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MARIA GRAZIA DONGU

“RICHARD THE THIRD” AND “LOOKING FOR RICHARD”: FROM STAGE TO DOCUDRAMA

1. Genres, Codes and Cultures

Since the second half of the seventeenth century, Shakespearean texts have always been rewritten and adapted to new audiences in England. The same thing happened elsewhere in Europe and in the British colonies, where Great Britain proceeded to substitute other cultures for its own and all over the world, where William Shakespeare was marketed as cultural capital in the age of globalization.¹ The long-time span considered was marked by the canonization of Shakespeare as a national hero and poet, as well as by the attack on his authorship and on the values with which his works were imbued or believed to be imbued. The former attitude favoured the philological restoration of his original phrasing. The latter validated many rewritings, based on the difference between the dramatic text and its

¹ See A. C. Y. Huang, *Global Shakespeare as Methodology*, in “Shakespeare”, 9, 3, 2013, web address <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450918.2013.827236>.

staging, and the need for translation into other media to disseminate Shakespeare and make his lines palatable to modern and non-British audiences.

In Shakespeare's time, when the authority of the text was only partially perceived, scripts were freely adapted to staging needs, to the audience, the body, voice and expressiveness of actors, as extant variants of the text demonstrate. Limited stage directions guaranteed blanks to be filled in by directors and actors. Unless a philological staging is required, the contemporary theatre particularly stresses some themes evoked in the text or creates an opposing web of meanings. The autonomous status and dignity of both the dramatic text and staging is now commonplace. Faithfulness to the source text is no longer considered a prescription, but rather a choice on the part of the director.²

Awareness of the differences between written and performed texts and their fruition became even sharper when the cinema translated Shakespeare's scripts into its own peculiar codes. Once again, faithfulness was cried for: faithfulness to the script, to British acting, to tradition. As Shakespearean dramas contributed to putting England on the map geographically and morally, they constructed and transmitted the nation's sense of community. Translating them into another language or adapting them to another medium was a difficult task, because the texts were inevitably altered. Even faithfulness might produce opacity or silence the precious ambiguity of the source text.

Notwithstanding vetoes and theoretical doubts, Shakespeare's dramas were adapted to meet the expectations and needs of directors, actors, and audiences. In the past century, the writings and practice of many

² See A. Page, *Introduction*, in *The Death of the Playwright: Modern British Drama and Literary Theory*, Edited by A. Page, Houndsmills – London, Macmillan, 1992, pp. 1-10.

directors and actors renewed the theatre. Carmelo Bene broke Shakespearean dramas into fragments and juxtaposed them with famous poems, creating one-man shows dense with old and new meanings. In so doing, the actor showed that culture had become the site of negotiation among diverse texts. Performances by Antonin Artaud, Eugenio Barba or Peter Brook enlarged the space of this encounter, suggesting conflict and negotiation by inserting quotations or allusions to heterogeneous iconic and symbolic traditions.³

The label ‘postmodern’ was used to emphasize the fragmentation of new performances and their blend of contemporary and canonized texts, different styles and media. It proved unsatisfactory, since the new staging sought for a dramatic performance, which was “beyond drama” and not “beyond modern”.⁴ Post-dramatic theatre could account for productions, which deconstruct the text and expose theatrical constraints, questioning the essence of performing and the people involved in it. The result is achieved using “a constellation of elements”, such as “narrative fragmentation, heterogeneity of style, hyper-naturalist, grotesque and neo-expressionist elements”.⁵ The dramatic text is thus not set apart but interacts with staging.

Globalization brought about deterritorialization, the sense that we belong to many cultures and thus to none. The vertigo of nothingness gives rise to the desire to reaffirm boundaries between *them* and *us* or to put together and connect cultural texts.⁶ In the field of art, a plurality of messages, languages and codes mimed contemporary reality, where

³ See P. Pavis, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, Translated by L. Kruger, London – New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 2.

⁴ See H. T. Lehmann, *Postdramatic Theatre*, London, Routledge, 2006, p. 26.

⁵ See *ibidem*, p. 24.

⁶ See J. M. Lotman, *On the Metalanguage of a Typological Description of Culture*, in “*Semiotica*”, 14, 2, 1975, pp. 97–123.

untranslatability provides an opportunity to make the essence of otherness felt in a different environment. Untranslatability counteracts homogenization and defies the appropriation of other cultural texts; whose goal is the domestication of alterity. Inconsistencies, untranslated words or puns express differences, which cannot be reduced to sameness without lying.

Translation studies have widened their focus to describe new forms of art, which enact a complex process of intercultural translation, such as adaptation.⁷ It reveals the negotiation between political agendas, ideologies, sometimes supporting, sometime confuting cultural hegemonies.⁸ It also helps to free the translator's activity from some of its restraints, and is enacted on the stage and in front of the camera, whenever the script is cut, reshaped, translated into lighting, gestures, movements, and intonation, as well as on the page, when writers transcode works in other genres, or compose new works by quoting or alluding, even through parody, to a hypotext.

Although considered controversial, the term postmodern is still used to classify films: the accumulation of information, the unreliability of the narrator and his attempts at engaging the spectator structure the apparently chaotic *Looking for Richard*.⁹ The film presents the audience with the challenges and opportunities of staging *Richard III* in a different temporal and cultural environment. Directed by Al Pacino through three long years and released in 1996, it boasts a striking cast of famous actors: among

⁷ See M. Minier, *Definitions, Dyads, Triads and Other Points of Connection in Translation and Adaptation Discourse*, in *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, Edited by K. Krebs, London – New York, Routledge, 2013, pp. 13-35.

⁸ K. Krebs, *Introduction: Collisions, Diversions and Meeting Points*, ibidem, p. 1.

⁹ C. Degli Esposti, *Postmodernism(s)*, in *Postmodernism in the Cinema*, Edited by C. Degli Esposti, New York – Oxford, Berghahn, 1998, p. 5.

them, Kevin Spacey (Buckingham), Estelle Pearson (Queen Margaret), Wynona Ryder (Anne), Penelope Allen (Queen Elizabeth), Alec Baldwin (Clarence), Frederic Kimball (Bishop of Ely). The camera records the actors and the film crew struggling to seize the real meaning (and significance to contemporary American audiences) of an elusive character. The main scenes of the Shakespearean tragedy are performed and shot, sometimes more than once, to translate them into something palatable and understandable for national and global filmgoers.

It might be objected that cinematic adaptations cannot exploit prefaces, notes or glossaries to let otherness permeate the para-text. *Looking for Richard* clearly proves that films can do even more than that: it disorders the Shakespearean plot, cuts some scenes, evokes others in brief silent shots and fills in the blanks with interviews, providing spectators with sudden insight into the British past, the double otherness they should come to terms with. Indeed, there is clear evidence in the film of an intertextual practice, which creates a cultural text by juxtaposing fragments of canonized, popular and new texts, which generally develop around a work of art. Films on *Richard the Third*, or even other contemporary characters, constitute the archive on which audiences and actors draw to trim "sophisticated narrative strategies into a recognizable popular film genre which is, in turn, an adaptation of other films, with intertextual links with its contemporary filmic counterparts".¹⁰

Multiple texts reverberate with each other in a sort of "refraction", which promises to make us see the past in the present and vice versa.¹¹ This

¹⁰ See I. Whelehan, *Adaptations: The Contemporary Dilemma*, in *Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, Edited by D. Cartmell and I. Whelehan, London – New York, Routledge, 1999, p. 2.

¹¹ See A. Lefevere A., *On the Refractions of Texts*, in *Mimesis in Contemporary Theory: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, vol. 1: *The Literary and Philosophical Debate*, Edited by M. Spariosu, Philadelphia – Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1984, pp. 217-237.

is a remarkable aspect of postmodernism. In a market-oriented society, competing values are profitably put forward when they are extensively shared.¹² *Looking for Richard* shows the anxiety of a dominant culture in the global market, coping with its sense of inferiority by questioning its models, under the scrutiny of Shakespeare and the guardians of his legacy. The docudrama ironically shows the dominant culture trying to domesticate the British past that is its own otherness, while at the same time revering it. The very process of refraction is emotionally described in the film, when Pacino states his principal intentions as a director:

“And by taking [...] *Richard III*, analysing it, approaching it from different angles, putting on costumes, playing out scenes, we could communicate, both our passion for it, our understanding that we’ve come to; and in doing so communicate a Shakespeare that is about how we feel and how we think today.”¹³

Like the translator and the critic, the refractor selects passages to discover the meaning of the text. Moreover, essays, translations, and refractions preserve invariants in the text (quotations, titles, symbols, iconic images, for instance). It is worth noting that *Looking for Richard* insists on this similarity: acting is equivalent to commenting on a dramatic text. It is explicitly structured into an exciting, sometimes frustrating, quest for the truth hidden in Shakespeare’s lines; or better the many truths which were revealed to or concealed from diverse nations and people throughout the history of *Richard the Third*’s staging. That is why the label of filmed essay seems to appropriately define Pacino’s film.¹⁴ Even more

¹² See S. Onega and C. Gutleben, *Introduction*, in *Refracting the Canon in Contemporary British Literature and Film*, Edited by S. Onega – Ch. Gutleben, Amsterdam – New York, Brill –Rodopi, 2016, pp. 7-15.

¹³ See Al Pacino, *Looking for Richard*, Fox Searchlight Pictures, USA, 1996.

¹⁴ See S. Kossak, “*Frame my Face to all Occasions*”: *Shakespeare’s “Richard III” on Screen*, Wien, Braumuller, 2005, p. 144.

convincingly, as the text itself has been invested with so many meanings in its run lasting four centuries, a contemporary performance cannot be but

“ [...] a process, something moving, constantly changing into something else, a protean element to be constantly changing into something else, a protean element to be looked for in different places and under various shapes.”¹⁵

2. *Shakespeare Refracted*

The initial film credits hint at the place of production, the United States. Afterwards, on a black screen, the words “King Richard” appear in succession: blanks after and between them are filled in to give us the full title. We understand that the film will oscillate between England and the USA, the Shakespearean text and moving pictures, theatre and real life. One of the stage directions, which mark sections of the film, is “the quest”. It will soon be clear that Pacino and his company are looking for both Richard and the Bard, equally elusive characters.

The first frame shows a cloudy sky: the camera lingers on it in a slow descending movement, focusing first on bare tree branches and then on a medieval cathedral. Reference is thus made to both historical and metaphorical time, the “winter of our discontent”, mentioned by Richard in his self-presentation, which functions as a prologue. However, it is not Richard’s first monologue, which is heard in a voice-over, but Prospero’s speech about the masques in *The Tempest*.¹⁶ This quotation serves to introduce one of the main themes in *Richard the Third* (politicians are

¹⁵ S. Lefait, “Change Shapes with Proteus for Advantages”: the Hybridisation of Film Form in Al Pacino’s “Looking for Richard”, in *Shakespeare on Screen, “Richard III”*, Edited by S. Hatchuel and N. Vienne-Guerrin, Rouen, Publications de l’Université de Rouen et du Havre, 2005, p. 52.

¹⁶ See W. Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974, p. 1630 (IV, i, 148-158).

actors on a stage) but expanding the metaphor to embrace people on the streets of New York as well as the actors. It resounds like silent music throughout the scenes and is heard once again in the last shot. Dislocating lines from drama to drama, Pacino pays homage to the intense intratextuality of Shakespeare's theatre. Zooming abruptly on a basketball court in New York, he demonstrates that Shakespeare's lines can still illustrate our lives, a concept restated in the ironic ending, when Pacino admits that Shakespeare has left nothing new to say to his descendants.

However, Shakespeare can speak on our behalf only if refracted, contaminated, by the rhythm and emotions of our own life, clearly a New York life for Pacino.¹⁷ *Richard the Third* is global inasmuch as it is local in *Looking for Richard*, both British and American. The untranslatability of the text is displayed, translation is always somewhat incomplete and ambiguous, but still pursued up to the epiphany of some recognition of otherness in sameness and vice versa. I mean that Pacino's film is purportedly an unsuccessful appropriation of a British cultural icon, as well as the privileged site of an imperfect negotiation between two cultures, and even more. In fact, the Italian immigrant, who intrudes to amicably greet Pacino, becomes part of the film, adding evidence of the fragmentary dissemination of Shakespeare's plays. Firmly rooted in his own culture, the man still becomes involved in Pacino's quest, testifying to a knowledge, which has not been communicated by books or films, but probably orally, as part of the popular lore of pithy sentences. He represents the many cultures, which live side by side in New York and in the world, sometimes giving birth to hybrid cultural texts.

¹⁷ See T. Cartelli, *Shakespeare and the Street: Pacino's "Looking for Richard", Bedford's "Street King" and the Common Understanding*, in *Shakespeare, the Movie, II: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, Video, and DVD*, Edited by Richard Burt and Lynda E. Boose, London – New York, Routledge, 2003, p. 189.

The echo of the opening quotation in the final shots suggests that the film is unfinished, and that Shakespeare and Richard are only dreamy images evoked by words. The Bard's incorporeal nature and the fragmentation process that his works have undergone are powerfully underlined. Contemporary scholars have always felt uneasy with the limited amount of biographical information regarding Shakespeare. Some have even questioned his authorship and suggested that his surname was a *nom de plume* used by other eminent figures, or his works the collective output of actors' companies.¹⁸ However, Shakespeare's portrait was engraved on the first page of the 1623 edition of his works, and his authorship attested by Ben Jonson. Shakespeare's authority has subsequently been testified to by the extensive borrowings from his dramas in novels, poems and plays, and by the large body of criticism on his sonnets and texts. His works have become pervasive in so many people's lives in the form of quotations and ready-made maxims for a variety of occasions.

His sudden incarnation in the film in the fashion we are so accustomed to is humorous. When Pacino walks onto the stage of a small theatre, he faces empty stalls, except for Shakespeare, who looks quizzically at him. Pacino shields himself from the amused silence of the author-director by abandoning the area. The self-mocking actor appears self-effaced, cautious, "confounded by native authority",¹⁹ If *Richard the Third* cannot be performed on a naturalistic twentieth century stage,²⁰ the

¹⁸ See *The Many Lives of William Shakespeare. Biography, Authorship and Collaboration*, Edited by W. Leahy and P. Pugliatti, in "Journal of Early Modern Studies", 5, 2016, web address <http://dx.doi.org/10.13128/JEMS-2279-7149-5>.

¹⁹ See M. Hattaway, *Varieties of Englishness: "Richard III" on Film, in Shakespeare on Screen, "Richard III"*, cit., p. 189.

²⁰ See S. Lefait, "Change Shapes with Proteus for Advantages": the Hybridization of Film Form in Al Pacino's "Looking for Richard", cit, p. 58.

scene also testifies to Shakespeare's persona, as it has been constructed by Shakespearian scholars, continuing to loom large on contemporary rehearsals of his plays. The critical apparatus and the archive of images, which have grown around *Richard III*, should be considered when trying to bring to life a story to which contemporary heterogenous audiences can easily connect.

The main points in an important debate about authorship are introduced here and developed throughout the film. Costumes establish a distinction between characters and actors. Impersonation is the result of many discarded hypotheses about the characters' intentions and their reactions to a given situation. When the actors dress in theatrical costumes, they perform following the preferred reading, which is the result of negotiation among cast members, who try to connect with the characters, according to the American Method. Pacino uses this term to refer to Konstantin Stanislavsky's theories and their development in the United States, which he has learned at the *Actors Studio* in New York. Method acting asks the actors to experience and live through the role, to find out their real motivation for saying what they said and acting as they do on the stage. Pacino's inquiry along the streets of New York, the cast members' collective quest for real motivations is part of this effort for naturalistic acting. Thus, their adaptation produces the "social energy" that Shakespearean drama might not have on its own when relocated in space and time.²¹

²¹ See S. Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Berkeley – Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1988, pp. 1-20.



William Shakespeare as a character

In a significant shot, Pacino explains that he wants to mediate his response to Shakespeare's drama. However, he steps down and leaves the stage to people in the street, scholars, and actors. The film gathers multi-coloured opinions about the Bard and what he means to us: a national asset for a British man, a master of feelings for a New York beggar, goods to be sold on the global market for a young British man, a boring dramatist for young people, an obscure text for students and the creator of powerful words for a child on an American farm. Different voices are heard in a whirlwind of diverse places and communicate Shakespeare's lost, or still powerful energy. The task that Pacino undertakes is to provoke emotional responses to *Richard the Third*. To achieve this goal, he decides to analyse the text and see it from diverse perspectives. The juxtaposition of fragmentary shots renders the quick, frantic rhythm of this collective search for a fifteenth and sixteenth-century Richard who still speaks to contemporary audiences.

What seems at odds with this effort is that the negotiation is mainly brought about by a conflict between British and American acting, ending with the implicit assumption that the latter can communicate more effectively in our modern world, overturning the inferior-superior relationship patronizingly expressed by British actors. The syntax of the apparently randomly arranged interviews and rehearsals suggests that Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* should be revitalised by an American aesthetics, giving more weight to gestures than to words, and reducing flowery speeches to syncopated words.²² Pacino pretends to be an insecure director, listening humbly to other people's opinions, but he is always in control of his material. The unravelling of the docudrama is marked by his sudden appearance as Pacino, metamorphosing slowly into Richard, looking directly and self-confidently into the camera. In so doing, he privately nods to the audience, under the spell of the famous actor and the character he represents.

The most important place is New York, and Shakespeare's England is almost unnoticed. The Bard's birthplace does not inspire Kimball, and Pacino is mute: the epiphany wished for by the American actors is the hilarious screaming of an alarm bell, perhaps Shakespeare's manifestation. When Richard's death is enacted on the stairs of a New York building, the film flashes back to the audition scene, showing Shakespeare's disdain. Haunted by the Bard, Pacino envisions himself auditioned and belittled by the great dramatist, whose intentions he has not completely understood. In so doing, he seems to humbly acknowledge the failure of his translation exercise.

²² See T. Cartelli, *Shakespeare and the Street: Pacino's "Looking for Richard", Bedford's "Street King" and the Common Understanding*, cit., p. 193.

In the end, the two cultures which have animated the debate do not merge but stand side by side in disbelief. To recreate social energy for a global audience, Pacino resorts to images from American cinema archives, comparing Richard and his faction to gangsters. Instead of rendering the past contemporary, he juxtaposes costume scenes, twentieth-century settings and garb and readings of the parts, to highlight the difficult transition from one world to the other. The desire to inhabit a remote era is symbolised by the medieval setting chosen, the Cloisters in New York. Built by assembling fragments of French abbeys and monasteries, it testifies to the desire for appropriation and preservation of an older, renowned culture. The buildings brought from Europe are surrounded by skyscrapers, and their contiguity emphasises America's hybrid culture. A non-diegetic, intellectual montage reproduces the juxtaposition of ages and cultures, as well as America's attempt to hold them together by assimilating or simply displaying them.

Editions of Shakespeare's dramas are shown, read, examined, mocked at, and then defined "The Anointed Book" throughout the film. Transferring authority from the dramatist to the book, Pacino seems to claim that the text should not be defiled, but preserved in its original sacred version, while at the same time demonstrating that written words should collide with images to show the conflict between two visions of politics, along with the one within the characters themselves. His intention is to present us with a provisional, incomplete adaptation of *Richard the Third*, authored by Shakespeare, British actors, critics, and Pacino's own company. Thus, he amusingly dramatizes contemporary theories on adaptation, showing to what degree ideological and nationalistic issues have affected them.

4. *Shakespeare's "Richard the Third": a struggle between male and female*

Shakespeare, like almost every dramatist, plays the part of a narrator who erases his own voice from the text, to display the illocutionary forces and perlocutionary effects at issue. He appears unobtrusively in the stage directions, but unlike Pacino in his film, is not an auto-diegetic narrator in his drama, nor does he merge with his creatures.

Richard is the wordiest character in the play and Pacino's counterpart. He ill-uses his rhetorical skills to manipulate, contrive other characters' fate and even to seduce the audience, which he addresses directly in several asides and monologues. He takes the empty stage to assume the role of the prologue: this initial disobedience to dramatic constraints emphasises his bulimic control of his means of communication. It is soon clear that he is a protean character, who can successfully perform as an actor, director and unreliable narrator, exactly like Pacino. His first monologue is an unflattering self-presentation, marked by tension between a masculine past and a feminine present, from which Richard feels estranged: *us*, the members of the House of York, inhabit the present, while *I* is determined to heighten his evil traits which do not fit "in this weak piping time of peace".²³ Allen's reaction to the character that she will impersonate shines a particular light on the play, which these lines echo. *Richard the Third* must be revisited as a struggle between male and female visions of the world.

Richard's discontent is also due to his appearance, on which he lingers by accumulating quasi-synonyms: "deform'd, unfinish'd, sent

²³ See W. Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, cit., p. 713 (I, i, 24).

before my time / into this breathing world, scarce half made up",²⁴ Richard commits himself to demonstrating that his destiny is revealed by his ill-shaped body. He is not really an agent in his story, as popular preconceptions determine his plots. Indeed, he is driven to action by an external cause, the mythology of the House of Tudor, created by the combined efforts and needs of Henry VII, his heirs and Elizabethan intellectuals. Neither Shakespeare nor his character could write the story in reverse. On the stage, a 'post-Richard' acts, forced to represent an unfair tale, a slave himself to Tudor propaganda.

In his first monologue, he protests that he has borne the burden of a versatile writer, by setting down "plots [...] inductions dangerous, / by drunken prophecies, libels, and dreams".²⁵ Scene by scene, his skills are displayed: he writes parts for all the actors involved in this tragedy, then sends them away from the stage. Standing alone on the platform, he plays the part of the great communicator, always present as an omniscient narrator. He inhibits the tales of other characters, condemning some to the silence of the Tower, asserting that other reports are false, counterpointing and making others repeat his erroneous version, warning killers to avoid listening to convicts, and fabricating false documents. Ultimately, this frantic activity results in self-destruction. The villain must disappear in the end to fully portray the role assigned to him.

His disapproval of the horrible construction of the character he has perfected step by step pervades the monologue in his tent. He perceives that he must defend himself from Richard the assassin, from the historical manipulation of events. The only way found to rescue the King from the vile legend splits him in two. The villain should die, and agonises in the

²⁴ See *ibidem* (I, i, 20-21).

²⁵ See *ibidem* (I, i, 32-33).

natural fits of self-defence. His end is unavoidable: the multiple tales he wove lead him to death. However, he might escape defeat if *I* could speak and not be silenced by *Richard*, the person who dominates Elizabethan chronicles (“Richard loves Richard, that is, I am I. / Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am”).²⁶ In the end, Richard does not write his autobiography but contrasts it with the manipulation constructed by intellectuals close to his usurpers and willing to secure peace in the kingdom. The Elizabethan rewriting of history engulfs Richard. Richmond, whose reconciliatory act mirrors Richard’s marriage politics, can construct his own version of the story and substitute the slain King’s rhetoric with his own.

Until the final scene, no character can really compete with Richard as an actor, director, or narrator: not even Buckingham, who is duped into believing that he is the schemer, but who simply follows Richard’s script when haranguing the crowd and utilizing his artful propaganda. People competing with Richard’s false rendering of events are the citizens who foretell civil war for England under the rule of a boy king; the scribe who broods over his disappointment at having been exploited to counterfeit reality; Stanley, when he presents his dream, anticipating Richard’s dreadful strategy, the compassionate killer, a self-censored narrator of a divine plot, at odds with human desire for profit. But the most successful competitors are women, those most exposed to changing powers.

In the drama, the weaker vessel does not take part in plots and assassinations: women are left to pray and weep at the sight of familial division and death. They generally grieve together, orphans and widows, mothers deprived of their sons. Their tearful words echo line after line, through the ages. In fact, Margaret is a former queen whose loss is not

²⁶ See *ibidem*, p. 751 (V, iii, 183-184).

recent, and who was not in England at the time of Richard's coronation. Her anachronistic presence, the fact that other women repeat her words and even ask her to teach them how to express their grief, points out the cyclical retelling of the same story, drenched with blood and tears. The archetype of the frail woman, situated at the margins of the action, is powerfully affirmed, and even reinforced by the initial background position of Margaret and by the fact that women consort when men are not around.²⁷ However, Lady Anne, Queen Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York, never renounce their right to speak out, not even when they are left completely alone and marginalised. In so doing, they prevent forgetfulness and hamper Richard's manipulation of events: they really become "moral dissenters to the actions of a brutal and corrupt king".²⁸ These frail women use words as weapons to enliven the memory of their beloveds, to create a new history and restore the now upset hierarchy of values.

Margaret can compete with the main narrator by telling a tale which is both retrospective and prospective and completes Richard's plot in an unwished-for, in his view, way. Throughout her speeches, Margaret evokes past dire deeds and invokes the biblical eye-for-eye law. Her belief is contagious. Her tale is in the form of curses and prophecies and must be completely expressed to fulfil itself. Thus, she intrudes into Richard's speeches and bids him stop interrupting hers. She succeeds in telling her story, which becomes true on the stage exactly as Richard's predictions do up to the last act. The most remarkable among the women on stage, she uses obscure, passionate, self-fulfilling language, the powerful weapon of marginalised people. Her deep faith in God the Avenger is not misplaced,

²⁷ See C. L. Hutchins, *Weeping Widows and Warrior Women: A Feminist Reading of Shakespeare's First Tetralogy*, Irvine (Cal.), Universal-Publishers, 2010, p. 44.

²⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 52.

while Richard's actors become more reluctant to enact his script. Like Richard, Margaret re-writes history according to the analogical biblical model, but does it more consistently. Richard relies on his rhetorical skills and on human frailty to construct a new story with a new protagonist, the Machiavellian hero, who takes power by means of secret schemes, assassination, and false information: his science is fallible.

The main tension, then, is between two plots, which the narrators involved try to superimpose on past events. Richard adopts one or the other, according to the context. He acts like a *homo novus*, who breaks down barriers between himself and power in the first acts but challenges his enemies as an 'anointed king', reverting to the beliefs which he had previously defied, in his last tragic battle and in the agony of his nightmares. Margaret is much more consistent in her tale and actions. She can reconcile herself with other women, one-time enemies, as all of them share the same destiny and the same evaluation of history as a mode of revelation, a cyclical process, reassuringly predictable.

When Richmond utters his peace-speech, he associates himself with the biblical revenge narrative which pervaded the War of the Roses in Shakespeare's rendition, but also borrows Richard's determination to become King, despite his position in the social pyramid. In his concluding statement, he takes on the role of the narrator, merging Margaret's and Richard's narrative strategies. The old and new plots are combined and not juxtaposed: marriage politics is merely a true expression of God's will. In the end, both plots originate from a narrative archetype in which traditional male values (courage, revenge) prevail. Women do not really put forward a new vision of the world, nor can characters escape from the tyranny of repeating history. Margaret serves as a counterpoint to Richard's political thought and indicates its failure. The role of Richmond, the man who makes her vision come true is, however, ambiguous. The ending leaves us

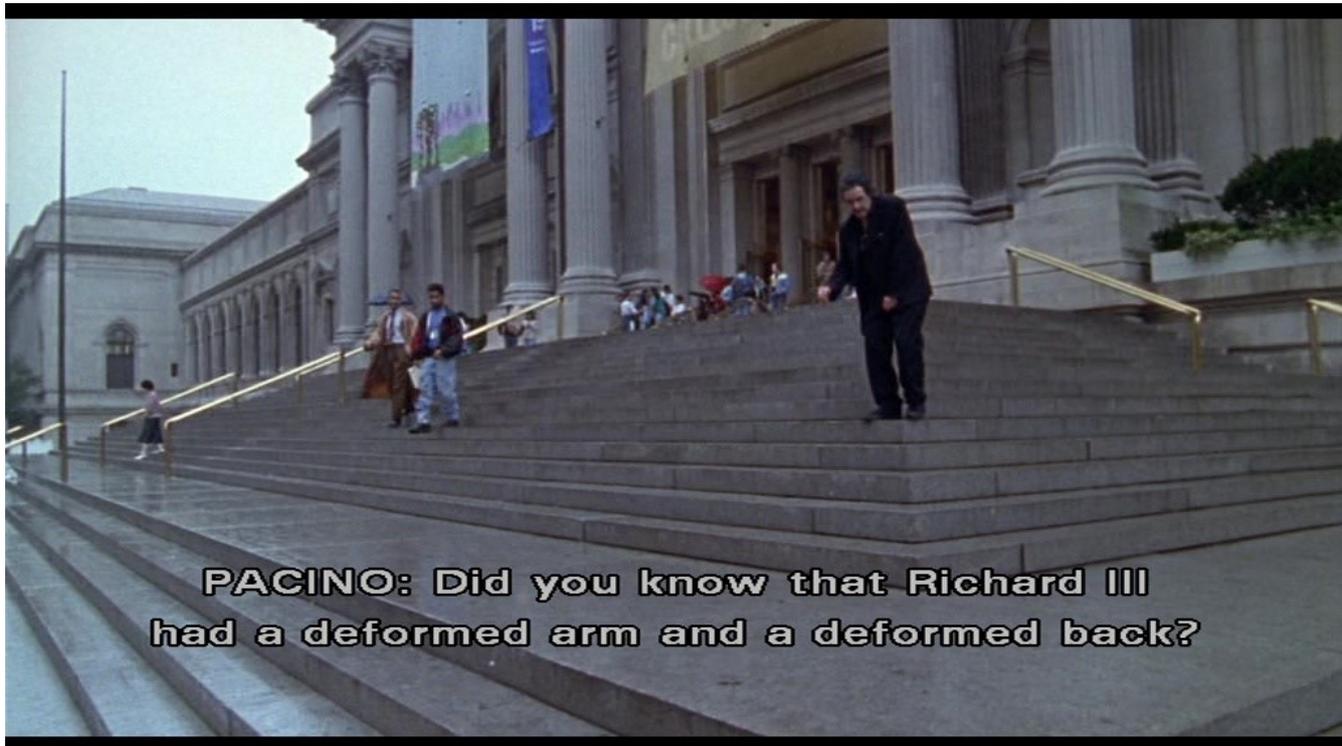
doubting his moral virtues. He uses the rhetoric of God's divine plan to justify his action, but his ends are not clarified. The abrupt truncation of the tragedy does not clarify whether he is inspired by God or wants to cynically pursue his plans, appealing both to male and female values. Nor do we see which plot regarding the life stories of these two Kings is more reliable.

3. Pacino's "Looking for Richard": a global reassessment of the past

Throughout the film "Looking for Richard", Pacino is an agent of intertextuality and an intertextual text himself. He literally travels between different places and cultures, linking them with his eagerness to listen to other people's opinions about Shakespeare and with his cinematic exposition of them in an apparently random series of shots. He slowly metamorphoses into the deformed Richard, a mafia boss, the member of a street gang, and those roles sometimes merge and are sometimes kept separate by the elements (costumes and settings) marking the situational context.

All these characters have been enacted by Pacino on the stage and on the set.²⁹ The actor's protean power shows itself in *Looking for Richard*, somewhat narcissistically, and favours intertextual echoes and refractions. His body is the signifier of many referents. All these referents combine into Pacino's perceived persona. This conflation of signifiers with a multiplicity of referents is part of Pacino's effort to make Shakespeare more familiar to the American audience, and, given the dominant position of the United States film industry, to the world.

²⁹ See S. Kossak, "Frame my Face to all Occasions": Shakespeare's "Richard III" on Screen, cit., p. 143.



Al Pacino metamorphoses into Richard III

This cultural assimilation is counterbalanced by the openness of the script, evident in the repetition of some scenes or words in different settings, and the insertion of supporting material, such as interviews, generally found around the work. Some of Pacino's statements serve as guidelines to deepen comprehension of the Shakespearean text and of the docudrama. When he says that everyone should be allowed to express his own opinions, he bridges the gap between scholars and actors, American and British acting, the man in the street and intellectuals. The Bard constructed by intellectuals and political power might have taken exception to it. Nonetheless, he belongs to the people involved in the construction of a global culture, even to those who resist globalisation.

The self-absorbed actor and the reluctant director coexist in Pacino, who is also one of the narrators. Initially, he tries to sum up the plot of *Richard III*, but stops abruptly, unnerved by the interweaving of so many

events and crowded scenes. He is joined by other actors and scholars in the effort to make sense of the characters' reactions and to identify the main issues at stake in the drama. One of the most striking shots displays a competition for the right to speak on behalf of Queen Elizabeth. While male actors describe her as a hysterical woman, who irrationally copes with her impending destiny as a widowed thus unprotected mother of a boy king, Penelope Allen strongly opposes their misogynistic point of view. The actress offers a feminist point of view, rescuing Elizabeth from that accusation, which diminishes her and her sons' reactions as much as Richard's villainy. In Allen's words, it is a domestic situation: a mother is lucidly conscious of her destiny in a patriarchal society, when deprived of her powerful husband. Her sons try to reassure her, pitting their arguments against her interpretation. Actors will depict Allen's narrative in the next shot. In accordance with Method acting, the actress has emotionally relived the situation and adapted her part to contemporary women's expectations. Because of the play's refraction, tension between a male-run world and female marginality in it is revealed.



Actor's misogyny revealed

Another interesting point is made when, first Pacino and Frederic Kimball, who are then joined by Winona Ryder, discuss the importance of the seduction scene. Constructing his story, Pacino chooses a young actress who can impersonate someone who can be easily trapped in the rhetorical web of Richard's speech. Kimball's hypothesis, that Anne was cunningly walking the streets behind a coffin only to display her grief, is rapidly discarded. Anne and Richard's motivations seem mysterious to us and to historians. The storyteller Pacino then intrudes to introduce, as he says, this important shot. A widow and orphan, Anne must seek protection. Richard needs a queen, and a queen belonging to the Lancasters, to appease the country and become King. Pacino wins the competition between narrators, and Richard the young woman. The performance takes on the nuance previously hinted at by another actor: the seducer Richard is seduced by his own rhetorical skills and wants to test them in a difficult situation.

On the contrary, narrators jointly define the dethroned Queen Margaret, relocated by Shakespeare in an unlikely setting. Pacino orientates his actors and the audience by underlining the nearly ghostly nature of this character who "haunts the Yorks". Allen insinuates that she must have been wandering around the castle in her rage for a long time, like a primordial force. Estelle Parsons, who will impersonate Margaret, says that she appears when the crisis is ripe, while Viveca Lindfors points out that Margaret's curses are fulfilled action by action. Cuts of stage rehearsals prove the theatricality of Margaret's speech, pointing to both the past and future, conjuring up a drama still to be performed. She is an omniscient narrator, just as in the past she was an actress who could not control her lines. Unlike Richard, she will be not disappointed or taken aback by unfolding events.

Among the competing narrators, Pacino is the only one who looks directly into the camera, addressing the audience. His concise messages, in his multiple roles, are brief, imperative, his voice-over bridges past and present, reality and fiction, often isolating key-words. His self-diminishing strategy counterpoints his quiet power. Ultimately, he is the only one who is present from the beginning to the end and tries to connect with his audience. By progressively reducing the lines delivered by the character, selecting speech-acts or questions in the climax episodes, he defines Richard’s downward spiral and expresses it in a rapper’s rhythm, to which Pacino alludes to in a striking simile of Shakespeare’s verses.



Al Pacino addressing the audience

In 1996 Pacino’s *Looking for Richard* captivated an international movie-going audience of critics and journalists. One of the reasons for this immediate response to the film is its intense intertextuality. The relationship between the work in progress and the play, which scholars and Shakespearean actors have long tried to stabilise in canonised versions and

rehearsals, is complicated by the interference of other texts, which have been principally identified in the American and British Acting Method, or in previous films, featuring Pacino himself or Lawrence Olivier. *Looking for Richard* vividly enacts some of the theories on adaptation as a translation process, which characterised the twentieth century.

Pacino is deeply involved in the debate regarding authorship. He shows how a performance emerges from the combined, sometimes conflicting, points of view of audiences, critics, directors and actors. He does not discard the importance of icons like Shakespeare, himself the cultural construct of multiple rewritings. The Bard's physical and amusingly disappointed presence is there to remind us of the elusiveness of our own past, which cannot be reproduced and is gone forever. What can be collectively re-created is the magic of the recognition of a message to be conveyed and grasped in a mutual exchange of emotional energy. In order to effectively achieve that, *Richard III* is clearly cut into pieces, and then re-assembled, along with the texts regarding the play. The communal deciphering of meaning is what matters most and reproduces global communities' main task, which is to precariously assemble the remnants of past and foreign cultures to create our own. In this sense, I think that *Looking for Richard* is about a global reassessment of the past, which we constantly contrast to our turbulent present years. Once a colony, now a dominant country in a global network, America takes upon itself the burden of negotiating between different cultures. The openness of the film reassures us about the danger of monolithic truth regarding *Richard III* as a cultural text, and urges everyone to make sense of the play, that is to say of the world, as it is now.

Penelope Allen's emotional burst about Queen Elizabeth's behaviour and words allows a more plausible interpretation of the character, freed from stereotypical prejudices about women and women in power. The

actress speaks from the point of view of a twentieth century woman, here being the mouthpiece of a feminist perspective on the world and on *Richard III*. Her sentences reverberate throughout the play, asking us to reassess the role and importance of the female characters in the play. The search for Richard, the male conqueror, implies a search for the women who allow his power to destroy humanity but still express their dissent from him and from the values he represents. The friction between a patriarchal hierarchy and a more inclusive vision of the world sheds light on us as we are, bogged down in the confused and confusing coexistence of conflicting discourses. Being aware of this frees us, as it does *Richard III*, liberating its full and interwoven meanings.

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