

ENGLISH ADVANCED: *RICHARD III/LOOKING FOR RICHARD*

Despite their parallel treatment of the enigmatic and villainous figure, Richard the third, Shakespeare's play *Richard the Third* and Al Pacino's film *Looking for Richard*, reveal varied perspectives on the contradictory forces of free-will and determinism, as influenced by their disparate contexts. In saying so, it is only through a comparative study that both convergent and divergent aspects of each text can be recognized, in light of the value shift from divine orchestration to individual (humanist) action. Informed by the writings of Richard's critic, Sir Thomas Moore, Shakespeare demonizes the historical figure, Richard the Third, in an act of political propaganda. By attempting to promote the value of Shakespeare in the late 20th and early 21st century, Pacino adapts the famous play into a dynamic metacommentary, whereby he deconstructs the psychology of Richard to convince contemporary audiences of Shakespeare's transcendence. However, Pacino demonstrates a secular paradigm, in which deities lack the authoritative power ordained to them during Shakespeare's time. Thus, while the texts reflect different purposes and religious ideologies, they both analyse the consequence of human ambition. Ultimately, the cross-examination of values embedded in these texts provides insight into the ways in which context affects meaning and construction, and more critically, illustrates the significance of social and religious context in the texts' exploration of human nature.

In an exploration of the tension between free-will and predestination, *RTT* demonstrates a theocentric paradigm in which cause and consequence are subject to divine authority. Not unaffected by Renaissance and Protestant Schism of the early 16th century, Shakespeare's metanarrative centres on the power of divine authority, indicating the rising tension in England at the time. Indeed, Shakespeare's use of iambic pentameter (as an underlying poetic order) reflects the Elizabethan value in a unifying system of divine justice. This is further expressed through Richmond's submissive tone when calling on God in the line: "Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord...if thy will be so." In submitting himself to God's will, Richmond demonstrates the belief commonly held at the time, that God is the ultimate orchestrator of one's destiny.

By contrast, *LFR* depicts a secular society that discredits theism as an absolute truth, propounding Nietzsche's notion that there is "no transcendent source of authority." Unlike in *KRTT*, Pacino explores the role of "Shakespeare's iambics as floating and descending through the pentameter of the soul", rather than as a symbol for divine authority. Moreover, in opposition to the common perception of Shakespeare's time, *LFR* rejects the concept of metanarrative, by presenting the play's dénouement as being devoid of divine influence. Indeed, Pacino represents Richard's death as a direct result of his own actions, reflecting the humanist value that explanations of human behavior should be based on reason, rather than religious dogma. whereas Shakespeare contrasts Richard's nightmare to Richmond's uplifting dream, which serves to reinforce God's predetermined will for Richmond to attain the throne, Pacino focuses on Richard's inner turmoil as the 'final battle', omitting Richmond's dream altogether. It seems, unlike Shakespeare, Pacino does not need to convince his audience of the legitimacy of the Tudor dynasty, suggesting the importance of context in determining compositional choices of representation, namely that of selection and omission.

However, Shakespeare also explores the power of free-will through Richard's character, who reflects the Machiavellian desire to "supersede an earthly order whose ultimate sanction had been the commands of an omnipotent God." (Hannah Arendt, 65) While Richard's attempt to usurp the throne – which is symbolic of his attempt to play the hand of God – would have been perceived as the reason for his death, Shakespeare's extreme characterisation of Richard also represents a shift towards humanism, in which cause and consequence is dependent on an one's actions alone. This battle between secularism and predestination is embodied in the pun: "I am determined to be a villain". By presenting Richard as both the medieval Vice figure and a human in control of his own ambitions, Shakespeare exposes the hypocrisy of the religious contention at the time, which struggled to harmonise these opposing forces. To this end, *RTT* reflects the Elizabethan value in the power of a divine authority, while representing the Renaissance struggle between secularism and providentialism. Thus, a comparative study is essential to...

Furthermore, in a response to Humanism, Pacino explores the role of Richard's personal ambition - the result of his free-will - in determining his downfall. When considering the effects of human ambition, Pacino suggests that Richard "deserves his death", not because it is God's predestined will, but because his actions affect so many lives. Moreover, Pacino incites sympathy for Richard, by portraying his villainy as the plight of the everyman on a larger scale: "Look and you will find Richard today." Even Pacino, as the writer, director and actor of LFR, can be seen as a type of Richard, whose multiple roles enable him to achieve his purpose. As Richard falls into Richmond's sword in the film's final scene, the film cuts to Pacino falling into the arms of Kimball, his co-writer. Through this final superimposition of character and actor, Pacino and Richard form a potent parallel as "actors, as I foretold you...[that] are melted into thin air." Thus, the intertextuality manifest through the medium of docudrama enables Pacino to promote the timelessness of Shakespeare, while also examining the inherent impact of free-will on an individual's demise.

Ultimately, it is only through a comparative study of two distinct social and religious contexts that the value shift from divine orchestration to humanist action is revealed. Moreover, despite the texts' differences in purpose and audience, both Shakespeare's Richard the Third and Pacino's Looking for Richard investigate notions of authority and the common intricacies of human nature. Thus, the role of context is crucial in shaping each text's meaning and construction, despite being based upon similar subject matter.