

The nature of power in looking for richard and richard iii



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The nature of power within Looking for Richard both reflects that which is represented in Richard III and extends or alters it to be incorporated into a modern context, appropriate for a wider, contemporary audience. Richard III is a Shakespearian play set at the end of the War of the Roses, where a dramatic shift of power had just occurred, and the ascent of Richard to the throne had begun. Written in Elizabethan times, power is not only reflected historically and dramatically, but also socially and politically in terms of context, as Calvinism was the ideology accepted at the time. Looking for Richard, directed by Al Pacino and released in 1996, is a self-proclaimed ‘docu-drama’, aimed at introducing Shakespeare, specifically Richard III, into modern society and to make it relevant, significant and accessible some four hundred years after the play was written. Using scenes from the play and incorporating modern interpretations Pacino offers both Shakespeare’s representation of power, his own and that of society, to connect past to present and present new forms of power that is seen in today’s predominantly secular society.

Within both texts the power of the individual and their motives is focused on in relation to audience and context, and extended in Looking for Richard to be relevant to modern society. The pursuit of power is a theme that transcends time, and is therefore a major theme reflected in both texts. Richard’s journey to the throne is reflective of all of humanity’s greed, and is still relevant to modern society. At the time that Richard III was written and performed, the government was in the form of a monarchy, with Queen Elizabeth I as the autocratic ruler. She had an immense amount of individual power, controlling what could and couldn’t be published and performed,

therefore influencing the writing of Richard III itself. As Richard III is historically Elizabeth's enemy, painting him as the Herod-tyrant Machiavel that Shakespeare does not only create a better situation for the monarchy, but also produces an intricate character through which one is better able to understand the nature of power. In Looking for Richard, Richard's power is physicalised by him carrying around a riding crop, symbolic of his autocratic power, making it clear to modern audiences of his position, with his inner power over his words and actions made external despite his physical deformity. Pacino also plays on his past roles as characters such as 'Scarface' and 'the Godfather' to reflect Hollywood's interest with the dark villain, a clear parallel between what Shakespeare created. In both texts the audience's perception of the power dynamics is very important, and the audience's opinion itself is somewhat represented within the texts. In Act two scene three of the play, citizens of the kingdom discuss their own views on the state of the monarchy, connecting it to the audience, and helping to gain power over them by encouraging them to believe their fellow contemporaries. A citizen states the opinion that Shakespeare hopes to generate within the people themselves, and displays their fear of Richard's power, saying "When great leaves fall, then winter is at hand;/When the sun sets, who doth not look for night?". This is an extended metaphor, relating the season to characters: the leaves referring to Margaret and her prophecy, winter referring to Richard, the sun setting to Edward's death and night representative of the anarchy the citizens expect to see from Richard as their monarch. This shows he holds great power, as the people believe he has the potential to plunge their newly peaceful kingdom into one of great unrest. The use of nature also produces a sense of foreboding and unease.

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In *Looking for Richard*, power over the audience through the people is also a vital element of the production. Like Richard tries to win the people over, so does Pacino, when throughout the film he adds cuts of him using handheld camera's to heckle passersby on the streets, the average person, to further entice the audience mainly comprised of the average American. Pacino himself has individual power as he is a well-known actor, using this quality to help educate others. Richard is known as a character with many sides, and Pacino becomes an extra embodiment of one of Richard's ' personas', as Pacino uses method acting to try and understand Richard as a character, allowing him to extend his power within the play reenactments, in the real-life scenes and among the people. He uses a combination of medium's and processes within the film to appeal to a wide audience, altering Shakespeare's original power dynamics to fit a modern context. Individual power is greatly affected by gender, and representation of the power of women differs vastly between the texts, as their role within *Looking for Richard* exaggerates them as a mere object for obtaining power both within the play and among the audience. In *Richard III*, the women serve not only to demonstrate Richard's power, but also to provide the voice of providentialism and that of the morally correct, whereas this is underplayed in *Richard III* in favor of sexualization, and the power one can obtain from this, to focus on the dynamics within the character of Richard himself. Trying to get to the core of the character requires certain alterations, and understanding Richard and his motives is one of the major purposes of the undertaking of Pacino's project. In coherence with the Calvinistic ideologies of the time, Shakespeare presents the women as the force for providentialism, in contrast to Richard who believes in the power of free will.

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They play an interesting role, as though they are considered powerless compared to the men, they exhibit prophetic power, out of control to the men that intend to control the women themselves. Their emotive force elevates them to a position that is powerful in terms of controlling the audience's thoughts. Only when the women come into view do we really see the emotional reality and toll of this politically volatile situation. Margaret, the prior Queen, whose husband has been killed by Richard in the War of the Roses, plays a role which reflects the belief in divine will and the supernatural, cursing Richard and his actions through the use of biblical allusion and seasonal metaphor to portray her character as vengeful, and as trying to correct the wrong. Using her power of prophecy she asks " If heaven have and grievous plague in store/.../Oh, let them keep it till thy sins be ripe", alluding to the ten plagues that was set upon the Egyptians during the persecution of the Israelites, connecting Richard to a murderous tyrant that will deserve God's punishment in his afterlife, and foreshadowing future events. Her ripening imagery, again an element of the extended seasonal metaphor, also connects her to Autumn, often associated with times of change, as opposed to Richard with Winter, and King Edward with Summer, demonstrating how Margaret plays an almost equally powerful role within the play. Throughout the play there are also parallels to the Resurrection plays, which involve female triads performing actions revolving around Jesus' tomb. The appearance of the so-called ' Three Mary's', being Elizabeth, the Duchess of York and Anne, gives them power in the sense that religion was a prominent part of society at the time and represented the all-powerful and divine force. This also gives them power over the Shakespearian audience, as their appearances during the falling action of the play, and their

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prophecies coming true persuades viewers of Richard's evil nature and of the triumph of God and morality over all that Richard stands for. As the three Mary's are at the ' tomb' (the Tower of London) they generate sympathy for the audience by showing pity for themselves and each other as a result of Richard's crimes, Anne commenting on how " Within so small a time, [her] woman's heart/ Grossly grew captive to his honey words". The use of alliteration and imagery not only emphasizes her naivety, but makes the audience sympathetic to her, therefore giving her power, as she is only a pitiful, meek young woman who's been exploited by Richard, whilst simultaneously demonstrating her powerlessness within the play itself.

The power dynamic's among the genders within Looking for Richard has taken a very different approach to that of Shakespeare. Whilst Pacino uses them to add a perspective and to create some form of sympathy, his focus isn't on the portrayal of what is right or wrong by God but on sexual power. Pacino placing focus on exploring Richard's motivations and rise to power diminishes the role of the females. Within the scene where Richard woos Lady Anne, Pacino sexualizes Anne, objectifying her to show Richard's power over her. This is shown in both the play re-enactment segments and the seemingly ' real world' situations, portraying Winona Ryder, the actor for Lady Anne, as subservient and meek, true to her character. Pacino earlier states that he wants to cast someone " very young", in order to serve his purpose of heightening Richard's individual power, and to bring it into a modern context. In today's society, sexualization is a common tool used to gain power over an audience and persuade them of something. As society is now secular, there is more freedom and less censorship, giving Pacino the

room he needed to transform a play heavily influenced by its Elizabethan context and harsh censorship laws into something that be used to explore the concept of sexual power, rather than to spread what could be seen as Tudor propaganda. The use of film and modern cinematic techniques helps the process of making it accessible to modern contexts, and is useful in creating parallels between the play and the modern world, such as in the scenes with Richard/Anne and Pacino/Ryder. The fact that he cast Winona Ryder, vastly seen as desirable, entices the viewer to be wooed along with Anne and aids in her objectification. This sexualization is notably seen when, instead of following the original script and have Richard and Anne part with formal farewell's, he has the two characters passionately kiss, showing the power Richard has to make Anne succumb to him. Using 'MTV cuts', Pacino is able to cut from this to a hand-held camera, showing a close-up of Winona turning to Pacino for security. Later, Frederic Kimball interrupts Ryder to mock her to emphasize his superiority over her. The use of side lighting and camera angles turning away reinforces Anne/Ryder as being subservient. This is juxtaposed to a shot of Pacino outside later yelling and laughing "I'll have her, but I will not keep her long", further objectifying Anne as a mere stepping stone to the throne, similar to the play, but now associated with Anne as a sexual conquest rather than a wife. Between these two texts, the forms and contexts greatly affect the way in which power based on gender is represented, and the effect the roles of women have in each. When trying to appeal to their respective audiences, the way in which this power is shown is very different, as even though the theme of power is constant, the ways in which it are seen and embodied in society is largely a product of the times.

Within the texts Richard III and Looking for Richard, many parallels exist in terms of the nature of power, however, due to the freedom of being produced in a modern context, Pacino is able to further the representation of power, by introducing multiple interpretations. Through the power of the individual, the audience and power differences between the genders, both texts are able to produce connected yet individual perceptions, from which the wider audience can judge. Looking for Richard incorporates much of the power dynamics that the play does, but is able to omit, alter or add to it to better fit a modern context, offering new insights into power itself, which we can analyse and compare through the texts.