

The meaning of international movement in roger robinson's 'monarch exodus'



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In 'Monarch Exodus', Roger Robinson uses the image of a travelling host of butterflies in order to draw attention to the plight of the immigrant who similarly must flee from home and venture onwards to a setting both unfamiliar and hostile. Robinson offers insight into the mental process of the travelling character, whose overlapping fear and gritty determination is able to reflect the stance of so many across the globe forced to seek solace in foreign lands.

Through the extended metaphor of flying butterflies, Robinson is able to track the mental and physical journey of refugees journeying in search of safety. This is immediately made apparent by the regular ABA rhyme scheme used to mirror the monotonous journey of the traveller, or perhaps echo the pace of the refugee's heart which rapidly and nervously beats. Detailing this is the mid-stanza line 'We're restless hearts that live in flight', with the synecdoche of 'hearts' coupled with the blunt form of declarative working to convey the sense that the immigrant's lifestyle is governed by base physical instincts which arise from within. Indeed, the poem is written predominately in iambic tetrameter which is able to capture the determination of the travelling butterfly, or immigrant, who refuses to 'stop till [the] journey's done', and the regular rhythm also gives the poem a cyclic quality suggesting that the plight of the refugee is one that continues to arise in times of crisis. The stressed opening word in the line 'Most won't get back to where they're from' is particularly interesting therefore in breaking from the standard iambic tetrameter, thus positioning absolute focus on the dangers of the immigrant's travel which is implied to lead to estrangement from home, and at times, death. The line 'The time to fly again has come.' is

one that is repeated as a mantra throughout, and this structural choice paired with the hyperbaton of the line aligning audience sympathies with the restless traveler in suggestions that they will again have to make such a perilous journey in the future.

To close the poem on dynamic verb 'come', and to do so with an emphatic end stop urges privileged readers to act in support for refugees and 'come' to their aid with sympathy and supplies. Indeed, the choice of a butterfly with regular connotations in the title- 'Monarch'- further encourages audiences to disregard their biased and stereotypical views of the traveller as low on the social scale, and to view them as on par if not higher to their own positions within society due to the determination and stamina of the immigrant. The stanzas decrease in length throughout, moving from three lines to two lines to eventually one, and this might be read as a structural metaphor for the time that is running out, therefore forcing the characters to act in haste to finish their journey. Furthermore, the liminal space of the 'sky' is used throughout the poem to dramatise the plight of the butterflies, and by extension the immigrants, who are caught between homes, and we can understand the point that Robinson is making that the anxiety felt by the traveller is not based primarily in fear or danger, but in a distinct lack of certainty. The slant-rhyme of diction 'fly' and 'alive' is one reformulated twice throughout the poem, explaining the determination of the unified voice through suggesting that not only their mental safety, but their very lives rest upon the journey they are making, and this is exemplified through the fricatives of 'few' and 'fly' which help convey the poet's central message of the dangers of immigration to the immigrant.

On a similar note, Robinson offers a humanised perspective of the refugee, exploring the mindset of a traveller to further compel readers to empathise with the struggling narrators. Such is made evident by the first-person person voice which creates an intimate tone aimed at winning the sympathies of the audience. Furthermore, the butterflies are referred to through inclusive pronoun ' We' throughout, which suggests that the refugees must seek solace and strength in each other's company in order to complete their mission. Alternatively, the inclusive pronoun could be read as including the reader, therefore creating the unsettling message that all might be forced to quickly leave their homes at some point in their lives. Dramatising this is the line ' when we move, we move as one', with the caesura and repeated dynamic verb ' move' conveying the danger and peril of the journey through suggesting that it is riddled with action and impulsive decisions. The declarative is a form used throughout the poem, used to mark out the stamina of the immigrants who are determined to finish their journey. One compelling example of this is the opening line ' We won't stop till our journey's done.', with the unusually stressed syllable of ' We' paired with the empathic end-stop implying that the characters are utterly focused on their goal to flee from danger and seek safety. The end-stop is the form of punctuation most commonly employed throughout the stanzas which conveys the single-track mindset of the refugee who refuses to sway from his position of determination. The phrase ' We'll rest among the leaves tonight' offers a surprisingly tender moment thus stressing the importance of peace and gentleness in times of terror.

In ' Monarch Exodus', Robinson through the extended picture of a swarm of butterflies is able to aptly capture the conflicting emotions of fear, danger, uncertainty, and determination which are felt by immigrants who travel daily across the globe. The poem can be read as a warning sign to modern readers to take action and offer support to those in need of a home.