

Steep Ascent Short Guide

Steep Ascent by Anne Morrow Lindbergh

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



Contents

Steep Ascent Short Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Techniques.....	3
Themes/Characters.....	4
Literary Precedents.....	6
Copyright Information.....	7

Techniques

The "confessional" style of *Steep Ascent* weds itself strongly to the literary form of the diary, a form Lindbergh works with in much of her fiction. The most striking feature of this allegorical novella is the significant absence of dialogue — but for some dialogue in the opening pages, the narrative relies almost entirely on interior monologue. In part autobiographical, Lindbergh's work is convincing without becoming self-indulgent.

Her use of evocative imagery and the cadence of her poetic style transform the story from a physical adventure to an adventure of the spirit. She emphasizes the spiritual elements of the journey or pilgrimage by alluding to religious themes. Merging idealized images with realistic elements, Lindbergh communicates a philosophy that asserts an optimistic belief in the participation of life. Despite her own apologies for not including a more passionate expression of the World War II politics in which the story takes place, her strong affirmation of life and the tenacity of the human spirit provides a subtle yet powerful argument against the destructive forces of warfare.



Themes/Characters

Using the metaphor of flight, Lindbergh achieves a powerful story of spiritual adventure in *Steep Ascent*. A semi-autobiographical work, it enjoys an inherent authenticity and provides an insightful narrative. Lindbergh's portrayal of her protagonist's, Eve's, journey is both sensitive and provocative. She presents Eve as an astute observer, possessing a foreigner's eye for detail. Eve, an American, has been living in England for ten years as the wife of a British airman. She decides to accompany her husband Gerald on a flight over the Alps to Italy, despite apprehensions about leaving her son Peter behind, and concern for the health of the baby she is carrying.

Initially Lindbergh draws the reader into the story with the bustle of activity and good-byes surrounding the preparations for the flight. No sooner has the plane taken off, however, than the metaphor permits the transformation of this seemingly simple story into an adventure of mind and spirit. No longer bound by temporal values of space and time, the flight allows Eve a period of meditation for reverie and reflection.

Eve experiences a series of revelations during the flight. She seems driven by a sense of urgency she does not fully understand. In the beginning she is preoccupied with time and with the fear of the dangers that might lie ahead. She observes the disappearing earth below with great longing, wishing somehow to possess it, feeling herself bound to its security; her own longing leads her to question Gerald's obsession with flying. She reflects upon the closeness the two share in the single engine plane in which they rely on their understanding of one another and a nonverbal communication composed of limited contact and gestures.

Eve considers her motives for making the journey. She concedes that she is not seeking physical adventure, resolving that she is an "earth person." But she is not satisfied, not wanting to waste life she seems anxious to appreciate it on all levels. Eve analyzes life's texture as having three levels — a "top crust," a "middle everyday layer," and a rarely attained "inner core." Her anxiety leads her to the realization that the emotional fear which is plaguing her mind and body denies life, and that allowing this fear to take control is tantamount to a decision against life.

This realization allows her to understand her motive for making the journey: She wants to break through the middle layer of life, to reach the more fulfilling inner core. This knowledge allows Eve the freedom to defeat her fear and participate in the joy of living.

At the moment of Eve's epiphany, she experiences an exaltation that is paralleled by the plane's ascent over the Alps. As they break through the clouds, Eve reaches an understanding of Gerald's love of flying in her new awareness of life and the sense of freedom that her spirit achieves in its release from fear. Eve's decision to live, the decision to make the steep ascent despite the danger or the fear of the unknown permits her a sense of ecstasy, a momentary glimpse beyond life's middle layer. Flying then becomes a metaphor for letting go of the earth and a vehicle for reaching the inner core of life.



This elation is followed, however, by a period of great danger as the plane is caught in fog and is unable to locate a safe point at which to break through the cloud in order to prepare a safe landing. Eve's joy gives way to renewed fear and doubt. As she is reminded of her own mortality, she reflects on faith. She is reminded of a pilgrim's hymn, which lends the novella its title: "They climbed the steep ascent of heaven . . . through peril, toil, and pain . . . O God, to us may grace be given . . . to follow in their train. . ."

The turning point comes as Gerald decides to make a "blind" descent risking the possibility of crashing into the mountains hidden by the clouds. In this instant, this test of faith, Eve's fear of danger and death dissolves. The final revelation, the revelation that brings her spiritual fulfillment comes with the acceptance that life is a gift, not a possession, and that to serve the gift, to participate in life is to remain open, aware and vulnerable. Eve's ability to transcend the fear of death comes from the selflessness she achieves as a server of life rather than a possessor. As a server of life, her decision to live becomes a decision not for herself but for others.

Although the crisis of nonparticipation experienced by Eve is not exclusively a women's problem, Lindbergh chooses to emphasize women's role as the "watchers and waiters" and the ordeal they face as they search for a sense of being. The apparent limitlessness attained in flight becomes the metaphor for the freedom that Eve's spiritual adventure affords. Eve's pilgrimage gives her the courage and fortitude to approach life with a new sense of awareness and to overcome the stagnation of nonparticipation.

Literary Precedents

Lindbergh's ideology draws on a variety of artistic, literary, and philosophical sources. Her diaries and letters specify the influence of Joseph Albers, D. H. Lawrence, Rilke, and T. S. Eliot. In her review of Antoine de Saint Exupery's *Wind, Sand and Stars* (1939), Lindbergh takes a quotation from Alfred North Whitehead's *Adventure of Ideas* (1933). "Adventure," he writes, "is nothing if it is not translated through the mind, through the spirit."

There is no doubt that Lindbergh's theme embodies this concept of adventure. Her choice of metaphor and her literary style also owe much to the work of her contemporary, Saint Exupery.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994