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Unveiling the Shadows of Tragedy: Exploring a Multimodal Metaphor in Agnieszka Holland's *Mr. Jones* (2019)

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Abstract. This article investigates how multimodal metaphors and allusions come together in Agnieszka Holland's movie, *Mr. Jones* (2019) to portray the Ukrainian famine from 1932–1933 known as Holodomor that killed millions of Ukrainians. The film utilizes powerful visual shots, delivering a vivid representation of the Holdomor. The verbal mode, conveyed through dialogues and extended sentences, is contextualized within the narrative. The visual mode, together with the verbal one, is enhanced by auditory elements. Through the intricate interplay of diverse modes, the representation of the Holdomor goes beyond the mere historical facts. It makes people think deeply about how suffering has been purposefully caused and kept hidden in history. It helps see the Holodomor from different angles, showing how allusions contribute to people's understanding of history and the tragedy of the Holodomor in particular.

Keywords: multimodal metaphor, allusion, the Holodomor, Mr. Jones.

Introduction

The Holodomor or Great Famine was a genocide that affected the Ukrainian people at the beginning of the 1930s. The term "Holodomor" refers to the intentionally created circumstances and deliberate aspects of the famine, including the confiscation of all food. This man-made famine resulted in the deliberate destruction of millions of Ukrainians through socio-economic policies enforced by totalitarian power over the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic from 1931 to 1933. Though many decades have passed since this tragedy, it continues to hold a significant place in social consciousness. Holodomor has been depicted in various forms of art (literature, music, painting, theatre, sculpture, architecture, and cinematography), and has been widely researched by historians, while its memory is preserved in the National Museum of the Holodomor-Genocide in Kyiv founded in 2006.

The film *Mr. Jones* (2019) directed by Agnieszka Holland, is probably the first one to put the tragedy at the centre of its story, as many Cold War films criticized mainly the Russians, but the Holodomor was almost never mentioned. The film portrays the events of the Holodomor with historical accuracy alongside with real-life accounts shedding light on the political dynamics of the time. By presenting the Holodomor, the film sparks discussions and conversations about this historical tragedy. It leads to further understanding of the broader implications of mass atrocities and the importance of human rights.

Mr. Jones, written by Andrea Chalupa, a descendant of Ukrainian emigrants, and directed by the Oscar-nominated director and screenwriter Agnieszka Holland, is a joint Polish, Ukrainian and British production. It narrates the journey of Gareth Jones, a Welsh journalist, who ventures to the Soviet Union in 1933 to interview Stalin about the country's spending spree. During his visit, he faces the horrifying reality of the Holodomor, and tries to uncover the truth hidden beneath the veil of propaganda. Wendy Ide (2020), a British critic, praised the film's significance in world cinema considering its high-profile reception. Notably, the biographical thriller was chosen as a competitor for the prestigious Golden Bear prize at the 69th Berlin International Film Festival.

The connotations of the titles the film has in different languages highlight the important cultural nuances to resonate with the target audience. It is not merely a marketing and localization strategy, aimed at engaging audiences and making the film more relatable and compelling in each respective country. The original title *Mr. Jones* is more generic and character-focused, as it presents the lonely figure of Gareth Jones – a character evoking a real-life Welsh journalist who stands alone in his struggle against the Soviet propaganda machine. While it does reference the main character's name, it may not immediately convey the specific subject matter of the film, but the advertising tag line for the film, "the truth cannot be hidden forever," makes it clear that he is going to be uncovering the truth. Gareth Jones was, in formal terms, a Mr. Jones. "Jones" is such a common name that it strikes the English speaker's ear as something like Mr. Smith. In other words, unless you know something of the history, Mr. Jones sounds like the name of a spy or someone trying to hide his real name. This is a vivid example of life and art coming together. For Mr. Jones can be seen as the proverbial Everyman who fights, in the end, for truth.

By contrast, the Ukrainian title of the movie, which translates as *The Price of Truth*, renders a powerful message which moves the spotlight from the journalist himself to the price one has to pay to bring the hidden truth to light, facing immense personal risks and formidable obstacles. His pursuit of justice and truth becomes a powerful testament to the importance of journalistic integrity and the courage to confront the darkest secrets of history, namely the Holodomor.

The Holodomor tragedy has been researched across various disciplines, but cognitive linguistics has not received much attention in its examination. This paper seeks to delve into the Holodomor concept by analyzing multimodal metaphorical expressions present in the film *Mr. Jones*. Through the analysis of the metaphor, the study aims to uncover a broader spectrum of perceptions enhanced by allusions.

Allusions are imprecise and require some background knowledge to understand. Though they might isolate an audience lacking awareness of the subject, allusions can also foster a sense of connection among those who recognize the reference. According to Irwin (2002, 522), this is one of the most significant aspects of allusions, as they have the ability to present something for artistic contemplation, fostering closeness and creating a community, actively engaging the audience in a manner that straightforward statements cannot achieve. In short, allusions involve the audience in the creative process by making them decode the hidden meaning, instead of just passively watching.

The research centers on the application of multimodal metaphor theory incorporating allusion components to understand how the Holodomor is portrayed in the film. It acknowledges that the perception of the Holodomor tragedy goes beyond scientific records and is influenced by the impactful and dynamic cinematic visuals, as well as the emotional resonance of sonic and verbal elements. This study ventures into the realm of cognitive linguistics to explore the Holodomor tragedy by scrutinizing the multimodal metaphors in *Mr. Jones.* By doing so, it aims to shed light on a wider range of perceptions associated with this historical event.

Theoretical Background

One of the most powerful tools for rendering meanings in a film is metaphor. Adding depth and complexity to the film, metaphors encourage viewers to think critically and actively engage with the story, leading to a more immersive and enjoyable cinematic experience. Linguists are increasingly interested in studying metaphors in films because movies offer a valuable source for cognitive research. The conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), pioneered by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) and further expanded upon by recent scholars (Bilyk et alii 2022; Cammaerts 2012; Hampe 2005; Kövecses 2002, 2015), forms the foundation of the cognitive approach to studying metaphor, especially in multimodal contexts. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is an inherent cognitive process that occurs when we understand one concept in relation to another. This comprehension is founded on the concept of metaphorical mapping, which refers to a structured correlation between the source and target, where the constituent elements of B correspond to the constituent elements of A (Kövecses 2002, 6).

In recent years, the study of conceptual metaphor has attracted growing attention in various modes beyond just linguistic analysis, which has traditionally been the primary focus within the field of cognitive linguistics. The cognitive approach to multimodal metaphors recognizes that human comprehension is not limited to language alone; it extends to other modalities as well. When encountering metaphors in different modes, such as visual, auditory, or written, our brains still engage in the same underlying cognitive mechanisms as with linguistic metaphors. Thus, a metaphor in a film can use visual elements, music, and spoken language together to convey a deeper meaning or emotion. By understanding how cognition operates in various modes, researchers can better analyze the impact and effectiveness of metaphors in different forms of media and communication (see Bilyk et alii 2023, Coëgnarts 2019; El Refaie 2013; Forceville 2009; Górska 2019).

Elisabeth El Refaie (2013, 236) suggests that multimodality provides distinctive possibilities for creating metaphors by exploiting the capabilities of different modes. Although there isn't a precise definition of mode, it encompasses various forms such as pictorial signs, written signs, spoken signs, gestures, sounds, music, smells, tastes, and touch (Forceville 2009, 4). Considering the range of modes available, multimodal metaphors in films can be presented visually, sonically, musically, verbally, or in written language. In this study, we focus on the following five modes: 1) visual depiction of a domain, where either the domain itself or its related elements are portrayed metonymically; 2) sonic depiction of a domain, using non-musical and non-verbal sounds to convey its meaning; 3) musical depiction of a domain, employing music to signify its identification; 4) depiction of a domain through spoken language, with on-screen characters or voice-overs identifying it; 5) depiction of a domain through written language, presenting it or its elements onscreen in written form.

Charles Forceville (2011) has stated that metaphor in film demonstrates several peculiar qualities. Firstly, films have greater opportunities compared to written texts for creating metaphors. Secondly, when a visual metaphor in a film requires unfolding over time, the elements can be presented simultaneously. Thirdly, some non-verbal modalities lack a structured "grammar" like language, leading to more diverse interpretations and disagreements when using metaphors that do not rely on verbal elements. Finally, non-verbal modalities in films can evoke emotions more rapidly and possibly in a subtler manner among audiences compared to the verbal modality, and this characteristic extends to multimodal metaphors.

Methodology

In our analysis, we have chosen the metaphor HOLODOMOR IS ESPIONAGE firstly due to its primary importance in rendering the message of the film and secondly its occurrence throughout the movie. The findings of the multimodal metaphor study concerning the CMT have facilitated the application of the following approach to analyzing multimodal metaphors in Agnieszka Holland's film, *Mr. Jones.* Our methodology has involved identifying and choosing this multimodal metaphor using the filmic metaphor identification procedure (FILMIP) proposed by Bort-Mir (2019), analyzing and explaining the metaphor's structure using Lakoff and Johnson's "A is B" model (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Then different modes of the domains have been distinguished and interpreted by means of mapping metaphor features within a specific context (following Forceville 2013). The detailed description of the procedure can be found in the research article on multimodal metaphors in the HBO miniseries *Chernobyl* (Bilyk et alii 2023, 112–113). This procedure was extended by analyzing allusion components found in different modes.

Results and Discussions

While analyzing the movie as a whole and specifically the concept of Holodomor, it becomes evident that most of the metaphorical meanings being studied are connected to concealing or unveiling alarming information about the famine in Ukraine. This enables us to categorize these metaphorical implications under one multimodal metaphor HOLODOMOR IS ESPIONAGE. In the case of ESPIONAGE as the source domain and HOLODOMOR as the target domain, different aspects of the tragedy are emphasized, helping the viewers grasp various facets of it. The concept of Holodomor is primarily revealed in the film within a twenty-minute cinematic timeframe, which the audience perceives as a film within a film. The narrative has a clear beginning (a train trip), development of events (scenes in the village), climax (cannibalism scenes), and resolution (hallucinations caused by hunger).

The target domain HOLODOMOR of the multimodal metaphor under study is mainly cued by means of visual, auditory and verbal modes. The visual mode is the most powerful in the film as it combines visual elements like images, colours, shapes, and spatial arrangements to reinforce and extend the metaphor's meaning.

The visual manifestation of the Holodomor begins when the main character finds himself in a train heading to a remote Ukrainian village. For example, one of the first scenes that hints at the famine is in the freight carriage full of people with hungry eyes observing Jones eating an orange. The vibrant colour of the fruit contrasts with the dark, muted shades in the carriage. Such a detail emphasizes the difference between the outer world of Jones and the inner story of the starving people [Figure 1]. The scene becomes even more dramatic when Mr. Jones throws the orange peels on the floor and several children hurry to pick them up and eat.

The emotional tension escalates as shocking moments appear on screen such as corpses everywhere. For example, in Figure 2 a film viewer can see a dead person at the railway station and nobody pays attention to him making it clear that it is a common situation in Ukraine at that time. Another striking scene (a cart with dead people) which proves the evidence of the famine in the village is presented in Figure 3.

The climax is reached in a scene where a distant house is shown to have no one but three starving children inside eating meat which turns out to be their elder brother. Mr. Jones's shock makes him nauseous and emotionally devastated. Cannibalism constitutes the darkest page in the history of the man-made famine in Ukraine. Deprived of food, people were forced to eat inedible things such as tree bark and some of them even resorted to cannibalism. Finally, the visual mode of HOLODOMOR is actualized in the scene where the main character experiences hallucinations. Being extremely hungry and shocked, he rushes through the forest and comes across a piece of wood that his blurred mind perceives as a loaf of bread. His hallucination develops into the images of children singing a song about the famine. The latter represents both the verbal and auditory modes of the target domain HOLODOMOR, which together with the visual one contribute to the sinister atmosphere of the twenty minute story about the famine. Using a song makes the auditory mode of the multimodal metaphor under study stronger and has a richer and more immersive impact on viewers. In this film, the song performed in Ukrainian is accompanied with English subtitles, thus becoming meaningful auditory and verbal modes both for Ukrainian and English speaking audience. This song plays a crucial role in cueing the target domain HOLODOMOR as it explicitly names the famine:

Hunger and cold Are in our house. Nothing to eat, Nowhere to sleep. And our neighbor Has lost his mind... And eaten his children...

The director uses this powerful song several times in the film in order to tie disparate parts of the story together. When listeners can visualize hungry children and events described in the song, the auditory mode becomes intertwined with visual perception and feeling. Due to high and low tones, slow tempo, terrifying emotional responses are elicited. Such feelings are the ones which occur when people find out about the famine repercussions.

The perception of the HOLODOMOR is reinforced by different diegetic sounds (soup sipping, cutlery rattling, crunching steps, howling wind, etc.) used in contrast with silence which predominates in the village scenes. The silence in the deserted village encourages the audience to focus on the presence of death. Just as silence can be powerful on its own, it is also used effectively in contrast with sound. For example, in a silent scene in which Mr. Jones is sitting on a log in a vast snow-covered field the only sound we can hear is his own while munching bread. Thus, the combination of silence, minimalistic visuals, and contrasting diegetic sound represents emptiness, loss and hunger.

The source domain of the multimodal metaphor HOLODOMOR IS ESPIONAGE is cued throughout the film by means of several modes – visual, auditory, and verbal. The very beginning of the film introduces the source domain ESPIONAGE visually to the audience in the scene where the main character speaks on the phone tapped by the KGB officers. To signify the idea of spying the viewers are presented with the image of the man in the headphones listening to the protagonist's conversation. There is a visual emphasis on telephone wires indicating how fast secret information can reach the authorities in Moscow. The main character, Gareth Jones, is perceived as a real spy: he forges the documents to gain access to secret information, tries to find hidden facts by questioning people, and gathers evidence by taking pictures and making notes in his notepad. Moreover, he tries to mix with the crowd by wearing local clothes and carrying bags with wheat. Wishing to be unnoticed, he runs fast along the dark streets in the rain having the case with documents in his arms. His behaviour creates the suspenseful atmosphere of espionage [Figures 4, 5]. This strong visual mode is enhanced by the auditory one through the sounds of the tense and escalating music.

In this article, we focus on the scenes in which the source domain is presented through the combination of different modes. A powerful manifestation of auditory, verbal and visual modes can be found in the scene where Gareth comes to the apartment of his colleague journalist Ada. As soon as they start talking, Ada switches on the gramophone to conceal their conversation from the neighbour eavesdropping outside the room. So the auditory mode of the source domain ESPIONAGE is manifested through the loud song playing on the gramophone and whispering voices of Gareth and Ada. It is enhanced by the clear visual image of the neighbour with the glass pressed to the wall in order to hear better [Figure 6]. The verbal mode is cued by Ada's words, "Don't talk, just listen." The dialogue itself resembles the conversation of spies as short questions are followed by concise answers.

In this very scene, we also come across a biblical allusion to Paul, the Apostle. In the film, Paul is a journalist who is killed for his attempts to reveal the truth about Ukraine and Stalin's gold. He is compared to Paul, the Apostle who was beheaded by the Roman Emperor Nero for preaching Christianity.¹ This allusion aims at highlighting the cruelty of authorities who prosecute and execute people for spreading unwanted information.

Another amalgamation of visual and verbal modes occurs in the scene where Jones sees Ada home. The dark street with subdued streetlight and the man following them closely create a vivid image of espionage. This picture is reinforced verbally by Ada's words "Shh..." and "That's my big brother." At first Ada hushes Gareth preventing him from touching upon a secret topic and then ironically refers to the man behind them as "Big Brother." The latter alludes to George Orwell's novel, 1984, in which Big Brother monitors and controls every aspect of citizens' lives. This literary allusion enriches the narrative by connecting to literature and highlighting the parallels between the themes of the

¹ See e.g. St. Paul the Apostle. Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/ Saint-Paul-the-Apostle. Last accessed 6. 06. 2024.

imaginary totalitarian society in *1984* and the real Soviet regime. The auditory mode in the scene is subtle, manifested only by the scarce crunching sounds of the characters' steps on the snow and the distant striking of a clock. The theme of Big Brother emerges again in the scene where the viewers see the poster of Stalin holding a bunch of wheat ears. This image may remind the viewer of the line from the novel: "the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall" (Orwell 2013, 3), which is an explicit reference to Stalin. What is more, this bright picture contrasts with the cruel reality where people desperately fight for a loaf of bread or even lie dead of hunger in the snow [Figures 7, 8].

The director of the film Agnieszka Holland emphasized in an interview that Orwell's presence in *Mr. Jones* was important to her: "because he somehow represents my point of view – how to tell stories that are impossible to tell in times when people don't want to listen to the truth" (Talu 2019). Recurring allusions to Orwell's novels (*1984, Animal Farm*) can be observed throughout the film. The opening scene of the film introduces a man typing something, which, together with the voice-over and the statuettes of animals (pigs and sheep), suggests that the man is George Orwell working on his novel, *Animal Farm*.

Like every detective story, the film has a villain, Duranty, the real-life journalist who served as the Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times* during the 1930s depicted in the film. He was known for downplaying the brutality of Joseph Stalin's regime and the famine that resulted in the deaths of millions of Ukrainians. He acts as the antagonist to the main character (Mr. Jones), playing into the hands of the propaganda machine of the time and concealing the truth. Their first confrontation happens at Duranty's orgy party. Here the target domain of ESPIONAGE manifests itself through the amalgamation of visual and verbal modes: in the "opium den" of the party, the viewers see Gareth trying to obtain clues by asking open-ended questions, concealed by diegetic sounds of drunken voices and light jazz music. We hear in the dialogue between Gareth Jones and one of the reporters: "journalists are *confined* to Moscow," "are they *paranoid* about *spies*?", "get a copy of it [*The Masque of the Red Death*] before they *ban* it."

The allusion to Edgar Allan Poe's short story *The Masque of the Red Death* is two-faceted: on the one hand, Duranty's party represents the escape from harsh reality to the castle surrounded by the plague as it can be seen in Poe's story; on the other hand, this scene resonates with the overall message of the short story, the fear of death is the strongest feeling inherent to humans, it determines a person's behavior in a critical situation at the subconscious level, and everyone is equal in the face of death.

Conclusions

The multimodal metaphor HOLODOMOR IS ESPIONAGE draws a conceptual connection between the Holodomor, a man-made famine that took place in Soviet Ukraine during the early 1930s, and the act of espionage, which involves obtaining secret or confidential information through covert means. By equating the Holodomor with espionage, this metaphor implies that the famine was not a natural disaster, but rather a calculated and intentional act of withholding resources, spreading false information, and manipulating circumstances to cause harm and death. It highlights the secrecy, manipulation of facts, and intentional deception that were employed to perpetrate the tragedy. This metaphor suggests that the suffering, starvation, and death caused by the Holodomor were not just a result of natural factors like crop failure, but rather a deliberate and hidden action similar to espionage. Just as espionage involves hidden agendas, manipulation, and secrecy, this metaphor underscores the notion that the Holodomor was a result of a combination of deliberate policies, propaganda, and actions that made the famine conditions worse.

We contend that the Holodomor depicted in the film *Mr. Jones* involves a multimodal expression, wherein visual, auditory and verbal modes play a role in conveying the metaphor equating it with espionage. The film effectively uses a variety of impactful visual shots, leading to a clear and vibrant representation of the multimodal metaphor. The embodiment of verbal mode relies on the surrounding context, primarily communicated through dialogues and extensive sentences. These two modes are reinforced by the auditory mode. Allusion also plays a significant role in the film's portrayal of the Holodomor. Allusions in the film provide historical context and depth, allowing the audience to connect the events of the Holodomor with other related historical moments, movements, or figures. This helps viewers understand the broader context in which the tragedy occurred. By referencing well-known symbols, the film imbues the Holodomor narrative with additional layers of interpretation. Allusions, as part of the film's multimodal composition, intersect with visual, auditory, and verbal modes, making the depiction of the Holodomor more poignant and emotionally resonant.

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Figure 1. Mr. Jones (Agnieszka Holland. 2019): the scene with the orange.





Figure 2. A dead man at the railway station.

Figure 3. A cart with dead people.



Figures 4–5. Gareth Jones takes photos in secret and lurks in the street.





Figure 6. The neighbour's eavesdropping.

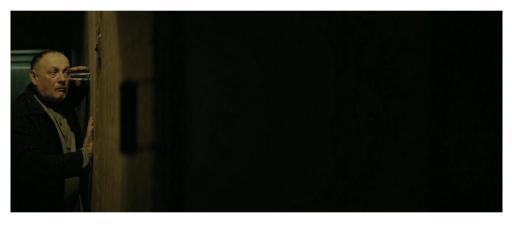


Figure 7. The poster of Stalin with wheat.



Figure 8. A victim of the famine lying in the snow.

