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## **Mapping Land and Self in Patrick White's *Voss***

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of MA in English  
Studies (literature, linguistics, culture)

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## **Abstract**

Australian literature is rich with great works of art which, despite their cultural significance, are still often overlooked in the larger context of literatures in English. In marking out how Patrick White's novel *Voss* (1957) explores Australian cultural tropes of mateship and landscape, this MA paper examines the novel's treatment of fundamental human issues of free will, freedom, humbleness, and sense of belonging. To this end, I follow the phenomenological reasoning of Tim Ingold and Edward Casey, whose ideas about the human relation to place ground my interpretation of White's cartographic imaginary in *Voss*. Using Ingold's analysis of travelling as a mode of being and Casey's distinction between place and space, I consider the ways in which the mutually constitutive processes of mapping subjectivity and mapping the land unfold their ontological, epistemological, and ethical dimensions. In this novel the scientific exploration of colonial space becomes the protagonist's quest – both physical and metaphysical – for selfhood, conceived through the ambivalence of his relations with the unfamiliar land, its strange people, and his own sense of exile.

## 1. Introduction

Australian Literature is still an underdog in the whole of English literature. Even though it is distinct and offers significant works to the world, it is still often disregarded and the attention that it has started gaining has been rather recent and grows slowly. Australia's early colonial history started with the English colonisation in 1788 when Australia was used as an elaborate prison base for the empire's unwanted convicts. As the time passed, the new colony slowly demonstrated its market potential for imported press, which meant that the publishing was mostly done in England. Consequently, the British literary tradition influenced the formation of Australian literature in quite many respects and was also a point of comparison and reference. John Schreckter even calls the first local writers 'British transplants' (1998:19), who would often embrace a rather critical or ironic approach as they felt more like visitors, whose ideals and points of reference were always the motherland. Roger Osborne explains that this specific organisation of printing meant "that the responsibility for publishing the work of Australian writers in the nineteenth century was more frequently taken up by newspapers and magazines" (2021:10). Scholars Sarah Galletly and Victoria Kuttainen show that the magazines not only published the selected stories of local artists, but also placed them "amid current authors and books from Britain, America, and elsewhere" (2021:54). In other words, Australian literary tradition was supported and shaped by these magazines and, as Osborne points out, it was the periodicals and not the publishing houses that made an impactful contribution in the developing stages of local literature.

According to *The Cambridge Companion to Australian Literature* (Webby 2000), Sydney's *Bulletin* was the most popular magazine and specifically here the novelists Marcus Clarke and Rolf Boldrewood published their early works and now are among the best-known nineteenth-century Australian authors. These weekly magazines became a source for tracing the first formations of Australian literary figures and Megan Brown observes that they "fuelled the myth of a distinctive Australian ethos, male and egalitarian, that was built on the archetype of the lone bushman whose masculinity and Australianness were created by his battle against the land" (2021:26). Brown's observation concisely names the most important motifs of the literary tradition that have survived to this day. Naturally, behind these notions lies fundamental complexity. As John Schreckter observes in *Australian Novel 1830-1980*, there looms an essential distress within the Australian imagination: "That concern, marked by our national

directions and given direction by geographic necessity, is to acknowledge the terror at the basis of being, to explore its uses, and to build defenses against its dangers" (Schreckter 1998:16). This terror is a well from which the distinctiveness of Australian literature stems from.

This sense of terror may be closely connected to the period of early colonisation. As almost all the new inhabitants were prisoners, this circumstance definitely raises the question of how to define the Australian identity: as a merging of many European and native cultures or as the outcome of strong resistance against miscegenation? This evaluative process may be even more important for the Australians themselves who need their national identity firmly shaped. Scheckter notices that some of the writers even found symbolic applicability in the convict system that inspires "recurring interrogations of individuality" (1998:88). He goes on to explain that even though there were some success stories of the convicts "it is also likely that the lasting influences of the penal system include the equally characteristic Australian senses of grim irony and serious self-doubt concealed, perhaps, behind an honest appearance of cheerfulness" (1998:88). He further notices that quite many Australians express "particular antagonism" towards the government and explain it as a lasting effect from the prison times. The convict literature helped create the methods that Australian writers would often use to examine both public and personal issues. Two major authors and books that focused on that period are Marcus Clarke with *For the Term of His Natural Life* (1874), John Boyle O'Reilly with *Moondyne* (1879). Another important period is 1900 – 1970, when Australia progressed towards Federation. Kerry Goldsworthy described this period as "depart from the generic conventions of romance and melodrama, and from the construction of the reader as essentially a British consumer looking for exotic and colourful tales of the colonies" (2000:105). She names Henry Lawson, Miles Franklin and Joseph Furphy, Brian Penton and Judith Wright as important writers of the period.

Many scholars and writers connect the creation of mateship – an entirely Australian phenomenon – with the prison experience, where certain friendliness and community support was needed for the convicts' survival. In his article on the policy of multiculturalism Eduardo Marks de Marques argues that: "Australian national identity is formed by the convergence of a cultural and biological Anglo-Saxon heritage and [...] a unique Australian construction of masculinity" (2021:99). What is suggested here is that the Australian understanding of masculinity formed in combination with the phenomenon of mateship. In the context of convict society, masculinity did not mean separateness from others or individualistic seclusion. The struggle to survive was shared and became common, there were no differences of class, all were

equally striving to survive. Thus, egalitarianism and mateship go hand in hand and both embody the hallmarks of Australian culture. There is also some controversial thinking about mateship as later creation and not something that actually emerged among convicts. *The Myth of Mateship* (1987) by Dennis Altman is an example that de Marques mentions in his article and says that Altman reads “the Wardian bond between men as a middle-class creation and not something developed among convicts, as well as its suggestion that this bond that was not necessarily heterosexual” (2021:105). The interest in revisiting such deeply engraved historical truths demonstrates the relevance of the topic and somewhat challenges the concept of Australian identity.

The environment is, without doubt, another key figure of Australian literature. The influence, indeed, was so forceful that, in historian’s Manning Clark words: “The spirit of the place makes a man aware of his insignificance, of his impotence in the presence of such harsh environment” (In Bliss 1986:3). David Carter suggests that the “environment would be the most influential” and would “express itself through literature” (2000:261). Therefore, he indicates the mirroring bond and adds that “the idea that Australia was pioneering a literature often led to the romantic notion that it should be a literature of pioneering” (ibid.:261). Logically, the importance of manhood and masculinity at least partly comes from the environment – to survive in a severe place, one needs to attain a certain character. Michelle J. Smith points out that “a great deal of Australian literary mythology surrounds the bushman and masculinity in rural setting” (2021:18). In her article she uses manliness as a context to explore the figure of the larrikin – once a threatening working-class individual, later a harmless model of Australian masculinity. Her analysis shows how the associations tagged to this figure changed over time and so demonstrates that the question was always important and alive in the public dialogue.

The concept of masculinity is very much embedded in the literary tradition and explores the specificities of Australian culture, where masculinity is not limited to the concept of physical strength but also involves a certain sensibility and sensitivity to the land. Scheckter sees the human ability to live on the land as crucial to the Australian sense of male mateship: “The heroes of Australian bush mythology are bullock drivers, shearers, swagmen, or bushrangers, landless itinerants and ‘mates’, who live upon the land, who may indeed love it, but who would scarcely claim to control it” (1998:43). He also goes on to further notice that adventurousness and landlessness in Australian literature gradually became more positive and more freeing than traditional descriptions of success, like stability and land-lording. Scheckter observes that “Australian myths often celebrate values radically removed from everyday life” (1998:172).

A great interest in and influence of the Australian bush have created a strong tension between the metropolis and the bush, on the one hand, and the outback and the bush, on the other. As Mary Fullerton explains in her study about Australia, “the bush” has broader and narrower meanings, namely, parts “that is not city, town or suburb” and “the actual timber and scrub country” (1928:36). ‘The outback’ has a very similar meaning ‘the bush’, but refers to even more remote parts of the Australian land. A scholar Megan Brown suggests that the reason for the previously mentioned tension may have occurred “because ‘the bush’ remains *primarily* a place created by the imagination, its voices unheard except as quaint or comic detail” (2021:25). In her view, the bush, paradoxically, is more an experience of time, specifically time that precedes industrial modernity. Many scholars identify a certain sense of the tragic as inherent in the figuring of the bush in Australian literature. For example, Carolyn Bliss sees the bush as a primal source of danger: “The sense of something sinister, ominous because unknown and unknowable, is undeniably central to the Australian perception of the bush” (1986:5). Thus, thinking about the Australian bush, Bliss draws a parallel with the ‘terrible beauty’ in W. B. Yeats’ poem *Easter, 1916* or even with the Romantic sublime. Ironic though they be, such comparisons went hand in hand with the expansion of colonial settlements in Australia and the exploration of the continent. As Scheckter notes, many writers would choose comparison rather than specificity and would attempt to describe the environment as a contrast to something else: “The interior was contrasted with the coastal regions, life in the outback was defined by its differences from life in the cities, and almost every aspect of Australia was compared at some point to something English” (1998:43).

Patrick White entered the stage of Australian literature in 1939 with his first novel *Happy Valley*. Previously he had published some poetry and had written a few pieces for theatre, but they remained in the closed circle of amateur actors and friends. His first novel was received well in England but not in Australia. The following novels *The Aunt’s Story* (1948) and *The Tree of Man* (1955) were, again, well received abroad, especially in the USA, but did not attract much positive attention at home. Unsurprisingly, such continuing dismissal in the homeland made White doubt whether to persist in writing at all. Interestingly, the critics’ opinions have divided up until recent days, as some critics enjoy the complexity and artfulness of White’s prose, while others claim to see little value in overly-complex stylistics of his novels. Success and public acknowledgement did come, even if somewhat late. It even came to a point where in 1970 White was offered a knighthood, which he declined. Three years later, he was awarded the Nobel Prize “for an epic and psychological narrative art, which has introduced a new

continent into literature” (nobelprize.org). Delys Bird claims that the Nobel Prize gave “Australian fiction international recognition” and sees the prize as a direct impact for other Australian authors' international sales and success, such as Collen McCullough, Morris West and Bryce Courtenay (2000:186).

We should note, however, that in 1957 White won the prestigious Miles Franklin Literary Award, given to the Australian novel of the year for the highest literary value and most skilful depiction of Australian life. The award-winning novel is *Voss*, a story about a German explorer who wants to map the undiscovered parts of Australia. As a work of art, the novel really displays White’s mastery as a stylist and gives us a layered story which addresses the fundamental human concerns of life and death. However, there are many contrasting opinions about the work. White was known for a very idiosyncratic style and, even though his books draw on the traditional Australian cultural figures, it is often the style of his narration that to this day leaves the critics and scholars perplexed. For example, Adrian Mitchell concludes that: “*Voss* is the most florid of White’s novels, and perhaps the most triumphant because of the rhetorical excess” (In Collier 1992:13). The British writer V. S. Naipaul, who equated style with embarrassment, because “the manner, which has been described as stylish, cannot support the matter” (In Collier 1992:15), was similarly reticent in his appreciation of White’s oeuvre.

Nevertheless, scholars have read *Voss* in quite a number of significant ways. There are those who consider White a modernist and places his name among the modernists like T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and James Joyce. Shirley Paolini, for example, reads *Voss* in direct comparison with Eliot’s *The Wasteland* and highlights both texts’ shared concern for exile, isolation, the strife of life, and the facing of the desert (literally and metaphorically). She notes that White writes a novel “within the European tradition”, but also adds that “White is a modernist in his ability to reshape conversation patterns and place before us a new vision: a protagonist who is one with nature and his adopted country” (1990:91). In this respect, many scholars agree that, even though White represents Australianness in his works, his imagination is anchored in the Western literary tradition as a whole. Norbert Platz puts it well: “It is this literary, artistic and philosophical sensibility which I want to indicate by ascribing to White a ‘Western consciousness of novel writing’” (1984:170). Delys Bird indicates that “White had revived and redefined nascent Australian modernism, and his writings has been a diffuse and ongoing influence on contemporary fiction” (Cambridge Companion p.185).

Other scholars put emphasis on the neo-Victorian aspects of the novel. For example, Mariadele Boccardi calls our attention to the ways in which the novel's portrayal of neo-Victorian domesticity chimes in with its critique of colonial cartography, whose imperatives problematise the ethics of Voss's quest. She suggests that "linearity and teleology in White's novel ought to reside with the explorers' journey, but in an ironic reversal that signals Voss's neo-Victorian stance, their progress takes them from the fully established urban settlement of Sydney through the pioneering rural domesticity [...] that is normally the starting point of the settler narrative" (2019:5). Post-colonialist reading might be the most leading among the scholars, because the novel is definitely open to it, as the story depicts colonialist reality.

The story in *Voss* is not a complete fiction, as White based his main character on an actual Prussian naturalist and explorer, named Ludwig Leichhardt, who became famous for his explorations in Australia. He managed to get funding for several expeditions and would have probably continued but in 1848 set out on his last expedition and was never seen again. Together with four other Europeans and two Aboriginal guides he moved inland and never returned. Four years later, other expeditions set out to look for the remains of Leichhardt's undertaking or at least for the signs of what might have happened, but much nothing was found, except for a few marked trees. In a similar vein, White also tells us about a foreign explorer, the German Johann Ulrich Voss who seeks to explore and map the unknown territory of the Australian bush in 1845. With the funding he receives from Mr. Bonner, he manages to prepare for the expedition and gather a team of settlers and two Aboriginal men. A few weeks before the beginning of the expedition, Voss meets Laura Trevelyan, a niece of his benefactor, and they form a strange emotional and intellectual bond. Both characters are social outsiders, strong-willed and opinionated. Even though they meet just several times, they recognise a deep connection and understanding that continues throughout Voss's journey. Laura stays at home but accompanies Voss metaphysically. Given the harshness of the Australian bush and the challenges of the expedition, the members of the party become divided and, eventually, split up, leaving everyone vulnerable to the natural elements and the judgement of the Indigenous people. In this, we recognise White's critique of the colonial project and its notion of the human as an autonomous subject standing over his and her environment.

Before proceeding with the analysis of *Voss*, in the next part of this MA thesis, called *The Phenomenology of Place and Movement*, I take up the phenomenological views of Tim Ingold and Edward Casey. They both theorise about place as an essential aspect of human life. Ingold examines different modes of travelling and suggests that we might think of movement as a

mode of being, while Casey explores the phenomenological importance of place and its relation to our conceptions of space and time. The theoretical overview will be followed up by the analysis of White's novel, conclusions, and a summary in Lithuanian.

## 2. A Phenomenology of Place and Movement

If someone would ask you what the place is, chances are, you would just look around implying that any given surroundings is the place. Place as a concept is largely taken very much for granted and, therefore, questioning what it is might seem odd. Nevertheless, taken-for-grantedness comes from the fact that we are always in some place, does not matter if we are actively aware of it or not. We are always in relation to our surroundings, we are always acting somewhere. Philosophers realised the importance of place centuries ago and tried to understand how it affects us. As I am going to analyse the novel *Voss* mainly through the relation between self and land, the ideas of Tim Ingold and Edward Casey will be very helpful and will support my analysis. Even though they consider the notion of place from different angles, both see it to be fundamental to people's perception and being. In this part I will provide an overview of the main aspects that both scholars indicate as essential when regarding the notion of place.

Tim Ingold is a British professor well-known in the field of anthropology and has published over fifteen books, all related to topics of culture, education, and art. In this paper I am going to concentrate on his work *Lines: A Brief History* (2007) where he analyses line-making as a mode of being. Already in the first chapters of the book we are made to realise how many lines we encounter in our everyday lives, and it seems that this observation was also the main motivation for his study. Human life is happening along lines and: "It is along paths, too, that people grow into knowledge of the world around them and describe this world in the stories they tell" (2007:2). This realisation moved him to explore the occurrence and the development of linearity as a societal method of being and processing.

Tim Ingold starts his analysis by first separating the notions of *threads* and *traces*, where the first group represents more the natural pattern found in nature and animals, while the second depicts footprints, be it from mythological or real people. Footprints mean life and they also

bring about the place: “It is through the transformation of the threads into traces, I argue, that surfaces are brought into being” (2007:52). To rephrase it, the place gains its significance once someone is travelling through it and travelling through the place is the way one makes their lifeline. Nevertheless, there comes a point when a crucial shift happens. As Tim Ingold indicates, the central transformation occurs once destination-oriented transportation and the activity of mapping replaced *wayfaring*. These innovations affected people’s understanding of a place: “once a knot tied from multiple and interlaced strands of movement and growth, it now figures as a node in a static network of connectors” (2007:75). Already in his words he encodes the message that a place of life and knowledge degraded into merely a connecting point.

It leads us to the next crucial thought being that modern societies exist in environments made of connected elements, ‘a mesh of interweaving lines’ (ibid.:75) that represents lines going *across* and therefore standing for *transport*. The line going *across* stands in direct contrast to one that goes *along* and stands for *wayfaring*. For Tim Ingold the distinction between *transport* and *wayfaring* is essential. Following his idea, the action of *wayfaring* is intertwined and equated to the action of *being*. Tim Ingold quotes Aporta (2004), who suggests that: “The act of travelling from or to a particular location plays a part in defining who the traveller is”. This means that *travelling along* necessarily involves one’s participation when all senses are committed to the journey and thus shows, even shapes, the one who is travelling. Therefore, if the practice of *wayfaring* is replaced by *transportation*, the mode of being is lost. To the traveller who is *being transported* (opposed to *being*) the journey feels almost like an exile, the time loses its meaning and becomes wasted and senseless. Tim Ingold also adds that it is not the mechanical means that differentiates the transport, but “by the dissolution of the intimate bond that, in wayfaring, couples locomotion and perception” (2007:78). Moving in the place and being works directly with our thoughts and the process of knowledge gathering.

The rise of transportation causes another major shift that happens on the level of the line. The trail is modified and turned into a dotted line, which then becomes a transportation line: “They differ from lines of wayfaring in precisely the same way that the connector differs from the gestural trace. They are not trails but routes” (2007:79). Such routes can also be formed intentionally, meaning even before there is transportation to use them. Occasionally, such an infrastructure is motivated by imperial powers, which always interpret any land as a blank surface. These routes then are occupational lines and, opposite to what the meaning entails, they do not connect, but divide. Integration of imperial routes motivated the creation of maps, which completely dismisses the previous traces of the land: “The gestural trace, or the line that has

gone out for a walk, has no business in the discipline of cartography” (Ingold 2007:85). The map is made for connectors and the more expanded the net is, the more wholesome picture one has.

The same equation is applied to gathering knowledge in general. Telling stories is inseparable from understanding and, naturally, the things that stories tell us about *occur* (opposed to *exist*) and are, therefore, topics and not objects. Tim Ingold expands that: “To tell a story, then, is to relate, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, retracing a path through the world that others, recursively picking up the threads of the past lives, can follow in the process of spinning out their own” (2007:90). Both in *wayfaring* and in gathering of knowledge, there is no rush, or, at least, speed plays no major role. Ingold suggests that in destination-oriented transport or in knowledge build-up (therefore imperial mapping), speed is seen as the very central aspect. The success of transportation and knowledge means that it was fast. The movement and involvement no longer are the necessary experiences on a journey. Rather, passengers undergo the well adopted: “enforced immobility and sensory deprivation. On arrival, the traveller is released from his bonds only to find that his freedom of movement is circumscribed within the limits of the state” (2007:103). The problem is, according to Tom Ingold, that our physical movement is directly connected with our thinking processes or as he himself phrases it “in reality, knowledge is not built up as we go across, but rather as we go along” (2007:102). The modern architect Le Corbusier is mentioned by Ingold because he designed linear and clear-cut streets, for people of reason, someone who: “walks the straight line because he has a goal and knows where he is going, he has made up his mind to reach some particular place and goes straight to it” (Le Corbusier 1924:274 quoted in Ingold 2007:153). Even though it sounds rather convincing as an architectural goal, it implies something harmful, namely, the way one walks, is the way one thinks - only in straight lines. Tim Ingold notices that from such a view comes the saying *thinking straight*, that is mostly seen as ‘literate science against oral tradition’ (Ingold 2007:153). This is not the only association that has been made. Linearity somehow started mapping the sexual distinction and became linked with masculinity, whereas curvature represents femininity. To take it even further, broadly accommodated expressions need to be mentioned: “the *twisted* mind of the pervert, the *crooked* mind of the criminal, the *devious* mind of the swindler and the *wandering* mind of the idiot” (2007:153). It becomes clear what an immense impact on our thinking mapping did, but, as Tim Ingold reminds us, let’s not forget that the environment is a cobweb of intertwined lines: “Ecology, in short, is the study of the life of lines” (2007:103).

Edward Casey is another well-known scholar who is interested in place, but he addresses the notion from phenomenological respect. I will be concentrating on his work *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1996) which is a rather detailed presentation of Western philosophical approach towards the notion of place and how it changed and developed. Both Tim Ingold and Edward Casey have noticed a disturbing shift that diminished the importance of the place and both of them see it as something that affects people in quite many significant respects. Edward Casey concentrates on the assimilation and depreciation of place, especially when compared with space and time and is advocating for its recognition.

Edward Casey starts his analysis with the old Greek terms of *cosmos* and *topos*. He particularly draws our attention to the word *Topocosmos*, which indicates an essential mythical role that place once had. When the creation of a world used to be considered, it is not the temporal that was the main condition, but the place. This is clearly reflected in cosmogonic myths and tales that rarely offer a chronological narrative, because they are built on the *cosmo-logic*. The idea that a place gains significance once someone starts acting in it, is an important similarity shared with Ingold, yet Casey also wants to point out the priority of a place, when compared with time or space. He says that places mark and define the world and, therefore, the duality and co-existence emerge, for both stand as a condition needed for the other.

Spatial extension gained significant attention in the Renaissance and Casey names the ‘invention’ of ‘infinite space’ its triumph. As time passed, this preoccupation with space turned into thinking that “spatial world could not be contained, and thus could not be conceived, as a matter of place alone” (1998:134). All of this was happening together with the newly developing view on nature, one that is exclusively mechanical. The attention is called to the shift that ended in a critical reduction of a place that then became equated to barely more than a position. This idea directly correlates to Tim Ingold’s point, that once imperial mapping started, the places were reduced to mere connecting points. The ability to point to a place the object is in, deceptively shows itself as a rather logical means to look at and evaluate the world. In reality, it becomes a limitation for a deeper understanding about places. As Casey puts it: “the inherent dynamism of place, its power to act or simply to resist, has given way to the supineness of space regarded as an indefinitely passible, indeed a passive medium” (1998:141). He even notices an interesting parallel between absolutization of space and one of God, whose existence seems to dwell in beyond time and space. The critical message of this understanding is, according to Casey, that place is completely left out as unimportant, and space gains God-like qualities. The focus lands on the beyondness of place, what is grand is beyond place.

For his analysis, Casey investigates some ideas that Rene Descartes introduced, as he thinks them to be active participants in the devaluation of the place. He proceeds to notice that relations established in the external place or among extended bodies: “have no separate status, no epistemological or metaphysical weight, apart from the very bodies they serve to situate” (1998:160). Descartes, explains Casey, only considers place as a situation for the bodies: “Place is a hybrid entity: as volumetric, it is like a thing; as situational, it is unthinglike and purely relations” (ibid.:161). Casey accurately points out that these trends of thinking pushed: “toward that fateful reduction of place to ‘site’ that will become the pervasive destiny of place [...] Place is no longer a genuine *measurant*, a measuring force, but something merely *measured*” (1998:165). Casey believes that the supremacy of space is being called upon. The characteristics of “abstractness”, “infinity” and finally “relativity” of space that eventually rules over.

Rene Descartes presents ‘extension’ as one of his key concepts regarding space. Casey explains that: “this means in turn that we cannot regard extension as an empty field or mere set of dimensions that comes to be occupied, fully or in part, by physical bodies [...] Not only does matter occupy space, but space *is* matter” (1998:153). This conclusion, however, does not leave Casey satisfied as he says that, in such a case, the difference between space and place is rather unclear, or simply leaves the place as a representative of a ‘situation’. Casey is rather unsatisfied with such understanding of a place and proceeds to notice that relations established in the external place or among extended bodies “have no separate status, no epistemological or metaphysical weight, apart from the very bodies they serve to situate” (1998:160). Rene Descartes, explains Casey, only considers place as a situation for bodies: “Place is a hybrid entity: as volumetric, it is like a thing; as situational, it is unthinglike and purely relations” (ibid.:161). There comes a change, however, with Locke’s proposal that place, unlike before considered, is not given, naturally pre-existing, but constructed by humans for their own practical intentions: namely, as Casey indicates, to measure the distance between objects. Casey accurately points out that these trends of thinking pushed: “toward that fateful reduction of place to ‘site’ that will become the pervasive destiny of place [...] Place is no longer a genuine *measurant*, a measuring force, but something merely *measured*” (1998:165). Casey believes that the supremacy of space is being called upon and lists reasons how space swallowed up place. First, he says, is the “abstractness”, then the “infinity” and finally the “relativity” of space that eventually rules over. Additionally, Casey reports that also Kant anticipated the diminishing of place to site by claiming that it is the human body that makes the uniqueness of the place possible and also symbolising it at the same time.

“In becoming a mere series of sites for matter in motion, nature becomes placeless as well as qualityless; and *it is both precisely insofar as it is also bodiless*” (1998:212). The body of the perceiver does not work only as an instrument to register the sensations, but is an active player for the perception of the scene. To put it shortly, it is because of the body that we are able to locate ourselves in any place and, therefore, place is related to actions of the body. To better explain this idea, Casey turns to Husserl and points out that through the medium of our bodies we establish ourselves as “I-centre”. This brings to the idea that space is strictly objective: “The way I feel my own body being/moving in a place will have a great deal to do with the way I experience that place itself” (1998:219). What closely corresponds to the analysis of Tim Ingold, is that Casey indicates walking as one of the best tools to understand and feel like a complete, united organism. Thus it implies that the act of walking and moving through a place allows one to be one with themselves. Casey, following and developing the ideas in Husserl, claims that only when the subject is feeling like a unity, he/she can do other activities. These eventually turn into being a united core-world: “organic self-unification is the condition of the unification of the surrounding world” (1998:225). The close relation of body and place brings us to a rather paradoxical combination when realism and transcendentalism are conjoined. The paradoxicality lies in the relations being at the same time subjective and objective, private and public. Casey brings up a very interesting claim: philosophers who recognised the body as the essential clue, could not overlook the importance of the place to the discourse. “The conjunction itself, however, is made possible precisely because the body is already social and public in its formation and destiny [...] while places for their part are idiosyncratic in their constitution and appearance” (1998:241). Casey quotes Wallace Stevens, who concluded that: “I am the world in which I walk” (1998:228).

Edwards Casey also recognises Heidegger’s ideas as formative and, to summarise, says that the philosopher used an approach “by indirection”. To his opinion, Heidegger chose a middle way, the in-between: “Thanks to such features as gathering and nearness, place becomes for him the very scene of Being’s disclosure and of the openness of the Open in which the truth is unconcealed” (1998:244). Even though Heidegger has put quite a lot of importance on temporality, the place creeps in as something that might be reached in other ways than bodily. It shows itself as an environment for the postmetaphysical event, therefore, a rather localised point. Localisation in this case does not mean the previously mentioned ‘featurelessness’, but quite contrary, a place where *Dasein* projects directions (like left and right). It is, thus, already a worthy place, a place to locate oneself ‘alongside’ a familiar world. Edward Casey puts the

emphasis on the observation that the subject does not locate ‘space’ in themselves. The reason for it is because the subject is spatial and not mental, where *spatial* means being ‘in the world’.

Tim Ingold and Edward Casey build their ideas from different perspectives, but they share some overlapping points. The place for them performs an important part in people’s relation to life and themselves. They both agree that the devaluation of place that happened is damaging and that importance and recognition of it should be brought back. Edward Casey demonstrates how place differs from space and time, while Tim Ingold shows how travelling through places is directly connected to being and gathering knowledge. These ideas will be essential for navigating through my analysis of the novel *Voss*, which starts with the first part titled *A Colonial Quest* that will be followed by *Relational Cartography* and the *Through the Desert towards Self-Sufficiency*.

### 3. A Colonial Quest

The expedition that Voss wants to perform is firstly a quest. Quest is one of the most ancient archetypes in literature and is traditionally associated with a romantic and brave gesture. The quest features a strong love line and an objective that the knight will have to achieve at the price of great effort and sacrifice. The love line of the story is somewhat unconventional. Laura Trevelyan is the niece of his benefactor, Mr. Bonner, and Voss first meets her when he steps by at an unlikely time, when the rest of her family is at church. However, Laura remained home, as she made a “decision that she could not remain a convinced believer” (1994:3). This is their first encounter, already pointing out how the two are separate from societal customs. Their bond is much more intellectual than physical and the connection forming between the characters will reach a metaphysical level. Although Voss meets Laura only several weeks before leaving, he feels a certain trust and promises to share his journey with her. He tells her: “While I am engaged on this expedition [...], I will, of course, keep a journal, that you will read afterwards, and follow me step by step” (85). Even though both characters have concealed their emotions while in Sydney, the first letter sent from Voss invites her to: “[...] *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” (147). With some reservations he openly invites her to keep their union alive, but, importantly, their relation remains poetic.

As the novel starts, the quest is already set in motion and the agreement between Voss and his benefactor – Mr. Bonner – already in place. Unlike his niece, the patron is a respected man who attends masses as required. He is driven by colonialist thinking and a utilitarian vision, calculating the personal gain that the results of the expedition might bring. A developed map would allow him to use the land for farming or extraction, thus broadening his wealth. Even though it is not Mr. Bonner who goes into the bush to explore Australia, he considers his money to validate as an action and without a doubt he regards the funding as a good deed for the whole community. This expedition symbolises claiming the undiscovered land and mapping it, appropriating it as he sees fit. Using Platz's words: "Total manageability leading to an enjoyment of power appears to be the gist of the functional view of Australia with its marked orientation towards the future" (1984:172). Mr. Bonner would wish to control as much land as possible, but, preferably, without many hardships: "No doubt he would have subscribed to a Crusade, just as he would continue, if called upon, to support the expedition, but in hard cash, and not in sufferings of spirit" (149). Naturally, he expects to get the most benefits for himself. His status of importance in the local community grew even before the expedition started, because he was considered a philanthropist. His wife, as Mariadele Boccardi points out, supports such view: "Mrs Bonner refers to Voss's journey to the interior as "an event of national significance" and "[a]n historical occasion" in quick succession, with the narrator continuing and at the same time ridiculing the nationalist discourse by the ironic metaphor of the "flag she intended to plant upon the summit of her argument" (78) (2019:7). His relation to land, as in fact also to people, is merely possessional. Mr. Bonner manages land and people, as he would manage his business, even his rare spurts of kindness have a tone of domination: "Regrettably, his kind offer sounded something like a command" (66). The relation between him and Voss is not an exception, being based on a certain balance of dominance: "The merchant at once mistook indifference to submission. The expression on his face had clarified as he sat forward to continue in full pride of superior strength." (16). Voss, on the other hand, seems to act according to other principles, although being wholly reliant on the funding from Mr. Bonner. However, he cares little about the prestige of the merchant and challenges his power position on almost any occasion: "Mr Bonner, who has been trying all this time to take the German aside, to talk to him intimately, to possess him in front of all the others, was growing more and more preposterous [...]" (105). Even though the merchant had to almost chase the German for some private conversation, Mr. Bonner still assumes his superiority: "The merchant's eye grew moist over a fresh relationship that he had created by magnanimity and his own hand." (105).

Voss chooses not to emphasise this asymmetry between his ideas and means to achieve them; he rather comforts himself by assuming that his goals are too complicated for simple-minded people like the merchant. “If we would compare meanings, Mr Bonner, [...] we would arrive perhaps at different conclusions.” (14). One of the motives for this expedition is to map the yet unknown land and describe it in categories of imperial science. In the end, he does want to map the unexplored parts of Australia, it is only important that he does it first and in his own way. Despite that, he sees further and links mapping together with asserting an attachment to a place. Voss wishes to belong somewhere, and the exploration of the unknown will let him claim his place: “I will venture to call it my country, although I am a foreigner” (34). Importantly, his will needs to be challenged during the journey, as: “Your future is what you will make it. Future [...] is will” (62).

It is important to point out that Voss himself follows that same colonialist agenda and thinking. His quest is not itself a purely selfless act, it is also a colonial quest. Therefore, it does not matter if the motivations of his benefactor are different from his own: “He had his vocation, it was obvious, and equally obvious that his patron would not understand” (14). In the story we learn that Voss, even while struggling, thinks highly of himself, often assuming a higher moral ground: “It would be better [...] that I should go barefoot and alone. I know. But it is useless to try to convey to others the extent of that knowledge” (63). Voss’s wish to better himself through the means of expedition in the wilderness does, however, signify an emotional link between world and feelings. Norbert Platz notices that “both Bonner and Voss assume God-like qualities, for both have targeted their thinking to submitting the continent to human will” (1984:174). As both Mr. Bonner and Voss share this feeling of worthy superiority, they cannot build an honest relationship based on understanding. They do not really appreciate each other’s stance, as they think theirs to be the only right one. Platz observes furthermore an important connection: “What Bonner’s pragmatic and utilitarian view, on the one hand, and Voss’s highly idiosyncratic stance, on the other, have in common is that both attitudes reflect the process of secularization [...] Using scientific thinking, man detached himself from the world emotionally so that he may subjugate it to his desire and will” (1984:174). Mr. Bonner wants everyone to submit to his power and influence, be it Australian land, be it Voss. His aspirations contrasts with his name, as Platz points out: “The fact that Bonner is of English extraction and that the English suffix “-er” indicates an agent, an agent who produces “the good/goodness”, evokes

the historical connection between the French Enlightenment and nineteenth-century English Utilitarianism” (1984:171-172). This collaboration strikes therefore for oddity, as both men are very different: “They were two blue-eyed men, of a different blue. Voss would frequently be lost to sight in his, as birds are in sky. But Mr Bonner would never stray far beyond familiar objects.” (11).

As much as he would like to, Voss cannot perform the expedition on his own. With the advice of the benefactor, he forms a team of European men. They quickly realise that their journey would not last long unless someone knowing and practising the art of wayfaring would guide them. This is how two barely English-speaking Aboriginal guides join the party. Importantly, they are not treated the same as other members and seem to perform a shielding function – both from harsh environment, both from locals they might encounter on the way. As Voss is concerned with claiming and owning, he immediately recognises how the Aboriginals differ from him: “Their bare feet made upon the earth only a slight, but very particular sound, which, to the German’s ears, at once established their ownership.” (163). Nevertheless, the landlord who recommended the two locals – Dugald and Jackie – to join the team, looks down upon them and would raise his voice “only because he was addressing blacks, and it made his meaning clear” (163-164). Voss, who is somewhat drawn to the Aboriginals, nevertheless, expresses the same superior colonial stance, he calls them “creatures” and, as a token of goodwill, offers Dugald “a brass button that he had happened to have in his pocket” (164). Ironically, it is that same button that is found by the search expedition that was formed after Voss’s party did not come back. The Colonel, who led the search, has found only “a button under a tree” (400) and nothing else.

It is clear that Voss relates to the Aboriginals as he would to some wild animals – in many ways similar to humans but at the same time impossible to fully understand, therefore mysterious. Or, as Mr. Boyle, the one who recommended the natives, puts it: “Like all aboriginals they will blow with the wind, or turn to lizards when they are bored with their existing shapes.” (163). And he feels that way, because the Aboriginals are one with their land, they know how to blend in, how to survive. For example, while the party rides through what seems like an empty land for them the Aboriginal boy Jackie “was always killing things, or scenting a waterhole, or seeing smoke in the distance” (235). The explorers’ mindset, especially in the beginning of the journey, is of *transportational* mode, to use Tim Ingold’s notion: they are primarily concerned

with reaching some point. The locals, thus, possess certain mysteriousness and this quality Voss transfers to the whole continent of Australia, an opinion he will express on multiple occasions: “Although so little of my country is known to me as yet”; “But in this disturbing country, so far as I am acquainted with it already, it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite“ (29). Nevertheless, neither he, nor the settler part of the expedition would be able to fully navigate through the land if not for their provisions and tools. This reliance is especially felt, when, after crossing the river, the party “stood rooted in the urgent need to find the compass” (176), which they will find, eventually. Compass will also return as a focal point of division when the team will discuss a possibility of splitting up in two groups “with or without compass” (287).

The team of the expedition displays yet another important figure of Australian literature – it portrays an example of mateship. All men come from different backgrounds and, even though they recognise Voss to be in a leading position, are travelling as equals: “Men shouted to their mates, their voices whipping the blue air, or else were silent, smiling to themselves, dozing in their well-greased saddles under the yellow sun [...]” (148). The mixture of the group is meaningfully important as it also works as a metaphor to the whole population of Australia, which consists of many different people. The nature and the landscape that they share makes the members of the expedition equal. This sense of mateship arises particularly because of the environment they find themselves in: “[...] when they had made themselves at home beneath the rock ledge, they were noticeably united” (247). The travelling through the unmapped parts of the land lets them experience wayfaring, where the routes are made as they go. As a scholar Deb Narayan Bandopadhyay notes, “the concrete level of topographical exploration is gradually transformed into a form of spiritual experience” (2009:128). Their pasts lose significance for at least those moments, when they let the place capture them, like when “they went walking through the good grass, and the present absorbed them utterly” (214). It is the “apparent simplicity of space” that roots them in the moment, “free, of past, and future” (187). Once Voss and his team enter the harsh Australian topographical adversity in its many different shapes, they start confronting diverse emotional responses, one of which is a sense of mateship. “The country had absorbed them to a great extent, and now, in the deepening shade of evening, on the edge of the brigalow scrub, they were diffident of confessing to their own lives” (255).

#### 4. Relational Cartography

As previously established, land is an essential figure in the novel. The role of place is integral to Voss's quest, as his metaphysical journey is very much intertwined with his physical struggles. Referring back to Edward Casey's ideas, it is not the temporal or spatial that initiates the German's transformations, but his response to the place. Bandopadhyay points out that: "As Voss and his party progress through their journey, they traverse various forms of space, thereby moving along new frontiers of the Australian landscape." (2009:128). While progressing towards the wilderness, the party stops at two farms on the fringes of the mapped area. Rhine Towers and Jildra are, respectively, run by Sanderson and Boyle. Both places portray two very different examples of how European settlers established their property in nineteenth-century Australia. First, the expedition enters the "gentle, healing landscape in those parts" (118). Rhine Towers embodies an establishment with friendly relationships between the owners and the workers. There the party of the expedition encounter calming silence and have a glimpse at the livelihoods of some free settlers and an emancipist whose daily activities create "an aura of timelessness enveloped in their rooted bodies" (119). This healing environment immediately affects Voss who "appeared to glow" and "was ready to believe that all men are good" (119). The place they are travelling through deletes their contrasting features and makes them equal: "[...] there was no difference – at that moment, and in that place" (121). Mr. Sanderson and his wife express respect towards their work force and, despite their successful property, remain humble: "both he and his wife would wash their servants' feet in many thoughtful and imperceptible ways" (120).

As the party progresses further for Jildra, the landscape changes somewhat, increasingly becoming drier and emptier: "By now the tall grass was almost dry, so that there issued from it a sharper sighing when the wind blew." (159). Mr. Boyle, who owns the second farm, does not care much for order and tidiness. His home was a "shack of undaubed slab" (160), whose dirty floor was "littered with crumbs and crusts" (ibid.). Yet there are many Aboriginal people, especially women, living on the property with him. His piece of land, curiously, reflects his mental state. When talking, Mr. Boyle "was twitching with his mouth to release the words, or some personal daemon" (161). The landowner has been changed by his land and now explores "the depths of one's own repulsive nature" (161). Even though Jildra strongly contrasts with Rhine Towers and in many ways seems unkept, unordered, and shabby, it also somehow better

reflects the increasing harshness of the Australian environment. Voss, who is strongly affected by the environment feels that “in the presence of almost every one of his companions, and particularly in the company of Brendan Boyle, he was drawn closer to the landscape; [...] and of that landscape, always, he would become the centre” (163). At last, the expedition leaves the last civilised point and enter the vast wilderness: “In that flat country of secret colours, their figures were small, even when viewed in the foreground. Their great horses had become as children’s ponies” (166). In White’s ecological imaginary, travellers’ manliness, egos and characters look small in comparison to the vastness and grandness of nature which will unleash the harshest challenges on the expedition.

To Voss, the purpose of the journey ahead is to claim the mysterious land to which he is drawn and to test his will. A lesson of humility will come without his willingness but will prove inevitable. In fact, before embarking on the expedition Voss explains to Laura: “My God, besides, is above humility.” (84). To Voss everyone’s God is a reflection of the self, therefore “easily destroyed, because in their own image. Pitiful because such destruction does not prove the destroyer’s power” (83), it is his pride and his will that keeps him moving further: “*Atheism* is self-murder.” (ibid.). He is yet unable to see that this strong sense of pride is hindering his chances of finding a place of belonging. In a way, Voss is too proud to admit that he is looking for a place to call home, because such a need translates to him as weakness, which he cannot tolerate: “Ah, the humility, the humility! This is what I find so particularly loathsome” (82). Laura observingly tells the German that she thinks he is flattered when experiencing “the hatred, or even the mere irritation of weaker characters” (82). Voss is often unable to disguise his intolerance towards the things he learnt to despise: “He was wiping his lips, which had begun to twitch, though in anger, certainly, not from weakness” (83). The literary scholar Rodney Edgecombe rightfully points out that the “strange transvaluation of human disability and immorality, so that frailty becomes a crime, points to the up-endedness of Voss’s scale of values, and to the rampancy of his pride.” (144).

For the very same reason that Voss is directly affected by the environment through which he moves and by his desire for silence and movement, the desert in White’s novel becomes a scene for both wanted and unwanted lessons. As Shirley Paolini remarks: “the desert journey affords Voss the opportunity to shed his pride and become humble” (1990:89). After a few encounters with the German explorer, Laura also notices that: “You are so vast and ugly, [...] I can imagine

some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice, and, yes, even hatred. You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places” (82). Laura touches upon a very important aspect – throughout the novel we are continuously reminded of Voss’s angularity and sharpness. Voss would “lay rather stiffly on the bed” (38), his smiling defined by “the skin was tight against his teeth” (39), his face “as if it has been wood” (49), “his lips were thin and cracked before the season of thirst had set in” (63), even his clothes “appear sculptured for eternity” (165). All of this is laconically summarised by Laura who tells him: “I would not want a marriage with stone” (61). As was already pointed out, Voss possesses stone or mineral-like qualities and he is at the same time constantly moving in search for a place to which he could belong, although essentially remaining isolated and incapable of full attachment, both physical and emotional. He is, indeed, erratic, both in the sense of prone to making errors and moving like a rock. Deriving from the Latin ‘*errare*’ (“to wander”) this word can also be used to describe a particular geological formation “wandering” according to thawing cycles.

The Latin verb brings us also to the “knight errant”, an essential figure of the genre of romance and the structural dimension of the quest, which is another aspect of Voss’s journey in White’s fiction. Applied to living beings, “errant” is someone who travels in search of adventures, who goes in the wrong direction or, in zoology, is an actively moving predator. Jean-Pierre Durix considers rockiness to represent endurance and points to Voss’s “disguised form of identification with materials which remain untouched by death” (2008:352). Voss is indeed drawn to the edgy and lasting rocks: “Deadly rocks, through some perversity, inspired him with fresh life” (12). In fact, Voss often seems to have blended with the landscape of the desert. Harry, a young lad devotedly following the explorer, observes: “the sun’s rays striking the surrounding rocks gave the impression that the German was at the point of splintering into light. There he sat, errant, immaculate, but ephemeral, if he had not been supernal” (240). At the end of the novel the stone metaphor is given a body and Voss literally becomes a statue: a monument to commemorate the explorer is erected after he fails to return from the expedition. In death, Voss literally takes up the shape of an errant rock, planted into the Australian landscape, in which he wanted to belong, but could not quite do so in life.

The lithic figuring of the life and death dialectic in the narrative highlights how White’s novel systematically sets up structural dualities. Thus, there is a contrasting side to Voss’s minerality. Laura embodies a different trope – the one of femininity as a metaphor for nature. Starting with

the most obvious aspects, her name communicates this metaphor from the very beginning. Laura is associated with the laurel, and it is to her that Voss wants to come back as a victor. In that respect, she is not unlike the laurel wreath given to the successful knights in mediaeval romances. In similar vein, Mr. Bonner's daughter Belle, after marrying decorated in pear blooms, is afterwards associated with them. To Voss femininity equates to the loss of will, weakness, empty faithfulness, but Laura challenges his views. She is more composed, colder, thoughtful than Voss's general idea of femininity. Importantly, persistence to metaphysically follow him on the journey and to wait for his return conflicts with the idea that feminine necessarily demonstrates weakness and loss of will. The most prevailing and even emphasised link remains, that nature – especially in its green, lush side – correlates to femininity and womanhood to Voss. He is usually communicating with Laura when they are in fresh air or a garden, even in his visions she appears in green places.

The name of Laura's maiden is Rose, which connects her to the ideas about flesh, fertility and femininity. Her whole being is described in very physical terms: "her big breasts moved dully as she spoke" (1), "her heavy chin sunk in her bosom, with her hands pressed together, almond-shape, in her great lap" (46). The usage of 'heavy' and 'sunk' instantaneously points to Rose's connection to the earth, while 'bosom', 'almond-shape' and 'great lap' symbolises fertility and womanhood. Duality is an essential part of White's novel, and he constructs a weirdly averted relationship between Laura and her closest maid Rose. Laura is often appalled by the maid, and it is particularly because of the demonstrated carnality: "But Rose remained, her breasts moving in her brown dress. Laura Trevelyan had continued to feel repelled" (47). In fact, Laura, not unlike Voss, is not fond of touches – "persistent touch was terrifying to her" (116) - thus her relationship with Rose is made even more complicated as the latter would enjoy helping her lady to dress up or to attentively brush the hair, while Laura would suffer through it and "make a special effort to smile at the woman, who was immediately grateful" (46). Rose also embodies domesticity as she literally takes care of other people, which is another feminine characteristic expressed in her character. Moreover, she is the one that allows herself physical relationship and falls pregnant, which makes her even more alike a blooming rose: "[...] the flesh of roses was becoming personal, as she [Laura] cut long, pointed buds, or heavy blooms that would fall by evening" (152). Laura, Belle and Mrs. Bonner worry quite much about the pregnancy of their maid, while Rose herself accepts the reality with calmness: "I shall resist all the attempts to make me suffer, or bring suffering to others" (70). Significantly, it is Laura who looks after

the baby as her own and, when Rose dies sometime later after the birth, takes on the responsibility with affection. The birth scene becomes a metaphysically transformative event for Laura, who experiences it with physical sensations, her “throat was bursting with it [pain]” (224), and who bit the inside of her cheek, as the child came away from her body” (ibid.). In her painful delirium we are told that: “Their livid, living stone was turning, by divine mercy, into flesh” (224). White’s grammar is unclear in this passage, because the pronoun ‘their’ does not refer back to two people, only to Laura. Nevertheless, the turning of the ‘living stone’ draws the linkage to Voss, whose mineral qualities we already discussed previously. Once again, we encounter a dualistic relation that White has incorporated in *Voss*. Laura and Rose are both feminine, but their modes of femininity are different, therefore, while Rose experiences a physical and bodily birth, Laura delivers the baby through metaphysical means. The baby also becomes the ‘flesh’ of Laura’s and Voss’s poetic relationship – she considers herself in a marriage with him, thus the baby becomes their daughter called Mercy.

Another important aspect related to the portrayal of femininity in *Voss* is that women in the novel are usually “rooted”. The image of roots is particularly recurrent in the context of Laura: either Laura and Voss end up walking in a garden with exposed roots of plants, or something in her appearance brings up the comparison to roots: “on her forehead, at the roots of her hair” (65). While on the expedition, Voss mishears her voice: “Too late, Laura says, or was it the shiny, indigenous leaves in which a little breeze had started up. She was clothed in it” (192). He is not only comparing her to leaves of the plant, but expressed her “rootedness” through the adjective ‘indigenous’, that implies she is a native of this land where he tries to belong. Aboriginal women too, are always portrayed as “rooted” to the place and the land they live on, or, at least, very close to it. Encountering a tribe Voss calls them “the ant-women who were engrossed by the continuance of life” (370). Ants are very earthy creatures, at first sight might even be difficult to stop, but they are, nevertheless, doing their meaningful deeds, making the circle of life turn. The Aboriginal wife of the emancipist Judd explains: “I do not love any other place, anyways enough to go back. This is my place.” (140). Later on, examining her further, Voss uses botanic lexicon to describe what he saw: “These were her true eyes, looking through the ferns at all wonders, animal-black, not wishing to interpret” (140). The lack of interpretation might seem like a negative trait, but in the context of Voss’s metaphysical journey, it translates as belonging to a place. During the scene of metaphysical dreaming, Voss seems to communicate with Laura in their shared sleep. Roots and plants are at the centre of this

transmission, as “dark hairs of roots plastered on the mouth as water blew across, [...] they were joined together at the waist, and were the same flesh of lilies” (181). Roots and lilies are recurring elements of White’s symbolism. Once the old Aboriginal Dugald reaches his home, he “came to lake in which black women were diving for lily roots. [...] their hair tangle with the stalks of lilies, and black breasts jostle the white cups” (213). This repeated symbolism presents the link between femininity and nature, and between errant knight and “rooted” woman. The previously mentioned dream that Voss and Laura have together symbolises their physical relationship, but one that never takes place in real life. It is nevertheless significant that being in a dream union with Laura, translates to Voss as becoming “rooted”, just as she is. In other words, for Voss, finding a place in nature is the same as finding a soulmate.

## 5. Through the Desert towards Self-Sufficiency

Desert has already gained its firm symbolic and metaphorical value in literature because many stories employ it as the ultimate challenge. It is a place for moral, ethical, and physical trials. Voss has his goals set, but the travel through the unmapped and wild desert stands as the obstacle that our romantic errant knight must overcome for his quest to be completed. It helps that the German explorer identifies more easily with the rocks of the desert than with any people or place he has known before. In other words, he is not afraid of struggles and even welcomes them as he believes that “to make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself” (28). In the novel, as Bandopadhyay observes, “the coastal iconizes the superficial, the artificial, and the finite. But the interior is the mystical, the essential, and the infinite” (2009:129). The colonised and civilised part of Australia cannot perform as a setting for a quest. Edgecombe explains that “the desert journey takes on an archetypal meaning as a quest for the divine, the allegorical mode arising from descriptions that assume primary and secondary meaning” (In Paolini 1990:90). For the German explorer, he himself was the divinity: “It had become quite clear from the man’s [Voss’s] face that he accepted his own divinity” (138). Voss sets himself a goal to become self-sufficient and he is not afraid of any test of his will: “I am not in the habit of setting myself limits” (84). He displays a strong sense of pride and, as Laura comments, he is “standing in the glare of his own brilliant desert” (84).

Self-sufficiency might be the ultimate goal that Voss set for himself. A scholar, Jean-Pierre Durix, calls this goal “one of the main dynamic forces of Voss” (2008:351). Self-sufficiency,

in his case, seems to be stemming from the self-centeredness: “Knowing so much, I shall know everything” (21). Importantly, such a stance once again proves that Voss himself is applying a colonial mode of thinking: to him nature, therefore, also the desert, is a man’s servant. As he does not belong anywhere or with anyone, he grows a dislike for dependency on others: “All that was external to himself he mistrusted, and was happiest in silence which is immeasurable, like distance and the potentialities of the self” (16). Durix says that “a desire to become a self-sufficient unit is generally opposed to the necessity of accounting for the presence of social life or physical factors” (ibid.:351). To Voss, becoming fully self-sufficient would mean to need no one and to be enough for himself. He tries to strip himself of any unnecessary modern life commodities, but sometimes still “think[s] of the material world which his egoism had made him reject” (30). Carolyn Bliss phrases it as follows: “What is clear is that Voss’s purposes require him to renounce all gentler emotions, avoid all human relationships, and utterly repudiate the comforts of the flesh” (1986:65). Laura, who sensed the grandiosity of Voss’s project, was fearful for him from the beginning: “To maintain such standards of pride, in the face of what you must experience on this journey, is truly alarming” (84). Through the progression of the expedition, it becomes clear that in the desert lay important lessons which Voss must take in.

The limitation of language is closely related to Voss’s aim for self-sufficiency. On many occasions throughout the novel our protagonist reminds us that silence is what he craves for and that he cannot express himself well in English. To him, language in general is more limiting than freeing “for he was doubly locked in language” (268). Rodney Egdecombe indicates that “the very use of *style indirect libre* suggests the dispensability even of the authorial voice – the self-relying, self-revealing pattern of Voss’s thoughts is all that we have access to” (1984:142). Additionally, the vocabulary that men uses to navigate in the wild desert is colonial English, the language of the locals is unattainable to them, just like the knowledge that Australian Aboriginals share. The expedition tries to scientifically observe the surroundings, but their means are limited to their colonial education. When Voss wakes up after the intense experience of dreaming together with Laura, he realises that “Wörter haben keine Bedeutung” (eng. *Words have no meaning*) (184). We notice in the novel, how the protagonist hopes to somehow assimilate to the locals but also understands that it could be attained through some other means and not his language. While going through the healing part of the landscape in the beginning of their journey, Voss also expresses a bizarre-sounding idea that “it is necessary to communicate

without knowledge of the language” (163). This inspiration comes from his observation of the locals, Dugald and Jackie, who seemed to him “to have communicated with one another by skin and silence” (164). Such communication is freed from words and, thus, cannot be misinterpreted. Voss often feels misunderstood, and it goes together with a sense of devaluation: “None, he realized with a tremor of anger, was conscious of his strength. Mediocre, animal men never do guess at the power of rock or fire, until the last moment before those elements reduce them to – nothing.” (55).

Character weakness is not something that Voss is able to tolerate, and humility is one of such traits. Nevertheless, his colonial quest gradually turns into a lesson about it. The word “humility” itself comes from the Latin word “humus”, which translates to “earth”. As Norbert Platz puts it, “Voss is made to feel the weight of the earth” (1984:175). In other words, his expedition towards self-sufficiency in pride becomes a lesson about humbleness. The lesson comes directly from the land, the etymology of the word demands to pay attention to the place, which is indifferent to anyone’s expectations, Voss’s included. People’s attempt to reach or gain something are now and again interrupted by nature’s ways. The scholar Norbert Platz has explored how Western Consciousness shows itself in Voss. He suggests that “the matter versus mind finds a visible equivalent in the fact that the expedition, demonstration of the man’s “mental” preoccupation with progress(ing), comes to a standstill, which is dictated by material conditions” (1984:175). Voss, who starts his journey towards self-sufficiency with a strong sense of pride, has to face the reality that no one can retain it in the desert. The initial attempt to perform a colonial and scientific expedition becomes almost irrelevant as the party enters the bush and the outback. “They were riding eternally over the humped and hateful earth, which the sun has seared until the spent and crumbly stuff was become highly treacherous” (204).

Carolyn Bliss points out that “in the world of White’s fiction, failure is both humbling and enabling to the man of spiritual hungers” (1986:68). Our protagonist, who deemed himself a victor, fails in what he wanted to achieve. His quest for a place to belong departs from what could have been the only setting in which he would fit. The urbanite reality of Sidney, where he still found someone he bonds with, is dismissed as unnecessary comfort. His search is therefore doomed from the beginning and the desert will show him why. A colonialist will never be able to grasp the ancestral knowledge developed over centuries of populations born and raised in such an environment. This because Voss is a man who thinks in straight lines and does

not wander, thus lacks the ability to adapt to the shifting, harsh nature of the bush. He follows lines in a world dominated by threads and footprints: a world which is still untouched and cannot be accessible to a Western eye. His blind struggle for victory prevents him from seeing that “the mystery of life is not solved by success [...] but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming.” (265).

## 6. Conclusions

Australian literature distinguishes itself from other literatures in English, because of its idiosyncratic thematic tropes. The depiction of two essentially traditional Australian topics – mateship and landscape – helped this MA paper to analyse the fundamental human issues that Patrick White addresses in his novel *Voss* (1957). The analysis concentrates specifically on the notions of free will, pride, humbleness, and a sense of belonging and how they are shaped by the place the characters act in. To this end, I have followed the phenomenological thinking of Tim Ingold and Edward Casey who consider the phenomena of the place as a fundamental setting for human being and knowledge gathering.

Tim Ingold’s book *Lines: A Brief History* (2007) was very helpful for an elaborate understanding and interpretation of the expedition that the protagonist sets to perform. His theory suggests that travelling (especially *wayfaring*) is in relation to *being* and, thus, is a mode of it. Furthermore, travelling is directly connected with how people gather knowledge. Edward Casey’s study *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (1998) elaborately differentiated between the notions of place and space. He demonstrated how the place has lost its significance to space and provided an opinion on why it should gain it back. Even though both scholars approached the topic from different perspectives, their theories emphasize the importance of the place to human experiences.

The analysis of this MA thesis was focused on relations between the protagonist and the landscape. One of his goals for the expedition it is to map the unmapped land of Australian bush, but this colonial quest evolves into a double journey, namely physical and metaphysical. Starting, therefore, from a typical Western and colonialist mindset, the protagonist will learn that the environment cannot be understood without accepting the rules of the place. His quest

for knowledge and belonging therefore clashes dramatically with the desert and its barren reality, one that can be comprehended only by being in the place, rather than mapping it. What Voss will learn is that even a God-like stance will crumble in front of a hostile environment.

This MA thesis analyses only a part of the whole spectrum of topics offered by the novel. It remains as a fruitful source for further in-depth analysis.

## Santrauka lietuviškai

Australų literatūra, nors ir turtinga puikiais kultūrinės reikšmės kūriniais, dažnai vis dar yra neįvertinama, lyginant su plačiu anglakalbės literatūros kontekstu. Analizuodama kaip Patrick White'o romanas „Vossas“ (1957) tyrinėja australiškos kultūros broliškos draugystės (angl. mateship) ir landšafto tropus, šiame magistro darbe nagrinėju, kaip romanas pristato fundamentaliąsias žmogiškąsias problemas kaip laisva valia, laisvė, tikėjimas ir bendrumo jausmas. To siekdama naudojuosi Timo Ingoldo ir Edwardo Casey fenomenologinėmis idėjomis, kurios svarsto žmogaus santykį su vieta. Šios idėjos grindžia mano White'o kartografinės vaizduotės interpretacijas. Šiam darbui svarbiausios idėjos yra Ingoldo keliavimo kaip būdo būti analizė, bei Casey vietos, bei erdvės skirtis. Vadovaudamasi šia kryptimi, apmąstau būdus, kuriais vienas kitam nepamainomas savęs ir vietos kartografijos procesas atsiskleidžia ontologijoje, epistemologijoje, bei etinėje dimensijoje. Romane „Vossas“ mokslinė kolonijinės vietos ekspedicija tampa protagonisto žygiu (tiek fiziškai, tiek metafiziškai) į savęs paieškas, kurios atsiskleidžia per jo ambivalentišką ryšį su nepažįstama žeme, jos svetimais žmonėmis, bei savo paties išstremtumo ir nepritapimo jausmu.

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