

# Escaping from daily miseries: comparing mitchell and frost



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Escapism is a method one uses to focus attention on pleasant or enjoyable things, as opposed to the harsh realities of everyday life. Humans face countless struggles, and to overcome these they turn towards their imagination or other means in life to slip away from their unwanted reality. Such an intent is foremost in the novel *Under this Unbroken Sky* by Shandi Mitchell and the poem “Birches” by Robert Frost. These authors use bold characters throughout their works to prove how people under different circumstances can vanish from their present to shed some light in their darkened lives. As well, both effectively use exceptional literary devices and imagery that make the reader have a stronger understanding of their intent. Both, Mitchell and Frost in their works demonstrate how characters elude ultimate oppression by choosing the road of escapism.

Novelist Shandi Mitchell and poet Robert Frost both use adults throughout their work to show how they escape from their immense struggles to have a moment of enjoyment in their lives. In the novel, Anna is a character who is not happy or satisfied with her life and the conditions in which she lives in. Her predestined fate, unstable marital life, estranged children and relatives are a result of her being a lifeless person. Her unfortunate life is no different than living a life with no purpose. Therefore, Anna escapes her daily struggles by building a strong relation with the coyotes since they attract her at first sight and she has never seen “anything so beautiful, so wild” (Mitchell 19). She encounters coyotes, every once in a while that leads her to build a strong attachment with them, much stronger than what she has with her own children and relatives. Anna escapes the unstable marital relationship and her own unsatisfying children by politely touching the

coyotes, giving them food, singing and talking to them. Her escapism reaches such a point of addiction that while spending time with a wild animal she forgets her responsibilities towards her children. When coming in contact with her son Petro, she hesitates and is “not sure if she should touch him” (155) since “it’s so much easier with the coyotes” (155). Considering she lacks a proper relationship with her children, she is not sure of how to treat them with love and care despite the fact that she demonstrates these emotions while tending the coyotes. Due to the estranged maternal character she possesses, her children become victims of a loveless mother. Another way Anna escapes her reality is by diving into a world of memories. Every time Maria comes over for her checkup, Anna tries to escape from any conversation about the unborn child and its unwantedness, Stephens’ responsibilities and her health by telling stories; “Once silence has passed, Anna tells her stories” (150), about attractive boys in school, her beauty as a young lady and her loving parents to Maria. She forgets all about her pains and worries of the present and her “eyes come alive” (150) when telling stories. Her expressions demonstrate how enthusiastically she leaves all the distress of her present and escapes into the memories that satisfy her.

Similarly, in the poem Frost represents an adult to demonstrate the theme of escapism. Frost himself becomes a man who escapes the present through his imagination of climbing on birches in attempt to forget his life that is full of miseries and to “get away from the earth awhile”(Frost). Climbing trees is universal, in order to be above all problems and undermining all ties to the earth. He climbs above the fray, to leave below the drudgery of the everyday, particularly when he is “weary of considerations,/ And life is too

much like a pathless wood” (Frost). A way to navigate through the pathless woods is to climb up high and seek a new path, leaving the difficulties behind with the hope of overcoming them for a while. The birches act as a means of transcendent escape for the man, giving him a moment of peace and tranquility. Either in texts, or real life situations the archetype of escapism is very common because it allows a person to enter a glorified world that temporarily satisfies all their needs and wants. Therefore, Anna, the man in the poem and Jack rise above their struggles by embedding themselves into a world far more pleasing and satisfying than their own sad realities.

In the novel and the poem, children are portrayed as characters who try to get away from their present to relish some moments of their life. In the novel, Lesya is displayed as a character who has the desire to live a content life with her family and the willpower to overcome all obstacles that her family may face. However, the reality is that she lives in a gloomy family with disrupted relations. Lesya, like her mother Anna, tries to forget her haunting reality at home by keeping herself busy and allowing her attention to be diverted. In doing so, she creates a close relationship with her aunt Maria and her family. She spends most of her day at Maria’s house, singing, helping with the crops and living through moments of laughter and joy. This helps her forget the awkwardness she faces at her own house, which is why “Lesya is happy to be with her Aunt and cousins” (Mitchell, 46), living a more lively life rather than the lackluster “ house with her mother” (46). This is a form of escapism for her from her mother’s reckless attitude and careless father’s presence. She experiences a temporary but pleasant life with her Aunt and cousins and so she wonders “ what it would be like to be

Teador and Maria's child" since their life is joyful and spending time with them "feels like a family" (46), rather than her own family which lacks a bond of love. The profound impact of having a bond-less family is heartbreaking, but instead of falling into a deep hole of hatred for her family, Lesya tries her best to join pieces of her family together. She tries to grow love in her mother's heart for her by walking tall and gracefully with "hardly a limp so her mother will see there is nothing wrong with her" (62). She tries to escape the reality of having deformed legs, which is the reason for the distance between her mother and herself; with the hope of her mother having some love and emotions towards her disguise.

Similarly in the poem, the poet through his imagination, portrays a boy as a child who swings on birches "over and over again" (Frost) as a source of escapism "until he [takes] the stiffness out of them" (Frost). The poet describes how the boy may not have similar intent for escapism like an adult does to escape from daily struggles. However, his purpose to climb birches is to get away with the curfews and his mother's denial of his wishes; which for the boy is an everyday struggle. He climbs in order to be free from the life that is to be lived according to others. For the boy, reaching the top means he is alone and for a while and can have fun swinging without any stoppings. Each time the swing gets higher, it represents him reaching the clouds of freedom, leaving behind the world of miseries. This also relates to many teenagers today. The biggest form of escapism from family problems, struggles or school for the current generation is the internet which eventually becomes an addiction. People spend hours of the day and night just surfing the internet, which may or may not be for any good. They may

do so in preference to working in the world, or in preference from having real life relationships with other people. With the internet, today's generation has the whole world in the palm of their hands; just with a few clicks they can virtually reach their comfort zone. This keeps them busy in a place where they are content with life, temporarily forgetting the reality of life. Other forms of escapism for many people include drugs, books, media or any other form of technology. Therefore, the theme of escapism is prominent in today's society among individuals who escape from their no longer desired present, likewise Lesya and the boy too flee from their struggling present for joy and peace.

Both Mitchell and Frost, effectively use rhetorical devices and imagery throughout their work to represent their importance as a source of escapism for the characters. In the novel, Mitchell uses literary devices and imagery to make the reader have a better understanding of her intent and theme. She describes the idea of Anna vanishing from her present using imagery; "Anna's eyes come alive and the stories begin" (Mitchell, 62) which helps the reader have a good understanding of how Anna forgets her disconsolate life by telling stories for a while by entering a world of memories. Anna also takes the road of escapism by keeping herself busy with Teador's family and farm. As Lesya hasn't seen her mother cleaning in a very long time "hops around the house feeling such joy that she thinks her heart might burst". (62) This hyperbole explains the excitement Lesya feels about the way her mother was able to forget her unhappy life by reuniting with the family members. Her happiness is comparable to a caged bird who is set free. Coyotes are also represented as an important symbol that represent

freedom and living in the wild away from any demands of the world. They become the reason for Anna to escape her miseries and divert her attention. Thus they act as a path that lets Anna escape her reality temporarily. On the other hand, the poet uses devices and symbols dominantly throughout his piece of work. In the poem, Birches are seen as an important symbol since they are the main key behind the theme of escapism for both, the boy and the poet himself. The birches are represented as powerful objects, "they are strong enough" (Frost), that even when the boy or adult swing on it "they seem not to break" (Frost). They hold on to all the worries and problems of the person and let them have a peaceful moment of joy. They fill up all the pain of the swinger "Up to the brim, and even above the brim" (Frost). This repetition effectively emphasizes the authors intent, helping the reader understand the competence of the birches and tree itself. These symbols, imagery and devices in the novel and poem help advocate the idea of escapism from daily problems.

Through their works, Mitchell and Frost illustrate characters who escape into an idealized world that is a better substitution than the hard truths of this world. In the novel, the characters escape the everyday struggles by building relations with others or through imagination whereas in the poem the characters swing on birches to elude their struggles; for both a transcendent escape. This theme is also present in many people today because they find escaping from the struggles of life a better alternative. The characters in the novel, poem, text and individuals in today's society share the mutual desire to break away from the struggling aspects of life through escapism that helps them relish and create beautiful moments in life, making it ethereal.