

‘Discovering the connections between texts enhances our understanding of our humanity.’

Texts that explore ideas universal to the human experience will resonate across time and provide an understanding of the social and moral values that characterized their compositional contexts. Shakespeare’s drama King Richard III adopts a theocentric worldview to examine the nature of the human condition, whereas Al Pacino’s modern docu-drama Looking For Richard aims to communicate Shakespeare to a modern secular audience. The duplicitous nature of humanity is examined with the contrasting values inevitably colouring the audiences’ view of the villainous Richard. An Elizabethan England demanded retribution for his moral transgressions whereas Pacino’s contemporary America takes a humanist stance and attempts to understand the psychology of Richard’s flawed humanity. The continuing resonance of King Richard III and its appropriations remains in its exploration of the corruptive nature of power and the duplicity that often characterises those who seek it.

Shakespeare explores the eternal consequence for an individual’s fallen humanity in a world governed by moral absolutes when an outward artifice is engaged to conceal an evil inner reality. Richard’s evil machinations are revealed in his opening soliloquy, “determined to prove a villain” due to his “dissembling” and “deformed, unfinished” appearance becomes a metaphorical representation of his inner devilish nature. The illusion between truth and reality is further reflected as Richard “seem[s] a saint” but “play[s] the devil”, orchestrating the murder of his brother Clarence in order to clear a path to the “golden crown”, convincing Clarence of his “love” even as the betrayal sends him “post-horse up to heaven”. The truth of Richard’s wickedness is only revealed in asides, admitting himself to be “subtle, false and treacherous” meanwhile portraying the “kind... Deserved...King”. To hide his lack of conscience he ironically details “how far I am from the desire of this” as he reluctantly “endures the load” of the crown, meanwhile, further beguiling the Mayor and citizens of his “virtue” and “holy...devotion” by positioning himself in the company of two “clergy men” with “a book of prayer in his hand”. Once crowned, Richard maintains appearance and flaunts his free-will accepting the “hazard of the die”. Ultimately unable to escape the reality of divine retribution and the punishment it affords, he will as prophesised by the ghosts of his victims, ‘despair and die’.

Pacino examines Richard’s villainy through a psychoanalytical lens affording a more sympathetic representation reflective of the moral ambiguity of his secular world. Richard the character, Pacino the actor, director and celebrity become inextricably linked as fluid cuts from rehearsal, social events and the drama blur lines between performance and the real world. Although post-modernism portrays grey areas of “opinion... there’s no right or wrong” the film is mindful to portray Richard’s obvious duplicity, reflected in Richard’s black attire, reminding a forgiving audience of his evils even as he proceeds to play the loving brother, uncle and husband. Furthermore, Pacino’s face is often shown in half shadow to visually symbolise Richard’s duplicity. Bookended allusions to The Tempest highlight the modern notion of life’s temporality; an “insubstantial pageant” that is ultimately “rounded with a sleep”. Although Frederic explains that “Shakespeare exaggerated [Richard’s] deformity” to metaphorically represent the “corruption of his mind”, the film weakens this feature until the end upon which Richard’s abandonment illicit sympathy from a humanist

audience. Throughout the film, although Richard's actions and charming rhetoric are juxtaposed, his evil nature and outward benevolence become indistinct as a result of contemporary moral ambiguity. Instead Emphasis is placed on the psychology of his character, with simplistic explanations of Richards scheming to help a "reluctant" modern America to engage with the film.

The quest for power in Richard III is dichotomous in nature, not only driving the plot of the play, but also serving as an examination of the human condition. Richard's ruthless murders serve to destroy his humanity and is reflected through the demonic imagery of the "dreadful minister of hell" and "foul devil". In addition, the use of animalistic motif "wretched boar" and "poisonous bunch-backed toad" symbolise his gross evil and corrupted humanity as he undermines the guiding hand of God, attempting to become the architect of his own life. Richard recalls a prophesy foreshadowing his death "I should not live long after I see Richmond" wherein Richmond acts as the metaphoric hand of God, a more deserving and rightful king. Richard's greedy acquisition of a wife, subjects and kingdom are all ultimately met with "emptiness" as a lonely Richard dies with "no soul to pity him" at the hand of "Gods just ordinance". Thus, death of the Machiavellian usurper satisfies the theocratic society, as divine punishment proves a more powerful reality than his wicked schemes, further illustrated in the closing "amen" which brings the finality and restoration of order.

No longer bound by theocentric ideals, power in Looking For Richard is presented as a human construct, by nature a reflection of a secular society with no central power delegating control or punishing those who abuse it. Pacino is often portrayed in the centre of all interactions as "the role and actor" begin to "merge", whether in company the public, historians or fellow actors. He uses his celebrity status to exert influence over others as a director, actor and public figure, all of which ties in to parallel Richard's desire for total control. This is later reflected as Pacino gleefully alludes to Richard, singing the gospel song "He's got the whole world in his hands", to simultaneously illustrate his complete authority and the subversion of "Gods fair ordinance". As an unremorseful Richard succumbs to sleep, a fragmented film montage illustrates the "alienat[ion] from his own body and self" where post-modern moral ambiguity does not demand any emphatic reminder of his murderous immorality and so, focuses instead on the "tragedy" of a man who "earnt his death" rather than the pure and "holy" victory of Richmond. This is further shown through the induced sympathy of the secular humanist audience upon his "lonely" death, with the resonating "silence" of post-modern oblivion.

Thus, through the study of relevant texts, our own understanding of the human condition is enhanced. Shakespeare's drama King Richard III serves to examine the nature of the human condition in a theocentric context, exploring notions of duplicity and the quest for power. Pacino's appropriation of the play parallels the same central ideas, however adopting a post-modern, secular approach.