



THE JOURNEY: BEGINNING AND END

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ABSTRACT

Journey has always been an important theme in literature. The literary artists through their works have always taken us into new realms by means of journey which need not be always physical. Every journey serves one purpose. This paper concentrates on the theme of journey treated by different poets of different period. The poems selected are Because I Could Not Stop for Death by Emily Dickinson, The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost, On the Move by Thom Gunn and Aubade by Philip Larkin. Their quest for destination is supported with theory of fantasy, realism and existentialism. The one binding notion of all these poems is the theme of journey as the backdrop.

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INTRODUCTION

Journey has always been an important theme in literature. The idea of journey is transferred to the readers who do not become a physical part of it by the visual imagery employed by the poet. The artist introduces a journey motif with multiple visions. It is not limited to the mere physical transference from one place to another rather a rejuvenating experience for the psyche.

The first major poetic work of Middle English *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer is set on the background of a journey. From then on we have seen many experiments in poetry based on the theme of journey or travel. Reading a poem itself is a travel experience as the reader moves through the fancies, dreams, and uncertainties of the poet. But the poems

that deal with the theme of journey are taking the reader to a new realm unfamiliar to him as enjoyed by the poet. The meaning of the word journey according to Merriam Webster's Dictionary is an act or instance of traveling from one place to another. But the journey need not be physical always. The excursion that the poet makes through the poem to the lands s/he obsessed with, to relive the past experience, or for mere fantasy, gives the reader a totally new experience. It is the poet's passion for journey, enthusiasm for a place or fascination for the customs and rituals of an alien land is what stimulating the writer to attempt a piece of art on that.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study looks into the poems where the refinement of the soul is achieved in the movement. The themes obsessed with are found expressions in the milieu of journey in these poems. Emily Dickinson's poem 'Because I Could not Stop for Death' unveils the journey of fantasy that the poet makes in the company of Death; where she passes from this mortal world to the immortal world. The poem 'The Road Not Taken' by Robert Frost marks the beginning of a journey where it is crucial for the poet to make the right choice to fulfill the quest for unexplored regions. The third poem under study is 'On The Move' by Thom Gunn which rests on the philosophy of existentialism. The journey of this poem is characterized by the movement than by destination. Finally, 'Aubade' by Philip larkin also sets a new experiment for the reader on the verges of existentialism. Here the poet makes a journey to answer the inevitable question of life i.e. death. The movement of the poem is from present to the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Each journey will have its own purpose and destination, which will be supported by an ideology. When we look in to the life of Emily Dickinson we find that her touring through the poems are preoccupied with themes of love, lost, death and immortality (Mulder, 550) which are generally grouped as flood themes. The passion that characterizes the personality of the poet recurred in the only outlet of her mind that is poetry. Emily Dickinson wrote poetry not for publication but for relieving her soul from seclusion and the constant attack of melancholia. The poem 'Because I could not Stop for Death' states the journey the poet makes from this world to the next. It is purely the fantasy that rules over the mind of the poet which is evidenced in comparing the Death as a Suitor than a hard reality. Likewise she has compared the funeral procession to a wedding procession. As the bride steps into a new house the poet is excited about the life after death. The poem remains as a fantasy as what the poet narrates is not her direct experience but the enjoyment the poet experiences is transferred to the readers. The journey is not only from this world to the other but also from childhood to eternity.

We passed the school, where children strove
At recess, in the ring;
We passed the fields of gazing grain,
We passed the setting sun (9-12)

The realm of fantasy is kept intact by the poet till the last stanza, where even a century is shorter than a day. The symbolism and imagery is infused into the poem in such a way that it is difficult to draw a line between reality and fantasy at the same time reminding us to treat death not painfully but as a joyful journey.

Robert Frost, the spokesman of realism, sets a realistic picture of making the right choice in his poem 'The Road not Taken'. The journey he wished to make is determined not by the destination but to quench his thirst for new pastures. He confronts the question at the starting point as to which route he might travel to. He decides to take the road less travelled by, which may land him to unexplored areas and experiences. And he wrote the poem about the road he did not select to travel by. As the Chinese proverb says 'every great journey begins with a single step' here Frost is also asking us to think about the first step which would ultimately make the journey thriving. Imagery used in the poem is significant in drawing out the theme and it allows the reader to relate more to the poem and interpret the theme in their own way as Frost concentrate more on the visual elements (Houston, 15). The poem can be read as an expression of individualism, where he decided to take up the journey of his life as a poet. Even though the road is less travelled by it would be a fascinating journey for him.

I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference (19-20)

In line with Robert Frost, we may count Thom Gunn who also believed the dictum that it is not the destination that matters but the spirit of movement. One should not think of a destination and consequences awaiting in the journey rather trust the decision one made to "Move". His poem 'On the Move' lingering on existential humanism takes on the power and will of man. According to Sartre 'existence precedes essence' (Atwell, 580), i.e., essence is created by the individual. An individual's decision is

conditioned not by the consequences instead they create consequences they want with the choices they make. Thom Gunn proclaims through the poem to escape the futile existence and move on. Life is a journey and a journey prospers only with the action i.e. movement. The idea of movement or motion should be set as the goal and it should not focus on reaching the destination or achieving something. We see eternal movement in the world which the poet reinstates in the epigraph of the poem "Man, You Gotta Go."

'Aubade' of Philip Larkin, on the superficial level deals with the question of Death. According to Taj uddin (103) mood of Larkin is that of an existentialist in dealing with death, but in effect he follows neither religious nor atheistic approach; because he seems to be rejecting both, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, in his poem, 'Aubade'. He shares his fears on death as:

This a special way of being afraid
No tricks dispel. *Religion* used to try,
That vast moth-eaten musical brocade
Created to pretend we never die, (21-24)

The poet's concern ".....but how/ and where and when I shall myself die" (6-7) is discussed at length. Unlike Emily Dickinson, The poet journeys to the other world, bearing the agony of life after death trying to find some consolation from somewhere. The journey he makes is from present to the future.

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