

A review on Mortenson's Three Cups of Tea: One man's Mission to promote Peace ...

One School at a time

Manila M P¹, Manibha M P², Geetha B³, Yasodha V⁴, Jhansi N⁵

Teacher, English, Bethany Navajeevan Matric School, Tamilnadu, India

Assistant Professor, English, Prince Shri Venkateshwara Padmavathy Engineering College, Tamilnadu, India

Assistant Professor, English, Prince Shri Venkateshwara Padmavathy Engineering College, Tamilnadu, India

Assistant Professor, English, Prince Shri Venkateshwara Padmavathy Engineering College, Tamilnadu, India

Assistant Professor, English, Prince Shri Venkateshwara Padmavathy Engineering College, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

In the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists were expanding fiction's social spectrum to encompass both high and low life and sometimes connected to the naturalist school of realism. Literary forms of the period were extraordinarily varied, and in drama, poetry, and fiction the leading authors tended toward radical technical experiments. One of the notable writers in the period is Greg Mortenson, an American humanitarian, professional speaker, writer, and former mountaineer. Mortenson is a living hero to rural communities of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he has gained the trust of Islamic leaders, military and militia commanders, government officials and tribal chiefs from his tireless effort to champion education, especially for girls. Mortenson discovers his mission and makes his best effort to fulfill his promise to the people of Korphe of building a school.

Keyword: promise, tireless effort, education, school, girls

Introduction

American Literature is the literature written or produced in the area of the United States and its preceding colonies. During its early history, America was a series of British colonies on the eastern coast of the present-day United States. Therefore, its literary tradition begins as linked to the broader tradition of English literature. The New England colonies were the center of early American literature. The revolutionary period contained political writings by Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. In the post-war period, Thomas Jefferson's United States Declaration of Independence solidified his status as a key American writer. It was in the late 18th and early 19th centuries that the nation's first novels were published.

With the War of 1812 and an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature and culture, a number of new literary figures emerged, perhaps most prominently among all were Washington Irving and Edgar Allan Poe. In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson started a movement known as Transcendentalism. Henry David Thoreau wrote *Walden*, which urges resistance to the dictates of organized society. The political conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired the writings of William Lloyd Garrison and Harriet Beecher Stowe in her world-famous *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. These efforts were supported by the continuation of the slave narrative autobiography, of which the best known example from this period was Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*.

Nathaniel Hawthorne is notable for his masterpiece, *The Scarlet Letter*, a novel about adultery. Hawthorne influenced Herman Melville who is notable for the books *Moby-Dick* and *Billy Budd*. America's two greatest 19th-century poets were Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. American poetry reached its peak in the early-to-mid-20th century, with such noted writers as Wallace Stevens, T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, and E. E. Cummings. Mark Twain (the pen name used by Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was the first major American writer to be born away from the East Coast. Henry James was notable for novels like *The Turn of the Screw*. At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists included Edith Wharton, Stephen Crane, and Theodore Dreiser. Experimentation in style and form is seen in the works of Gertrude Stein.

At the beginning of the 20th century, American novelists were expanding fiction's social spectrum to encompass both high and low life and sometimes connected to the naturalist school of realism. In her stories and novels, Edith Wharton scrutinized the upper-class, Eastern society in which she had grown up. One of her finest books, *The Age of Innocence*, centers on a man who chooses to marry a conventional, socially acceptable woman rather than a fascinating outsider. At about the same time, Stephen Crane, best known for his Civil War novel *The*

Red Badge of Courage, depicted the life of New York City prostitutes in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*. And in *Sister Carrie*, Theodore Dreiser portrayed a country girl who moves to Chicago and becomes a kept woman. Hamlin Garland and Frank Norris wrote about the problems of American farmers and other social issues from a naturalist perspective.

American writers also expressed the disillusionment following upon the war. The stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald capture the restless, pleasure-hungry, defiant mood of the 1920s. Fitzgerald's characteristic theme, expressed poignantly in *The Great Gatsby*, is the tendency of youth's golden dreams to dissolve in failure and disappointment. Fitzgerald also elucidates the collapse of some key American Ideals, set out in the Declaration of Independence, such as liberty, social unity, good governance and peace, features which were severely threatened by the pressures of modern early 20th century society. Sinclair Lewis and Sherwood Anderson also wrote novels with critical depictions of American life. John Dos Passos wrote about the war and also the U.S.A. trilogy which extended into the Depression.

The first group of fiction writers to become popular the local colourist took over to some extent the task of portraying sectional groups that had been abandoned by writers of the new humour. Bret Harte, first of these writers to achieve wide success, admitted indebtedness to prewar sectional humorists, as did some others; and all showed resemblances to the earlier group. Within a brief period, books by pioneers in the movement appeared: Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Oldtown Folks* (1869) and *Sam Lawson's Oldtown Fireside Stories* (1871), delightful vignettes of New England; Harte's *Luck of Roaring Camp, and Other Sketches* (1870), humorous and sentimental tales of California mining camp life; and Edward Eggleston's *Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), a novel of the early days of the settlement of Indiana. Down into the 20th century, short stories (and a relatively small number of novels) in patterns set by these three continued to appear.

Important movements in drama, poetry, fiction, and criticism took shape in the years before, during, and after World War I. The eventful period that followed the war left its imprint upon books of all kinds. Literary forms of the period were extraordinarily varied, and in drama, poetry, and fiction the leading authors tended toward radical technical experiments. American writers toward the close of the 19th century moved toward naturalism, a more advanced stage of realism. Hamlin Garland's writings exemplified some aspects of this development when he made short stories and novels vehicles for philosophical and social preachments and was franker than Howells in stressing the harsher details of the farmer's struggles and in treating the subject of sex. *Main-Travelled Roads* (1891) and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly* (1895) displayed Garland's particular talents. These and a critical manifesto for the new fiction, *Crumbling Idols* (1894), were influential contributions to a developing movement. Toni Morrison, the most recent American recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, writing in a distinctive lyrical prose style, published her controversial debut novel, *The Bluest Eye*, to widespread critical acclaim in 1970.

Other notable writers at the turn of the century include Michael Chabon, whose Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* (2000) tells the story of two friends, Joe Kavalier and Sam Clay, as they rise through the ranks of the comics industry in its heyday; Denis Johnson, whose 2007 novel *Tree of Smoke* about falsified intelligence during Vietnam both won the National Book Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was called by critic Michiko Kakutani "one of the classic works of literature produced by [the Vietnam War]"; and Louise Erdrich, whose 2008 novel *The Plague of Doves*, a distinctly Faulknerian, polyphonic examination of the tribal experience set against the backdrop of murder in the fictional town of Pluto, North Dakota, was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, and her 2012 novel *The Round House*, which builds on the same themes, was awarded the 2012 National Book Award.

Greg Mortenson is an American humanitarian, professional speaker, writer, and former mountaineer who was born in 1957, and grew up on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, Tanzania. His father, Dempsey, founded Kilimanjaro Christian Medical Center (KCMC) a hospital, and mother, Jerene, founded the International School Moshi. He served in the U.S. Army in Germany, where he received the Army Commendation Medal, and later graduated from the University of South Dakota in 1983. In July 1992, Mortenson's sister, Christa, died from a massive seizure after a lifelong struggle with epilepsy on the eve of a trip to visit Dysersville, Iowa, where the baseball movie, 'Field of Dreams', was filmed in a cornfield.

To honor his sister's memory, in 1993, Mortenson climbed Pakistan's K2, the world's second highest mountain in the Karakoram Range. While recovering from the climb in a village called Korphe, Mortenson met a group of children sitting in the dirt writing with sticks in the sand, and made a promise to help them build a school. From that rash promise, grew a humanitarian campaign, in which Mortenson has dedicated his life to promote education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan. His work has not been without difficulty. In 1996, he survived an eight day armed kidnapping by the Taliban in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province tribal areas, escaped a 2003 firefight with feuding Afghan warlords by hiding for eight hours under putrid animal hides in a truck going to a leather-tanning factory. He has overcome two fatwas from enraged Islamic

mullahs, endured CIA investigations, and also received threats from fellow Americans after 9/11, for helping Muslim children with education.

Mortenson has received so many awards and honours. US Army Commendation medal in the year 1975, American Alpine Club David Brower Conservation Award in the year 1998, Peacemaker Award from Montana Community Mediation Center in the year 2002, Climbing Magazine "Golden Piton Award" for humanitarian effort and Vincent Lombardi Champion Award for humanitarian service and Peacemaker of the Year" Benedictine Monks, Santa Fe, NM and Outdoor Person of the Year - Outdoor Magazine in the year 2003,

Mortenson describes the origins of his humanitarian work in his book, *Three Cups of Tea*. He states that he travelled to northern Pakistan in 1993 to climb the world's second-highest mountain, K2, as a memorial to his sister, Christa. After more than 70 days on the mountain located in the Karakoram range, Mortenson failed to reach the summit.

According to the account in *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson stated he took a wrong turn on the trail and ended up in the small village of Korphe. Physically exhausted, ill, and alone at the time of his arrival there, Mortenson was cared for by some of Korphe's residents while he recovered. As a gesture of gratitude to the community for their assistance to him, Mortenson said he would build a school for the village after he noticed local students attending school in an outdoor location and writing out their lessons in the dirt. Mortenson has since stated in a 2011 interview that the timing in the Korphe account in *Three Cups of Tea* is inaccurate and that the events actually took place over a longer period of time and during separate trips.

Three Cups of Tea is the true story of one of the most extraordinary humanitarian missions of our time. In 1993, a young American mountain climber named Greg Mortenson stumbled into a tiny village high in Pakistan's beautiful and desperately poor Karakoram Himalaya region, exhausted, and depressed after a failed attempt to scale the summit of K2, Mortenson regained his strength and his will to live thanks to the generosity of the people of the village of Korphe. Before he left, Mortenson made a vow that would profoundly change both the villagers' lives and his own that he would return and build them a school.

The book traces how Mortenson kept this promise in the high country of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Mortenson was up against considerable odds. Not only is the region remote and dangerous, it is also a notorious breeding ground for Al Qaeda and Taliban terrorists. In the course of his work, Mortenson was kidnapped and threatened with death; he endured local rivalries, deep misunderstandings, jealousy, and corruption, not to mention treacherous roads and epic weather. What kept him going was his passionate belief that balanced, non-extremist education, for boys and girls alike, is the most effective way to combat the violent intolerance that breeds terrorism. To date, Mortenson's Central Asia Institute has constructed fifty-five schools, and the work goes on.

Mortenson initially approached Karakoram as a climber and he never lost the mountaineer's appreciation for the region's austere beauty and incredible physical challenges. His co-author David Oliver Relin deftly evokes high altitude landscapes haunted by glaciers, snow leopards, and the deaths of scores of climbers. As Mortenson transformed himself from down-and-out climbing bum to the director of a humanitarian enterprise, he came to appreciate more and more deeply the struggles that people of the 2 region endure every day struggles that have intensified with the recent explosion of war and sectarian violence.

In the course of this narrative, readers come to know Mortenson as a friend, a husband and father, a traveling companion, a son and brother, and also as a flawed human being. Mortenson made enemies along the way and frustrated his friends and family. Relin does not shy away from depicting the man's exasperating qualities- his restlessness, disorganization, sleeplessness, and utter disregard for punctuality. But Mortenson never asks others to make sacrifices that he himself has not already made time and again. The war-torn mountains of Pakistan and Afghanistan appear in the news as the site of terrorist training camps, Al Qaeda hide-outs, and fierce religious extremism. In *Three Cups of Tea*, Mortenson and Relin take readers behind the headlines to reveal the true heart and soul of this explosive region and to show how one man has made a difference.

Mortenson is a living hero to rural communities of Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he has gained the trust of Islamic leaders, military and militia commanders, government officials and tribal chiefs from his tireless effort to champion education, especially for girls. He is one of few foreigners who has worked for over a decade in rural villages where few foreigners go, and considered the 'front lines' of the 'war on terror' In addition to his advocacy for female literacy and education, Mortenson is an advocate for the global abolishment of the manufacture and usage of land-mines, and actively campaigns for the U.S. to join the 158 countries that have already signed an anti-land mine pact. While not overseas half the year, Mortenson, 52, lives in Montana with his wife, Dr. Tara Bishop, a clinical psychologist, and two young children.

As well as exploring Mortenson's life and his relationship with men and women in the villages, the book is an adventure story. From the beginning of the journey, when he sends 580 letters out to the universe, hoping that one person will respond by giving money to build a school in Korphe, the reader is waiting and hoping with Greg. He

lives in his car. He has a personal relationship that goes sour. He finally gets money from Jean Hoerni, an accomplished scientist, who died happily knowing he had given money to build a school for children who previously had no hope of receiving an education.

Each chapter of the book takes the reader closer to the dream fulfilled, and a universal sigh of relief is felt when the first school is built. The reader comes to understand the incredible obstacles, both personal and political, that stood in the way but it doesn't end there. There is always a new beginning because so many more children are in need. Mortenson's personal journey is also fulfilled when he meets his wife, Tara, the daughter of a famous climber. She understands his vision and sacrifices so he can continue his work. As readers we rejoice when they meet and create a family. Perhaps the most poignant aspect of the book is how women's lives have been changed by Greg's work. Aslam, a village leader, recognizes that his daughter, Shakeela, "is the cleverest among them" (205). She had no hope, though, of ever getting an education until Greg passed through the village. So many climbers passed through the mountains with their expensive gear and dreams of reaching the summit of K2, but it was Greg who finally changed their lives. Shakeela becomes "Hushe's Valley first educated woman". In a photo included in the book, she is serious and full of pride and will use her education to help her village. Jahan, one of Korphe's first female graduates, asked Mortenson for money to complete her education to become a doctor. When it is time for the tuition payment, she boldly outlines exactly what she needs. For a woman from her village to so clearly pursue her goals demonstrate the far-reaching effects of the education that has been provided. She will make a huge difference in her community, and the circle of light will widen.

Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace . . . One School at a Time is a personal journey and an adventure story, both harrowing and inspiring. The reader is brought into the fold, asked not only to read the book, but also to help make a difference in a wounded world.

The opening chapter is aptly titled "Failure," since it shows Mortenson at a low point in terms of both physical exhaustion and personal disappointment. Relin begins the story in the middle of Mortenson's descent, when Mortenson is in peril and unsure of his future. Relin continues with two flashbacks to Mortenson's past that introduces readers to Mortenson's character and provides some important context. The first flashback involves Mortenson's recollection of Christa. These memories show Mortenson to be a loving brother, and they also explain his motivation for undertaking the dangerous climbing expedition up K2. The other flashback describes Mortenson's efforts to rescue a fellow climber, establishing that Mortenson possesses great physical strength and stamina and showing his powerful sense of determination. Both stories also reveal Mortenson's instinct to help others, even at his own expense.

When Mortenson arrives in Korphe, he is weak and disoriented, so the villagers view him sympathetically rather than as a threat. Since they have a tradition of helping strangers, they take care of him, and Mortenson responds with gratitude. Also, because of his background especially his boyhood experience of growing up in a different culture, Mortenson does not judge them and is very open to understanding their ways. He is eager to repay their hospitality, and his medical skills enable him to contribute to the community. Having recently lost his beloved sister, Mortenson is attracted to the close relationships among the villagers, as well to the fatherly kindness of Haji Ali, so he begins to feel that Korphe is like a second home. His desire to help the villagers is so strong that they believe his promise to return, even though no other Westerners have tried to help them.

Mortenson's ability to build trust is helped by his talent for languages, which enables him to show respect by speaking with people directly rather than through a translator. He also wants to understand the ideas and beliefs of the Pakistanis, not in a theoretical way, but concretely, by living as they do. To better understand Islam, Mortenson begins learning the activity of prayer rather than just reading about the religion. Whenever he is in Pakistan, he lives in the same way as the people he is with, eating the same food and following the same customs. He even insists on wearing drab clothing so he will not stand out. Above all, Mortenson always keeps his word, and therefore he maintains a good reputation with the locals.

As the story unfolds, several things change. Mortenson goes into other parts of Pakistan, such as Waziristan, that are ruled by tribal leaders and are already infiltrated by the Taliban. Relationships between the two sects of Islam (Sunni and Shia) become tenser. Osama bin Laden takes up residence in Afghanistan, which brings an increase in the influence of Wahhabi, an extremist form of Islam. Extremism spreads with the increasing number of *madrassas*, or religious schools, which are often the only source of education available to the poor. Mortenson realizes that the best way to combat the rise of extremism is by providing an alternative source of education. The political climate changes even more after the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, leading some in America to criticize Mortenson for helping the people of Central Asia. However, the CAI's programs are seen by many as the best model for promoting peace in the region.

Mountain climbing, both literal and figurative, is a key theme throughout the book. On the literal level, it is mountain climbing that brings Mortenson to Pakistan in the first place, and subsequently it is the climbing

community that provides much of the financial and moral support for his project. Mortenson, a nurse, is befriended by physicians Tom Vaughan and Marina Villard due to their common interests in climbing. Vaughan writes the article in a mountaineering journal that leads Mortenson to Jean Hoerni, a successful physicist who is also a mountain climber. Marina Villard becomes Mortenson's girlfriend, and although their relationship breaks off, Mortenson meets the love of his life, Tara Bishop, at a mountaineering event.

On a figurative level, mountains symbolize the various challenges Mortenson and others face throughout the book. Climbing them becomes a symbol of meeting those challenges. Mortenson's attraction to climbing stems from his desire for freedom and his love of pushing himself to his limit. He shares these traits with other members of the climbing community, which helps to sustain him and his supporters in the daunting project of building schools in remote areas of Pakistan. In addition, Mortenson's love for high places helps him to bond with the Korphe villagers and to appreciate the dramatic beauty of Pakistan's mountainous regions. He also learns that, for the people who live in these remote areas, the challenge is not about going to the summit for an adventure, but about surviving with dignity in a hard land. As the book unfolds, CAI schools are built with views of the mountains, reminding the students of the challenges they will encounter and inspiring the students to overcome them.

Conclusion

Greg Mortenson's efforts to help the people of Northern Pakistan are complicated both by personal challenges and by practical obstacles that include political tensions, cultural differences, and lack of money. Mortenson discovers his mission and makes his best effort to fulfill his promise to the people of Korphe. But he does not have the experience, resources, or temperament to accomplish this goal. Although he believes his goal of building the Korphe school is about to be fulfilled, Mortenson discovers that a bridge must be built first. He falls into doubt about his mission, and his depression is worsened when his girlfriend rejects him. At this point he considers giving up, but he cannot let go of his promise and resolves to build the bridge and the school. Once Mortenson overcomes his self-doubt and contacts Jean Hoerni for more assistance, his mission truly begins and he continues to work and grow throughout the rest of the book.

References

1. Kirkus Rev.of *Three Cups Tea*,Review of Books 1 Feb. 2006:124.Print.
2. Lohmann,Jenifer . *The Novelist Story*.EBSCO Publishing, 2007.web.7Dec. 2014
3. Mortenson, Greg,and David Oliver Relin.*Three Cups of Tea*.Penguin Books, 2007. Print.
4. Mortenson, Greg, and David Oliver Relin .*Three Cups of Tea.achievement.org*, n.d. Web .17 Jan.2015.
5. Mortenson ,Greg. *Life and Works .Gale online Encyclopedia Detroit: Gale .2014.Web. 6 Dec.2014.*
6. Susan, Coyne.“*Three Cups of Tea* study Guide.”GradeSaver, 13 July. 2011:n.pag. Print