

Transformation Radio Interview

Host: Good morning and welcome to Radio 10HSC. Today we are pleased to announce that with us today is Mr Harper, a 14th century literature analyst and Mr Collins, a modern cinematic expert. Mr Harper and Mrs Collins will be looking at how the narrator in both Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale" and Sam Raimi's film transformation, A Simple Plan, reflect the context and values of their respective texts.

Mr Harper, we'll begin with you. Chaucer's tale is narrated by the pardoner himself, how does that shape the values in the text?

Harper: Chaucer's tale was written in the fourteenth century, an era renowned for corruption inside its highest authority, the Catholic Church. Whilst the pardoner himself is an official one, it is obvious he is more concerned with his own wealth than the people he is supposed to be pardoning.

He harangues his audience out of their money and doesn't care if the "povereste wydow" "starve for famyne" as long as he has "moneie, wolle, chese and whete." He states archaically that "lewed peple loven tales oldie" and this line is emblematic of how he views his potential targets.

Chaucer has used iambic pentameter to give the text a feel of everyday speech and has also used rhetoric to convey his message. He also portrays the pardoner as a hypocritical one too concerned with his own wealth. The pardoner states that "oure liges lords seel, that I showe fyrst, my bodye to warrante" before preaching "radix malorum est cupiditas."

Despite preaching that greed is the root of all evil, the pardoner only cares for himself to ensure that he has a "joly wenche" in every town. In one particularly hypocritical moment, the pardoner promises to tell some "morale tale" but only after he has had his "drynke."

Host: Mr Collins, how are these values transformed into a modern text?

Collins: Well, Sam Raimi transformed Chaucer's tale to a feature film, but he also had to transform the values too. A tale of church corruption would not suffice for modern audiences so Raimi transformed the values.

The wealth of the church is transformed to big business and the authority of the church is transformed to local law enforcement. Whereas the pardoner is the narrator in Chaucer's tale, Hank is the narrator in the modern text.

Hank, Lou and Jacob, a transformation of the three rioters, stumble across a huge amount of money in the forest. Lou tries to talk Hank into keeping the money by telling him that it's the "American Dream in a goddamn gym bag." Hank replies that you're supposed to "work for the American Dream" before Lou argues that "this is even better then."

The angle of greed however, is still kept in the film. In a particularly clever mis-en-scene, Hank asks Sarah 'metaphorically' whether she would keep the money. Sarah says no but when Hank dumps the money on the table, a shadow eclipses her face and she transforms in the greedy individual audiences saw in Chaucer's tale.

Law enforcement is another area where values have changed. The Church was the highest authority in Chaucer's time but nowadays the local law enforcement keeps society in line. In the film, a false FBI agent acts as the deceitful pardoner who tricks a local cop which ultimately ends in his death. The fake agent is

portrayed as mysterious right from the beginning through Raimi's use of eerie, non-diegetic music that immediately makes the audience weary of this imposter.

Host: Thankyou. But of course, the very fact that there is a transformation of form is also very important.

Harper: Yes it is. In Chaucer's context, very few people had access to written literature. For this reason, his tale was designed to be performed, not read. He uses language features like iambic pentameter and rhetoric so that the text suits a performance more than a reading.
The narrator in the story, the pardoner, allows the themes of church corruption and authority to come through in the text, but as these values change, so does the way they are presented.

Collins: That's correct. Raimi transformed these values into a film where diegetic sound and mis-en-scene replaced rhetoric.
The modern public are much more inclined to see a movie than they are a play. Raimi also had to make an addition to the cast to fit in with his context. Raimi added a woman, Hank's wife Sarah, as a modern audience would not take to a female-less film like Chaucer's audience. In one particular scene, the recurring motif of read is used as the joy of Sarah's new child is eclipsed by her traitorous brain plotting against Lou. A shadow is used across her face in startling neo noir to give Sarah a traitorous appearance. The narrator, Hank, is nearby and is shocked by her approach but this is representational of his context, and that women are no longer portrayed as one-dimensional characters.

Host: A big thankyou to all out guests this morning and it really has made is clear that the roles played by the narrators, reflect their differing contexts.