

The Meaning of Journeys

There are many texts which allow us to indulge in journeys and along the way converge on the true nature and implications of journeys through their use of language and filmic techniques and their utilisation of themes. Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, through its highly magical aura and imaginative themes, along with Robert Frost's *The Road Not Taken*, which delves into consequences of journeys and the theme of choice, and also The Wachowski brother's feature film, *The Matrix*, which revisits the theme of choice and portrays journeys on a grand scale, all contribute to our understanding of journeys.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* presents highly imaginative themes through its portrayal of magic and the enchanting to deliver a play that develops the true concept of journeys.

The first such method that Shakespeare employs to develop the meaning of journeys is his use of magic. Right throughout the play the enchanting is presented to the audience in a sensational and magical way. The airy spirit Ariel is a classic example of Shakespeare's use of the theme of magic. Ariel 'twitters' in and out of the play much like the creatures he takes the form of and he has the ability to become invisible but also create eerie music for those who are stranded in Prospero's "cell." This use of the enchanting supports the sub-theme of imaginative journeys, the first of the three main branches of journeys. Through the use of imagination and magic, Shakespeare is able to take both the characters and audience on an imaginative journey. This is the first main way in which Shakespeare begins to shape the meaning of journeys in a text, where the journey can be both for the characters in the text and also for the audience.

Another concept of journeys that Shakespeare seeks to develop is the idea of journeys being on a grand scale. This concept becomes evident during the first scene of the play when the tempest is raised. It would have been just as easy for Shakespeare to have set the play on an island closer to Europe but chose

instead to enlarge the scale to encompass a larger portion of the world, hence creating a larger journey. This concept of journeys on a large scale was also influenced by the fact that at the time much of the world was unknown to Europeans. It is this influence that allowed Shakespeare to further develop the meaning of journeys by delivering theme on such a grand stage.

The other main technique that Shakespeare uses to develop our connotations surrounding journeys is his use of clever quotes and lines at integral times from various characters. Arguably the most effective and intriguing line in the entire play comes from the most unlikely of characters. Caliban, the half-man, half-beast, is given the role of describing the magical aura of the island. He states that “sometimes a thousand twangling instruments” would hum about “mine ears.” He goes on to say describe them as “sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.” This almost poetic language is given to Caliban despite Prospero labelling Caliban as a “devil, a born devil, on whose nature nurture can never stick.” This is an extremely effective use of juxtaposition which clearly shows a contrast between the beauty of the island and the harsh nature of Caliban.

Shakespeare also allows Miranda to express her views of the island, however, in this instance the responder is encouraged to make connections between the gentle goodness of Miranda and the beauty of the island. Miranda rhetorically asks “how many goodly creatures are there here?” before going on to conclude “how beauteous mankind is?” These quotes describing the island by two characters who share the least in common, yet still describe the island in such beauty, is the other technique Shakespeare uses to portray the island as beautiful, intriguing, imaginative and with an aura of mystique.

Robert Frost’s poem, *The Road Not Taken*, has also developed the concept of journeys through the use of many advanced language features.

The first of these features is the use of the rhyming pattern. The rhyming pattern of ABAAB, demonstrates how journeys can flow from one event to another. The key to this rhyming pattern in connection with the poem’s themes is how the

pattern backtracks. The fifth line 'backtracks' and rhymes with the second line, giving the impression of forethought and reflection on events that have already occurred. This is consistent with the theme that journeys are full of choices that must be taken and can be reflected upon afterwards. In the context of the poem, the second line of each stanza is representational of a choice, and the fifth line revisits that choice, reflecting or regretting upon it. This develops the concept of journeys by suggesting that journeys are on a continual loop of choices and reflection.

Another language feature that adds to the concepts surrounding the term 'journeys', is the use of the extended road metaphor. The poem, whilst not necessarily portraying a physical journey, uses the metaphor of the road to connect it with the theme of journeys. Frost uses the audience's associations with a road to develop a connection between the road, and choices that are made in life. In the text, forks in the road are presented as choices, inevitable choices that must be decided upon for one to continue upon a journey. The very first line of the poem raises both the theme of choice and the road metaphor as it states that "two roads diverged in a yellow wood," hinting the link between a road, life and inevitable choices.

Another concept of journeys explored in the text is the enormity of the journey itself. The text suggests that the road represents a lifelong journey full of choices that must be taken. Most importantly though, is the on-going nature of this journey. The text is written in the past tense, and from the tone of the poet we are lead to believe that it is reflecting on a lifetime of choices and events. The archaism of "long I stood" reinforces this suggestion of the poem reflecting on a long period of time. This, along with the statement that the poet took the road "less travelled by," also reinforces the idea of extended reflection. This develops the concept of journeys by imposing upon the responder the idea that journeys can be extended, lifelong and can cause reflection for years after.

Another text that develops the concept surrounding journeys that they can be lifelong, is the Wachowski brother's film, *The Matrix*, through its use of language and filmic features

In the film, Neo is on a lifelong journey of self-discovery and enlightenment. From the outset, Neo is labelled as the "one" who will save the human race. Neo, himself, becomes sceptical of this assumption and the Oracle, Morpheus and seemingly destiny pull him through. This clever plot raises the concept that journeys can occur and someone can be taken on a journey even if they are not a 100% willing participant.

Another concept surrounding, in particular, "imaginative" journeys that is raised in *The Matrix*, is that journeys can be mysterious and strange. The Wachowski brother's use a variety of language and filmic features to accomplish this effect. There is one scene in particular that develops this theme superbly. In the scene, Neo has been brought before Morpheus and is told about his destiny. The first feature used is the mysterious, almost riddle-like ways that Morpheus speaks in this scene. He tells Neo that if he chooses to, he will "stay in wonderland" and Morpheus will show him "how deep the rabbit-hole goes." This use of very mysterious and fantastic language is coupled in this scene with the very effective use of lighting. The scene is conducted in an abandoned warehouse on a stormy evening with lightning flashes in the background. Morpheus' face is always covered partly in shadow and the light falls only on his trademark sunglasses, giving him a mysterious aura. This scene is also home to some of the most intriguing non-diegetic music of the film. The background music is eerie, mysterious and invites the responder to question what is "real" in the scene and gives off an impression of the unknown. All these features combined help *The Matrix* to become an impressive display that develops our understanding of journeys by allowing us to question what is "real"?

All these texts, through their successful use of language and filmic features, help to influence, create and morph our understanding and popular connotations surrounding the concept of physical, imaginative and inner journeys.