

Robert frost and ted  
hughes: journeys in  
"out, out," "daffodils,"  
and "red"



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By embracing the concept of a journey, we frequently reach our destination with a greater understanding of ourselves and current surroundings. After scrutinizing the concept of journeys it has become self evident that our lives can be quite capricious so it is crucial to value the insignificant things in life that we often take for granted. In ' Birthday Letters' Ted Hughes illustrates how unpredictable, erratic and fluctuating a journey can be. Robert Frost supports this perception and expresses the insignificance of life in his poem ' Out, Out'. Both texts have demonstrated to me how unpredictable and unforeseen journeys can be. Appreciating and being grateful for the little things in life will be auspicious for us. This is expressed in Ted Hughes' poems ' Daffodils' and ' Red' where he symbolically describes the emotional journey that was his marriage with Plath.

The inclusive language at the beginning of the Hughes first poem ' Remember how we picked the daffodils?' shows how Hughes affectionately recalls memories from the loving beginning of their marriage and reinforces the connection they once shared. However, the language in the text abruptly shifts in tone, ' She cannot even remember you'. This abusive language, coupled with the change to second person, effectively contrasts to the beginning of the poem and represents troubles that they had with Plath's mental illness and ultimately the downfall of their marriage. In the poem Hughes refers to the daffodils as if they are struggling and suffering, this is a motif for their relationship. He personifies the daffodils to create a feeling of unease and instability ' among the soft shrieks-/ Of their girlish dance-frocks-/Fresh opened dragonflies, '. From this the audience can recognise that Hughes is uncertain and concerned about the connection between himself

and Plath. This culminates in his realisation that his marriage, like the flowers, 'Opened too early' which expresses his regret that they lost the passion and warmth that was once felt in their relationship.

Hughes shows how the journey can often be unpredictable and fluctuating so it is important to appreciate the joyful moments when they arise to avoid feeling the anguish Hughes did. The tragic ending of their relationship and Plath's debilitating mental illness is conveyed further in the final poem of 'Birthday Letters', "Red". Hughes uses strong descriptive language to metaphorically encase Plath in the colour red, 'But red/ Was what you wrapped around you'. Hughes uses this symbolism of the colour to represent her self induced suffering and to show his animosity towards Plath. In the final message of the poem we are introduced to a new colour as Hughes uses a metaphor to represent Plath's motherhood and graciousness with blue. "But the jewel you lost was blue", although Hughes displays Plath's qualities that appealed to him, his bitterness is still evident and the audience is once again presented with his disappointment that Plath could not overcome her illness even with the aid of motherhood, that she let go of her jewel and consequently lost herself. Hughes illustrates his mistakes of taking the happiness of his marriage for granted and provides us with the lesson of appreciating the little things in life. Thus, the poem reinforces to the audience that journeys are always continuing, as we regularly have a hunger to relive past experiences that we constantly yearn. Ultimately, Hughes shows that journeys allow us to not only understand events in our life, but also acquire intuition towards our beliefs.

After examining the notion of journeys, a reader can be compelled to consider the fragility and brevity of life. Robert Frost strongly expresses just how abrupt and insignificant our lives can be in his poem ' Out, Out'. The title of the poem is an allusion to Shakespeare's Macbeth, when Macbeth hears the news of Lady Macbeth's death he reveals " Out, out, brief candle!/ Life's but a walking shadow, ... Signifying nothing." The dying of the candle shows how simply our lives can be diminished and abandoned. This reference also reinforces how infinitesimal our lives are in the great scheme of things. This is illustrated again at the end of the poem, by the overall detached tone when the bystanders, who are not affected by the boy's death " turned to their affairs". This act of the bystanders who almost seem to forget about the boy's death proves the irrelevance and pointlessness of our existence. In the poem Frost creates a harmonious and tranquil setting " Five mountain ranges one behind the other/ Under the sunset far into Vermont." However this peaceful image is interrupted when he personifies the buzz saw which " snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled." The use of onomatopoeic verbs thoroughly enhances the intrusion of the saw into the natural background.

Frost demonstrates how something so serene can expeditiously be overturned which ultimately results in the boy's loss of life. This recognition of how subtle and minuscule our existence can be creates the moral of our lives being precious. With the use of evocative imagery and a metaphor, " Holding up the hand,/ ... as if to keep/ The life from spilling." Frost expresses the boy's horrific realization and recent understanding of how fragile his life is. The metaphor illustrates the boy's disbelief as he is convinced such a

simple act can preserve his existence. This emphasizes how quickly something so innocent can be corrupted and it's because of this ease that our lives are so precious to us. Frost underlines the need to seize the day and make the most of the present. Furthermore it is demonstrated how ferocious a journey may be and how it is often impossible to predict what a journey may have in store for the traveller. Thus it is essential to value our lives as they are regularly more vulnerable and fragile than we expect.

It is impossible to predict what a journey will have in store for us. They can drive us to appreciate the current happenings in life. In Hughes' poems 'Red' and 'Daffodils' and Frost's 'Out, Out' I was obliged to consider the importance of not taking everything for granted, as the authors of these texts clarified the perception of how fragile and brief life is. Analysing journeys has allowed me to acknowledge how enlightening they can be in gaining a fuller understanding of the complexities of life. It has recently become apparent how journeys can challenge, inspire and reevaluate our underlying assumptions about the world.