

The Challenges of Intercultural Transfer: The Italian Reception of Aotearoa/New Zealand Films

Authors : Martina Depentor

Abstract : While the cinematic medium contributes to bringing images of a culture to foreign audiences, Audiovisual Translation contributes to deciphering those cultural representations to those same audiences. Through Audiovisual Translation, in fact, elements permeate the reception system and contribute to forging a cultural image of the original/source system in the target/reception system. By analyzing a number of Italian critical reviews, blogs and forum posts, this paper examines the impact and reception in Italy of five of the most successful and influential New Zealand films of the last two decades - *An Angel at my Table* (1990), *The Piano* (1993), *Heavenly Creatures* (1994), *Once Were Warriors* (1994), *Whale Rider* (2002) - with the aim of exploring how the adaptation of New Zealand films might condition the representation of New Zealand in the Italian imaginary. The analysis seeks to identify whether a certain degree of cultural loss results from the 'translation' of these films. The films selected share common ground in that they all reveal cultural, social and historical characteristics of New Zealand, from aspects that are unique to this country and that on the surface may render it difficult to penetrate (unfamiliar landscapes, aspects of indigenous culture) to more universal themes (intimate family stories, dysfunctional relationship). They contributed to situating New Zealand on an international stage and to bringing images of the country to many audiences, the Italian one included, with little previous cultural knowledge of the social and political history of New Zealand. Differences in film types pose clearly different levels of interpretative challenges to non-New Zealander audiences, and examples from the films will show how these challenges are or are not overcome if the adaptations display misinterpretations or rendition gaps, and how the process of intercultural transfer further 'domesticates' or 'exoticises' the source culture.

Keywords : audiovisual translation, cultural representation, intercultural transfer, New Zealand Films

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