

My class has a playlist. We were asked if there was any song that built a world for us. Music that did more than make us feel something. Music that transported us somewhere. Music that let us exist in a place. It is hard to choose just one.

There's a term in media studies called paratext. It basically means all the text and material that surrounds the primary media text. This could mean a book cover, a foreword, or even a typography choice that influences how a reader interacts with or receives a text. Literary theorist Gerard Genette claimed paratext to be more than a boundary or a sealed border. The paratext is, rather, a threshold, a zone between text and off text, a zone not only of transition, but also of transaction. The cover or title of a book transitions us to receive the text in the interior differently than if there was nothing surrounding it, nothing to prime us, to prep us for what we are about to read. Even if we pick up an old book that is leather-bound and ripping at the seams, let's say, we are crossing a threshold, entering into the world differently than if handling a modern plastic enveloped printing.

Media being influenced by sources of paratextual media attached to it framing our perception of a world is not unique to novels.

In fact, I'd argue it's more prominent in the world of audiovisual mediums, particularly when it comes to music. [Rains of Catermere plays]. Music has the ultimate paratextual relationship with any media it touches. Media theorist Francis Dyson describes sound as three-dimensional, interactive and synthetic, perceived in the here and now of an embodied space. Here and now of an embodied space. If this definition works to speak specifically about music, my question would then be, where does this music take you? [Indiana Jones theme plays]. If you're in the same space as me, you're pushing up your fedora as you stow your whip running out of a poisonous dark-lined tunnel to escape with your golden statue before being crushed by a giant boulder, or getting speared by the angry locals. Of course, the majority of people are going to recognize the Indiana Jones theme song. Heck, I could probably play hundreds of songs that you would recognize for the world that they represent. Theme songs are probably the most recognizable element for people when they're calling a story world. They act as the book cover transitioning us to the world within. John Williams' Raiders March prepares us for an adventurous world, one where comedy and quirky mishaps thrive. [Westworld Theme plays] Whereas the drones and player piano notes a perfect mix of new and old world in the theme song for the TV show Westworld, transitions us to an entirely different place, darker, dangerous, and violent. There's another aspect of this discussion of music in media and how it texturizes our perception of the world. That is, diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic means sound that is in the world of whatever we're watching, like the sounds of a bird chirping [chirping sounds] if the sound of a typewriter while an artist struggles with page after page of their perfect script [typing sound]. These sounds create coherency for an audience, consistency with the narrative. They put an audience in that space with that character. They make the world exist. Non-diegetic is any sound, voice, or music that is not in the world. Like a theme song or music perfectly queued to elicit emotion. [scene from The Social Network plays]. The music in this scene of the social network isn't intended to exist in the world, but somehow it lets us exist in that moment as a friendship falls apart.

Justin Horton describes non-diegetic sounds as coming from an uncertain place, a somewhere else beyond the film world that exists alongside it, a coexistence of planes. Non-diegetic sounds, then, are not from the film's world, yet seemingly encompass it? Music localizes moments. The idea of living our lives to a soundtrack is so far from reality, but somehow a soundtrack makes a world real.

Let's do a test. Listen to this. [Narrator reads: \*The days had pressed on as the worn crew of the Sidewinder traversed the oblivion sands. They found themselves faring the dunes of the bare salts, a place that very few have bothered venturing into. It is precisely what it sounds like, a barren waste of sand with not but a glimpse of any real life for miles. Spinnerend, the spindly green half-orc homing the side-winder would never have led the crew to these parts. No, that dandy idea came from the cap'n, the one that was now busy clutching a chain around his neck and mumbling to himself about a storm coming\*]. This world of my own invention is somewhat described in this passage. There are characters and a mysterious intent, but perhaps you caught none of that. Here's the test part, listen again, and see what you gather now. [Narrator reads with an ensemble playing beneath: The days I pressed on as the worn crew of the Sidewinder traversed the Oblivion Sands. They found themselves wearing the dunes of the Bear Salts, a place that very few have bothered venturing into. It is precisely what it sounds like, a barren waste of sand with not but a glimpse of any real life for miles. Spinnerend, the spindly green half-orc homing the sidewinder would never have led the crew to these parts. No, that dandy idea came from the cap'n, the one that was now busy clutching a chain around his neck and mumbling to himself about a storm coming].

Did you gather that there's a foreboding mystery afoot? Perhaps the listener knows that the crew is in trouble of some kind. No matter what you gathered, you have to admit there's a greater sense of being able to exist in this moment in time by simply adding music.

The paratextual relationship of music to media defines so much of how worlds are built. Themes bring us recollection of great worlds that we've experienced, triggering conscious associations similar to what the sense of smell does for memory. Music transitions us, it prepares us and sets the stage quite literally in some cases for how we are to enter a world both mentally and emotionally. And beyond all of this, music creates moments. It paints with reality as it brings our investment through its emotional triggers. I suppose the moral of this story is, when it comes to crossing that threshold into another world, there's nothing quite like a well-timed song.

The music used in this podcast was sourced from Apple music, but a special thanks to the brilliant artists John Williams and Raman Jawadi, who have created the iconic themes sampled here. I also sourced the Reigns of Castamere song featured in Game of Thrones from YouTuber Eric The Pooh. The sound effects sampled are all from the website art list and purchased under a paid subscription. I've also borrowed brilliance from literary and media theorists Gerard Jeanette, Francis Dyson, and Justin Horton. All of their quotes were taken from articles available on JSTOR. Last but certainly not least, this was inspired by Brent Bellamy, a brilliant professor who creates the richest of moments for his students all without the aid of a soundtrack.