

Band 6 Journeys Response

The journey is as important as the destination. Discuss.

The journey may offer life-changing experiences, but it is ultimately the destination that motivates the traveller to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals, making both equally important. Such physical journeys involve the exploration of new and challenging environments, equipping the traveller with fresh experiences, perspectives and insights of the world around them. Through a variety of written and visual techniques, these notions are explored in Peter Skrzynecki's poems *Crossing the Red Sea* and *Migrant Hostel*, Mel Gibson's film *Apocalypto*, and Dr. Seuss' picture book *I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew*. The process of the journey is portrayed through phases of movement and standstills, allowing the traveller to reflect on the impact of the trip.

Journeys can be driven by aims of escaping to a better place, but the process itself is just as significant as it shapes the outlook of the traveller. In *Crossing the Red Sea*, the journey of the migrants from war-torn Europe is ironically also a standstill on the boat, forcing them to contemplate their past and present circumstances. The voyage itself is a source of alleviation from emotional seclusion, as shown in the metaphors "Voices left their caves | Silence fell from its shackles," creating a tentative mood of hope and showing how the migrants are emotionally opening up. This sense of optimism is reinforced in the Biblical allusion to resurrection in "Another Lazarus...who was saying a prayer in thanksgiving," conveying the migrants' hope and gratitude for a new start. Negatively, however, the migrants' 'limbo-like' status is highlighted by the metaphor of "patches and shreds | of dialogue," creating a pessimistic tone which augments the sense of lost identity. Furthermore, the personification of nature in "pine tress whispering against a stone wall", also a symbol of the migrant's European heritage, creates a pensive, homesick mood. Despite this, the metaphor of "a blood-rimmed horizon," generates an atmosphere of uncertainty and foreshadowing beckons the migrants to move on from their old lives. Clearly, the destination is integral to the migrants' dreams of a new beginning, but the journey itself facilitates a hopeful change in their outlook that is equally important.

Similar to *Crossing the Red Sea*, *Apocalypto* portrays a forced exodus during a period of massive change and upheaval, during the decline of the Mayan Empire, in which "Jaguar Paw", a hunter and the son of a tribal chief, strives to escape from ruthless kidnappers and reunite with his family and native jungle. This journey is initially centred on surviving and reaching home, but extends into the rediscovery of his native jungle and identity as a hunter. The shadowy, flickering lighting from the bonfire the night before his capture creates an ominous, uncertain atmosphere and foreshadows the violent upheaval of his life and identity. The shaky trailing camera when Jaguar Paw escapes and runs from his kidnappers creates an atmosphere of helplessness and bewilderment, showing how ironically 'the hunter has become the hunted'. However, this powerlessness is broken when Jaguar Paw narrowly escapes drowning in a mud pool and his artificial blue body paint washed off by a rich mud, conveying his physical and spiritual reconnection with his native lands. This enhanced grasp of his identity is evident in the dialogue he shouts to his pursuers, "I am Jaguar Paw! I am a hunter! This is my forest!" hence reaffirming his mood of confidence and control. The lingering, panning shot of Jaguar Paw and his reunited wife and son rejecting both the Mayans and Spanish by disappearing into the dense jungle emphasises his regained sense of freedom and self-determination. Hence, the

Jaguar Paw's home and homecoming are equally important, as he realises that only a free life as a hunter, connected with the primal forces of nature, is suitable for him.

While *Crossing the Red Sea* and *Apocalypto* present journeys in phases of movement, *Migrant Hostel* depicts one in a standstill, allowing the migrants to reflect on the process of the journey and their impressions of the destination, making them both important. Immediately apparent is that journeys often involve prolonged hardship and bring out the darker side of human nature, instead of being solely positive experiences. The assonance in "coming and goings" suggests the migrants have little grasp of the passage of time and creates a mood of disorientation, highlighting the overall dark tone of the poem. This concept of disorientation is sustained by the simile of "like a homing pigeon | Circling to get its bearings", conveying the lack of permanence and prolonged nature of the migrants' journey. The obstacles of the journey are not merely physical, but social as well, as evident in mainstream Australia's rejection and disdain of the migrants. Skrzynecki highlights this air of hostility through the metaphor of the "barrier at the main gate | Sealed off the highway," symbolising the isolation and neglect of the migrants. The use of the euphemism 'Migrant Hostel' to describe the harsh detention centre creates a sense of irony, reflecting a bitter and disillusioned tone from the author. The alliteration in "partitioned off...by memories of hunger and hate" highlights the pessimistic and inward shift in the migrants' outlook by shunning citizens from enemy nations in WWII. Clearly, though the standstill of the journey in the hostel has been rather dark and cruel, it has hardened and acclimatised the worldviews of the migrants towards inevitable hardships, showing how the journey is important for dealing with the destination.

The persona in the picture book *I Had Trouble in Getting to Solla Sollew*, like the migrants in *Migrant Hostel*, is disillusioned by the journey to the increasingly out-of-reach paradise of Solla Sollew. However, he gains a broadened understanding of life and himself, hence rendering the journey just as important as the original destination that motivated it. The idiosyncratic dialogue "Solla Sollew, where they never have troubles. Or at least very few," is repeated by everyone the persona meets, giving the first hints that the destination is more of a Utopian idealisation than reality. His vacant facial expressions and body language is gradually dispelled as the journey goes on, reflecting a change in his naïve and unquestioning worldview. Throughout the picture book, the persona is peripherally placed off-centre, suggesting that he has not found any balance in his life or his place in the world. Only when he decides to deal with his problems instead of running away from them do the pictures start centring on him, reflecting his enhanced control over his own destiny. The exaggeratedly large club he wields in striking position is a symbol for the newfound confidence the journey has equipped him with, reflecting his hopeful mood for the future. Hence, the destination may have been of utmost importance at the outset, but when it becomes unreachable, the journey itself becomes just as significant because it teaches the persona about life and reality.

In conclusion, each of the mentioned texts has life-changing implications for their respective travellers, not only as a result of reaching the destination, but also the journey itself. While the destination provides the motivation at the outset of the journey, the process is equally important as it facilitates new experiences, perspectives and insights as a result of reflection and introspection by the traveller.