

ENGLISH ADVANCED: *KING RICHARD III/LOOKING FOR RICHARD*

Despite the influences of their differing contexts, the modern film representation of Richard III, directed by Loncraine, is effectively able to connect with Shakespeare's original play Richard III through a skilful use of techniques to represent the ideas of the power of language and morality which are central in both texts. The film is set in 1930's Britain in what appears to be a Hitler-type world, with Richard being represented in a similar way to Hitler himself. In today's society, Hitler has obvious connotations with immense fear and dominant power and thus Loncraine's decision to use the familiar context of a Hitler-type world allows modern audiences to achieve a better understanding of the extremes of Richard's power and immorality. Like Richard, Hitler employed a very compelling use of language to assert his power and hence this context further elucidates the power of language and its association with power and ambition. Shakespeare on the other hand was shaped by his Elizabethan context; with Queen Elizabeth on the throne, the pressure to advocate the Tudor Myth influenced Shakespeare's representation of Richard in the way that he demonised him and exaggerated his Machiavellian character and deformity to reinforce the Tudor's legitimate right to the throne.

Throughout this section (Act 3 Scene 5 to Act 4 Scene 1) there are many direct and indirect references from the film representation which pertain to Shakespeare's original play in terms of the ideas of morality and the power of language. Near the start, following the murder of Hastings, Richard reclines on his sofa whilst humming along to upbeat, almost joyful music and flicking through the photos of dead Hastings. This use of ironic music contrasted with the morbid photos clearly stresses his inherent immorality and lack of conscience or consideration for others, which is a theme reflected throughout Shakespeare's entire play.

Anne's reflection on how she could have fallen for Richard is a scene from Loncraine's film and the original play which especially highlights the power of language, with the scene in the film initiated with a high angle shot of Anne which reflects her vulnerability to Richard's impressive oratory skill. She explains that her "woman's heart grossly grew captive to his honeyed words" - the reference to Richard's successful wooing, despite his status as the murderer of her husband and father in law, as 'honeyed' indicates his prowess with language and the persuasive power that language can have over people.

A little further into the film, Richard sits before a mirror while two women fuss over him before his display of reverence in hope to be coerced into the throne. The mirror is symbolic of his duplicity and clear lack of morality, whilst the girls are making him into someone he is not – someone who will appeal to the citizens. This relates to the seemingly sexist line from the original play "play the maids part: still answer nay and take it" - Richard is 'playing' a different character and is going to feign modesty just like the maid in the metaphor.

Following the mirror scene, Richard emerges from the room with a prayer book in his hand, which is again an act of putting on a false appearance, giving the impression he is dutiful and reverent. In Shakespeare's original, this is equivalent to and a transformation of the stage direction "Enter Richard aloft, between two Bishops," which, when acted out in the play, would have been visual imagery of Richard framed by the symbols of his supposed reverence, while he is actually acting immorally. This false appearance is again evident in the film when he seems to be modest in saying "I am unfit for state and majesty...see how far I am from the desire of this" and then changes his mind, saying "I'm not made of stone," which is clearly dramatic irony as the audience already knows his true intentions. This statement is spoken directly to the audience, an effective instance of 'breaking the fourth wall' which correlates with Richard's soliloquies in Shakespeare's play. These techniques both give insight into Richard's true scheming and cunning nature for the audience. In the film, the mentioned statements, accompanied with mock sighs, also demonstrate the way that Richard has used the power of language and reverse psychology to persuade the people of his worthiness to be king.

The immorality of Buckingham and Richard is illustrated in the film through use of contrast when they are cackling uncontrollably with joy about their successful deceit and then immediately sober up and start shaking hands with the other men. This is reflective of Buckingham's line in Shakespeare's play: "And so most joyfully we take our leave," which is contrasted with Richard's earlier reluctant acceptance of the crown in "I cannot nor I will not yield to you." The contrast in both highlights their duplicity and immorality as well as the extreme power of their language to facilitate their win. Immediately after Richard's acceptance, he hits Buckingham with the prayer book, a disrespectful, irreligious action which explicitly exhibits his amorality especially after professing his reverence and using it to his advantage.

The section of the film ends with a panning camera shot that gradually tilts up to the podium, which is representative of Richard's ascent to the throne, the symbol of his power and the outcome of his consistent lack of morality and strength of language and words. Behind him on the podium is a red flag bearing the image of a boar, which is a distinct connection with the original play in which Queen Margaret labels Richard an "abortive, rooting hog." This reference further establishes the interconnectedness of the two texts and helps to validate Loncraine's film as a transformation of Shakespeare's play Richard III which maintains the original's textual integrity. Overall, Loncraine's version of Richard III implements a variety of techniques and a change of context to successfully transform Shakespeare's original play into one that will appeal to a modern audience, whilst particularly representing the ideas of morality and the power of language which are intrinsic in both texts.

Reflection on how viewing this representation has added to my understanding of how texts can be connected: