

Road Trip

Jack Kerouac, in his beat novel *On the Road*, was not the first to acknowledge that the journey can be every bit as interesting and significant as the destination. As an existential theme in human life, the journey is perhaps the most obsessively referenced source for philosophers, novelists, playwrights, composers, poets, psychologists, teachers and all manner of religious instructors. The structure is appealing – a journey demands a beginning, a middle and an end, just like life, and just about every culture throughout history has adopted some version of the theme.

A particularly overt example of the structure is the late 15th-century morality play *Everyman*, which uses the journey from birth to death to offer common-sense advice on, amongst other things, keeping your books in order, choosing your companions, putting a value on your actions, and achieving salvation. In the 18th century, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* developed this theme with the central character reborn as "Christian," who is subject to an even more detailed moral advice than *Everyman* as to how to survive the perils and temptations of the world and secure admission to the "heavenly city." Alternatively, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* has an entirely different tone. Like Jack Kerouac he had the insight to use the structure to examine the personalities of the pilgrims themselves, giving us a generous cross section of life in the 14th century in all its sweaty and entertaining detail.

In a uniquely Spanish iteration of the theme, Cervantes gave us *Don Quixote*, the iconic "sad knight" riding out on his quest with his faithful squire Sancho Panza by his side and an image of his muse Dulcinea clutched to his breast. After a series of adventures in which he tilts at windmills and battles imaginary enemies, Don Quixote, at the end of the road, must pitch his romantic idealism against the cold reality of the Mirror Knight in a fight to the death.

In the realm of psychology, Carl Jung places the concept of the Quest in a prominent place in the hierarchy of psychological archetypes. The story of the hero engaged in an epic journey overcoming a series of obstacles in order to achieve his destiny has been a familiar theme throughout history from Greek myth to the action movies that are the big revenue earners in Hollywood today.

Pilgrimage is a refined version of the theme in which the purpose of the journey is to attain some form of enlightenment. In the 1400's, Compostela was the most popular destination for pilgrims after Rome and the Holy Land. Since then the Camino has inspired hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and travelers to walk "The Way." After a period of relative obscurity, there is currently a revival of interest in the pilgrimage, and in the summer months the route is well populated with travelers of every persuasion making the journey on foot, on bicycle and on horseback. The 33rd (and last) station of the Camino is the cathedral town of Santiago de Compostela in the heart of the Galician countryside. Upon entering the cathedral the pilgrims traditionally approach a stone column and place a hand into the deeply worn indent created by the thousands of hands that preceded them. Next they ritually bang their heads against a sculpture of San Matteo, the architect of the cathedral, in order to receive his knowledge and wisdom before ascending the steps to the tomb of Santiago and completing their journey.

For some, however, there is another stage. Galicia has a strong Celtic heritage and for the Celts and the itinerant Roma (the Gypsy people whose culture has so influenced Spain) there is a coda to the Christian pilgrimage, a road from Santiago to the coastal village of Finisterre – "the end of the earth." Here there is a lighthouse dating to the Roman empire and the remnants of a temple dedicated to *Ara Solis*, the sun god. Here, in the Pagan view of the world, the sun, after traversing the heavens, ended his journey in a fiery descent into the underworld, before rising in the East and beginning the journey all over again.