to the natural world whereas women have different concerns and experiences because of gender roles. The study also examines men as 'men' through the prism of gender as well as listening to some male voices. The present study is organized around specific themes that define ecomasculinity and the issues the team of men confront over the course of their expedition. The paper is about the dynamics of men and masculinity experienced by the characters when they are with the natural setting. The study is an exploration of psychological aspects of men. The mental satisfaction men gets from the adventure they experience within the nature is reflected in the novel. It is observed that experiences gained from the encounters with the nature increases self-efficacy, mindfulness and subjective well being. Most men have very little power over their own lives, whereas some others show competitive and aggressive behaviors. Some men dominate the masses of men.

The protagonist of the novel *Voss* is such a person. For Johan Ulrich Voss, form of ecomasculinity is courage and display of physical strength while undergoing an expedition as well as strong belief in one's will power. The major component of the rational, normative definition of masculinity is independence. Voss is sufficient with himself and the expedition he undertakes is tied to his identity. He gained sense of fulfillment from the idea of this great expedition. The novel shows the real and significant accomplishments of men in the natural setting. Johan Ulrich Voss came to Australia with a strong belief that he can prove himself. A team of men led by Voss goes for an expedition. Mr. Bonner who is the sponsor of the whole expedition considers the event as a turn in the history. The novel begins with the arrival of Voss at Mr. Bonner's residence to discuss the details of the expedition. Voss's arrival evokes curiosity in the minds of everyone in the Bonner's house.

Rose Portion, the maid of Mrs. Bonner addresses him as 'German gentleman'. There are many reasons for Mr. Bonner to choose Voss as the leader of the expedition. Voss is ambitious of achieving the absolute.

"He was sufficient in himself" (15 White)

"I will be ready. All arrangements are in hand. I have engaged already four men."(21 White)

The team members selected by Voss were, Harry Robarts, Le Meisurier, Frank, Palfreyman and Turner. Mr. Bonner knew that the expedition is of great distances which will tax physical strength. So he decided to involve a large party. Mr. Bonner's list included Angus, who is an owner of a great property in Rhine Towers, and also Judd, whom Mr. Bonner and Mr.Sanderson swears as a man of physical strength and moral integrity.

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. But he strongly believed in his will and dreamed about the successful completion of the expedition. He at many times thinks of the material world while he walks through the dark grass.

"Many disturbing and opaque thoughts began to move in his clear mind. What am I? What is it necessary to be?" (37 White)

Ecopsychology is the revelation one gets while moving through the nature. The term ecopsychology, first coined by writer and theorist Theodore Roszak in his 1992 book, *Voice of the Earth*, is loosely defined as the connection between ecology and human psychology. Roszak argues that humans can heal what he calls their 'psychological alienation' from nature and build a more sustainable society if they recognize that we all have an innate emotional bond with the natural world. The sounds we hear while we walk through the forest, the aroma of flowers, plants and the trees, the warmth of the sunlight which touches us through the leaves and the fresh air gives us a feeling of comfort in every sense. It reduces our stress and relaxes our body. Nature has got a great power of restoring our mind and thoughts. Japanese researchers have studied an ecopsychological study on how nature can heal human beings. It is known as Shinrin – Yoko which means forest bathing. The study states that aerosols from the forests, inhaled during a walk, increases the levels of Natural Killer or NK cells in the immune system, which fight tumors and infections.

Ecofeminism is a term which shows the interconnectedness of women with ecology. Women can be identified with nature. Ms. Laura Trevelyan was Bonner's orphaned niece who was raised by Mrs. Bonner. She was a woman perhaps ahead of her time who is smart, independent minded and strong-willed. She can be considered as the counterpart of Voss's character. In the beginning of the novel, Laura appears to break the limits of her gender but she remains locked within the normal social boundaries of the times. Voss is so humble in front of Laura. He says "I do not always understand very well, not all things."(11 White). She spends most of her time in the garden at Bonner's house. When Voss first arrives at Bonner's house, Laura says he must see the garden. The garden that Laura loves is full of vibrant greenery that fascinates her and promotes mental healing. The fresh breeze, dappled sunlight and fragrant greenery of her garden reduce her anger, pain and induce relaxation. When Voss and Laura became intimate, it was difficult for them to part. Even though they communicated very less through words, the emotions inside them were so intense. Their walk together in the garden was the sweetest moment they think about at the time of pain in their life. In the midst of the expedition, Laura's prayers were the only relief which comforted Voss.

"My poor Miss Trevelyan! I shall be followed through the continent of Australia by your prayers, like little pieces of white paper."(90 White)

Laura has a deep admiration towards Voss. Some consider him as uncouth and mad. Mrs. Bonner says, "He is simply lost. His eyes cannot find their way". (28 White). But at every situation Laura Trevelyan shows her concern towards Voss to everyone she talks with. She tries to make everyone understand that he does not intend to make fortune like other men. She says "He is not afraid" (28 White).

The benefits of seeing and being with nature is so powerful. The study shows how far the identities of the characters in the expedition team are shaped by the encounters they face in the surroundings in which

they live. The emerging field of men studies analyzes the problems of men in the modern world. Some branches of studies were developed recently such as sociology of men, psychology of men and ecomasculinity and so on. These new disciplines study the changes in men's roles and responsibilities. Researchers have been examining masculinity for a long time. According to Michael S Kimmel and Michael A Messner, in their famous book 'Men's Lives',

"Historically, there have been three general models that have governed social scientific research on men and masculinity. Biological models have focused on the ways in which innate biological differences between males and females programmed different social behaviors. Anthropological models have examined masculinity cross – culturally, stressing the variations in the behaviors and attributes associated with being a man. And until recently, sociological models have stressed how socialization of boys and girls included accommodation to a sex role specific to one's biological sex". (15 Kimmel and Messner)

While each of these perspectives helps to understand the overall meaning of masculinity and femininity, their ability to fully describe the inner meaning of gender towards nature in different culture is often limited. Books such as *The Male Machine* (1976) by Marc Feigen Fasteau and *The Liberated Man* (1975) by Warren Farrell discussed the costs to both physical and psychological health of men when they are with the surroundings. According to Fasteau men are supposed to be functional. This is true in the case of Voss. He spends time thinking about how to successfully complete the expedition. Personal reaction, how one feels about something is considered dysfunctional. (10 Fasteau). The study describes how masculinity is differentiated on the basis of cultural, historical and geographical locations. Maleness is considered as biological, but masculinity is a product of culture. Patrick White's representation of Johann Ulrich Voss in the novel *Voss* is a powerful, painful, complex fate. Voss admires the Australian desert, which also evokes the nostalgic feelings of his youth in Germany. His coming to Australia was to prove his strength and passion towards his will. He feels the inevitability about his exploration. He says to Frank Le Mesurier, a companion in the expedition,

"I will cross the continent from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it with my heart."
(33 White)

Thus Voss is so faithful and honest. Patrick White uses the psychology of the explorer as a metaphor of man. Voss expresses the conviction that simplicity and misery are the conditions for man's restoration. The superman is a premature ideal, it presupposes man. The Character Johan Ulrich Voss is a superman who 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's expedition can be considered as a travel to tranquil land which reinforces masculinity. It can be treated as a rite of passage for personal development upon entering manhood.

Voss as an adventure narrative is analyzed here within the context of male behavior, focusing on independence, courage and confidence. He is accompanied by Palfreyman who is an ornithologist, Frank Le Mesurier- a young man who is looking for the purpose of life, Harry Robarts who is a physically strong and simple English boy, Turner- a drunkard, Judd, an ex-convict, Ralph Angus, a landowner, Dugald, the old man and Jackie, the younger one. During the expedition, the men faced many pathetic incidents. As they rode, it began to rain where the rain drops seemed like bullets. Men and animals grew very weak as they pounced against the strong rain with their heads "Some of the men hated one another than ever". (267 White) At many circumstances they felt that the greatest pleasure would have been to die.

"Oh I am sick, sir', he complained, when he realized he was being observed. 'There is no need for you to tell me that, Frank,' said Voss. (269 White).

On the journey, Jackie, a black boy joined them. They travelled through caves where they could smell the good magic. Voss caught sight of the drawings. Voss remembered how, as a boy, he had flown kites with messages attached to their tails. Looking at the kite- figures, his heart was hopeful.

"Men gone away all dead," the boy explained. "All over," he waved his arm. "By rock

By tree. No more men', he said, beginning to comb the light with his dark figures, as if it had been hair." (275 White).

Adventure in nature is the area not experienced by most of the people in modern societies. Modern technologies have written off love towards nature and have seen exploration as things of past. Most of the people have a notion that nature exploration is done only by astronauts and sea divers. People hardly realize that nature is open to everyone.

"The expedition of Johann Ulrich Voss was forcibly encamped, for men are convinced early in their lives that the excesses of nature are incited for their personal discomfiture. Some who survive the trial persuade themselves they had been aware all along, either through their instinct, or their reason of the existence of the great design, yet it is probable that only the wisest, and most innocent, were not deceived at first." (331 White)

Sometimes the earth appeared flat, where the leader of the expedition, Mr. Voss, would walk out to test the ground. When he had gone a certain distance, the leader would perceive the folly of continuing and thinks that he must return to those men.

"Nothing could be more awful than the fact that they were men." (333 White)

Biophilia is the love human beings have towards nature. The spaces we inhabit have distinct physiological and psychological impacts on us. In the novel, the men could feel the hope from the land that showed the green promise. So the men were stretching their muscles, and flattering themselves, on the strength of their survival, that all the goodness which emanated from. As they continued their expedition their flesh were reduced to such an extent that they could no longer smile. They were very tired.

"At once every man, with the expedition of the leader, raised his voice, in curses, commands, or words of advice." (337 White)

Voss alone of all his party remained persistently cheerful. Voss explains to the team that all these circumstances were foreseen. But Judd replies that they were strong then and had hopes. The leader then mentions about the lack of wisdom abandoning hope of the team members. Judd had no intention of going further after the death of Palfreyman. The circumstances reduced them and they were too thin to express anything positive. At the end of the expedition we can see Judd is the only person who goes against Voss. Judd says that he is a plain man. He says that he trusts himself. He wanted to go back home. Judd protests against the thoughts of Voss. Angus and Turner too joined Judd. Voss moves ahead with Harry Robarts, Le Mesurier and Jackie. The two parties get separated with the consequence that nobody really experienced any real desire to look back. The two parties rode in opposite directions.

"If you are suffering from delusions, it is the result of our unavoidable physical condition,' said the German" (341 White)

The story is an innocent celebration of masculinity in nature. The story is an exploration of emotions that make them human.

"If there is hell before and hell behind, and nothing to choose between them." (346 White)

Voss has the freedom to wander at will and to fulfill his will, while the woman in the story Laura Trevelyan is ignored and restricted to the domestic and urban spaces, reinforcing the Australian power structure of men out there and women in the domestic sphere. Laura is often seen as the feminine counterpart for Voss.

The mission of the Wanderer is a search for masculine transcendence. Ultimate aim is to rise above and discover the essential truth of the spiritual being. Voss carried out this mission, ensuring that the moments of melancholy understanding and sublime transcendence remain an entirely masculine experience. Laura Trevelyan remains in a state of maturity after Voss's death, living a plain life detached from society and in the memory of Voss. Voss's Expedition remains a completely masculine experience knowing the moments of

melancholy and profound transcendence. Voss claims that one's will is his destiny. In his reply to Laura, on an occasion, he says that "Your future is what you will make it. Future", said Voss "is will". (68 White) 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.

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