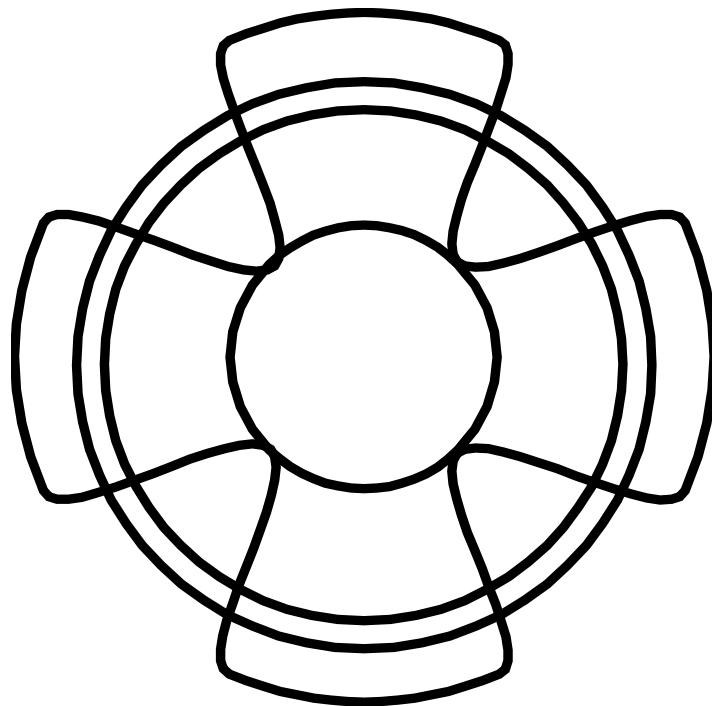


**The Internal Quest for Knowledge and the Personal  
Development of Johann Ulrich Voss in Terms of  
Religion and Psychology in Patrick White's *Voss***



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## **The Internal Quest for Knowledge and the Personal Development of Johann Ulrich Voss in Terms of Religion and Psychology in Patrick White's *Voss*.**

### **1. Introduction**

Working with Patrick White has been both interesting and challenging. Interesting as it has been like exploring a whole new and different universe, and challenging as it required quite a lot of knowledge to understand White's extensive use of symbols and allusions to various traditions.

When I read *Voss*, I was puzzled at first by White's special style, and when I turned to secondary literature, I was surprised to discover that the ways of interpreting the book were so many, not to mention so different from each other. In this essay I will not attempt yet another all-scale interpretation of *Voss*, which would be impossible within the given limits of space. Instead I will go into detail with one theme and see if it is possible to reach any valuable conclusions based on a relatively narrow study of a single subject.

I have chosen to focus on White's way of presenting the quest for illumination and the search for knowledge of the true nature of mankind. I intend to discuss how White uses different religious reference myths in *Voss* in order to support a description of his main character as a megalomaniac claiming divinity, who goes through a process of self-realisation, and in the end experiences illumination, realising his own true nature. With focus on The New Testament, The Gospel of St John in particular, and the Gnostic traditions, I will illustrate how White makes use of these traditions by means of symbolism, imagery, and allusions in general.

I will also make parallels to Jung's psychological studies of the human psyche. In his work, he has analysed both Christianity and Gnosticism at length in order to support his theory of the process of individuation, and in addition to this, he has worked extensively with the alchemical process, which is considered to be a symbol of the development of the psyche as well as a chemical process of turning base metals into gold. White seems to make use of this alchemical symbolism in combination

with the religious symbols and images, and I will attempt to show how he combines it all in his description of Voss.

In an attempt to limit the area of interest in this essay, I have decided to work solely with Voss and his inner development, and the symbols used to describe this. I realise that this creates some problems as all the other characters have some kind of significance, and that they influence Voss in all sorts of ways. The most important character is of course Laura, and it is certainly a problem to leave her out of an analysis of *Voss*. The relationship between Voss and Laura is extremely important, as she is one of the motivating factors of his personal change, but as I am only trying to describe the actual development within Voss, and not what motivates it, it is possible to leave her out of the analysis.

Finally, through close reading and some speculation based on my discussions of Gnostic thinking and Jung's psychological studies of the human psyche, I will try to argue for Voss' divination in the end of the novel. I have no intention of concluding that either White or Voss are Gnostics in any way, but I do intend to show that White raises and deals with some questions, which have occupied the minds of many thinkers throughout history, and that he rethinks conventional religion creating a new system of his own with a new set of ideals.

## **2 Religious Reference Myths**

White uses a bricolage technique as he makes use of intertextuality and various traditions by way of allusions and references. Literary critics reading *Voss* have made comparisons with authors such as Conrad, Blake and Eliot, and there are obvious parallels to literature such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* and Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress*. Various myths and legends come to mind like the story of Faust and the Arthurian legend of the quest for the Holy Grail. One may also analyse the novel from a philosophical point of view using German philosophy and Existentialism as inspiration. The possibilities are endless.

As mentioned I have chosen to work with the religious reference myths in *Voss* and look at the symbols White uses to refer to these traditions. He is

constantly alluding to the Bible using various texts from both the Old and the New Testament, but he is also aware of the Gnostic innovation of the Christian doctrine, and the consequent change of focus from received or preached knowledge to the mystical and personal experience of esoteric knowledge.

## 2.1 The Gospel of St John

In my opinion, the Gospel of St John (henceforth referred to as St John) is one of the most important religious texts to have in mind when working with the religious aspect of *Voss*, as White uses references to this text in order to characterise Voss' illusory belief in his own divinity. Voss considers himself to be divine in the best part of the novel (144,175,250), but towards the end, he renounces his claim to divinity, and abdicates the throne he has placed himself upon (366). The other characters also seem to "sense his divinity" (175), especially Harry Robarts, who has faith in him and calls him "Lord" several times. (366)

St John is the fourth and final of the gospels, and it is extremely interesting as it differs from the three Synoptic Gospels in terms of its message. In the Synoptics Jesus is preaching the Kingdom of God, whereas in St John his preaching is focusing on his own divine nature (Noack 127). There is a direct parallel between Voss and St John's Jesus Christ in Voss' speech imagined by Le Mesurier, which ends: "... I am, I am, I am" (250). This could be a reference to Exodus where God says to Moses: "I am who I am" and "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I Am has sent me to you'." (3.14), but considering the reference to the divine Word only a few lines below, I think the connection to St John is also possible. The latter is known for the metaphors in which Jesus says, among other things, "*I am* the light of the world"(8.12), "*I am* the resurrection and the life"(11.26), and "*I am* the way, and the truth, and the life"(14.6) (emphasis added). With the nature of St John in mind, this parallel may underline some of Voss' characteristics. He is, like Christ, in a way preaching his own divinity, and it is important to remember that the overall aim of his journey is to prove his own divine nature.

As mentioned above, Voss' speech is referred to as "the divine Word" (250), and this may indeed underline the comparison with Christ. In the very beginning of St John, Christ is identified with the Word (Logos):

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God; (1.1-2)

Even in the *Revelation*, Christ is called "The Word of God" (19.13) and to make the parallel explicit, White has referred to the *Revelation* in connection with Palfreyman's uncle who has been working "for many years on a key to the *Revelation of St John the Divine*" (263). It is important here to bear in mind that the word used in the original Greek version of NT for the Word, and thus Christ, is Logos (λόγος). This is important, as Logos is a word, or concept rather, which has been used in a metaphysical sense in Old Testament as well as by ancient philosophy. Webster's Encyclopedia defines 'logos' as both "the rational principle that governs and develops the universe" and "the divine word or reason incarnate in Jesus Christ". It has been translated from Greek as for example discourse, ratio, thought, and reckoning. Naturally there is a great difference from the way ancient philosophy used Logos to St John's use of it, but generally it seems to have connotations of a greater knowledge of the world and a deeper meaning or understanding of life. By calling Voss the divine Word, he is identified with some kind of divine enlightenment, if not Christ himself.

Another important feature of St John, which differentiates it from the Synoptics is a focus on the dualistic thought of a division between life and death, light and darkness etc. An example of this is evident in the beginning of St John: "4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."(1.4-5) Because of thoughts like these, it has been discussed if the author of St John had any connections to Gnostic traditions (Müller 63).

## 2.2 Gnosticism

There are many different Gnostic schools of thought, and they differ radically in many respects. For instance they are different in their attitudes to life in this world, as they range from liberalism to extreme asceticism.

Generally, however, all the Gnostic traditions are based on a strictly dualistic system of light and darkness, and they have similar versions of the system of creation. In short, the cosmology of the world is based on a fall in the lower part of the divine world caused by 'Ignorance'. One of the lower gods, Sophia, conceived a desire to know the supreme authority who is in principal unknowable, and this desire became an evil god, called the demiurge, who created our material world. Thus all humans are in fact creations of evil, forced to live in darkness and ignorance. However, in every human there is a divine spark of light, which makes man long for a reunion with his divine origin. This reunion can only be realised if the spark of light is freed from the body, its prison in the material world. This kind of salvation in Gnostic terms can only be achieved through enlightenment or 'gnosis' - knowledge of the world and man's own dual nature. (Jonas 174-197).

Gnosis (γνώσις) is thus a concept of extreme importance, as it is the vehicle of salvation. In *Voss* there is a strong focus on knowledge as the main characters are searching for knowledge in some form, but the nature of it is not always specified. It is as if they cannot put their fingers on what it is exactly they want to know. Hansson speaks of an "instinctive character of the knowledge" for which the questers in White's novels strive, and she mentions as an example Voss' intention of knowing everything. (62) The quest for this knowledge may not even be at a conscious level. Voss is certainly not aware of the true nature of his quest, and when he begins his journey he does so with the purpose of achieving perfection and proving his own divination as is already mentioned. He feels an urge to explore the country and lead the members of the expedition into the desert, but he is unable to say what it is exactly that gives him this urge (33). In this way, as Bulman-May puts it, "the individuating gratification remains an unconscious aspect of his quest". (1995: 113)

Hansson suggests that White's questers have a "sense of being parts of an integral divine totality" (65), and Voss may have an instinctive notion of some kind of divine spark within, similar to that of the Gnostics. Through suffering and self-sacrifice he intends to reveal this true nature of his. Voss states early in the novel that "to make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself" (34), which corresponds to the Gnostic thought of freeing the divine spark by destroying the matter in which it is trapped.

There seems to be a connection between illumination and suffering, as the questers has to go through many trials before they finally see the light. White of course puts focus on knowledge, but it is not his main concern. He hints at the nature of knowledge, but he never reveals it in so many words. He seems to be more interested in the process of illumination, the nature of the quest for the ultimate knowledge. Hansson states that "the price paid for knowledge/illumination necessarily means the full acceptance of the terms of the traditional quest, that is the assumption of suffering." (63) The theme of suffering is common in 'quest literature'. In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the main character has to go on a journey to hell before he reaches Paradise, and in John Bunyan's *A Pilgrim's Progress* Christian has to go through a lot before he finally reaches the Celestial City. In these examples it is also the *process* of illumination, which is the main theme, and thus the comparison with *Voss* is possible. Le Mesurier seems to have understood the idea of the process as an end in itself and sums it up by saying: "The mystery of life is not solved by success, which is an end in itself, but in failure, in perpetual struggle, in becoming" (271). The connection between achieving knowledge through suffering is also stressed by Laura at the end of the novel: "true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind." (446) Voss has to suffer humiliation in the desert before he is illuminated. He has the strongest ambition and will to reach the goal of his, to prove his divinity, but as Hansson puts it, his "will-power is based on false knowledge and pride, and he must be stripped of both before his quest is completed" (68).

White is being kind of secretive in his approach to knowledge in *Voss* in the way he constantly circles around knowledge, hinting at it without revealing completely what it contains. This is similar to the way the Gnostic message was presented to adherents of the religions. The Gnostic teachings were not of a nature that could be taught; the true knowledge had to be experienced (Jonas 173). In order to prepare the individual for the 'awakening', they were taught a complicated mythology as a guide to the final illumination. Thus the Gnostics were also mainly concerned with the process of illumination, as the esoteric knowledge in itself was unattainable without the ultimate personal experience. This is not to say that White is Gnostic, but he may share the Gnostic idea of knowledge as something that cannot be mediated - it has to be experienced.

### **3 Light Imagery in *Voss***

White is alluding to the dualistic system of light and darkness of the Gnostics through the use of light symbolism and imagery throughout *Voss*. Irtraud Petersson calls it "a major *leitmotif* and thus a guideline through the novel"(246). She has devoted an article to a discussion of White's use of light symbolism in *Voss*, and her starting point is a general interest in the significance of the title. Bulman-May has listed several possible interpretations of the title (1995: 91-98), and Petersson mentions some, but they both agree on the possibility of a connection to the Greek word for light. *Voss* is German, and the German pronunciation of his name is [fos]. The corresponding Greek word phos (φῶς) means light, and Petersson lists in her article the different perceptions of light in various traditions and religions.

There seem to be an overall connection to knowledge and illumination, but the different traditions differ somewhat in the exact perception of light. The pre-Socratic ideas of light can be seen as a metaphor of "the transition from ignorance to knowledge", but it does not include any moral values. In the Old Testament "light can denote salvation, self-understanding, and is often combined with wisdom

and the knowledge of God's will", whereas in St John it is "the revealer" who is identified with the "true, exclusive light confronting an unenlightened world which is dependent on illumination" (Petersson 247). Petersson also mentions Gnosticism in connection with light, and describes illumination as "the mythological awakening of the spark of light imprisoned in darkness (matter)" and as "fulfillment with the substance of light, transformation in light, deification" (247). This also serves to underline the previous discussion of Gnostic dualism. In *Voss* this connection between light and illumination or knowledge is stressed repeatedly. As examples could be mentioned phrases like "blaze of revelation" (337), "truth of sunlight" (127), and "illuminating, true, naked word" (333).

### **3.1 Bringers of Light**

Petersson also discusses the idea of the characters in *Voss* being bearers of light, and thus being providers of illumination as well as receivers of it. She places *Voss* in this category and describes him as an enlightener and one who sheds light. There are several examples of *Voss* being connected with light. Light shines from his tent (251) and at some point he is almost "splintering into light" (246). At the same time, however, Petersson points out the parallel to Lucifer, the bringer of light. (248)

Lucifer was the proud angel who fell from heaven as described in Isaiah:

12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day  
Star<sup>1</sup>, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to  
the ground, You who laid the nations low!

13 You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to  
heaven; above the stars of God I will set my  
throne on high; I will sit on the mount of  
assembly in the far north;

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<sup>1</sup> Other translations of the Bible use 'Lucifer' instead of 'Day Star'.

14 I will ascend above the heights of the  
clouds, I will make myself the Most High.'  
(14,12-14)

The parallel between Voss and Lucifer is obvious, as their common 'crime' is the aspiration for divinity, and their attempt to place themselves on the throne of God. They also share the destiny of ending in Hell, Voss' Hell being the Australian desert. Lucifer is generally known as Satan or the Devil, and at least twice, Voss is referred to as the Devil. (256, 441) Apart from the hints to his divine nature, Voss is mainly described with negative and even evil features all through the book.

In this way White uses light imagery to represent the two opposite traits of Voss' character at the same time, and he thus reveals Voss' dual nature with a refined subtlety which makes it difficult for the reader to interpret his symbols of light from time to time. When White calls Voss "the light"(251) he could be referring to Lucifer and Voss' evil nature, but if one considers the reference to St John on the previous page (250), it could also be a reference to his divine nature. St John has a clear reference to light in the beginning where light is victorious over darkness (1.4-5, quoted on my page 4), and this makes the parallel possible.

These very different connotations of light make it very difficult to work with White's metaphors such as the "skull with a candle expiring inside". (358) Skull imagery normally has negative connotations, but in this case Voss is described positively as being incandescent, and he is loved by his followers who chose to ignore the fact that Voss' light is fading. As the general impression of Voss is positive, the light may be a reference to his divine nature slowly dying. This interpretation is supported by White's use of the same metaphor on page 337. Here the metaphor is slightly different as he is referring to a "spirit...flickering in the skull" instead of a candle. The candle is equalled with the spirit, and is thus given divine connotations.

### 3.2 The Comet

Another symbol of great importance is the comet, which appears in the sky while the three white men are held captives by the Aborigines. (378) Hansson interprets this as a symbol of Lucifer's fall from heaven, and she supports this interpretation with a reference to the "flying serpent" of Isaiah 14.29 (94), using the reference as a parallel to Jackie calling the comet a Great Snake. (378) Further support can be found in the Revelation where "a great star fell from heaven, blazing like a torch" (8.10) and "a star [is seen] fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key of the shaft of the bottomless pit". (9.1) These are clear references to Lucifer's fall.

The appearance of the comet coincides with the moment of Voss' illumination. After seeing the comet he has realised in some way that he is not God, which is evident when he says to Le Mesurier that he has no plan, but he "will trust to God". (379) Voss is clearly illuminated by the vision symbolising, perhaps, pure evil, but symptomatic of white's style, it is not revealed to the reader what it is exactly he has realised, one can only speculate.

### 4 Jung's Psychology of Religion

In his studies of the human psyche, Jung has been very inspired by religion, Gnosticism and Christianity in particular. He considers religious phenomena in general to be merely reflections or projections of the human psyche and the process of individuation (Wulff 432), and he used the various religious symbols to explain the structure of the personality and illuminate the process of self-realisation.

When working with Patrick White it is tempting and rewarding in several ways to apply the theories of Jung in order to explain the quest for self-realisation, and to discuss the development of the characters in his terms. One has to be careful, though, with suggestions about White consciously using Jungian symbols and theories in his writing. According to David Marr's biography, White was not familiar with Jung's studies at the time when he wrote *Voss*. He was, however, interested in the idea of wholeness, as he "saw himself as a shattered personality - not one man but a cast of characters", and was therefore interested in a search for some kind of unity or

wholeness of the personality. When he read the works of Jung while working on *The Solid Mandala*, he was able to recognise many of the symbols he had previously used "spontaneously", and he found that Jung was able to provide him with clarification to a large extent (452). With this reservation in mind I will discuss Jung's theories, and attempt to apply them to *Voss* through an interpretation of the journey into the Australian interior as a metaphorical journey into the unconscious. The actual expedition has the object of mapping the desert and discovering its secrets, and the object of the parallel psychological quest of the individual characters would be discovering secrets within their personal unconscious. As mentioned my focus will be on Voss and his development in the novel.

#### **4.1 The Structure of the Human Psyche**

Jung's basic ideas of the human psyche are based on his theories of archetypes and the collective unconscious, which is thoroughly described by David M. Wulff in his *Psychology of Religion*. I will not include a full description of Jung's psychology, but only briefly mention the most important points in relation to the process of individuation.

The shadow is one of the most important archetypes in the Jungian collective unconscious. Wulff describes the shadow as consisting of "all the reprehensible qualities that the individual wishes to deny" (424). It is the negative part of the personality, and for Jung, it is an imperative in the process of individuation and self-realisation to integrate this part of one self, and thus come to terms with both positive and negative sides of one's personality. The self is another, and perhaps the most important of the archetypes. It signifies the perfect balance between the conscious and the unconscious, the point of the personality where all the opposing qualities of the psyche are united in harmony. Thus the self has a degree of completeness, which is totally incomprehensible and basically impossible for anyone to obtain. Jung calls the self "God within us" as it produces the same symbols and images as are used to symbolise deities (427-28). These symbols and images are many. For instance perfect

symmetrical forms like the Mandala are often seen, as well as the lotus, the Holy Grail and, of course, the philosopher's stone in the alchemical system.

These are all symbols of psychic wholeness for which a person strives unconsciously, and attempts to achieve through the process of individuation. Jung defines this process as "becoming ones own self...and the aim of individuation is...to divest the self of the false wrappings of the persona...and of the suggestive power of the primordial images". (Wulff, 428) In other words, a person has to give up his/her persona, which is a mask or artificial personality created by the person, often unconsciously, in order to meet the expectations of society. In addition to this, he/she has to realise the delusory quality of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, which provide the person with mythical or religious ideas.

Basically, individuation means coming to terms with the nature of ones unconscious. It involves the incorporation of all the real aspects of the personality, both the positive and negative qualities, the persona and the shadow, the conscious and the unconscious, and thus achieving a psychic wholeness similar to the self. However, as mentioned it is impossible to become ones self completely. Given the paradoxical nature of the self as a compound of incompatible entities, the completion of the individuation does not seem to be a logical possibility. Instead the individuation will continue and repeat itself infinitely on different levels. (Wulff, 431)

## **4.2 Alchemy**

As a symbol of the individuation process, Jung uses the alchemical process, which was considered by medieval alchemists to represent a perfection of the soul as well as a transformation of base metals into more precious ones such as gold (Wulff 438). A detailed description of this process is beyond the scope of this essay, but it is important, in relation to the individuation process, to mention the three stages of the process, nigredo, albedo, and rubedo, which are the Latin names referring to the colour of the metal, black, white and red, at the different stages in the alchemical process. Bulman-May also mentions a fourth stage, citrinitas (yellowing), but since it

was not in use after the sixteenth century, I will only refer to the other three stages (1997: 10).

Wulff describes the nigredo stage as "the encounter with the dark shadow" when a person becomes aware of "the conflicting tendencies within the psyche". The albedo stage is reached when "the unconscious gradually becomes illuminated [through] the 'purgatorial fire' of self-discovery". The rubedo stage represents the unified self, which has integrated all its different aspects, positive and negative (440). The colour symbolism in *Voss* is quite extensive as White uses colours in the description of his characters. If given alchemical connotations, this symbolism may certainly serve to support the description of the characters as being on different stages in their psychic development. Voss, for instance, is described as being black, or he is associated with black things and animals. He is wearing "black cloth" (57) and "black boots" (151). He carries a black stick at some point (342) and he is described as a "trapped crow" when he is in the carriage with the Bonners. (72) Associating Voss with blackness places him at the first stage of the process of individuation, ready to go through the changes of personality and achieve illumination.

The actual process of the alchemical change is as important as the different stages. The alchemists attempted to change the base metals into gold by means of burning. By using increasing temperatures they changed the substance and the colour of the material they were working with. This process of burning also seems to be important in relation to *Voss*, and the fact that a desert is the object of the expedition may not be coincidental at all. They travel right into the realms of a persistently burning sun, and there are several references to characters being burnt by the sun. For example on page 73 Voss is "burnt up...walking into the sunset", and later he is "blackened and yellowed by the sun" (169). Le Mesurier also speaks of "the process of burning [in which] it is the black that gives up the gold" (361). It is evident from this example that there is a connection between destruction by burning and the creation of something more precious, and this idea corresponds with Voss stating that "to make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself" (34). When he says this he is actually about to destroy himself by entering the furnace of the Australian desert. I

mentioned this element of destruction in connection with Gnosticism and the possibility of Voss destroying matter in order to free the divine spark which is captured within himself, and in both cases it is a question of destroying something imperfect to create, or liberate, something more precious.

### **4.3 Jung and Gnosticism**

According to Wulff, alchemy is the link Jung needs to connect his psychology to his studies of Gnostic writers. (418) In Gnosticism he finds an interest in the process of individuation similar to his own, and he is able to make an interesting parallel between the Gnostic universe and the individual psyche. He equals the ego with the evil demiurge, who believed himself to be God, but the demiurge is defeated by the supreme authority of the Gnostic system, who, according to Jung, is equalled with the self. The self is identified with the Primal Man of Gnosticism, who represents the perfect balance between the conscious and the unconscious, and he is associated with symbols of psychic wholeness such as the quaternity. He is the saviour who is sent by the true God, or supreme authority, in order to "redeem the world through mystical knowledge". (436-37) It is important to Jung that this salvation is to take place in this life through illumination and knowledge of the true nature of human kind, and it is the introversion of Gnosticism, which appeals to him and enables him to connect the Gnostic thoughts with his own psychology.

By applying Jungian terms to the Gnostic theology, it can be used creatively in an attempt to analyse Voss' psychic development. It is thus possible to see the Gnostic universe as a symbol of Voss' psyche, and the cosmic battle between the evil demiurge and the Primal Man becomes the psychic battle between Voss' ego and the self. To begin with, the ego has the upper hand, and under the influence of his 'personal demiurge' he believes that he is God. Through the process of individuation consisting of the humiliation and suffering he endures in the desert, the self slowly takes over the power and finally wins the battle when Voss receives his final illumination at the sight of the comet. As the process of individuation is completed and Voss becomes his own self, he also becomes the Primal Man as the two were

identified with one another. (For the moment I have chosen to ignore the fact that it is not logically possible to complete the process of individuation).

As Voss and the Primal Man can be equated, the parallel becomes interesting because of the connection between Gnosticism and Christianity. Some of the Gnostic traditions were originally part of the early Christian church, but they developed in different directions and ended up being separate religions sharing some of the Christian doctrine, which they had retained and elaborated on, developing their own religious systems. This meant that some of them actually identified the Primal Man with Christ and considered him to be the saviour of the world. (Wulff, 437). As a result of an analysis like this, Voss can actually be seen as a Christ-figure, which is quite surprising considering how he has been described rather negatively in the novel as an egocentric megalomaniac with absolutely no apparent similarities to Christ.

### **5 Voss as a Christ-Figure**

In order to characterise Voss as a Christ-figure, it will require some revisions of the conventional ideas of Christ and the concept of God in general. In continuation of my previous analysis I will try to look at Jung's criticism of some of the Christian symbols, and then suggest how Voss can be seen as a Christ-figure.

White has provided the reader with an example of a conventional image of Christ in his description of Palfreyman. It becomes evident that Palfreyman is a devoted Christian when the members of the expedition are celebrating Christmas and he wants to read the service from his prayer book (202). At some point Voss says that Palfreyman has the capacity of Christ (242), and even though Voss probably intends it to be ironic, it may be seen as some sort of hint to the reader, that Palfreyman may be significant in a religious way in the novel. When Palfreyman is killed by the Aborigines, there are so many allusions to the Crucifixion of Christ, that a comparison is obvious. When he is walking towards the group of Aborigines, it is implied that Palfreyman resembles the image of Christ, as he reminds everybody of the image they have previously seen in church (342). He also shows his palms to the Aborigines, as did Christ after his resurrection for Thomas to see his stigmatised

hands (St John 20,27). The spear, which is thrown at him, hits him in his side between his ribs (cp. St John 19,34), and his toes are turned in, similar to Jesus' feet when they were nailed to the cross. These are all clear allusions to the Crucifixion. After Palfreyman's death Harry Robarts sees a "white bird depart out of the hole in Mr Palfreyman's side" (344) which must represent the Holy Spirit leaving the earthly remains of Palfreyman. Finally there is the aspect of him wanting to take upon himself the suffering of others, especially his sister (263). Voss criticises him for this kind of humility (151), but he does not seem to mind it when Palfreyman agrees to be the one to talk to the Aborigines, even though it means sacrificing his life for the sake of the group. (341-42) Morley describes Palfreyman as the archetypal image of both the "Christ figure" and "redemptive suffering" (143+146), and it is clear that he represents pure goodness in opposition to Voss.

### **5.1 The Incomplete Christ According to Jung**

One of the major features in Christianity, which Jung is criticising is the fact that Christ is pure goodness, and as the evil aspect of his personality is missing. This means that he is not complete in terms of Jung's psychological development. The dark side of his personality ought to be incorporated into his personality and coexist with the goodness, even in the case of the ultimate symbol of Christianity - Christ himself. This imbalance is exemplified in the Christian symbol of the Trinity, which Jung considers to be an imperfect quaternity with the Antichrist as the missing part. The cross also serves to underline the imperfection of the trinity, as it is the ultimate symbol of psychic wholeness and the union of opposites. (Hansson, 102-3) In this way Jung has changed the conventional perception of God and religion, and he suggests that the ideal is no longer perfection in moral terms, but completeness of the personality in psychological terms.

Ideas like these may be the reason why Palfreyman is called a failure as Christ in spite of all the similarities. He is pure goodness, but he has not managed to come to terms with his negative sides constituted by the guilt he feels toward his sister who is a hunchback. He feels that he has failed by not being able to ease her pain, and thus

he has the need to make up for letting her down by taking her suffering upon him self (263) and thus "make spiritual 'amends' for his failure". (Platz, 173) He succeeds in imitating Christ in his deeds according to the conventional conception of Christianity, but he fails in achieving the psychic balance within his own personality by coming to terms with his guilt. Voss, on the other hand, manages to achieve the psychic wholeness and unite the opposite aspects of his own personality through the process of individuation. In this way he actually manages to realise his own self, which, as mentioned, is considered to be the ultimate ideal. This in fact makes Voss closer to becoming like Christ than Palfreyman is. Jung's innovation thus means that it is no longer considered enough to imitate Christ in deeds, one also have to follow him on "the lonely and difficult road of individuation, allowing the ego - the ordinary person that one thinks one is - to be put to death in order that the self - the son of God - may become incarnate within." (Wulff, 442)

## **5.2 The Paradox**

Another aspect of the comparison between Voss and Christ is a slightly different notion of the paradox. In conventional Christianity the paradox is the idea of Christ being completely human and completely divine at the same time. This is a necessity in order to make his death by crucifixion and subsequent resurrection significant as the redemption of mankind. This paradox is also referred to in connection with Palfreyman, but it is described as something incomprehensible, and the members of the expedition seem to have sort of a distant relationship with the religion. They "all remembered the face of Christ that they had seen at some point in their lives, either in churches or visions, before retreating from what they had not understood, the paradox of man in Christ, and Christ in man." (342)

The paradox in Voss is to be found in the Jungian idea of individuation. As mentioned previously it is logically impossible to complete the process of individuation because it would mean a union of opposite and incompatible entities. As the process repeats itself continuously, it is possible to minimise the gap between these opposite aspects of the personality, but it is not possible to close it. If

Voss actually completes the process, this invariably creates a paradox, as closing the gap means that he becomes complete as well as divine. It can be discussed whether or not Voss succeeds in his self-realisation, and becomes a Christ-figure, or if he merely takes a giant leap in the process of individuation. Paolini seems to consider Voss a failure in his imitation of Christ as he fails to "return from the desert victorious over evil" as Christ did (90). This, however, does not necessarily mean that he does not succeed. In my view it is possible to argue for the opposite point of view, that it is actually impossible for him to return if he does complete the process of individuation and becomes a complete person. Sørensen has taken Gnostic thinking a bit further, as he argues that it is not possible for the human nature to acquire the ultimate enlightenment, and that if someone were to experience this true illumination, and realise his own dual nature as both matter and spirit, he would in fact lose his human nature. With this aspect of Gnosticism it would be impossible for Voss to return from the desert, and his death is in fact an unavoidable and logical consequence of the illumination. At some point Laura speaks of three stages "of God into man. Man. And man returning into God." (386) This process or development is similar to the development of Voss in the novel, and the final stage in particular can support an interpretation of Voss' death as his final divination. Laura's statement just before Voss' death may also serve to support this argument: "when man is truly humbled, when he has learnt that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so. In the end he may ascend" (387).

## **6 Conclusion**

In this essay I have attempted to explore only a little part of White's universe, which has proved to be of an extremely complex nature. I found it difficult to single out one theme and work with that exclusively, as everything in the novel seems to be closely interwoven and impossible to separate into smaller units. It was necessary, however, to limit the subject, and I did so accepting the loss of many clarifying details.

In spite of this, I found it very interesting to work in detail with the subject I chose for this study. I found that White uses an extensive system of reference myths

and intertextuality in general. He makes use of various religious systems by alluding to them and using their symbols and images in order to convey his messages. This means that there is a large demand on the part of the reader, as he/she is required to be familiar with these myths in order to understand what White is trying to say in the novel. In addition to this he has a special way of using the various symbols, which does not make it easier to work with his writing.

Not only does he refer to several traditions, he also has a creative way of using the many symbols so that they can be given multiple connotations. This can be rather puzzling at times when it is not obvious from the immediate context how one is supposed to interpret the images. The example I chose to work with was the use of light images. I found that light could denote both positive and negative entities, but a few times the images were slightly ambiguous. I discovered, however, that most often White left small hints in other parts of the book, which helped clarify how the images were supposed to be interpreted. This way of writing is quite impressive, but it leaves the reader with some detective work in order to grasp the message completely.

Another speciality of White's is his ability to surprise the reader. For example the way he builds up an idea of Palfreyman as the perfect Christ-figure, only to call him a failure at the crucial point of his 'crucifixion'. For an explanation I chose to turn to Jung's psychology and his critique of conventional religion. His idea of conflicting parts within the personality striving for union and psychic wholeness, and his consequent creation of the new ideal of the self as a complete entity consisting of both positive and negative aspects, provided me with an explanation for Palfreyman's failure. The process of individuation with the object of living out ones self also suggested a possible way of interpreting Voss sudden change of personality, and it inspired me to speculate in the comparison between Christ and Voss. This, however, was only possible when based on Jung's innovation of the Christian doctrine.

I am fascinated by White's style of writing in *Voss*, even though it has been a challenge to work with. It is frustrating at times when White leaves one with hints only, without revealing his message or knowledge directly. But, in a way it also allows for a different kind of experience when reading the novel. White allows the

reader to *experience* the book by forcing him/her to participate actively in order to understand the message. This of course leaves it open to various interpretations, but it also allows reader to pick it up and take it wherever he/she wants to instead of having to passively receive whatever the author has decided to convey.

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