

The journey in literature



From its beginnings, literature has been characterized to a remarkable degree by narratives and images of journeys. What gets many texts started and what keeps them going is very commonly a journey of some sort. However, these journeys are not always simple physical journeys from one place to another. Writers often use journeys as metaphorical representations of life itself. In one way or another, journey metaphors enable writers to express notions of chance and choice, discovery and departure, and search and struggle. As the critic Stephen Hutchinson so clearly puts it, “ the journey is a universal, yet diverse metaphor that reveals a great deal about how writers in different places, times, and persuasions characterize themselves and the very world that they live in” (Hutchinson 72). Accordingly, great writers such as Homer, Miguel De Cervantes, St. Augustine, and John Bunyan, have all characterized life as a journey in many of their great works. For example, while Homer’s *Odyssey* and Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* examine life through metaphorical journeys of circular departure and return, Augustine and Bunyan represent life through journeys of a much more linear and progressive nature. Through and throughout telling the tale of *The Odyssey*, Homer reveals and examines a life in which Gods are like men and men are like Gods, a life that affords choice but guarantees fate, a life that has no price tags but in which nothing is free of charge. Odysseus’ journey home to Ithaka after the Trojan War consists of many small adventures, and by examining any one of his adventures along the way, one can come to understand Odysseus’ journey as a whole, and the journey of life itself as it seen through the eyes of Homer. For example, the installment involving the Kyclops in Book IX of *The Odyssey* is one such revealing episode of Odysseus’ journey. After Odysseus defeats the Kyclops

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and finally reveals his true name, the Kyclops realizes that fate has been fulfilled:" Now comes the weird [Fate, destiny] upon me, spoken of old. A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived her—Telemos, a son of Eurymos; great length of dayshe had in wizardry among the Kyklopes, and these things he foretold for time to come: my great eye lost, and at Odysseus' hands."

(Homer IX. 531-536)This passage clearly reveals that some of Odysseus' journey is predestined, however, that is not to say that his entire journey is completely fated. Throughout the poem, Homer makes it clear that Odysseus and his men can and do make their own choices throughout their odyssey, and they are also clearly subject to the consequences of those choices. For example, before they meet the Kyclops, Zeus raised a storm against Odysseus and his men in response to their piratical raid of Ismaros, a storm that carries them to the land of the Lotos Eaters and subsequently to the land of the Kyclops. Therefore, since Odysseus and his men meet the Kyclops as a direct result of their actions, but are also destined to defeat the Kyclops, they seem to somehow participate in their fate. Throughout the entire poem, Homer seems to be illustrating this complicated interaction between choice and fate. Throughout their entire journey, Odysseus and his men actually participate in a kind of evolving, fluid fate that is based on choice, consequence, and the will of the Gods. Throughout his journey, Odysseus and his men may choose how to walk on a certain path, but it is the Gods who choose what path they are on. Like most journeys in great literature, The Odyssey is a journey that undoubtedly represents the journey of life. The greatness of The Odyssey is found in its grayness. Nothing is black and white. Through Odysseus' journey home, Homer presents life in all of its mystery. A complicated life in which choice lies within fate, and fate lies

within choice, a life in which there is no simple answers. Miguel Cervantes also examines life through a similar metaphorical journey in his most famous novel, *Don Quixote*. Although most of Cervantes' novels coincide from beginning to end with journeys, *Don Quixote* is clearly the most memorable of them all. As one of the best-known fictional characters ever created, *Don Quixote* embodies a noble quest for a romantic ideal in a corrupt and fallen world and as Cervantes narrates *Quixote's* knightly expedition, he continually juxtaposes chivalry and modernity, and by doing so, he reveals life in all of its confusion and complexity. While the novel is full of metaphorically loaded scenes, *Don Quixote's* battle with windmills is perhaps the most unforgettable and representative scenes of the entire novel. As *Don Quixote* mistakes a field of windmills for an army of giants in the following passage, his confusion between the everyday and the legendary could not be more apparent: At this point they caught sight of thirty or forty windmills which were standing on the plain there, and no sooner had *Don Quixote* laid eyes upon them than he turned to his squire and said, " Fortune is guiding our affairs better than we could have wished; for you see there before you, friend *Sancho Panza*, some thirty or more lawless giants with whom I mean to do battle..." (Cervantes 1208) Throughout his entire journey, *Don Quixote* ridiculously romanticizes the real in this manner, and as his journey progresses, it becomes clear that the chivalric world of the past is gone forever. Cervantes' juxtaposition of romanticism and modernity parodies every aspect of knighthood and chivalric romance, demonstrating once and for all that European society had changed irrevocably since the age of knights and castles. However, through *Don Quixote's* journey, Cervantes not only parodies medieval life, he also calls the values and realities of modern

life into question. At last, when Don Quixote is defeated at the end of the novel, he finally returns to the reality of life as usual. At the end of his journey, Don Quixote arrives where he started, but now knows that place for the very first time. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is yet another narration of a metaphorical journey. However, instead of using a fictional odyssey to represent real life, Augustine uses real life as a metaphorical representation of a spiritual odyssey. Although Augustine's *Confessions* is an autobiographical account of his early life and conversion to Christianity, it is also much more. It is an intricately woven piece of literature in which Augustine highlights certain episodes of his life with subtle biblical allusion (Foreman 9). For example, in Book II of his *Confessions*, the pear tree episode clearly parallels the Genesis account of original sin: " We carried off an immense load of pears, not to eat—for we barely tasted them before throwing them to the hogs. Our only pleasure in doing it was that it was forbidden" (Augustine 623). When reading of forbidden fruit in a garden, one cannot help but to think of the Garden of Eden. Accordingly, numerous critics argue that Augustine includes this episode because it corresponds to the archetypal experience of Adam and Eve in the garden of Genesis and to its tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Leigh 79, Mallard 30). The pear tree in the orchard of Augustine's neighbor in every sense is also his personal tree of knowledge in a less than Edenic garden. Creatively aligning himself with the sin of Adam and Eve is but one way that Augustine presents his life as a recapitulation of Christian history. From his stealing of forbidden fruit, to his acceptance of grace in a garden, the real life journey of Augustine's *Confessions* continually parallels Christian history. He is even thirty-three years old at the time of his conversion—The very same age Christ was when

he was crucified. St. Augustine found universality in the journey of his life. He believed that the real life escapades of his life fully represented a journey that we must all make, a spiritual journey back to God, a journey that can only be completed through the grace of God. John Bunyan's allegorical novel *The Pilgrims Progress* tells the tale of a very similar journey and both works share the very same theological underpinnings. The basic metaphor of Bunyan's allegory is simple and familiar. The objects and characters that the pilgrim Christian encounters are homely and commonplace but they are also charged with spiritual significance as Bunyan charts the pattern of puritan conversion. As the critic Philip Edwards argues, Christian's journey marks the progressive attainment of spiritual understanding but also strongly emphasizes the danger of losing one's way (Edwards 116). St. Augustine's journey does also stress the difficulty and confusion involved in the Christian odyssey back to God, but Bunyan clearly presents that journey in an even darker light. Christian's journey is a perilous adventure in which Christian encounters giants, wild beasts, and bottomless pits. For Bunyan and for countless other believers, this difficult journey represents the narrow path to god that every Christian hopes to travel to the end. Each one of these texts is a complicated masterpiece, and this analysis is clearly but one simple way of wrestling them down to our level. Their exploration of the journey ranges from the unknown to the everyday world as each one of these writers show how much is possible within the limits of human life, a life that is anything but ordinary. Works Cited Augustine, St. *Confessions*. The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces: Fifth Continental Edition. New York: Norton & Company, 1987. 617-633. Bunyan, John. *The Pilgrims Progress*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987. Cervantes, Miguel De. *Don Quixote*. The Norton <https://assignbuster.com/the-journey-in-literature/>

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