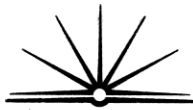
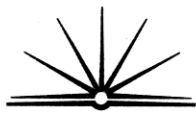


A transformation takes an older text, and rejuvenates it by changing its values and ideas to reach a new context. This process of transformation can be seen in Sam Raimi's A Simple Plan, a late 20th Century transformation of ^{Geoffrey} Chaucer's 14th century poem, "The Pardoner's Tale." Both these texts focus on the same simple allegory, of three men finding death disguised as treasure, and both focus on the ideal, "Radix Malorum est Cupiditas" (Avarice is the root of all evil). ["The Pardoner's Tale" reflects 14th Century values, as it explores the consequences of sin and the nature of death. The doctrinal assumption behind the text is quite orthodox, and, using traditional images and motifs of death, relies on a belief in the necessity of God's forgiveness to attain eternal life. A Simple Plan demonstrates that the human condition



is changeless, and presents the same timeless problems against a new context. It adopts a modern contextual outlook on values, ~~and~~ taking a humanistic, rather than theological approach to sin.

One of the major changes that has been brought about by the change in context has been the change of setting ^{between} ~~in~~ the two texts. "The Pardoner's Tale" derives much of ~~its~~ its richness of setting from its place within the wider context of the pilgrimage. This allows Chaucer to focus as much on the sins of the "Riotours" as the "ypocrise" of the Pardoner himself. This ^{allows Chaucer to} creates ~~an~~ an exposé of the social and religious evils of the late 14th Century, a reflection of the values of the context. This is shown by comments such as the ^{that he is} Pardoner's claim ~~to be~~ doing "Cristes"



body work", when only moments before he has confessed, "I rekke neure, when they been ryed. That hir soules goon a blakeberged".

The actual setting of the rioters is far less defined however. Except for the mention of "Flaundes" in the first line, the rioters are allocated a moral, rather than physical setting. It is an allegorical landscape through which they travel.

A Simple Plan on the other hand, is set in an anonymous setting, allowing Raimi to give universalism to the modern contextual values he presents. The bleak physical conditions of the film highlight the desolation of spirit and moral decay of the characters. The film both starts and ends in snow, giving an apparent endlessness to the season, suggesting that no matter how



long Hank lives, he will never escape this winter.

Another change that has been brought about to reflect the differing contextual values between these two texts is the way in which the rioters are portrayed. In "The Pardoner's Tale", the rioters appear nameless, distinguishable only by their characteristics as the "youngeste", "proudeste" and "worste". This is because they embody the attitudes of the average 14th Century Christian man, who was deeply conscious of his own sin, and looking for stability of mind in a country ravaged by the "pryce theef... deeth".

The rioters in A Simple Plan however, are named and developed. This is a reflection of the fact that Hank is telling this story, not with ambitions of repentance, but with honesty,



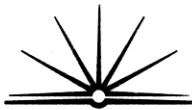
and a hope that others will see what is important in this life before they reach his point of despair. The development of characters also allows Kaimi to depict the modern notion of moral decay. The fact Hank moves from his morally superior statement, "you work for the American Dream", to the murder of his own brother, an action traditionally viewed as one of the greatest sins, shows a portrayal of the common values and beliefs as to the consequences of sin.

Another important change that has occurred between the two texts is the change in medium. This not only reflects the changing contexts, but also allows the composers to reflect the values of their time. Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Pardoner's Tale" is constructed as poetry. This is a reflection of



The fact that most of Chaucer's ~~are~~ responders would never have read his work, but rather, it would have been read aloud. This makes poetry an appropriate medium, as it is easily read and remembered.

The use of poetry also opened up a variety of techniques in which to portray the values of the context. The repetition "O Original", "O cause", "O glotunge", and rhetoric questioning "Thou art so fals and so unkynde allas?" of the Pardoner help to develop ~~his~~ ^{the} didactic tone, used to achieve his moralizing purpose. There is also use of irony. Whilst the Pardoner denounces each sin in advance of the tale, to exemplify its sinister nature, he makes clear the ever-widening gap between his appearance and reality. This makes clear his

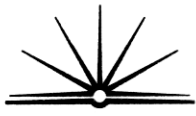


purpose, "To be advanced
by hypocrisy"

A Simple Plan on the other hand,
is presented in the medium of film.
This allows Raimi to reach a more
modern, movie-going audience. It also
opens up a range of techniques in
which to portray the modern values
presented in the text. Raimi shows sin
as determined by moral absolutes,
rather than by consequences, a
modern, less theological value.

He also shows sin as being punished
not by eternal damnation, but
rather a living death, moral decay.

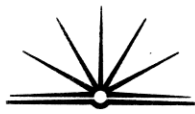
The use of the recurring raven motif
draws out this modern value of
moral decay. The ravens are, "always
waitin' on somethin' to die." Their
constant appearance reminds the
responder of the scavenging, and



constantly worsening nature of the characters.

The ~~the~~ recurring fox motif is also important. The fox's sly, cunning and predatory nature make it the perfect catalyst for the events in the text. The characters each grow to be more like the fox, and reflect its nature.

~~The~~ These two motifs show the moral decay and modern values of the new context. This is added to through the voice over at the start of the film. Hank's comments on what it takes to make a man happy, "Simple things really... a wife he loves, a decent job, friends and neighbours who love and respect him" has an eerie shadow cast over it by the use of past tense, "I had"

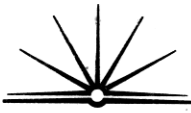


all that. I was a happy man"

The camera shot spiralling above Hank adds to this reflective moment, as if he is looking down on himself, and cannot intervene.

This shows that at the end of the film, while nothing has changed aesthetically, sin has taken its modern punishment, moral decay, and now the days Hank can live happily are "few and far between".

It is clear therefore, that this transformation has brought about a change in values to reflect a changing context. Whilst Chaucer reflected the values of his time through a religiously entertaining and moralizing tale, Kaimi reflected a modern valuing of humanistic moral absolutes. The medium, setting and characters have all been



manipulated and changed to
place modern values on an ancient
message. ~~whereas sin is determined
and punished in the~~ ~~The change from~~