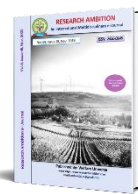




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Raincoat: Appropriation, Intermedial Translation and the Non-Manichean Adaptation of O. Henry's The Gift of the Magi

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Adaptation, Appropriation, Intermedial translation, Self-censorship, non-Manichean predicament, ideology.	The area of adaptation has always remained a ground of contest and conflict especially when there is appropriation and inter-medial translation influenced by culture. This paper is based on the film Raincoat, which is an adaptation of O. Henry's well-known short story The Gift of the Magi. The change of setting as well as social relations, has raised the necessity of certain appropriations in the adaptation. Change in social relations forces the characters to be self-censored at every step, in every action. Yet, their social relationship can hardly censor the personal affection they share for one another. The intermedial translation of the silence, the unexplained actions and the unquestioned identification of certain characters reflect their ideologies as representatives of a particular culture. The objective of this paper is primarily to analyse this appropriation, which demands the characters' denial to overthrow the social matrix. In the course of the study, this paper also aims to observe the inter-medial translations which, although shape the adaptation as an 'analogy', maintain a Non-Manichean predicament.

Since the very beginning, the relationship between literary text and film adaptation has remained a much-debated area and the debate are mainly centred on the question of originality. While literary critics decry the loss of 'literariness', 'original authority' or 'lack of fidelity' in the case of adaptation of a literary text, critics like Dudley Andrew have called the debate over 'fidelity' to the literary text 'the most frequent and tiresome' as according to him, adaptation involves:

The reproduction of something essential about the original text...as though adaptations were the rendering of an

interpretation of a legal precedent... The filmmaker presumable must intuit and reproduce...the original. It has been argued variously that this is frankly impossible. (31-32)

In order to emphasise the requirement of the representation of the exact implicit and explicit components of a text, we often overlook the constraints that films have. Irrespective of all these conflicting points one has to admit the fact that cinema is the representation and reflection of the collective ideological structure of the audiences. The collective identity expects and appreciates only the

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things they can identify with. Since the history of adaptation, there existed the tendency to privilege text over film. 'Manichean' is a term that, although it has a religious origin, is now used to refer to moral dualism in philosophy. This involves an approach which categorises everything into two different categories—good and evil. The tendency to give the privilege of text over film can also be interpreted as part of the same Manichean approach. This paper is based on the film *Raincoat*, which is an adaptation of O. Henry's well-known short story *The Gift of the Magi*. The change of setting as well as social relations, has raised the necessity of certain appropriations in the adaptation. Change in social relations forces the characters to be self-censored at every step, in every action. Yet, their social relationship can hardly censor the personal affection they share for one another. The intermedial

translation of the silence, the unexplained actions and the unquestioned identification of certain characters reflect their ideologies as representatives of a particular culture. The objective of this paper is primarily to analyse this appropriation, which demands the characters' denial to overthrow the social matrix. In the course of the study, this paper also aims to observe the intermedial translations, which, although they shape the adaptation as an 'analogy', yet, maintain a Non-Manichean predicament.

From Plato and Aristotle to critics like Edmund Husserl, Stanley Fish and others, Phenomenological, Reader Response, and Reception theorists have acknowledged the role of readers. When one analyses a film, it works like a text, and the viewers are said to be transformed into the readers. The importance of the viewers in analysing a film is quite the same as the

readers in the analysis of a literary text. It is basically the viewers who determine the representation of elements like gender, identity or class in a film. It is because of the viewers only that the socio-cultural context of a film adaptation becomes of primary importance. Here, appropriation becomes extremely important. The word 'appropriation' has been used by Julie Sanders to refer to the kind of adaptation which has to cross the boundary of culture. Such adaptation needs to experiment with certain features of the text considering the cultural expectation and acceptance of the target viewers whose collective identity is different from the collective identity of the source culture. Texts and films are two completely different media. When the text is a foreign text based on a different culture, inhabiting the cultural gaps calls for the necessity of intermedial translation.

In "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation", Roman Jakobson talked about three different types of translation: intralingual (or rewording), interlingual (or translation proper), and intersemiotic translation (or transmutation). The first kind involves the process of interpretation of verbal signs by using other signs in the same language, while interlingual translation uses some other language to interpret the verbal signs. The third category, intersemiotic translation, is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of non-verbal signs" (114). Film adaptation comes under this third category of translation. Wagner, in his *The Novel and the Cinema*, has discussed a type of adaptation which he has named an 'analogy' where the setting of the story changes and similarly the characters' names can also be changed. In his essay "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin has said that rather than aiming to recapture what is embedded in the original

translation, a work should be free to be symbolised in a foreign language. In that sense, the adaptation of a literary text into a film can be called an artistic transposition or appropriation.

In the film, the story is not about the unconditional love of husband-wife Jim and Della any more. Rather, it's a story about the unconditional love of the two former lovers who have been separated as the man, Manoj, who lacks all those qualities that are desirable for an ideal man in our society. Whether it is the protagonist, Neerja, or another female character Sheela, both have to sacrifice their love as their families wanted someone with money and security as their husbands. Helpless, unemployed and lonely Manoj cries in the bathroom; can't sleep at night. It is only Sheela who can identify with Manoj's pain. Without even Sheela's saying anything Manoj understands that Sheela is also going through the same pain. There exists an unquestioned and unexplained understanding between Manoj and Sheela. That understanding is translated through signs like the shower, which can hide the sound of weeping and also sleeping pills, which Sheela gives to Manoj and asks him to take if he can't sleep. The viewers can understand their identification from their successful translation of Manoj and Sheela's unsaid words, as well as their hidden expressions. Sheela tries to protect Manoj from her husband's anger by telling lies. To Sheela and Neerja, like many other women in India, 'choice' is an unknown word. They are hardly given the chance to make their choices. In such a society, Neerja fears to remain trapped in the bathroom for her entire life. The sign bathroom connotes the helpless, wretched condition in which several women of our society spend their lives.

Sheela's education cannot rescue her from the wretched condition she is subjected to. Neerja's or Sheela's relationship with their husband is a social and familial imposition. The setting of the film has changed their relationship. Although their love for one another does not change over the span of six years and despite Neerja being unhappy in her marriage, she never for once thinks about leaving her husband. These women, Neerja and Sheela, never think about overthrowing the social matrix they are placed in.

In a cultural setting which is different from the cultural setting of *The Gift of the Magi*, love has its specific clauses and conditions. Lovers are united or separated on the basis of those conventional clauses. The way the love of Jim and Della remains unchanged even after their severe poverty; the love of Manoj and Neerja also remains the same even after their separation and even after Neerja's marriage to another man. From that spirit of sacrifice, Jim and Della sacrifice their respective valuable possessions, the watch and hair, to buy the Christmas gift of their choice. The same spirit of sacrifice inspires Manoj to give the money he has borrowed to set up a business and prompts Neerja to give the few gold jewellery she has. Both are bankrupt, yet they try to improve each other's condition without hurting the sentiment. As the two are former lovers meeting after the span of six years, their behaviour at every step is guided by self-censorship. Although in pain but they cannot think about overthrowing the social matrix imposed upon them. They can hardly share their problems with each other anymore. Both engage themselves in telling a number of lies just to hide their current situation.

Working in more than one language means working with two different cultures. So, presenting the same

meaning across borders by using the same signs becomes almost impossible. This demands for intermedial references through which the components of ideological collectiveness can be translated. As a film desires the immediate response of the viewers, it will be difficult to achieve if there is a cultural gap. Different kinds of signs have been used in order to achieve cultural appropriation and to minimise the cultural gap by the intermedial translation of the understanding, sensitivity, belief, expectation, acceptance and fear of the characters. The relationship between text and film is non-Manichean in nature, as art provides the space to debate, discuss and recreate. Thus, both text and film can be given a unique and independent value.

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