

## Introduction: Journeys and Quests

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Usually defined as the act of traveling from one place to another, a trip over a great distance or a set of experiences that someone has over a period of time, especially when they change the person in some way, journey may also imply the idea of walking or covering a longer distance, marking someone's attempt to reach a more or less remote destination, and even a displacement. Throughout literature, journey means adventure and quest, whether material or spiritual: it determines, for those who undertake it, enrichment of soul and mind and, subsequently, an initiatory experience. No traveler is, at the end of the journey, the same: this specific voyage-adventure changes everything and everyone: this is obvious from Homer's *Odyssey* to Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and from Wu Cheng-en's *Journey to the West* to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, to mention only these few (and famous) examples.

Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant underlined that each journey represents spiritual progress, and the quest it implies stands for a personal search for truth, peace of mind, sometimes immortality or the attempt to discover a hidden (sacred or secular) center. Any pilgrim has always understood their journey as a self-escape, a complex experience meant to shape the inner world and to meet all the challenges of the universe: "Travel within yourself and you will reach the Grail as well..." All types of dictionaries of symbols reveal that journeys are not only physical movements from one definite point in space to another; they are much more than purely dynamic actions, turning into personal adventures and explorations, witnessing the protagonist's deep desire for spiritual change, understanding and knowledge, an irrepressible need to

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