

# Transformation – the pardoners tale and a simple plan essay sample



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“ A transformation pays homage to the original text and reinvigorates the original ideas and values by creating a text that appeals to a new audience.” For many years, classic tales and texts have been transposed into contemporary forms in order to appeal to new audiences. Representative of this is the transformation of Chaucer’s ‘ The Pardoners Tale,’ a poem composed in the 1300’s, arising from a theological society, into the modern film adaption, ‘ A Simple Plan,’ appropriated by Sam Raimi to suit a modern audience of a secular society. Due to the contexts of the two texts differing greatly, there have been significant modifications of the original tale in the aspects of societal values, transforming the ideas from religious to secular. Despite this, the theme ‘ Radix malorum est Cupiditas’- Greed is the root of all evils, remains universal to both texts. The two texts also explore the motivation behind certain human behaviours and consequences of poor decision making. Composed in fourteenth century England, Chaucer wrote a powerful poem with the intention to outline the corruption within society in that time period and to convey that Christians weren’t living up to expectations.

The poem exposes the corruption of Christian values; successfully achieved through the use of the hypocritical pardoner who delivers an allegorical sermon, preaching about the evils of sins of which he admits to immersing himself in. This can be contrasted with the twentieth century film adaption, ‘ A Simple Plan,’ set in the 1990’s of America, during the time of the depression of the farming sector. Raimi transformed the film with the intention of showing the corruption of the American Dream. The tagline, ‘ Sometimes good people do evil things,’ effectively conveys his purpose; to

outline the evils generated from greed. The Pardoner's Tale follows the escapades of three naïve rioters on their quest to slay 'Death,' which unknowingly results in their own deaths. The tale is narrated by the corrupt character of the pardoner, whom preaches against avarice, a vice which he is guilty of himself. Intent with convincing his audience to buy false relics in exchange for pardons of their sins, he proclaims he cares nothing of their corrections, but is merely interested in the profit. The tale is conveyed effectively through the use of rhyming couplets, combined with rich descriptive language and metaphoric speech. 'Elegantly shaped and slim, and girls selling fruits,

Singers with harps, bawds and girls selling wafers.' The repetition of the s creates smooth, soft sounds which develops a pleasant visual image; advertising their actions with great appeal. The use of different language techniques introduce power and meaning to Chaucer's poetry. In the prologue, the reader is given insight into the irony of the pardoner himself in the passage from 423-434, where he familiarises his audience with his theme, contradicting this with his sole intention. "I preche of no thyng but for coveityse. Therefore my theme is yet and evere was, Radix malorum est Cupiditas." His confession that he preaches for nothing but greed develops irony within the pardoner's character and his hypocrisy is exemplified as he goes on to say that he preaches against avarice, the vice of which he is guilty of himself. A Simple Plan pays homage to the original tale, taking the integral elements and reviving the original tale, shaping it to entertain a modern audience. This is achieved through the use of various visual and

filmic techniques such as the recurring motif of ' bars,' symbolising a sense of imprisonment in their restricted lifestyles.

The bars are shown in different ways; the first being the fencing the fox is running behind and again featured when Sarah is shot from behind the spaces in the bookshelf. This is effective as it is introduced at the beginning of the film and repeated again towards the closing scene, signifying that despite all that has happened she is still stuck working her job as a librarian, imprisoned by her dull occupation. Although these motifs may not strike every viewer, upon close analysis, the film reveals many key elements which create meaning, adding depth to the plot. Another example of this is the use of monochromatic tones contrasted with recurring splashes of the colour red. Initially the red symbolises love and warmth in Hank and Sarah's lives; the wreath pictured on the door leading to their homely cottage, the vibrant red of the dressing gown Sarah is clad in, featuring her pregnant belly and the soon to be loving parents, and finally the red of the flowers Hank and Jacob place on their father's grave. The camera zooms in on the flowers; sharply focusing on them for a few seconds.

This symbolises the colours change in meaning: from love and warmth to blood and death depicted later in the film with the cunning red of the fox and the stark contrast of the blood on the white snow. Raimi also uses the motif of the fox to represent the protagonist, Hank, and foreshadow his future situation. The fox is shown stealthily killing a chicken prior to the scene detailing Hank's murder of Dwight Stevenson. As the events and murders unfurl, Hank becomes trapped in his situation, the future not looking too bright. His position is foreshadowed again with the use of the fox which is <https://assignbuster.com/transformation-the-pardoners-tale-and-a-simple-plan-essay-sample/>

featured later in the movie; stuffed on the windowsill of the barbers. This is symbolic of Hanks future condition; dead on the inside. The obvious change in form from poem to film is reflective of the different contexts and the transposition required in order to appeal to a new audience. The Pardoners Tale was directed at a society where the majority of people were illiterate, therefore the medium of a poem is appropriate and Chaucer's use of rhythm and rhyme effectively entertains his audience. " Were set hem in a tavern to drynke, And as they sat, they herde a belle clynke."

This quotation not only exemplifies the rhyming couplets used by Chaucer to appeal to his audience but it also but it also introduces the setting of the tale, which is significant as, among other vices, he preaches of drunkenness. Conversely, the change in medium of A Simple Plan is adequate to appeal to a modern audience where society is dominated by film culture. The language features are replaced with visual techniques to give the film a deeper meaning. This is illustrated right from the opening scene with the first thing pictured being a black eye, as the camera zooms out it becomes evident that the evil eye belongs to a crow; which becomes a motif throughout the entirety of the film, symbolic of death. The camera then scans the bleak white landscape; snow covered and lacking the vibrancy of life, this emulates the dullness of the character's lives as they are living in the time of the farming depression. The idea that love of money is corrupting is demonstrated in The Pardoners Tale when the rioters are presented with potential wealth. With the prior agreement readily dismissed the rioters plot against one another, willing to sacrifice whatever necessary in hope of

receiving more profit. " Herkneht, felawes, we three are all agreed; Let ech of us holde up his hand til oother, And ech of us bicomen others brother."

Their pact to stand by each other is foreshortened when the characters are overcome with greed, revealing the humanistic flaw of selfishness. The devastating deaths resulting from the situation, highlights the truth that when decisions are made purely to benefit oneself, the situation has the potential to be reversed; bringing bad fortune rather than good. This moral compromise, brought about by greed and a love of money is illustrated in A Simple Plan when the situation is transposed to Sarah being presented with the money. Hank poses the hypothetical question that if she were to find four million dollars, would she keep it? Her initial response; ' I wouldn't take it; that's just me, I wouldn't,' is contrasted dramatically with her sudden change of heart as she sees the money before her eyes, and the reality of the situation sinks in. This scene marks a sudden change in Sarah's character, showing that greed has the power to corrupt her previous morals as she is overcome by evil.

The scene is shot with a changing shift in focus from Sarah's face in the background to the money on the table; this is symbolic of her shift in character, also shown by the greedy smile that inhabits her face and the glint of evil in her eyes. Raimi also uses the filmic technique of picturing the character in left hand side of the frame. This challenges what the viewer is accustomed to; the subject being pictured on the left. He uses this when the characters are embodied by the evils of greed, differentiating good and bad; left and right. It is interesting to note that Sarah is depicted as the most evil, conniving character of the lot, formulating devious schemes to secure her

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wealth. I believe Raimi intentionally made this character female in order to signify the changing role that women have had over the ages. This proves to be quite a contrast when compared with The Pardoners Tale which eliminates any female mention. This is understandable in context of the tale as it was set in a time where women were lacking in power and dominated by men. Raimi incorporated Sarah's character in the transformation to illustrate the contrast between gender roles and the two contexts, showing women's importance in modern day society. Aside from the change in medium, the most significant alteration would be the absence of religion in A Simple Plan.

This serves to be quite a contrast from The Pardoners Tale, which is based solely on the black and white religious principles of sins and heaven and hell. References to the Bible and religion are predominant in the tale and are shown almost immediately, not only in the tale itself but in the introduction, further developed in the prologue with the metaphor, ' Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe, of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe.' The venom representing the danger of his words serves as a metaphoric reference to temptation and the Garden of Eden. ' Of holiness, to seem holy and true,' this statement again gives the reader insight into the character of the pardoner; suggesting that his words are as hollow as his values. The Pardoners Tale is a sermon used to inform his audience about the sin of avarice. With the context of a theological society, the rioters are used merely as examples to represent evils and the effect of greed, to the extent that they remain unnamed and anonymous throughout the tale. The characters

are two dimensional, distinguished only by the reference of one being younger than the two that plot against him.

This is effective as the audience doesn't develop sympathy for the characters and they become symbols rather than people, used purely to warn to pardoner's audience against the vices of greed, swearing and drunkenness; behaviours which are exhibited by all characters. Despite the shallow caricatures of the rioters, the character of the old man serves a significant purpose in the tale as he conveys the inevitable outcome of human existence: death. The three rioters fail to understand their morality and in search of the man death they find death of a different kind when the old man directs them to the florins of gold. " If you are so eager to find death, turn up this crooked way, For in that grove I lafte hym, by my fey, Under a tree, and there he wole abyde." Again demonstrating Chaucer's use of rhyme, this quotation foreshadows the prevailing events because although the rioters fail to understand at the time, the gold symbolises their death. This is ironic because on their quest for death, they unexpectedly meet their own deaths. Overcome by greed brought about by their lust for money, a sense of evil is evoked within the scoundrels, resulting in the sudden death to all three of them.

When transforming the original tale, Raimi disregarded the focus on religion and the belief that death meant either heaven or hell, in order to appeal to a modern audience of a secular society. As a result of this, Raimi develops the characters in depth, establishing a relationship between the characters and the audience. This is effective as the attachment holds the audience's

attention, keeping them sympathising with the characters, entertained from <https://assignbuster.com/transformation-the-pardoners-tale-and-a-simple-plan-essay-sample/>



start to finish. Raimi positions the viewer to feel a sense of sympathy and almost pity towards Jacob by creating a character status; setting Hank above him. This is achieved not only through the depiction of Hank's educated and employed character creating superiority over Jacobs 'stupidity' and unemployment but also through the use of filming techniques. Raimi positions the camera at angles that are demeaning to Jacob; picturing Hank above him in the frames. This creates a division between the two characters, showing that Hank has more power.

As the pardoner confessed earlier, he preaches with the intent of making a profit; by telling the tale of the drunken rioters in a tavern, he hopes to encourage people to give him money in exchange for absolution of their drinking. "Now, goode men, God forgive you your trespass, And ware yow fro the synne of avarice! Myn hooly pardoun may yow alle warice, So that ye offer nobles or sterlynges, Or ells silver broches, spoones, rynges." This stanza is ironic as he has previously confessed that he has succumbed to avarice and preaches for nothing but greed. He sells false relics and his intention only to make a profit; he cares not for the correction of sin. When considering the purpose of the tale the pardoner tells, it is deemed appropriate for the outcome to be the death of all three rioters as they were merely symbols of evil, exemplifying the effect of drunkenness among other vices. However the ending has been altered to suit the context of A Simple Plan; while the theme of death is still prominent in the film, Hank and Sarah are subjected to a different kind of death entirely, a living hell. Although from the outside it would appear that they are continuing with their everyday

lives, they are forever alone with the memories of the murders- trapped in an eternal winter.

Their misery is depicted right from the first words of the movie when Hank's non-diegetic voice over speaks in past tense: " I remember my father telling me what it takes to be happy. Simple things really; a wife he loves, a decent job, friends and neighbours who like and respect him. I had all that. I was a happy man." The emphasis on ' had' and ' was' insinuating that he no longer has those simple things, he is no longer happy. The original text The Pardoners Tale has undergone a dramatic reinvigoration due to the context of the two texts; however in transforming the tale, A Simple Plan manages to adapt the fundamental components, maintaining the theme ' greed is the root of all evil.' Despite the change in ideologies, from religious to secular, Raimi shows that even after the years, greed remains the motivation behind corrupt human behaviours. This is demonstrated by the corruption of Christian values featured in The Pardoners Tale, compared to the corruption of the American Dream illustrated in A Simple Plan- two very different contexts, the same drive behind evil decisions; greed.