

1-1-1988

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

The Literary Traveler as a
Metaphor of a Human Psychological Cycle

A Thesis submitted to the
University Honors Program
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree
With Upper Division Honors

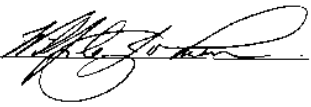
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by

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DeKalb, Illinois

December 1988

Approved: 

Department of: English

Date: December 16, 1988

JOURNAL OF THESIS ABSTRACTS

THESIS SUBMISSION FORM

AUTHOR: Jeff M. Guga
THESIS TITLE: The Literary Traveler as a Metaphor of a Human Psychological Cycle
THESIS ADVISOR: Dr. William C. Johnson
ADVISOR'S DEPT: English
DATE: December 16, 1988
HONORS PROGRAM: University Honors Program
NAME OF COLLEGE: Northern Illinois University
PAGE LENGTH: 16
BIBLIOGRAPHY (YES OR NO): yes
ILLUSTRATED (YES OR NO): no
COPIES AVAILABLE (HARD COPY, MICROFILM, DISKETTE): no
SUBJECT HEADINGS: (CHOOSE FIVE KEY WORDS)
Literary Travelers and Human Mortality

ABSTRACT (100-200 words):

Readers of literature are frequently exposed to principal characters who are travelers. The traveler and his adventure are metaphors of a human psychological cycle--a cycle driven by the need to come to terms with our forthcoming deaths and a cycle which ends, if successful, with a perceived understanding of his or her existence. In pursuing this thesis, an analysis is made of the following novels: Candide, Don Quixote, Gulliver's Travels and The Divine Comedy (three books).

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THESIS NUMBER: _____

Readers of literature are frequently exposed to principal characters who are travelers, and literary presentations of the traveler motif are almost universal. However, the psychological aspects of those travelers are not as easily discerned and are often more complex than at first appears to be the case.

The traveler and his adventure are metaphors of a human psychological cycle--a cycle driven by the need to come to terms with our forthcoming deaths and a cycle which ends, if successful, with a perceived understanding of his or her existence.

Each of us, as a traveler, starts out in his physical or mental realm, usually comfortable with one's position and surroundings. Then, the traveler begins to feel the desire to enter into the realm of the unknown, to experience the extreme limits of his or her physical consciousness. Once the journey reaches this end, that is once the traveler gains an awareness of the timelessness of being, the traveler, if successful, can return confident, of his or her existence in the timeless thread of being. Joseph Campbell, in A Hero With a Thousand Faces, calls this destination of the traveler the "life affirming threshold." The experience is affirming because death is no longer a negative conclusion of life but a positive event which can be synthesized into the larger

realm of the spirit. Campbell goes on to say of the traveler's culmination: ". . . the hero-soul goes boldly in -and discovers the hags converted into goddesses and the dragons into the watchdogs of the gods" (p. 217). In terms of the traveler's adventure the hags and dragons represent the hardships that are faced on the way to cross the threshold. Once across, the true form or nature of the hags is seen. This fact renders them impotent to further hamper the traveler.

This boundary, the "life affirming threshold," is the goal of the traveler; this leads to a further refinement in defining a traveler. A successful traveler crosses the threshold, the unsuccessful ones do not.

Humans have known of the existence of our life affirming thresholds and our desires to exceed the thresholds boundaries long before written literature. However, these desires have moved men and women throughout time to record stories of their struggles of how they have or have not pushed, or even moved beyond, their life affirming threshold. Using the motif of a traveler as the main character in a novel, authors have given readers a written record of a secondary drive which exists in mankind.

This drive pushes men and women, despite the tremendous hardships which can arise in their journeys, to seek their life affirming threshold. Examples are found not only in the literature of the ages but in recorded history as well. The

explorers and the quest for the horizon, scientists attempting to unlock the atom, the Apollo moon mission, and the Voyager's travel outside of the solar system - each is an example of a secondary drive in mankind. That is to say, as with a primary drive (hunger, thirst and sex), the motivation is genetically ingrained. To understand our existence, at the edge of and beyond the threshold, is a compulsion so strong and so common in all cultures it can only be that the algorithms of all souls contain and drive it. Literary figures such as Gulliver, Quixote, Candide, and Dante are all written examples of man's efforts to overcome death - to see beyond known thresholds.

The foundation of the cycle these characters go through is the pattern of the traveler and his travels. This traveler, upon coming to a gap--a perceived emptiness or problem in his life, is driven to seek understanding, in order to fill the gap. In seeking understanding the traveler often initiates a pilgrimage, generally in the mental or spiritual realm and more than likely carrying over into the physical realm as well.

Consider, for example, Don Quixote. After reading of knight errantry, he travels in the mental realm to come to terms with his nearing death; he then decides to continue his traveling in the physical realm by initiating a pilgrimage. Although Quixote is considered a wanderer he does have a purpose in his random travels. His traveling is to duel with

an enchanter, an enemy, who "knows that in the fullness of time I [Quixote] shall engage a favorite knight of his in single combat, and that I shall conquer him, and he will not be able to prevent it" (p. 65). This knight of Quixote's enchanter is death.

The second element which comprises the foundation of the human cycle to overcome death is travel, of which the types have been named "physical" and "mental." Travel in the physical realm is accomplished through movement away from the surroundings known to the character. The reasonings for the departure may vary, from the desire to determine what lies beyond in the unknown to being a refugee because of hardship. Swift's Gulliver is primarily a physical traveler, roaming the oceans to see the world and to gain financial benefit.

In contrast with the physical traveler, the mental traveler may not physically move at all. This person is moved to open unknown avenues of thought or spiritual awareness through repeated internal contemplation. Dante, in the Divine Comedy, is a spiritual traveler as he progresses from the underworld and into heaven. By contemplating his life and its associations in his mind, Dante strengthens himself for his Christian ascension, at death, to God. Virgil says, in Purgatorio, of Dante's travel, "He goes seeking liberty, which is so dear. . . for it would not be fitting to go with eye dimmed by any fog before the first minister of those of Paradise" (p. 23).

Considering both these types of travelers it is easy to synthesize one more, a hybrid who travels in both the physical and mental realms. Here again Don Quixote and Gulliver are examples. Both maintain a physical existence in the present while living their world through an alternative view generated within their minds. The difference between these two characters and a "normal" individual is their frequent inability to determine which realm is truly real, a point which will receive further attention later.

Yet there are successful, and there are unsuccessful, travelers of both mental and physical types. In Voltaire's *Candide* we are presented with the narrative of a successful traveler. Beginning as a refugee from his home, Candide is literally kicked out; his journey takes him throughout Europe and South America. Candide approaches his journey with the innocence of a naive child, for he "had been brought up never to judge anything for himself" (p. 85). In terms of his threshold, Candide is unable to distinguish the edge or its meaning.

As time passes, however, Candide is made painfully aware of the harsh edge his world possesses. Through a multitude of floggings, murders, rapes and deceptions, Candide is stripped of the ignorance he maintains of his mortality and his inability to have a profound effect on it. His awareness begins:

If this is the best of all possible worlds, then what are the others? I could let it pass if I had only

been flogged, that happened also with the Bulgarians; but, O my dear Pangloss, greatest of philosophers, was it necessary that I see you hanged without knowing why! O my dear Anabaptist, best of men, was it necessary that you be drowned in the port! O Mademoiselle Cunegonde, pearl of young ladies, was it necessary that your belly be slit open! (p. 28)

As Candide travels through the physical realm his mind has begun to perceive a gap within his life. This gap is the violence and eventual death of his life. As Martin says of Paris, which is a symbol of the world, "it's a crowd in which everyone seeks pleasure and in which almost no one finds it" (p. 67).

Candide does journey to find pleasure, to understand his existence, to cross the life affirming threshold. Candide is a successful traveler (as he and the reader are made aware) through the events of the novel. There are two confirmations Candide makes that alert the reader and the character of the progressing journey to deal with death.

First, a king asks if Candide is royalty. Candide replies "No, Gentlemen, and I have no desire to be" (p. 90). This is the first evidence of Candide's learning of his inner boundary. The easiness of life a king leads, as seen by the inexperienced masses, is not "the best of all possible worlds."

Second, the old woman asks of Martin the hard path of mankind. The narrator tells us, "Martin above all concluded that man was born to live in the convulsions of anxiety or the lethargy of boredom. Candide did not agree, but he

asserted nothing" (p. 99). Candide is now beginning, after being exposed to his caustic world, to see the fiber that will fill the rift his death implies for his soul.

The wiseman, whom Pangloss asks concerning the conditions of evil on the earth, knew of this fiber. "What should we do?" asks Pangloss. "Hold your tongue" replied the wiseman (p. 100). That is exactly what Candide did with Martin's assertion of man's endless "convulsions of anxiety."

Candide had formed his own answer, his own method of satiating man's desire to know the conclusion of his death cycle. His answer is "we must cultivate our garden" (p. 101). Candide has reached the life affirming threshold of his journey. His understanding of his own existence as a mortal human is founded upon individual realizations. To Candide it does not matter if the world is seen as the best of places or the worst, only that personal versions are the best for the individual.

Personal versions of the world are also the principal subject of Cervantes' Don Quixote. He was a knight errant "taking whatever road his horse chose, in the belief that in this lay the essence of adventure" (p. 36). His adventures in the physical world were enhanced by his fictional dreams of historic chivalry. Most often these dreams would take precedence over reality and Quixote would see the world as his dream.

The dreamworld, that is the world and his dreams, was

Quixote's theater for his search for the life affirming threshold. Here he traveled, seeking an order to be applied to his existence. This order would give Quixote the confidence to die, for when he found the edge of his threshold death would be there, waiting to duel with the lance of the Knight of the Sad Countenance. The winner would take all and cross over the threshold. Quixote relishes his duel:

Tell me now, what greater pleasure can there be in the world, what joy equal to that of winning a battle and triumphing over an enemy? There can be no doubt of it. None.

When this duel is concluded the knight, if successful, will return to an affirmed life. It will be a world where boys will herald his return with shouts of joy and praise, where a just king will hold court with gentlemanly jousts for entertainment, and where a fair princess will hold her hand out for the valiant (pp. 165-168).

This vision of the knights' paradise cannot be in our physical realm. However, the motivation Don Quixote draws from the vision can be found in the physical realm, for an affirmed life is led by the one who turns the unmannerly brawl into a gentlemanly joust. The knight who overcomes his death, an unfair fight, is able to comprehend his existence through inner direction. Quixote tells the reader of the successful knight: "We know our enemies, not only from portraits but in their real persons" (p. 503). He would know the threshold's edge.

Given, then, the nature of Quixote's travels to find the

edge of his life and cross over the threshold, it has to be proven that he is a successful traveler. This proof lies in three principal occurrences towards the end of the knight's physical journey.

The first of these is Quixote's proclamation of his ability to obtain inner direction. He has learned that he is the master of his fate:

All I can tell you is that there is no such thing in the world as Fortune, and that events here, whether good or ill, do not fall out by chance but by a particular providence of Heaven, from which comes the saying that every man is the architect of his own destiny. (p. 896)

Furthermore, the second principal occurrence is that Don Quixote learns that his death will not be an end. He proclaims that "the narrow and laborious path of virtue ends in life; and not in life which has an ending, but in life without end" (p. 507). In crossing the life affirming boundary, the successful traveler is aware of his spiritual existence and the continuing journey he will face in that realm.

However, his spirit will still travel in the physical after his death. This is the third proof of Quixote's successful journey - others will draw from his existence and use it to enrich their lives. Sancho Panza is Quixote's legacy, the one who will continue the journey to push to the edge of man's life affirming threshold. Quixote has awakened in Sancho and others the desire to know of the order in their

lives, to find the life affirming threshold.

Don Antonio, lamenting the attempts to cure Don Quixote's knight errantry, proclaims the motivation derived from the knight:

And if it were not a sin against charity, I should say I hope Don Quixote may never be cured, for with his recovery we not only should lose his pleasantries but his squire Sancho Panza's as well; and either of them can turn melancholy itself to mirth.

The primary melancholy of man is his death. For someone to be able to turn the melancholy into mirth, to provide some understanding of a feared event, is to say that that man was able to overcome his own end.

Understanding is also the goal of another famous character in literature, Gulliver of Swift's Gulliver's Travels. Here is a tale of a traveler who sets out to discover the world and its adventures while he is earning his wages as a doctor on a ship. From the beginning of his travels, however, Gulliver is unable to grow from his experience. His vision is tainted by his poor attitude as he feels he has "been condemned by Nature and Fortune to an active and restless life" (p. 121).

This "active and restless life" leads Gulliver, at the end of the novel, to put his faith for his future completely in the ideas espoused by a society of horses called Houyhnhnms. Ironically, this society asks Gulliver to leave their presence because he is of a race of primitive, non-speaking humans called Yahoos, which the Houyhnhnms keep as

slaves. The Houyhnhnms felt that to have a representative of the uncivilized humans among them may tarnish their otherwise peaceful and just society.

Gulliver, despite his vast travels, is blinded to the shortcomings of this snobbish society. This blindness is a result of his being unable to discern in the Houyhnhnms his real world--the world of humans. He sees the Houyhnhnms as a viable utopian society and adopts their ideas and ways to such an extent that he forgets that Lemuel Gulliver is a Yahoo. By the end of his journey he is unwilling to touch or associate with much of anything to do with his own race but insists in living with horses.

Gulliver's failure to understand his world is a clear sign of his failure as a traveler and as a human seeking to cross the life affirming threshold. Campbell, speaking of the failed adventure, describes a character such as Gulliver:

On the other hand, like most of the rest of us, one may invent a false, finally unjustified, image of oneself as an exceptional phenomenon in the world, not guilty as others are, but justified in one's inevitable sinning because one represents the good. Such self-righteousness leads to a misunderstanding, not only of oneself but of the nature of both man and the cosmos. (p. 238)

Therefore, in Gulliver's separating himself from his race of Yahoos because of his perceived superior understanding of existence, he has failed the task of comprehending human death. Based on Gulliver's actions, he will live his life in confinement until his death, just before which he will only then be gratified that his existence as a non-Houyhnhnm will

be over.

The life of a failed traveler is grim compared to that of one who has come to terms with his death. For in dealing with and understanding forthcoming death, literary characters show us a life lived for the best. Dante, by the conclusion of the three books of The Divine Comedy, shows readers the fullest of peaceful fruits the successful traveler enjoys.

These fruits begin with the tale itself, for it is a result of Dante's journey in the mental realm to come to terms with his nearing death. He begins in Inferno, which is really after his journey and the crossing the life affirming threshold, by addressing the reader "In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself within a dark wood" (p. 23). The reason for Dante's mental travel is established immediately; he has come to a gap, a time when his faith in God and in Florence has waivered, and now he must travel to reaffirm his faith in each. Furthermore, Dante recognizes his journey to renew his faith is of a collective nature, that is to say all the inhabitants of earth are part of his existence.

The affirmation Dante wishes to find is of the order within God's universe, from the outer spheres of heaven to the inner motivations of earth's inhabitants, past and future. He seeks to rediscover the grace of God and therefore to reaffirm his existence on this earth-- and beyond, into life after death. Upon meeting Judge Nino in

Purgatorio Dante proclaims the goal of his journey: "I am in the first life, though by going thus I gain the other" (p. 109).

The journey is very difficult, for to gain the other life, that of continued existence in the spirit realm under God's light, Dante must constantly realign his vision to the proper order of the universe. The Eagle of Divine Justice in Paradiso likens the difficulty Dante faces in understanding the methods of the just heavenly spheres to trying to envision the bottom of the sea:

Therefore the sight that is granted to your world penetrates within the Eternal Justice as the eye into the sea; for though from the shore it sees the bottom, in the open sea it does not, and yet is there but the depth conceals it. (p. 273)

This is exactly what Dante must do, though, in order to see the bottom of the sea and to realize the "soul as the unity of the whole man, a being reflective, responsible, immortal" (comments on: Purgatorio p. 335).

In this journey Dante is not unaided, for he relates "God has so received me into His grace that He wills that I see His court" (Purgatorio p. 335). God directed Beatrice, Dante's earthly inspiration now in heaven, to send a guide, Virgil, to see Dante through hell and purgatory. But there is one more guide in The Divine Comedy, the real poet Dante himself, for he is the guide for the reader to find his or her way out of "the dark wood." This is a strong indication of Dante's crossing the life affirming threshold as he has

the ability and desire to return and tell others of his journey.

Further argument for Dante's crossing the life affirming threshold and gaining the understanding of his existence can be found in the last pages of Paradiso. Here, when questioned by St. Peter about faith, Dante describes his strengthened vision after traveling through the spiritual domain:

The deep things which so richly manifest themselves to me here are so hidden from men's eyes below that their existence lies in belief alone, on which is based the lofty hope. . . (p. 349)

After Dante expresses his clearer vision, St. Paul, in one of the most beautiful passages of the whole Comedy, asks Dante directly if his faith has been restored. Using the metaphor of having coins for having faith, St. Paul asks: Now the alloy and the weight of this money have been well examined; but tell me if thou hast it in thy purse." Dante replies "I have indeed, so bright and round that of its mintage I am in do doubt" (p. 349),

Finally, in the closing passages of Paradiso Dante relates the culmination of his spirit's crossing the life affirming threshold: "I think I saw the universal form of this complex [the unity of creation and the creator], because in telling of it I feel my joy expand" (p. 483). Dante understands his positions within God's order of the universe. Dante knows that in his earthly life he is surrounded by the

sunlight of God's face and the trees of Paradise. Dante is free of his physical end and, like the souls in Purgatory, nests in his own light. Furthermore, he is sharing his light even now with readers of The Divine Comedy.

Dante is not, however, the only author discussed who shares his tribulation or his failures with readers. It could be said that all authors who publish their works are giving of themselves. Curiously, many of the great examples of literary giving involve the motif of the traveler. The technical reasons for the repeated use of the traveler as the principal subject are easily understood. These could be, for example, to add interest, to target specific subject groups and areas, or to provide a tool for the novel's linear progression. But the psychological aspects of the traveler's appearance and reappearance in literature are harder to define.

This paper has presented the traveler as a manifestation of a human cycle, one beginning at birth and ending at death. The traveler and his adventure are a metaphor of this cycle. And the struggles faced during the journey are human attempts to understand the quick and often violent conclusion of our physical existence. In overcoming his struggles the traveler, if successful, crosses the life affirming threshold and comes to terms with his existence in this universe.

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