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Whispers of the Wild: Nature's Myths and Hallucinatory Visions in Patrick White's Voss

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ABSTRACT

Voss, Patrick White's fifth novel, revolves around the historical figure Ludwig Leichhardt, a 19th-century Prussian explorer who met his end during an Australian expedition. While myth typically involves legendary stories of heroes, the protagonist, Johann Ulrich Voss, undertaking a journey across the Australian continent in 1845, may not fit the mold of traditional heroes like Hercules or Odysseus. Nevertheless, Voss achieves his mission with a sense of self-satisfaction and contentment. White delves into profound aspects of human life, exploring inner meanings that convey deep truths. The significance of suffering and misery on the path to wisdom permeates his fiction. Voss, an ambitious explorer, is counterpointed by Laura Trevelyan, sharing his flawlessness. The novel incorporates the supernatural, intertwining insightful hallucinations and various myths. As Voss leads his expedition through the interior deserts of Australia, the hallucinations provide a captivating glimpse into a diverse environment. Despite the ultimate failure of the journey, the novel suggests a spiritual success. The painful expedition becomes a journey of self-discovery through revelatory experiences during challenging times. The intense mystery persists until the expedition's end. Both Voss and Laura lead lives intimately connected to nature, believing in its magical power. Voss undergoes a transformation, turning the physical journey into a profound psychological exploration. The relationship between Voss and Laura is portrayed as a soulful exchange, where unspoken words are heard through a form of telepathy or extrasensory perception, bypassing conventional communication channels.

Keywords: Myth, Hallucination, Telepathy, Self-revelation, Psychological Myth.

Myth and Insightful Hallucination in Patrick White's novel *Voss*

"Patrick White's fifth novel, '*Voss*,' centers around the historical figure Ludwig Leichhardt, a Persian explorer and naturalist from the nineteenth century who met his demise during an Australian expedition. While rooted in Leichhardt's real story, the novel takes on a fantastic and mysterious narrative. Leichhardt's existence in the mind of Patrick White serves as the inspiration for the protagonist, Johann Ulrich Voss. The narrative unfolds as an adventurous tale of Voss, a German with a deep ambition to cross the Australian continent in 1845. Despite not fitting the mold of traditional heroes like Hercules or Odysseus, Voss emerges as a hero who accomplishes his mission with profound self-satisfaction and contentment. Patrick White explores profound aspects of human life, delving into inner meanings that convey deep truths. Themes of suffering and misery as essential components on the path to wisdom resonate throughout his fiction.

Voss is counterbalanced by Laura Trevelyan, a flawless character who, along with Voss, imparts a metaphysical completeness to the novel. Orphaned and new to South Wales, Laura resides with her uncle, Mr. Edmund Bonner, the expedition's sponsor. The novel ventures into the supernatural, intertwining insightful hallucinations and various myths. The hallucinations in the Australian interior deserts offer readers a captivating glimpse into a diverse environment. Although the expedition ultimately fails, the journey is portrayed as a spiritual success, leading to self-discovery through revelatory experiences amid challenges. The relationship between Voss and Laura is depicted as an exchange of souls, where unspoken words are heard through a telepathic communication. The novel commences with Voss and Laura's meeting in Mr. Bonner's mansion, where Laura leaves a strong impression on Voss.

Patrick White, recognized as an artist of the mystic landscape of the mind, crafts a psychological novel where the protagonist undergoes a spiritual self-discovery. The relationship between Voss and Laura significantly influences the expedition's fate, with Voss being influenced by Laura's thoughts. Telepathic communication becomes a pivotal element in their relationship.

The novel commences with Voss entering Bonner's house while the family is away attending Sunday Holy Mass. It is during this time that he encounters Laura Trevelyan for the first time. As their conversation unfolds, it gradually unveils various dimensions of men and women, delving into Laura's thoughts that offer insights into her connection with the land. Their dialogue serves as a gateway, leading readers into a realm of imagination, emotions, and the landscapes embedded within Laura's inner mind. The novel intricately depicts Laura's psyche, which becomes the foundation of Voss's life. Laura finds solace in her garden, where she immerses herself in the profound revelations that nature provides, showcasing a stream of consciousness. The dependency between Laura and Voss extends beyond the physical realm, intertwining their minds on a deep, mental level. The mystery surrounding their relationship remains intense throughout the expedition.

Both characters share a close affinity with nature, harboring a belief in its magical power. Voss undergoes a transformative journey, transcending the physical aspects to delve into the depths of the psyche. The narrative introduces telepathy as one of the unknown perturbations, challenging the perspectives of rationalists and materialists. This phenomenon, categorized as extra-sensory perception, involves the direct transfer of thoughts between individuals without conventional communication channels. The essence of modernism, encompassing myth, mysticism, metaphysics, and supernatural occurrences, is a fundamental aspect of the novel. Patrick White explicitly designates "*Voss*" as a work emerging from this thematic realm. Even when Laura walks alone in her garden, she senses the presence of Voss through intuition. Despite having met only twice before the expedition, Laura's connection with Voss remains palpable as she visits the harbor to witness his ship embark on the adventurous journey.

“Walking with their heads agreeably bowed beneath the sunlight, they listened to each other’s presence, and became aware that they were possibly more alike than any other two people at the Pringle’s picnic”. (White 64)

In the novel, there are instances where Laura and Voss enjoy leisurely strolls amidst the garden, using these moments to share their innermost thoughts. During one such occasion, Voss imparts to Laura his belief that one shapes their own destiny and that the future is a manifestation of one's will. In response, Laura acknowledges that Voss's ambitious expedition is a product of his unwavering determination. However, concerned about Voss's relentless pursuit, Laura, grappling with mental stress, earnestly advises him against letting his will become a destructive force. Despite her well-intentioned caution, Voss remains captivated by his grand aspirations for the impending expedition. Their subsequent encounter occurs during a dinner arranged by Bonner to commemorate the commencement of the expedition. This gathering becomes a pivotal moment for the couple as they exchange ideas and delve deeper into each other's personalities. The meeting unveils a profound connection between them, characterized by a blend of sentimentality. In a particularly touching moment, Voss appeals to Laura to remember him in her prayers, emphasizing the emotional depth of their relationship. This encounter not only strengthens their bond but also reveals the extent of Voss's emotional investment in the expedition and his connection with Laura. Laura express her admiration towards Voss and says

“You are my desert”. (White 83)

Voss too admires Laura. When their arms brush, Voss was conscious of some extreme agitation or exhilaration in her.

“My poor Miss Trevelyan! I shall be followed through the continent of Australia by your prayers, like little white pieces of paper. I can see them, torn-up paper, fluttering, now that I know for certain that you are one of those whom pray.” (White 85)

As the expedition sets off, the final rendezvous between Voss and Laura unfolds near the seaside. Although Voss is embarking on the adventure alone, there is a concealed journey occurring within him, where he carries Laura along in his inner self. This hidden adventure forms a captivating aspect of the narrative, illustrating that, despite the physical distance, the couple traverses an inner landscape together, bound by an unbreakable connection. Their inner travels become an inseparable part of their beings, creating a tapestry of shared memories that sustains them in the times that lie ahead. The brief yet meaningful moments they spend together linger as cherished recollections, providing solace and strength for the challenges that await.

The symbolism of wild lilies encountered in the desert deepens Voss's association with Laura, serving as a poignant reminder of their connection. While physically absent during Voss's journey, Laura assumes a spectral presence in his mystic visions, appearing and disappearing as an ethereal companion. Following their parting, the couple sustains their connection through the exchange of letters. Voss, upon reaching Sanderson's Rhine Towers, initiates their correspondence by composing his first letter to Laura. This epistolary communication becomes a lifeline, bridging the physical distance and maintaining the thread of their emotional and spiritual bond despite the vast geographical expanse that separates them.

“Dear Miss Trevelyan, do not pray for me, but I would ask you to join me in thought, and exercise of will, daily, hourly, until I may return to you, the victor.” (145)

The tragic denouement of the narrative is underscored by the poignant realization that the last letters between the separated couple were never delivered, marking an inevitable and sorrowful conclusion. Despite the physical distances, the couple, now severed by fate, finds a means of communication through extra-sensory perceptions. Laura, however, is not spared from the psychic

disturbances that manifest as delusions, creating an additional layer of complexity to their already intricate connection. Over time, Voss comes to understand that the hallucinations he experienced regarding Laura were not mere figments of his imagination but rather indicators of a deeper, hidden reality. The novel, characterized by its epic scope and narrative artistry, navigates the realms of love, perception, and the enigmatic nature of human connection.

The exploration of true love becomes a central theme, prompting contemplation on its existence, authenticity, and the fine line between illusion and a genuine emotional experience. As the mind becomes entangled in the web of love, the narrative delves into the profound and obsessive nature of this potent emotion. The heart-wrenching experience of losing a loved one is metaphorically likened to going through withdrawal, highlighting the powerful and addictive qualities of love. The memories of their shared moments become a source of solace, offering comfort to both individuals amidst the overwhelming emotions of separation. While the novel challenges the authenticity of love as an illusion, it suggests that the illusion itself does not negate the truth or meaningfulness of the emotional connection.

The theme of fate or destiny in love is interwoven with mysterious occurrences, adding a layer of mysticism to the narrative. Voss draws strength and hope from the thoughts of Laura, creating a spiritual tether that transcends physical boundaries. The illusions and unfulfilled desire to be with Laura perpetuate an endless realm of imagination, emphasizing the enduring and transformative power of love even in the face of separation and the passage of time.

In the novel, religious myth can be observed by viewing Voss's suffering as a martyr as well as a redeemer. Judd one of Voss's teammate abandons him and leaves the party. Judd feared and doubted on Voss's mission. The character of Judd to Voss can be compared to Judas to Christ. In the mission of Voss, Judd is Judas. At the end of the novel, the tragic death of Voss can be seen as a sacrifice to his Will.

"They cannot kill me; it is not possible." (White 357)

When he was beheaded, a comet was seen across the night sky. This was viewed as the story of the ancestor the Great Snake by the aboriginals which they refer as the great grandfather of all. The star which falls from heaven takes up residence as Great rainbow serpent. The comet shows the redemption of Voss. Voss's journey is a quest in nature which makes his life as a myth which can be considered as a legend. "Voss did not die," Miss Trevelyan believes that he is still in the country and always will be. His legend will be written down. The novel is a mystical sensation. A mystical communion of Voss and Laura is seen in the inner realm of mind.

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