

## **Texts Can Take Us on a Journey We Never Dreamed of Taking...**

Texts with imaginative and fantastic auras contain the potential to take us on a journey in which we are able to conceive the possibility of the inconceivable. Imaginative journeys lead to inevitable choices and enlightenment as well as drawing parallels with the real world, further adding to the realism of our journey. Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, along with the cover of Victor Kelleher's novel, *The Ivory Trail*, the Wachowski brother's film, *The Matrix*, and the R.E.M. song *Leaving New York*, all demonstrate these concepts and allow us to explore new and exciting worlds beyond the comprehension of everyday life.

Shakespeare's final masterpiece, *The Tempest*, is a classic example of how well-constructed texts lift us from everyday society and take us on journeys that we never even dreamed of taking.

Shakespeare uses the theme of choice to show how we leave our seats and travel with the characters when we become engrossed in a text. All of Shakespeare's main characters in *The Tempest* have to face difficult choices, from Ferdinand deciding whether to marry Miranda, all the way up to Prospero himself, as he decides what course of events to undertake. But it is not just the fact that the characters must face choices, but it is the enormity of these choices that develops the aura of surrealism. At the time of *The Tempest's* release, the Jacobean audience were prominently made up of lower class citizens who would have gone about their existence without divulging into situations or professions that required such far-fetched choices. So for the majority of the audience, the choices faced by the characters were of pure fantasy. For a character to face the choice of whether to abandon ship, whether to search for a missing companion, whether to murder their king or whether to murder Prospero in one day is a set of choices that the average Jacobean citizen would not have to make in a lifetime. Shakespeare also draws comparisons between his works and real-world events, which demonstrates that even journeys that are extremely far-fetched can have

their grounding in the real world. Shakespeare also explores the issue of colonialism during the 'age of exploration.' The other characters in the text refer to Caliban as a "savage" and as a "monster." Yet Shakespeare himself grants Caliban some of the most beautiful language in the whole play. Shakespeare allows Caliban to speak using positive connotations, metaphors and alliteration when he states that "sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about mine ears." In this simple statement, Shakespeare is expressing a political comment about the treatment of 'natives' when various European countries 'discover' a new land. So even in the most far-fetched of places or texts, solid, real-world situations are detectable and this further adds to the concept that we, as an audience, can be taken on an imaginative journey beyond our wildest imagination.

The other theme explored in *The Tempest* that demonstrates how texts can remove us from the melancholy of everyday life is through the concept of enlightenment and self analysis.

In the text, the most prominent use of enlightenment and self understanding is evident in Prospero's epilogue at the end of the play. Prospero understands that he has done some morally incorrect things, and events of ill-nature have been carried out against him. He states that what strength he has is "mine own – which is most faint." This reinforces that his deceitful ploys have weakened himself not just physically but morally as well. He also asks for forgiveness from his crimes and attempts to show his more compassionate side by reminding the audience of how he "pardoned the deceiver." He is, of course, referring to those who plotted against him to take his dukedom from him those twelve years ago. By reminding the audience of how he was gentle on his enemies, and how he learnt understanding and became enlightened, he is subtly asking the audience to be just as kind to him as he asks for forgiveness.

In his final act of enlightenment and spiritual gesture, he once again addresses the audience with "let your indulgence set me free," completing his journey of enlightenment and self-understanding.

The concept of enlightenment is not just confined to *The Tempest* however, but is evident in the cover of Victor Kelleher's novel, *The Ivory Trail*.

The cover contains presumably the main character of the novel, with his face blurred by the sand, staring upwards towards the dark upper corner of the cover. His face is partially covered by the sand in the foreground but his eyes have depth and meaning to them, indicating that he is deep in thought. This is then easily adapted to the concept of enlightenment by the nature of the journey portrayed on the rest of the cover. The cover shows pictures of landmarks from right around the globe and this combined with the written text, "Not all journeys have an ending," further give off the possibility that while the story does occur in the physical world, there is also a hint that the journey could be one of spiritual enlightenment for the traveller. Once again, this concept helps to convey the idea that texts can allow us to travel on an imaginative journey we never dreamed of taking.

The theme of choice also appears in *The Ivory Trail*, as the visual images suggest a journey that encompasses a large area, the whole world in fact. This, combined with the fact that the story is titled as a "trail" suggests that for the traveller to venture along their journey they must make decisions or choices as to which path or track to continue along. This further expresses the idea that texts have the potential to let us visit places we never thought possible.

Another text which presents the idea of texts taking the responder on an imaginative journey is the Wachowski brother's film, *The Matrix*. Right from the beginning of the film, the text's main character, Neo, must make choices as to his future inside *The Matrix*. The most important of these choices is his decision of whether to take the blue or red pill. As Morpheus puts to him, if he takes the blue pill, "the story ends," and Neo will not get a chance to fulfil his prophecy. If however, as Neo does eventually decide, to take the red he "stays in wonderland" and Morpheus promises to show him just how "deep the rabbit-hole goes." This critical scene demonstrates once again how texts can take us on unimaginable journeys. This particular scene is one of the best in the whole film with

its use of lighting and non-diegetic sound. In the scene, a creepy, eerie and suspenseful number is played in the background as lightning flashes illuminate only parts of Morpheus' and the others' faces. This example not only takes the audience on an unfathomable ride, but also the characters themselves.

The other leap-of-faith style choice that Neo must make is whether or not to believe the information the oracle has given him in regards to him being the chosen one. As Neo and other characters often put, "The problem is choice." Choice is the underlying theme behind *The Matrix* and the theme is stressed as we "can't see past the choices we don't understand." These choices catapult Neo into his role and further demonstrate how texts can take us on far-fetched journeys.

Another link evident in *The Matrix* is the parallel to the real world. *The Matrix* was released in 1999, just before the turn of the millennium and amidst all the hype surrounding the 'Millennium bug.' The film then played on society's fear that machines could one day control and cripple our lives just as they were 'planning' to do come millennium eve.

The final text that shows how texts can take us on unimaginable imaginative journeys through the use of links to the real world is the R.E.M. song *Leaving New York*. The song is based upon the events of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centres on September 11, 2001. The singer states how "leaving New York" is "never easy." This line is presented archaically to make the event seem even more surreal and make it more difficult to digest, just like the event itself. This line also shows how even tragic real-world events can be translated to a journey. The concept that texts can take us on a journey we never dreamed of taking is given a more literal meaning in this text than in the other texts studied. The incidents of September 11 were considered acts against human nature and were unfathomable and were beyond what anyone ever expected. It was an incident no-one ever thought was possible and the text allows us to go back to that moment in our own lives when we found out about the attack. The text does indeed take us on a journey that we have already taken, but still one that we

never dreamed or envisioned of taking in the first place. It portrays just how tragic the event was but also shows just how far-fetched it seemed before it occurred. This text allows us to re-discover a previously unfathomable journey that we never thought possible.

All these texts help to convey the idea that through the themes of inevitable and difficult choices, enlightenment and self-discovery, and through parallels with the real world, texts have the intriguing potential to take us on an imaginative journey we previously never dreamed as a fathomable possibility.