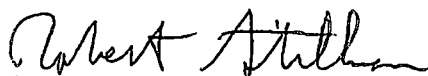


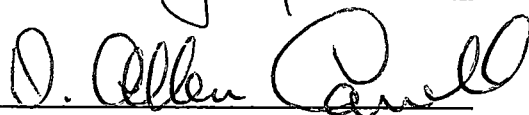
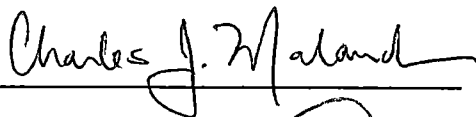
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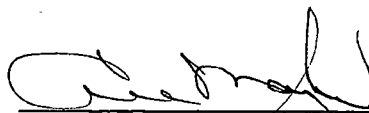


Robert Stillman, Major Professor

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Accepted for the Council:



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**BREAKING TRADITION:
A STUDY OF FILM ADAPTATIONS OF *RICHARD III***

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Jared Scott Johnson
August 2001**

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ABSTRACT

Since the advent of film as a visual and artistic medium, Shakespeare's *Richard III* has captured the interest of filmmakers and viewers alike. In the play, Shakespeare, through his central character Richard Gloucester, renders his vision of radical evil. The conception of evil, a perennial theme both in literature and in the world it seeks to describe, has changed in tandem with shifting performative mediums: A Renaissance understanding of evil is to a late twentieth-century understanding of evil as Shakespeare's stage is to the modern movie theatre. In short, Shakespeare's Richard is worlds apart from the evil figures that we see through pop cultural mediums today.

This thesis asks the following questions: if Shakespeare's England is so different from twentieth-century Hollywood, then why do filmmakers continue to revisit Shakespeare's material in general and Shakespeare's *Richard III* in specific? Further, how do they appropriate Shakespeare's understanding of evil to fit with their own and their world's conceptions? To answer these questions, this project examines three film adaptations: Laurence Olivier's *Richard III* (1955), Ian McKellen's *Richard III* (1995), and Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (1996).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
Introduction	1
I. Shakespeare and Aesthetics: Reconstructing British National Identity through Cinema in Olivier's <i>Richard III</i>	12
II. Shakespeare and Politics: Challenging Mass Media Representations in McKellen's <i>Richard III</i>	34
III. Shakespeare and Tradition: An Outsider's Perspective in Pacino's <i>Looking for Richard</i>	55
Conclusion	79
Works Cited	83
Vita	88

Introduction

At the close of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first, the works of William Shakespeare are still performed, adapted for film, taught in the classroom, and critically debated. This is fascinating—especially in light of late-twentieth century literary approaches that undermine the canonical foundation on which Shakespeare has stood for so long.¹ Shakespeare's institutional popularity attests to the versatility of his plays both as important art forms and as valuable critical commentary on both the past and the present. However, the literature that a particular society chooses to study functions like a mirror; the plays of Shakespeare that we study now reflect as much about our own contemporary era as they do about Shakespeare. One such play that has received attention, especially from filmmakers, is his *Richard III*.

Shakespeare's *Richard III* has interested me since I first read it as an undergraduate; I was fascinated to read a character so self-aware of the things he was doing, constantly justifying, rationalizing, and showing off, yet tragically blind to the consequences of his actions. Richard takes opportunistic individualism beyond social and moral conventions by paving his way to the throne and securing it through the parallelism implicit in the plot: he establishes his right to kingship by sanctioning the murder of Clarence and by wooing Lady Anne in the first half of the play. Paralleling this action, in the second half of the play, Richard tries desperately to hold on to his crown by organizing the murder of his two nephews and by wooing Queen Elizabeth into consenting to marry her daughter. Thus, all of Richard's actions aim at either eliminating the competition or making him look somehow worthy of his illegitimately "earned" title.

¹ I will explore a number of these canon-undermining literary movements both later in the introduction and in the body of this thesis.

In his play, Shakespeare also captures through his other characters the intricacies of power dynamics both within and outside of the family. However, by his ability to control and manipulate events, we are always reminded that the drama of the other characters' lives is always controlled by Richard's shriveled hand.

More than any other of Shakespeare's plays, *Richard III* explores and embodies the concept of radical evil in its title character and his actions throughout the play. "Radical evil" is a term that clearly dichotomizes morality and is applied to literary characters like Milton's Satan or historical figures like Adolf Hitler. In Shakespeare's time, the conception of radical evil was grounded heavily in the Christian religious tradition. Building on the Augustinian notion that evil manifests itself in the form of privation—absence of God—and the scholastic arguments defending God's omnipotence, Shakespeare's own era inherited a series of assumptions following this same logic. For Shakespeare, evil was structured within a providential framework: evil did not interrupt God's plan; rather, God condoned the existence of evil to serve His ultimate will. In this sense, God allowed Richard to operate unchecked in order to punish the houses of York and Lancaster for usurping Richard II's legitimate, though arguably incompetent rule. However, interpretations of *Richard* have changed as worldviews have shifted. In a late twentieth/early twenty-first century post-Nietzschean, post-Freudian secular intellectual climate, a reading of the play that emphasizes evil as a byproduct of God's providence is no longer satisfying. As present day readers, how are we to understand the evil that Richard III exhibits throughout the play? Moreover, with respect to a 400-year historical gap, how are we to understand Shakespeare? These general, overarching questions guide the investigation that this thesis makes, that is, to examine three popular film adaptations

of *Richard III* in order to discover how filmmakers interpret and handle both the concept of evil and Shakespeare's material.

Evil not only permeates this play, but it also structures and saturates the action as Richard embarks on his bloody task to usurp the English throne. True, villains abound in Shakespeare's collected works, each varying in degree of wickedness—Iago, Macbeth, Claudius, Angelo, Malvolio—yet no other of Shakespeare's fiends so dominates the play in which he is set. Richard commands the second largest part in Shakespeare's oeuvre, next to Hamlet, and he devotes his lines to myriad forms of manipulation: vying for the audience's empathy in the opening soliloquy, falsely praising Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth in the wooing scenes, obsequiously feigning sincerity towards his family and piety toward the citizens, delivering murderous imperatives to his henchmen, and so on. Richard, unlike Shakespeare's other villains, becomes director and lead actor in the staging of his own morality play. Richard showcases his virtuosity as a director and actor. In an earlier scene, Catesby has discovered for Richard that Hastings will not participate in his plot to seize the throne. Although the outward purpose of the meeting is to decide on the date of coronation for the young Prince Edward, the underlying function of the meeting for Richard is to demonstrate his power within the court as unquestioned ruler. In the scene, Richard makes an example of Hastings by staging an emotional reaction that justifies his sentencing of Hastings to death.

The scene begins as the powerful members of the court—Buckingham, Stanley, Hastings, the Bishop of Ely, and others—sit around a table, waiting for Richard to arrive and begin the meeting. Assuming the role of director, Richard's absence already sets him up as the center of the scene. He comes in late, greeting the men:

My noble lords and cousins all, good morrow...

Than my Lord Hastings no man might be bolder.

His lordship knows me well and loves me well—(22,29-30)

Here, Richard acts the part of the amiable court servant. Even though he is in a position of authority, he does not at first aggressively assert his power.

He directs the action further, excusing himself from the meeting after the discussion commences, again thrusting himself into the spotlight. He calls Buckingham away to gather his resolve and re-enters the scene of the meeting looking obviously disturbed. He then transfers the attention he has won through his strange behavior to the others, asking,

I pray you all, tell me what they deserve

That do conspire my death with devilish plots

Of damned witchcraft, and that have prevailed

Upon my body with their hellish charms? (69-52)

Unwittingly becoming the victim in the play that Richard directs, Hastings answers that anyone who wishes such cruelty upon Richard should be executed. Richard explodes with mock-wrath, first bearing his “withered up” arm, then blaming Queen Elizabeth and “that harlot Strumpet Shore” for enacting their witchcraft upon him and implicating Hastings in the misdeed as Shore’s “protector.” He exclaims without missing a beat, “Thou art a traitor. / Off with his head!” (71-76).

Because of the obvious ethical problems with the scene, Shakespeare invites us into the world of acting. This point of departure works well for introducing the topic of this paper, namely, a study of three film adaptations that take *Richard* as their subject:

Laurence Olivier's *Richard III* (London Films 1955), Richard Loncraine/Ian McKellen's *Richard III* (United Artists 1995), and Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard* (Fox Searchlight 1996). All three versions feature consummate lead actors, which this play *demands*, who prior to starring in their respective film versions first starred in various stage versions of the play. For this reason, I am concerned just as much with each film's director as the artist as I am with each film's actor as the artist.² Further, this duality also presents an interesting opportunity to understand the films in terms of "tradition"—not only the literary and theatrical tradition as embodied by Shakespeare, but also the filmic as began by Olivier and continued by McKellen and Pacino.³ In the body of my thesis, I argue that Olivier and later Pacino used the Shakespearean tradition as a means to reinforce their own individual statuses as actors and filmmakers. McKellen, in contrast, sought to question the notion of tradition, perhaps even understanding the concept as a way of brainwashing the masses and becoming itself a commentary on history.

The theoretical framework that I employ in my analysis of these three adaptations incorporates both formalist film criticism and cultural materialist literary criticism. Using formalist film criticism, I understand each work in terms of narrative elements (the story and how it differs from Shakespeare's story with regards to specific, lines, events, characters, and chronology) and stylistic elements (the use of mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, and sound techniques). In other words, I use film formalism as a way to understand film as a text. However, the intellectual weight of my

² This duality of artists presents the problem of authorship, especially when discussing the Loncraine/McKellen collaboration: who is the author of the text? I will take up this problem in the second chapter.

³ I complicate and discuss the notion of tradition and its effect on the concept of literary canonicity in later chapters drawing largely from T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent."

analysis rests in cultural materialism, a school of literary thought that takes its name from the “analytic sense of ‘culture’”—meaning that it does not privilege “high” culture over “low” culture—and “‘materialism’ as opposed to ‘idealism’”—assuming “that culture does not (cannot) transcend the material forces and relations of production” (Dollimore and Sinfield vii-viii). In accordance to the former precept of cultural materialism, I base my examination of the three film versions of *Richard III* on the tension created by the implicit “high culture” quality that Shakespeare’s name carries with the “low culture,” or a better term, “mass culture” element that necessitates the survival of films and the motion picture industry. Corresponding to the latter, my analysis of the films is grounded in the fact that the film industry does not promote a free-floating of ideas. Instead, films are cultural products that reflect the views of subjects, in this case the directors and actors, who, in turn, respond to and replicate dominant ideologies.

According to Jonathan Dollimore, cultural materialism “grows from an eclectic body of work in Britain in the post-war period which can be broadly characterized as cultural analysis” (2).⁴ Dollimore elucidates the roots of cultural materialism:

That work includes the considerable output of [Raymond] Williams himself, and, more generally, the convergence of history, sociology and English in cultural studies, some of the major developments in feminism, as well as continental Marxist-structuralist and post-structuralist theory, especially that of Althusser, Macherey, Gramsci and Foucault. (2-3)

⁴ Jonathan Dollimore is one of the most well known cultural materialist scholars. He, along with Alan Sinfield, brought cultural materialism to the forefront of British literary criticism by publishing a collection of essays entitled, *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*. London: Manchester UP, 1985.

I want to stress here the influence of Althusser on cultural materialism as it is through his work that I base my understanding of ideology. Althusser provides both a working definition of ideology that is central to this thesis as well as a lead into discussing a theory of mass culture.

In his essay, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," Althusser posits two contrasting theories of ideology and synthesizes these theories by demonstrating how they interrelate. Althusser's first thesis on ideology is: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence." According to Althusser, ideology functions in the abstract; it consists of the ideas that guide "world outlooks."⁵ The second, opposing thesis that Althusser proposes is: "Ideology has a material existence." Even though ideology exists as an abstract concept, it realizes itself through material representation. Althusser notes that, "an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (242). In other words, ideology becomes real as it manifests itself through institutionalized structures. Further, Althusser demonstrates the "subject's" relation to the dominant ideology:

Throughout this schema we observe that the ideological representation of ideology is itself forced to recognize that every 'subject' endowed with a 'consciousness' and believing in the 'ideas' that his 'consciousness'

⁵ Althusser notes that ideologies or world outlooks can be studied from a critical distance and that ideologies can prove to be "illusions":

The ethnologist examines the myths of a 'primitive society', [and determines] that these 'world outlooks' are largely imaginary, i.e. do not 'correspond to reality.' However, while admitting that they do not correspond to reality, i.e. that they constitute an illusion, we admit that they do make allusion to reality, and that they need only be 'interpreted' to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world (ideology = *illusion/allusion*). (241).

Althusser's example here shows one ideology, the present one, being privileged over another; 'reality' is constituted by the present ideology. Taking this notion to its epistemological conclusion, there is no "truth," only ideology.

inspires in him and freely accepts, must '*act* according to his ideas', must therefore inscribe his own ideas as a free subject in the actions of his material practice. If he does not do so, 'that is wicked.' (243)

Here, Althusser illustrates the ideological process of naturalization; ideology is what is obvious, the status quo.⁶ However, because of the very "obviousness" that ideology forces through the "free" minds of subjects upon the material world, the subject becomes all too aware when he opposes the dominant ideology. This last point leads Althusser into his third thesis, a synthesis of his two theories.

The third thesis that Althusser proffers is: "Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects." In this third theory of ideology, Althusser links ideology's existence in the abstract and ideology's realization in the material world together through the concrete subject. This act of responding to ideology Althusser calls "interpellation." By acknowledging ideology, the subject attests to its "Truth":

⁶ This process of naturalization squares fully with Dollimore's understanding of ideology as a self-justifying and self-perpetuating force: "[Cultural] materialist criticism traces the cultural connections between signification and legitimization: the way that beliefs, practices and institutions legitimate the dominant social order or *status quo* – the existing relations of domination and subordination" (6). Later in the essay, he explains the way in which new ideologies replace and appropriate their predecessors. Dollimore perceives the notion of canonization as a sort of revisionist history—we study works and appropriate them to fit with our current world-view. He explains this concept in terms of teleology: "History...tends to be invested with a law of development (teleology) which acts as the counterpart of natural law, a development leading 'inevitably' to the present order and thereby doubly ratifying it" (7). This "naturalizing" of historical events is really an artificial process conducted by the dominant ideology. Dollimore appropriates the Hegelian triangle, writing it in the cultural materialist terms, consolidation, subversion, and containment. He explains the terms as such: "The first refers, typically, to the ideological means whereby a dominant order seeks to perpetuate itself; the second to the subversion of that order, the third to the containment of ostensibly subversive pressures" (10). Containment is the most important element as it rewrites history to make subversion a teleological necessity: "How else...can we explain why what is experienced as subversive at the time may retrospectively be construed as a crucial step towards progress?" (13). Power structures change, but tradition remains. Cultural materialists read history and literature as a perpetual cycle of appropriating and re-appropriating world events to justify dominant ideologies through consolidation, subversion and containment.

It is indeed a peculiarity of ideology that it imposes (without appearing to do so, since these are 'obviousnesses') obviousnesses as obviousnesses, which we cannot *fail to recognize* and before which we have the inevitable and natural reaction of crying out (aloud or in the 'still, small voice of conscience'): 'That's obvious! That's right! That's true! (245).

So, ideology and the subject are concomitantly locked in a codependent relationship; ideology validates the subject as the subject validates ideology.

I use the term "dominant ideology" in the course of this study to point out the overarching set of assumptions that I make about particular film audiences, in this case, American and British. I incorporate the term most centrally in my discussion of Laurence Olivier's 1955 adaptation. In this chapter, I suggest that the British and American involvement in World War II created a sort of historical trauma that influenced the dominant ideology of postwar film audiences. Here, I understand Althusser's definition of ideology in the abstract sense. However, in my examination of the success of the film at the box-office, I gather evidence that supports my interpretation in the abstract; the fact that audiences buy tickets to watch the film serves as evidence of ideology functioning in the material world.⁷ This second way of understanding dominant ideology—evidence in the material world—corresponds with my use of the term "mass culture."

⁷ I want to stress here, also, that I use the word "dominant" to offset any understanding of ideology as a monolithic structure; instead ideologies and cultures are multifaceted as different experiences necessitate different subject positions. However, although many different subject occupy many different subject positions, I suggest that a set of beliefs exists in a specific setting at a particular time period that can be understood as dominant.

Mass culture is a term that I apply to the subjects of dominant ideology, in other words, film audiences. In a chapter entitled, "That Shakespeherian Mob," from his book, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns*, Richard Halpern discusses mass culture as it relates to the commodification of Shakespeare. In the chapter Halpern, drawing from the insights of Jürgen Habermas, defines a "mass-cultural public" as a public that "passively consumes rather than critically debates its literature and art" (71). Halpern points out the distinction that Habermas makes between a "mass-cultural public" and a "culture-debating public."⁸ However, Halpern refines his definition of a mass cultural public in talking about "cynical reason." According to Halpern, a more accurate understanding of mass culture consists not in setting a mass-cultural public and a culture-debating public in opposition, but in realizing that the two overlap:⁹

Cynical reason "sublates," in a mock-Hegelian way, Habermas's distinction between a culture-debating and a culture-consuming public. It produces a public of consumers who see through the false claims of advertising but continue to buy and use its products—who aren't fooled by the sham rhetoric of politicians but vote anyway or retreat into a grumbling but submissive apathy...Mass culture is neither more nor less critical than high culture; it does not eliminate but simply neutralizes criticism, while the system learns to subsist and reproduce itself on the basis of its cynical by-products. (106)

⁸ According to Halpern, Habermas understood "culture-debating public" as "the bourgeoisie of the coffeehouses and salons who wrest from a court-based aristocracy the right to dispute literary and aesthetic matters" (70).

⁹ For this part of his discussion, Halpern draws from Peter Sloterdijk's book, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: U of Minneapolis P, 1987).

My use of the term “mass culture” most closely follows Halpern’s revised definition. I relate the term to film consumers, ticket buyers. However, I intend the term to be understood not in terms of an ignorant mass, but a mass that critiques and debates as well as consumes its entertainment.

My thesis is divided into three chapters, each discussing in detail the relationship of each film to a larger tradition. In light of the theories outlined in the introduction, I understand the concept of “tradition” as a construct historically created and propagated by dominant ideologies. In a general sense, my study of film adaptations of *Richard III* explores how each film breaks with Shakespeare’s tradition. More specifically, though, my project explores each of these films with respect to the dominant ideologies from which they were produced, with special attention given to how they reflect or oppose those ideologies and how they interpret the concept of evil. In chapter one, I understand Olivier’s *Richard III* as a post-war reconstruction of British national identity. I argue that Olivier used Shakespeare’s canonical status as an attempt to reaffirm British *cultural* elitism as a response to Britain’s fledgling rank as a world superpower. Further, I suggest that the film failed at the box-office due to post-war attitudes regarding villainy. In chapter two, I discuss McKellen’s *Richard III* as a critique of the ideas that structure the term, “tradition.” In the chapter, I view the film as both a critique and a manipulation of these ideas—specifically, with regard to popular culture and mass media. In the third chapter, I evaluate Pacino’s *Looking for Richard* as an American film seeking to break into Shakespeare’s British-dominated tradition. I use a deconstructive lens to suggest that Pacino encounters and fills the historical gaps in the text by drawing on his experience of playing a villain in Brian DePalma’s *Scarface*.

Chapter I. Shakespeare and Aesthetics:
Reconstructing British National Identity through Cinema in Olivier's *Richard III*

While Laurence Olivier was certainly slated to star in London Films' 1955 adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, he was not approached to direct the film until Sir Carol Reed, a successful and popular British filmmaker—because of prior commitments—refused the project (Cotrell 265). Alexander Korda, a London Films producer, recruited the actor/director based on his previous work as director with Shakespeare adaptations: Olivier's 1944 *Henry V* and his 1948 *Hamlet* (both produced by Two Cities Films). Both of Olivier's adaptations received mixed reviews.¹⁰ However, despite the less than glorious critical acclaim of Olivier's directorial works, each film had in one way or another established Oliver as a more than competent filmmaker.¹¹ What is significant about these two films is not so much Olivier's critical success, but his commercial success. Olivier became a name—a brand name—and established his cultural capital in the post-war film market.¹² Olivier used this capital to contribute to the Shakespearean film tradition. More specifically, Olivier's fame presented him with a unique opportunity to render a lasting impression of the way in which *Richard III* should be adapted on a smaller scale and how Richard should be played on a larger scale.

Olivier's *Richard III* made an impression so distinct that any other filmic adaptation of

¹⁰ Some film critics of *Henry V* praised the project: "At last there has been brought to screen, with such sweetness, vigor, insight and beauty...a play by the greatest dramatic poet who ever lived" (*Time*). Others noted its limitations: "In over-bright Technicolor, half an hour too long, at its worst it is vulgar and obscure..." (Richard Winnington, *News Chronicle*.) *Hamlet*, too received mixed reviews. James Agee, in a *Time* review, fell in love with the film calling it, "nearly solid as gold," while Winnington again complains that, "[Olivier] has allowed himself to be intoxicated and sidetracked by décor and deep focus and tracking cameras. He has achieved neither first-rate cinema nor first-rate Shakespeare" (Morley 98, 100, 102).

¹¹ The Motion Picture Academy awarded Olivier with a prize for "outstanding achievement as an actor, producer and director in bringing *Henry V* to the screen." Olivier received the Best Actor and Best Film awards from the Academy for his *Hamlet*. The film also won Carmen Dillon Best Art Director honors and Roger Furse the Best Set Design (Morley 98, 102).

the play would be rendered part of a larger cinematic tradition. Olivier's film understands itself as a form of high art, an extension of British literary supremacy. However, its internal contradictions—namely those between stylistic and narrative elements—suggest that the film unwittingly comments on recent political and historical events, specifically, World War II. In this chapter, I explore these contradictions and posit that the British and American reception of the film confirms the public's unwillingness to accept Olivier's performance as a villain. Further, by romanticizing a treacherous period of British history, the film implicitly subverts the aims of British nationalist cinema.

Olivier's star power in 1954 was nowhere near where it was in 1946; since *Hamlet*, he had starred in three films and narrated a documentary.¹³ As a result, Olivier returned to that at which he excelled—Shakespeare. Korda trusted Olivier with a project with which Olivier was familiar; his experience with directing both *Henry V* and *Hamlet* coupled with his experience of performing *Richard III* on stage at the Old Vic in 1944 made him an excellent second (if not first) choice. In part, the dual role of director and star appealed to Olivier as a means to, as Kiernan suggests, “restore himself to the throne of England's greatest Shakespearean actor” (254).¹⁴

Further, the role gave him the opportunity to perfect and showcase a character that he had obsessed over a decade before on stage. Kiernan tells us that Olivier “almost

¹² Margaret Morley notes that in a 1946 poll conducted by the *Motion Picture Herald*, Olivier ranked fifth in “Money-Making Stars” (98).

¹³ Of his feature films, *The Beggar's Opera* (1953) “for Olivier, professionally, and for [Herbert] Wilcox (the co-producer alongside Olivier) commercially, [the film] was a considerable failure,” and *The Magic Box* (1955) “lost all its money due to the box-office failure [that it incurred]” (Morley 109, 113). Only *Carrie* (1952) bolstered his marketability as an actor. Richard Winnington described his performance in this film as, “[t]he best acting of his career” (111).

literally 'became' Richard and found himself driven by a compulsion to speak his own lines instead of Shakespeare's. On opening night he feared his performance would be a travesty as he struggled between Shakespeare's speeches and the ones he imagined Richard would be having" (211). Kiernan illustrates here that Olivier became Richard from the "inside-out"; he quotes Olivier describing the art of acting: "[Acting is] wanting literally *to be* the character...Once one makes that commitment, one can then get at the character's reality and truth. One is no longer acting, one is being [*sic*]" (212).¹⁵

Although Olivier would be returning to the role of Richard, he would also be confronted with the difficulty of cutting or translating Shakespeare's text to the genre of film. John Cotrell describes the textual challenge to Olivier and script advisor Alan Dent as that of "editing and reshaping one of Shakespeare's less distinguished works into an entertainment of sufficient pace, style, and above all, intelligibility to appeal to mass audiences." Cotrell quotes Dent's perception of the difficulty in adapting *Hamlet*: "One had to choose at the outset between making the meaning perfectly clear to 20 million cinemagoers and causing 2,000 Shakespearean experts to wince" (266). The same sentiment applies to the script changes made for *Richard III*. Olivier's treatment of *Richard III* is innovative both in terms of narrative and stylistic elements. Of the stylistic filmic elements that I wish to concentrate on, for the purpose of this part of my discussion, are the film's textual preface, language, mise-en-scene, and cinematography.

¹⁴ For this reason, too, Olivier signed on to act in a yearlong stage festival at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford where he performed *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, and *Titus Andronicus*.

¹⁵ Kiernan observes that, "Olivier today (1981) points to his 1944 *Richard III* as the signal turning point of his career. Although acclaimed before in other parts, he says that he did not truly learn to act until he confronted the twisted character of Richard" (211).

These elements suggest how Olivier *wanted* the film to be received—as an art object that stands outside of history.

Olivier begins the film with text and trumpet; while we listen to grandiose fanfare that celebrates the majesty of England's past, Olivier presents a stylized textual preface that draws us back to the Middle Ages. The first image we see consists of black and red calligraphic text set against a yellow background that calls to mind historical documents, culminating in a proudly displayed "Laurence Olivier presents Richard III by William Shakespeare." From there, the preface becomes more stylized as Olivier begins each section of text with a large red capital letter set against intertwining vines. Further, this text is broken by images of jousting knights, shields, and red and white roses designating the two houses of York and Lancaster. These elements force the viewer to associate these words with the image of medieval manuscripts. The pseudo-medieval artwork that Olivier uses is not so intricate that it incorporates the intricate symbols of Plantaganet iconography; nonetheless, these elements provide the film with an antiquated tone.

The substance of the textual preface supports its style. Olivier makes clear in his summary of the events leading up to the crowning of Edward IV in 1471 that the film is about England's *past*; it in no way reflects contemporary events. Further, Olivier reminds us that even the "history" that influenced Shakespeare's play did not accurately represent the past; instead, he tells us, "The story of England / like that of many another land / is an interwoven pattern of history and legend." "Legend" implies a story that fictionalizes history. Olivier then tries his hand at writing Shakespearean poetry as he, in a Shakespearean vein, employs three different metaphors to communicate a single point:

"The history of the world like / Letters without poetry, flowers without perfume / Or thought without imagination, / would be a dry matter indeed / without its legend." He then emphasizes that although legends may be "scorned by proof a hundred times," they are "worth preserving." In an NBC radio broadcast interview with Alexander Clark, Olivier echoes the sentiment he offers in the preface of the film. What firmly establishes Richard's villainy is his murder of the two princes in the tower. Olivier comments that, "There's no reason to suppose that he killed the babies in the Tower. To begin with, their mother -- the babies' mother -- remained a firm friend of Richard up to the time of his death, and lived perfectly free." Further, in the interview, Olivier takes credit for the preface, saying that *Richard III* is a "beautiful bit of work" that stands independently from history: "As I've tried to say in the preface to *Richard III*, it's a legend, and what a pity all legends should die, merely because they're disproven."¹⁶

Just as his textual preface suggests that the film should be understood as distinct from history, so too suggests the film's language. In keeping with the tradition of his *Henry V* and his *Hamlet*, Olivier assembles a cast of well-known British stage actors (Cedric Hardwicke as Henry IV, Ralph Richardson as Buckingham, John Gielgud as Clarence, Claire Bloom as Lady Anne, etc.) to deliver Shakespeare's lines with theatrically-trained precision. Though he makes drastic changes to the film's text, he retains Shakespeare's lines and language structure. Olivier explains some of these changes as such: "[S]ome of the most famous lines like 'Richard's himself again' and 'Off with his head, so much for Buckingham' are not Shakespeare's at all, but were added later by Garrick or Cibber, who thought nothing of adding scenes adapted from

¹⁶ Falkenberg, Jinx. "Laurence Olivier, Alexander Clark on *Richard III*: A Radio Interview Transcript." 3

Henry VI to their productions!” (Cottrell 267). In addition to letting us know that the film is grounded in legend, Olivier caters to academics with his use of language by his additions from *3 Henry VI*. Early in the film, he uses elliptical language to communicate treachery to academics. Olivier has Richard speak these lines to the little prince, just as in the earlier play: “And that I alone the tree from whence thou sprang’st / Witness the loving kiss I give the fruit” (5.7.31-2). Though Olivier’s Richard commences his kissing of his nephews (following Clarence’s lead) he leaves out the aside that Shakespeare gives Richard for the academics to fill in—an allusion to Judas: “To say the truth, so Judas kiss’d his master, / And cried ‘All hail’ whenas he meant all harm” (5.7.33-4). Here, we sense Olivier’s conception of a dual audience: a “high-culture” audience, which consists of academics and theatre-goers who are intimate with Shakespeare and his works and a “low culture” audience, the masses to whom Olivier feels compelled to instruct. Furthermore, the freedom that he displays with his playful and witty allusion to the former work reiterates his disassociation of his film from social and political reality.

In addition to the textual preface and Olivier’s use of Shakespeare’s language, filmmaker also emphasizes fantasy over reality through his use of *mise-en-scene*. Most of the action of the film takes place in the city, London. In his chapter, “Towards a Director’s Aesthetic,” from his book *Laurence Olivier and the Art of Filmmaking*, Dale Silviria comments on the simplicity of Olivier’s set: “Collapsed into what amounts to a single edifice are a cathedral, palace, and Tower.” According to Silviria, what is significant about Olivier’s set is not its adherence to reality, or even history for that matter; the set does not resemble a medieval castle in the least. Instead, Silviria calls

attention to the set's "artificiality." He clarifies his observation, commenting that "the backgrounds—the...London panorama, the misty Thames with its ship spires, those improbable distant glimpses of the Tower—are truly unrestrained fancies in Richard's world, but their sure falseness ironically binds us to a clear-eyed assessment of their nature when we observe them" (36). Silvria makes an interesting critical move here, seeing the artificiality of the set as an exponent to Richard's fantastical and deluded imagination; for the purposes of my argument, I read it as another way of centering the text in the world of legend and fantasy to stand in stark contrast to historical reality.

Other elements of *mise-en-scene* that contribute to our understanding of the film as a legend are costume and makeup, lighting, and figure expression and movement. First, the costuming recalls the just-out-of-fashion British costume drama; the players in Olivier's film dress their late fifteenth century part. The costume that Olivier wears in his opening soliloquy is a close replica of the outfit the historical Richard wears in his portrait hanging in the National Portrait Gallery; Olivier's black beret-like hat atop shoulder-length silky black hair and his red, velvety three quarter-length robe unmistakably mirror this distinct image. Olivier describes his obsession with (presumably) this image when preparing for his stage Richard in 1944: "I had a picture of him in my head, a painting, an oil painting of what he ought to look like.... I never believed that the real portraits of him were anything like him; or if I did, I wasn't going to admit it. Nothing was going to stop me from putting on that makeup" (116). When he did put on "that makeup," he looked even more like the portrait—particularly with his long aristocratic putted nose job. In trying to emulate this portrait, Olivier shows his interest in perpetuating the legend of Richard III.

As the film progresses, Olivier's costume darkens from a blood red color to jet-black. Similarly, the low-key lighting throughout the film suggests a film-*noir* tone. As Buckingham suggests that he and Richard continue their plan "[t]o part the Queen's proud kindred [Dorset and Grey] from the Prince" (2.2.150), to which Richard responds with an affirmative, "My other self, my counsel's consistory, / My oracle, my prophet! My dear cousin" (2.2.150-52), the two converge in their diabolical thinking. Olivier represents this union with shadows; the camera pans down to the ground and records the two men's shadows as they walk away, giving away to an eventual blackness. Shadows and overall darkness dominate Olivier's film and give it an otherworldly, fantastical quality.

Just as Silvria notes the artificiality of the set, the figure movement of the characters, particularly Olivier's, seems deliberately theatrical. In the scene following Richard's coronation, Olivier's body seems to follow his voice in jumping from a calm annoyance with Buckingham to a violent fury as Richard screams, "Then let it strike!" The artificiality of Olivier's actions is only emphasized by the film's cinematography. In his opening soliloquy, Olivier allows the camera to enter the throne chamber where he is musing to himself. In film, the camera is a dynamic, participating entity. However, for the first few minutes of his speech, Olivier renders the camera a passive recipient of his "wisdom." He approaches the camera and stops, allowing the camera to capture him in a medium close-up, before he begins: "Now is the winter of our discontent..." By making the camera merely a recorder of his actions, Olivier gives himself the opportunity to perform for it and for us. Olivier recounts his 1944 stage experience:

As Richard III I had to make the audience like me...Halfway through [the opening soliloquy], I knew. I knew that I was holding the reins. When I said, "Can I do this and cannot get the crown?" the audience made a sort of "hhhaaaa" sound. I knew it had worked—whatever it was. They were mine for another hour before I need to start worrying (118, 129).

This mentality of winning over the audience is apparent, too, in the film. Later in the speech, the camera dollies in for a medium close up as Olivier stands with his left shoulder facing us. He divulges his plan to us: "I'll make my heaven to dream"—he pauses and momentarily looks away—"upon the crown." Then, he looks back at the camera for approval. He walks away, as if he has won the approval of the audience, which the camera metonymically represents. Excitedly, the camera dollies after him, eagerly wanting to hear how he is going to do it. This convention of "partnering" the camera illustrates Olivier's use of deliberate artificiality.

While these strategies emphasize the legendary aspect of the adaptation, there is a cultural aspect of the film that cannot be ignored. Debuting in Britain in December 1955 and in the U.S. a few months later, Olivier's *Richard III* is a film importantly situated in history. Richard's shadow is paralleled by the shadow that World War II cast over Europe and the United States. For Britain, the war- and postwar- years were a time of reconstructing British national identity. A decade before *Richard III*, Britain's involvement in the war and its growing awareness of its waning empire in part provoked the production of Olivier's *Henry V* (1944). Raymond Durnat notes the parallelism between the action of the film and world history:

Henry V invades France as Eisenhower was about to invade *Festung Europa*. Then Henry V marries a French Princess in a 'United Europe' spirit, although whether France here = France our ally, to whom Churchill had in 1940 impulsively proposed 'marriage,' or Germany our enemy whom we musn't (*sic.*) hate for ever, is quite ambiguous. (109)

Henry V gave Britain back its identity as a dominant political nation—an identity that was called into question both during the war as the United States and Germany assumed the dominant political roles and two years later when Britain needed to borrow \$3.75 billion from the U.S. and \$1.25 billion from Canada to cover its losses from the war.¹⁷ Durgnat adds that the film "isn't about the historical Henry V, or even about Shakespeare's idea of Henry V. It's about the *Demi-Paradise*, Britain as happy home of poets and warriors alike" (110).¹⁸

Other critics understand *Henry V* as a film that tries to reconstruct British national identity through "high culture"; since Britain no longer held the political power that it once had, at least it still had its literary and cultural reputation.¹⁹ Shakespeare was the embodiment of Britain's cultural elitism. Sarah Street elucidates Britain's exploitation of its literary reputation during wartime:

¹⁷ Britain's loss of empire was further punctuated by its forced withdrawal of troops from occupied Egypt in 1954. On October 31, 1956, Britain (along with France) tried unsuccessfully to take back the Suez Canal from Egypt. Britain's failed attempt to reclaim its territory stood as a symbol of the nation's waning status as a political power player.

¹⁸ The idea that Britain was once again a powerful political force that permeated *Henry V* can be demonstrated in Britain's political involvement in the early 1950s. Britain was a key player in the occupation of Germany. Further, Britain was a founding member of both the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949 and the Southeast Arms Treaty Organization in 1954. Britain aided the U.S. in the Korean War (1950-1953), and it set in motion a project to build an atom bomb.

¹⁹ Similarly, we could read Olivier's *Hamlet*, too, as a project in which Olivier uses his talent as a director and as an actor to reconstruct British national identity.

The Second World War was an exciting period for creative adaptation when British film production was galvanized by propaganda imperative. Britain's literary and theatrical heritage was an obvious source for scripts which communicated particular notions of nationhood: that which must be defended was articulated in high-cultural terms. (116)

In other words, adaptations of British high cultural works did not have to compete with other films for box-office dollars; their cultural legacy differentiated them from common films and made them more eligible for prestige from the expert critics rather than collecting money from the masses.

Street also notes that the wartime- and post-war period also made famous a number of British stage actors, including Olivier and Ralph Richardson, who plays Buckingham in *Richard III*. Film, according to Street, became a legitimate and attractive outlet for stage performers: "Apart from the fact that many theatres were closed during the war, film became more respected as a medium because it offered actors the promise of stardom in the name of patriotism" (117). In her discussion of British film stars, Street notes that these actors who transferred their talents from the stage to film were heralded, but heralded because of the heavy responsibility buckled to their backs: "[B]ecause of the British cinema's inferiority complex about Hollywood competition, home-grown stars were often invested with a patriotic imperative as bearers of British national culture" (119). This may be one explanation as to why Olivier became such a revered Shakespearean actor. Not only was he prodigious on the stage, but he was also practically nationally canonized through his starring roles in *Henry V* and *Hamlet*.

Olivier performed *Richard III* on stage at the Old Vic in 1944. The play was performed three times, and Olivier was satisfied with his success as the title role (Olivier 30). However, not until ten years later did Olivier begin shooting for a film adaptation of this play. I suggest that during and shortly following World War II, a British and American mass audience, reflecting the dominant ideology in wartime Britain and the U.S., would permit and embrace adaptations of Shakespeare plays that could be consolidated as part of that ideology. As I have pointed out earlier, Olivier's *Henry V* was the embodiment of wartime values and even goes so far as to imply that God is on the winner's side. *Hamlet* coincides with the dominant ideology because the play is relatively harmless in political terms. Certainly, Claudius is a usurping villain like any underhanded political manipulator. However, the stress of Olivier's *Hamlet* lies not in the political realm, but in the familial. Olivier drew from contemporary Freudian criticism to render his adaptation a family melodrama.²⁰ *Richard III*, in contrast, explores the dark side of politics. Olivier manipulates the narrative elements in the play to communicate values that challenged the dominant ideology. As a result, the adaptation was rejected by both British and American mass-culture audience.

Because *Richard III* is about a tyrannical ruler, there is always a cultural materialist tendency to associate the character with historical tyrants, in this case, with

²⁰ Olivier writes in "The Film *Hamlet*": "Perhaps he [Hamlet] was the first pacifist, perhaps Dr. Jones is sound in his diagnosis of the Oedipus complex, perhaps there is justification in the many other complexes that have been foisted on to him—perhaps he just thought too much, that is, if a man *can* think too much... I prefer to think of him as a nearly great man—damned by lack of resolution, as all but one in a hundred are." (Quoted in Morley 107).

Hitler.²¹ Olivier, almost anticipating this line of thinking, offers this personal insight regarding the film's stage production:

I had a lot of things on my side, now I come to think of it, from the point of view of timelessness. There was Hitler across the way, one was playing it definitely as a paranoiac; so that there was a core of something to which the audience would immediately respond. (Quoted in Brown, 24)

In this passage taken from a BBC interview, Olivier knew that he was exploiting Hitler's notoriety. In a 1956 article in *Quarterly of Film, Radio and Television*, Harry Schein draws this surprising parallel between Richard and Hitler:

Richard is a thoroughly evil man...politically smart, highly intelligent but with his intelligence completely subordinated to the murdering lust for power. Such a person is in reality just as uninteresting as Hitler or Himmler. He becomes only interesting when the evilness is given a shadow, a cleavage, a psychological background. (409)

Here, we see how subtly challenging to the dominant ideology Olivier's film really was. Schein's front of disinterest in Hitler attests to the fact that the effects of Hitler's forceful imperialistic endeavor imposed on the rest of Europe was a wound not yet healed. The dominant ideology in mid-1950s America and former Allied Europe wanted to force Hitler into the position of evil Other. Thus, as Schein unwittingly observes, Olivier's film proves inconsistent with the dominant ideology as it creates sympathy, or at the very least it evokes some degree of understanding, for the evil Other; Olivier's *Richard III* speculates on the nature and psychology of a tyrant, of a Hitler.

²¹ Although the film was produced at the time of later "tyrants" like Stalin, Krushchev, Mao Tse Tung,

Shein's review is a sign of the times, both in the U.S. and in Britain—the immediate post-war world, the early 1950s, still understood the world in terms of good and evil, Free World and Communist World. Shortly after World War II, the United States entered into the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Having learned that the Soviets built an atom bomb with U.S. plans delivered to them by Alger Hiss, the U.S. experienced another “Red Scare” like that following World War I. This Red Scare was defined by Senator Joseph McCarthy’s “witch-hunt” in which he aggressively pursued Communist spies in the government through the press and government hearings. Even though McCarthy was censured by the Senate in 1954, anti-Communist propaganda filled the pages of popular magazines.²² Britain, too, engaged in this dichotomous thinking; both countries joined NATO in its fight against the spread of global Communism and both participated in the Korean War, a war against Communism that ended ultimately in a stalemate.

I posit that while evidence of this dichotomy is undoubtedly present in Olivier’s *Richard III*, Olivier’s performance of King Richard is too unfortunately reminiscent of a Hitler for a mass audience. Olivier represents Richard’s ruthlessness as a tyrannical ruler, but he also gives the character a psychological profile. Further, Olivier’s omissions of key narrative elements in Shakespeare’s play, coupled with Olivier’s own acting project of presenting Richard as a “Romantic Hero,” transform the meanings of the play.

The major narrative shift from Shakespeare’s text in Olivier’s film is the filmmaker’s omission of Queen Margaret. Margaret is the widow of former king Henry

Franco, Tito, and others, film critics have understood Richard’s tyranny vis-à-vis Hitler’s.

VI. Her role in the play is to remind the audience that Richard is part of God's plan to punish the House of York for its unlawful seizure of the throne (which squares with the early modern world-view that places faith in providential history). Constance Brown argues that the theme of retributive justice as symbolized in the character of Queen Margaret is replaced by the visual crown motif in Olivier's film: "[t]he parabolic curve from legitimate king to tyrant to legitimate king is clearly defined through the use of crown images" (24). Brown contends that "by giving predominance to a theme obscured in the play, he [Olivier] has given the film a significance the play does not have. Olivier's film, like the play, is a portrait of an individual tyrant. Unlike the play, Olivier's film surpasses melodrama to become a portrait of tyranny" (25). Though it was not *universally* accepted at the time of Olivier's film, the orthodox understanding of the War of the Roses—and an understanding with which Olivier was probably familiar—suggested that British history as understood by Shakespeare was the result of Tudor propaganda. According to Shakespeare scholar E.M.W. Tillyard, the Tudor historians More and Hollinshed shaped history to their own ends: Richard's scourge existed as a necessary evil to purge Britain of its sins, to make him part of God's plan to restore the Tudors to the throne. By omitting Margaret from the text, Richard acts on his own volition, defying fate—becoming a romantic hero.

Another of Olivier's narrative omissions concerns the parallel murder scenes of Clarence and that of the two princes. In the play, Richard persuades two gruff murderers to do his dirty work—to murder his brother Clarence to free up his ascendancy to the

²² In the December 1955 issue of *Variety*, such a piece called "Sarnoff's 'Commie Memo'" warned that "[I]n nearly every non-Soviet country and region there are newspapers, magazines, radio and tv stations, either overtly or under pro-Communist control or in 'liberal' disguises" (44).

throne. Olivier fuses the action of this scene (1.3) with that of Edward's deathbed scene (2.2) as he crosscuts between the two. In the film, while Edward is "lulling in a lewd love bed," simultaneously kissing Mistress Shore's hand while he tries to unite the factions in his kingdom (never a good idea), Richard sneaks off to speak to his hired murderers. "How now my hearty, stout and resolved mates," he obsequiously calls to them. Richard then leads the two murderers down into the dungeon where Clarence is held. In the play, the two murderers deliberate in such a way that Shakespeare demonstrates his skills at dark comedy:

2nd Murderer: What, shall [I] stab him as he sleeps?

1st Murderer: No, he'll say 'twas done cowardly when he wakes.

(1.4.100-01)

Olivier's murderers evince the same dull intelligence as apparent in Shakespeare's original text, but the filmmaker gives them a more sinister quality by cutting out the moral deliberation felt by the Second Murderer (a dilemma he solves as he remembers the reward money Richard has offered). Instead, Olivier gives the First Murderer the lines of the negotiator; he talks to Richard, then Brackenbury, and then Clarence, idiotically smiling the whole time. The Second Murderer, the one who should be having doubts, is the silent driving force behind the murder. He has a total of three lines; the most chilling is his utterance in response to Clarence's request for wine: "You shall have wine enough, my lord, anon," after which the two stab Clarence to death as shrieking music plays in the background. They then hurriedly stuff his dead body into a butt of wine.

Similarly, Olivier reinterprets the scene in which Richard convinces Tyrrel to kill the two princes. Olivier replaces Shakespeare's dialogue with a medium close up of Richard whispering his plan to Tyrrel. Instead of allowing Tyrrel to decide how he wants to murder the two, Olivier's Richard enacts his vision of the murder on Tyrrel, smothering his henchman's face with a pillow. Furthermore, Olivier presents the actual murder by showing the action of Tyrrel smothering the children in their sleep and by having Tyrrel describe the murders in a voice-over narration.

What these two interpretations of the murder scenes do is to eliminate volition on the part of the murderers. Olivier neither allows Clarence's murderers to feel any remorse nor permits them to feel any sense of purpose—they are simply following orders and also taking some sadistic pleasure in their work. Tyrrel, forced by his fear of Richard, conversely, seems shaken and wan with care as his trembling voice recites his misdeeds. The point that Olivier makes by omitting dialogue is that Richard, from Act I until the end of the play, is a tyrant not to be questioned and always to be feared.

Despite Richard's heinous deeds, Olivier's film gave American and British audiences something they could not accept in the post-war years—a romantic hero in the tradition of Milton, Byron, and Marlowe. This hero's pride and ambition overarches conventional morality; basically, he lives and dies by his own actions, never repenting. Olivier presents Richard's heroism in the battle of Bosworth Field. Instead of having Richard wrestle with his conscience in the tent scene before battle through Shakespeare's provided soliloquy, Olivier makes his Richard shrug off the presence of the ghosts and say confidently to his soldiers and defiantly to himself, "Conscience is but a word that

cowards use... / March on, join bravely, let us to it pell-mell; / If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell" (5.3.109-13).

In the final battle scene, Olivier shows us Richard's fierce independence. A long shot records Richard standing in the middle of the field, unhorsed; at which point he utters his most famous lines, "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse! (5.5.7). Catesby comes by to help, but Richard, asserting his independence and having nothing but contempt for those who wish to infringe on that independence, yells harshly at his ally, "Slave, I have set my life upon a cast, And I will stand the hazard of the die" (9-10). Richard finds himself surrounded by Richmond's troops, makes a defiant move towards them, and they move in like piranhas, eager for the kill. The camera sweeps up above the action to record the slaughter of this villain from a bird's eye view. This scene is the most violent of the whole film, which makes Richard look all the more heroic as he becomes a martyr for excessive pride and ambition. Dying, he clutches his sword and holds it like a cross, again conjuring the image of sacrifice.

Olivier creates an interpretive problem by playing Richard both as a romantic hero and as a tyrant, thus engendering a tension between two diametrically opposed character types. In trying to reconcile ambition with tyranny, Olivier somehow creates a measure of sympathy for Richard. Olivier also helps the cause by importing some lines from *3 Henry VI* in which Richard reveals his motivation for "prov[ing] a villain":

Why, love forswore me in my mother's womb;
And for I should not deal in her soft laws,
She did corrupt frail nature with some bribe,
To shrink mine arm up like a wither'd shrub,

To make an envious mountain on my back,
Where sits deformity to mock my body;
To shape my legs of an unequal size,
To disproportion me in every part... (III.ii)

Richard's free use of pronouns comes dangerously close to blurring an apostrophized "Love" with Richard's mother, and thus to blaming the Duchess for his deformity. Olivier's incorporation of these lines into Richard's opening soliloquy demonstrates the filmmaker's project of developing a psychological portrait of Richard, thus helping the viewer to *understand* the evil Other.

The problem with the reception of Olivier's *Richard III* is that Olivier's own need for public approval prohibited him from making a Richard that the public could hate. After Hitler, the post-war political ideology of former Allied nations consisted of a desire for clearly defined dichotomous values, and while on one hand, Olivier gave the western world a Richard who is the embodiment of evil, he also gave them a character whose ambition and faults they could understand. Roy Armes writes in his *Critical History of the British Cinema* that, "if *Henry V* captures the patriotism of the 1940s, *Richard III* is a perfect embodiment of the more cynical mood of the late 1950s" (168). If Olivier's *Henry V* allows audiences to participate in the upside of imperialism, then his *Richard III* makes audiences aware of how that same imperialistic ethos can manifest itself as evil. If Armes's insight that the film and the political ideology of the post-war United States were one in the same, then we would expect audiences to accept and attend the film as an element of their dominant culture.

Richard III was marketed and distributed as a high-culture independent film, but its publicity also made it familiar to a popular audience. However, despite the popularity of Olivier's other Shakespeare films and the good reviews that *Richard III* received, the film failed to attract popular following. The film debuted at the Leicester Square Theatre in London on December 20, 1955, appealing to a British national consciousness.²³ There, it ran a mere seven weeks.²⁴ Due to its poor screening in England, the producers marketed the film to an American mass audience via television.²⁵ Prior to its U.S. debut on March 11, 1956 at New York's Bijou Theatre, the film aired over television. General Motors paid NBC an estimated \$500,000 for the right to broadcast the film. According to John Cottrell,

Richard III made entertainment history, as the first full-length feature film ever to be televised in advance of its cinematic showing... [I]t was estimated that this Sunday showing—146 stations in 45 states—was watched by upwards of 40 million people, the largest number ever to

²³ It could be argued that the film failed to capture this British national consciousness: "Contrary to all expectation, *Richard III* was not chosen for the annual Royal Film Performance. Alfred Hitchcock's *To Catch a Thief*, starring Cary Grant and Grace Kelly, was preferred, possibly because the selection committee shied away from another unsavory royal subject after the showing of *Beau Brummel* the previous year" (Cottrell, 271).

²⁴ Although the Leicester Square Theatre showed *Richard III* for only seven weeks, *Variety* was pleased with the film's success in this theatre. In its fifth week, *Variety* wrote: "Current frame looks great \$12,600 and equal to opening round. Most consistent grosser at this theatre for many years. Continues." (25 Jan. 1956: 12). In its seventh week, *Variety* commented: "Seventh round of 'Richard III' closed with great \$12,800." (15 Feb. 1956: 13). Despite these grosses, the film was not brought to any other of London's major theatres in 1955-1956.

²⁵ In Nash and Ross's *Motion Picture Guide*, the authors suggest that *Richard III* "was not a hit when it came out in England." However, "in later years, after the word of mouth began, it was re-released [in 1967] to resounding success and has been, perhaps, the most financially rewarding of the three" (2606). Armes's insight seems applicable in this context. Following the logic that sales reflect ideology, it is not late 50s American audiences that are cynical; the cynical consumers of Olivier's product are audience from the late 60s to the present. Of course, this is an argument unto itself.

witness a daytime television program, excluding certain political and sports programs. (272)

Cotrell further tells us that “despite this gigantic ‘sneak preview’ the film still ran ten weeks on Broadway” (272). These ten weeks that *Richard III* lasted on Broadway seem meager when compared to the success of Olivier’s previous Shakespeare projects.

Margaret Morley writes that *Henry V*, appearing in theatres near the end of World War II, “ran for 46 weeks, the longest run of any British film until that time, and it was judged the ‘best imported film of the year.’ In London it ran for five months at the Carlton, Haymarket” (98). Olivier’s *Hamlet* enjoyed even greater success. *Variety* reports that *Hamlet* ran 66 weeks at New York’s Park Avenue theatre. It seems from these statistics that audiences supported Olivier’s Shakespeare adaptations when Olivier romanticized heroism. However, when the filmmaker attempted to romanticize villainy, audiences turned away. Morley emphasizes the impact that Olivier’s bringing of *Richard III* to screen had on his career: “[*Richard III*] did not make money in the States and because of its failure to get good box-office takings Olivier could not, after Korda’s death, raise the money for the film of *Macbeth* which he wanted to make” (118). *Richard III*’s failure to lure a popular audience seems to negate Armes’s claim. American audiences were not “cynical”; rather, they were too attached to wartime- and post-wartime- idealism to support a film that explores the motivation of a tyrant.

In this chapter, we have observed a film that was deliberately presented as a cultural artifact, a filmic extension of the great British literary tradition. However, using insights from the cultural materialist literary movement, we find that despite its efforts, Olivier’s *Richard III* ultimately fails in trying to escape the culture in which it was

produced. This ideological contradiction is represented in the film through the internal contradiction between narrative and stylistic elements and is further embodied in the individual character of Richard. American and British audiences were nebulously keen in their awareness of the implications of supporting Olivier's *Richard*. On a subconscious level, to support the film meant to condone tyranny. As a result, the film suffered at the box-office. Olivier neglected history and concentrated on the aesthetic appeal of Shakespeare's play. In the next chapter, we will look at how filmmakers Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine do exactly the inverse—Loncraine and McKellen strip *Richard III* of its aesthetic appeal and adapt the play as a commentary on contemporary history.

Chapter II. Shakespeare and Politics:
Challenging Mass Media Representations in McKellen's *Richard III*

Between 1955—the time in which Olivier filmed his version of *Richard III*—and 1995—the year that filmmaker Richard Loncraine and Shakespearean actor Ian McKellen collaborated on their filmic *Richard III* project—six film adaptations of the play were produced by filmmakers from the United States and Britain as well as from Italy and the Soviet Union.²⁶ However, what differentiates the Loncraine/McKellen *Richard III* from these other adaptations, and in particular Olivier's film, is the conception of audience. Olivier set the tone of how Shakespeare was to be adapted, viewing the subject matter from a cultural elitist perspective; Shakespeare's plays were British cultural artifacts that needed to be treated (in Arnoldian terms) with "high seriousness." In contrast, McKellen (the Shakespearean interpreter of the team) understood Shakespeare as good entertainment. In talking of his adaptation, McKellen said enthusiastically, "It's very exciting. It's very funny. It's very sexy. It's very violent. The audience I know will love it."²⁷ Both Shakespeareans wanted to bring the bard to the screen, and consequentially to the masses, but how each saw the masses affected their individual

²⁶ The six versions are as follows:

- 1960 British (BBC). Two parts (Richard III, Acts 1-3, The Dangerous Brother; and Richard III, Acts 3-5). Directed by Michael Hayes. Cast: Paul Daneman, Mary Morris. Black and white. Television production. 60 min.; 75 min.
- 1964 USA (Westinghouse Broadcasting Corporation). Narrated by Dr. Frank Baxter. Used in secondary schools. Black and white. Abridgement of the play. 112 min.
- 1964 British (BBC, episode of *War of the Roses*, also shown on American television in 1965). Directed by Michael Hayes. Cast: Ian Holm, Roy Dotrice, Janet Suzman, Peggy Ashcroft. Black and white. Television production. 155 min.
- 1980 Soviet Union. Directed by Robert Sturua. Cast: Ramaz Chkhikvadze, Salome Kancheli. Color. Feature film. Approx. 120 min.
- 1981 Italian (RAI television). Directed by R. Carlotto. Cast: Carmelo Bene, Daniel Silverio. Color. Television production. 120 min.
- 1982 British (BBC television). Directed by Jane Howell. Cast: Ron Cook, Julia Foster, Zoe Wanakaker. Color. Television production. 230 min.

projects. In the first part of this chapter, I argue that McKellen challenges Olivier as both an actor and a film adaptor by subverting Olivier's reverential reading of the play. In the second part, I discuss the ambiguous stance McKellen's *Richard III* takes regarding the issue of audience and mass media as an extension of that challenge.

Olivier used the genre of film to capture his patented theatrical Richard—in a sense, to canonize himself. Olivier the actor was the authority, performing to instruct a less sophisticated film and television audience about Shakespeare's greatness; hence, the authentic setting, period dress, and relatively strict adherence to Shakespeare's language. I propose that Olivier's interpretation was governed by modernist tendencies, or more specifically, modernist views of the Renaissance. Richard Halpern elucidates this idea in his book, *Shakespeare Among the Moderns*:

The modernist view of the Renaissance...was of an organic and agrarian society undergoing an accelerated transition to modernity.... To put it bluntly, modernism constructed the English Renaissance as an allegory for the colonial encounter itself; the period's catastrophic experience of modernity and the disintegration of its organic and ritualized culture offered an historically displaced and geographically internalized image of the effects of contemporary imperialist penetration into indigenous third-world societies. (26-27)

²⁷ McKellen says this about Richard's rise to the throne. The quote comes from an interview that was part of the original press kit. The Richard III Society website obtained the interview from Mayfair Entertainment International Ltd. (5) (www.r3.org/mckellen/film/mckella.html).

According to Halpern, the canonical validity given to Shakespeare and Milton (among others) during the modern period mirrored the validity claimed by Britain to rationalize its colonization of "underdeveloped" countries.²⁸

Halpern writes that "modernism influenced Shakespearean performance as powerfully and persistently as it did Shakespeare criticism, and the two develop in a meaningful if uneven tandem." Further, the unquestioned greatness of Shakespeare was perpetuated by modernist ideology that stressed "Shakespeare's institutional base in universities" and "the intrinsic intellectual power of modernist reading of Shakespeare," as it "responded to a novel set of social, cultural, economic, and political developments" (2). These factors combined to solidify Shakespeare's canonical status, to reinterpret Renaissance popular culture as that "for all time." This canonized, aesthetic understanding seems very much in line with Olivier's project. As we have seen earlier, Olivier's film protested its involvement with history and asserted itself as belonging to British legend. Olivier's film was a *Richard* for art's sake.

²⁸ Halpern notes that the canonicity given to Shakespeare began during the Victorian period and influenced scholars during the modern period: "What began as a relatively minor tradition within Victorian scholarship came to exert a disproportionate and belated influence on the modernists, whose reading of Shakespeare both built upon and critiqued it." According to Halpern, "the Victorians...[were concerned with] establishing [Shakespeare's] racial pedigree within the European family" (17). He writes that in 1864, phrenologist J. W. Jackson, "read" Shakespeare's skull and discovered that Shakespeare's "was doubtless by descent of that well mingled and thoroughly amalgamated Celto-Teutonic race, familiarly known as the Anglo-Saxon, but in reality consisting of elements from nearly every Caucasian stock in Europe, with possibly a remote tinge even from the Mongolic...Shakespeare's presumed cultural "universality" is implicitly grounded in his racial variety" (quoted in Halpern 18). Further, Jackson suggests that his "evidence" demonstrates "the entire predominance of the higher over the lower elements in his being, which was, indeed, cast in an essentially spiritual, and, if we may so express ourselves, transcendental mould" (quoted in Halpern 18). Halpern concludes that in light of Jackson's observations, Shakespeare's head "represents the world as fantasized by British imperialism, with the higher and lighter races at once ruling over, and bringing enlightenment to, the lower and darker ones" (18-19). Halpern quotes Jackson from his 1864 essay, "Ethnology and Phrenology as an Aid to the Biographer," which appeared in *Anthropological Review and Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 126-140.

As a commentary on the modernism which Olivier was employing, John Collick argues in *Cultural Politics: Shakespeare, Cinema and Society* (1989) that ideological forces determine what interpretations are accepted as legitimate explanatory forms. He states that "[t]he need to ensure that readings of Shakespeare conform to the understanding of the plays formulated in Britain during the industrial revolution, and at the height of the Empire, has determined the nature of Shakespeare criticism so far." He extends this logic to include films: "films which don't appear to reinforce the supremacy of the poetry or the values it supposedly embodies are ignored, suppressed or re-appropriated" (4). This seems to support the reception of Olivier's *Richard III*. Initially, the film did not do well at the box-office.²⁹ However, upon its re-release in 1966, *Variety* wrote that the film "[broke] house records." (quoted in Morley 118). I suggest that one possible reason for this change in popular attitudes was that enough distance from the "good" war had elapsed so that critics could then divorce the film from the pure evil that Olivier's Richard represented. Instead, critics acclaimed the film because it, at least in cultural elitist terms, upheld the "Truth" of high-culture.

In the same way that Olivier embraced the high-cultural validity of Shakespeare's name, so too did he expect his audience not to question Shakespeare's greatness. Halpern gives us some insights into the notion of a theater audience in his discussion of mass culture. Halpern paraphrases Jürgen Habermas, in writing that "a mass-cultural public...passively consumes rather than critically debates its literature and art" (71). Olivier, himself the product of the modern era, belonged to and had faith in the mass-cultural sect of Shakespeare; it was what made him famous, and he wanted to be its

²⁹ In the first chapter, I argue that one of the reasons that Olivier's *Richard III* suffered at the box-office in

leader. Operating under the Western assumption that Shakespeare was the best that literature had to offer, Olivier wanted to perform accurately a modernist reading of *Richard III*. Further, what was considered to be precarious was not Shakespeare's text, but Olivier's ability to represent it accurately to a dual audience—on one hand, an “educated,” theatre-going, Shakespeare-consuming mass, and on the other hand, an “ignorant,” film- and television- watching, entertainment-craving mass. Olivier wanted to extend Shakespeare's cultural capital to include his film adaptation, in a sense, to canonize himself. In his *Richard III*, McKellen (with the help of the director, Richard Loncraine) explicitly *challenges* this notion of canonicity as developed by Laurence Olivier's 1955 film version by ignoring the modern conventions that Olivier employed and by representing his appropriation of Shakespeare as what *Time* reviewer Richard Corliss calls “all movie.”³⁰

McKellen abandons any concern for recasting the film in Medieval London. Instead, drawing from Richard Eyre's 1990 play production in which he starred, McKellen places the action of his film in an otherworldly 1930s Britain.³¹ H.R. Coursen wrote this of the play, which just as validly applies to the film: “[The] setting was post-World War I Britain, home of Edward Duke of Windsor, Oswald Mosley, and photographs of Wallis Warfield [Simpson] shaking hands solemnly with Hitler [*sic*]...[He] used the huge National [Theatre's] frame to create a panorama of a fascist rise to power” (quoted in Crowl 53). McKellen imagines an England as it could have become; these images recall “English aristocratic flirting with fascism and Hitler which

1956 is because wartime attitudes still dominated American and British popular culture.

³⁰ In other words, McKellen abandoned the high-cultural reverence that Olivier used as criteria for his adaptation and presented his *Richard* as a sex-saturated action film.

reached, through Edward VIII, into the heart of the royal family” (Crowl 53).³²

Appropriating history to his own ends, McKellen sets the film in the not-so-distant past where a Richard could have assumed political power. In doing so, the filmmaker shifts the direction of the play’s filmic tradition.

In his “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” T.S. Eliot asserts that works of art exist not in a vacuum but along a historical continuum in which newer works inherit the “tradition” of their predecessors. In his words, “No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead” (2173). Olivier’s *Richard III* functions as a key landmark of the play’s filmic tradition. McKellen acknowledges this fact in an interview with the Richard III Society: “Now I knew that ‘Richard III’ [i.e., the 1960 BBC version] as a play, and indeed ‘Richard III’ as a film, because of Olivier’s version, have all been immensely popular.” McKellen demonstrates an even more intimate knowledge of Olivier’s work in telling us that, “Olivier had played *Henry V*, *Hamlet* and *Richard III* onstage, before he re-created them for the cinema.”³³ Here, McKellen compares himself to Olivier as a Shakespearean actor. McKellen implicitly echoes this theme of theatrical competition in an interview with Gary Crowdus. During the discussion, McKellen boasts of playing Richard about 200 times on stage, thus placing himself alongside Olivier as a consummate Shakespearean (46). Besides wanting to

³¹ Orson Welles used a similar fascist setting for his 1930s stage version of *Julius Caesar*.

³² The historical connection requires some piecing together, but Mosley belonged to the fascist party during this time in English history. Further, Edward abdicated in order to marry Simpson (an American). Both connections are shadowed by Hitler’s rise to power in Germany.

³³ This quote comes from an interview with McKellen on the Richard III Society homepage: <http://www.r3.org/mckellen/film/mckella.html>, p. 3.

compete with Olivier as an actor, McKellen wished to challenge Olivier's interpretation of the play as a filmmaker. In the Crowds interview, McKellen notes the poor box-office turnout of Olivier's Shakespeare adaptations:

But when you think of the Hollywood Shakespeare over the years, Zeffirelli's productions were probably more influential and reassuring to producers than Olivier's movies because they're more easily available to the general public.... And they made money.

Here, McKellen suggests that the better a film does at the box-office, the more available it becomes to viewers and filmmakers alike. McKellen wanted to distinguish his film from Olivier's as a moneymaker, not an art piece.

In his essay, T.S. Eliot notes, too, with his analogy of the catalyst, that even though some works exhibit less obvious markers of their heritage, that heritage nonetheless exists.³⁴ According to the analogy, the catalyst—the force that brings about change in the tradition—can disappear without a trace. Fortunately, McKellen is not so subtle in echoing the tradition from which his work sprang. Olivier's influence pervades McKellen's film, both structurally and stylistically—so much so that McKellen seems deliberate in his attempt to make Olivier's work new. Structurally, like Olivier, McKellen frames the action of the film around paraphrased action from *3 Henry VI*.³⁵ Whereas the first ten minutes of Olivier's film capture Edward IV's coronation, the first ten minutes of McKellen's film takes us to the battle of Tewksbury, re-imagined here as a

³⁴ The analogy reads as such: "When [oxygen and sulphur dioxide] ... are mixed in the presence of a filament of platinum, they form sulphurous acid. The combination takes place only if the platinum is present; nevertheless the newly formed acid contains no trace of platinum, and the platinum itself is apparently unaffected; has remained inert, neutral, and unchanged. The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum..." (2173).

military ambush. In McKellen's *Richard*, Prince Edward receives a message via tickertape that Richard's forces are close at hand. Seemingly assuming that the message is less imminent than it really is, Prince Edward bids his father Henry VI goodnight and closes the door to Henry's bedchamber. He walks back to his desk, stopping to throw his dog a meaty bone and sits at his desk to resume eating his evening meal. The dog stops gnawing, looks up, whines suspiciously, and then starts barking. The camera cuts to the concrete wall where, suddenly, the nozzle of a tank busts through and armed men with gas masks begin shooting the officers in Henry's headquarters. Edward runs for his pistol, but it is too late—Richard has already shot him. Richard bustles to King Henry's chamber door, opens it to find the king with his back to Richard, huddled and praying for a miracle. Richard contemptuously shoots him in the back, and for the first time reveals his identity by taking off his mask.³⁶ The following scene in McKellen's film replaces the coronation scene in Olivier's film. Instead of a formal gathering where King Edward has the crown thrust upon him as we see in the Olivier version, McKellen imagines the scene as a gathering of Yorkist aristocrats, celebrating their victory of the civil war. Also significant, structurally speaking, is McKellen's sharing in Olivier's vision of a film without old Queen Margaret. As has been argued by Constance Brown, without Queen Margaret, the meaning of the play is stripped of its providential framework and is replaced by a portrait of tyranny.

³⁵ This tradition of incorporating action from the previous plays developed, as Olivier freely admits, from Colley Cibber's theatrical productions.

³⁶ Samuel Crowl understands this scene as a coded scene intended for Shakespearean insiders. He writes that general audiences would not be able to comprehend that, "the two officers are in fact Henry VI and his son Prince Edward, that the tank's elongated nozzle and Richard's gas mask are witty visual reminders of Richard-as-the-white boar—the rooting hog who wears many masks and can change colors like the chameleon—and that the curious focus on Edward's dog is, of course, conjured from Richard's own very wry self-assessment: 'dogs bark at me as I halt by them.'" (57).

McKellen's film echoes Olivier's film stylistically as well. The most obvious example of McKellen consciously quoting Olivier is his appropriation of Olivier's relationship with the camera. Olivier delivers Richard's opening soliloquy to a camera that moves along with him. Olivier uses camera distance as a metaphor for Richard's relationship to the audience. At one point during the soliloquy, the camera captures Olivier's whole body, a medium long shot that tells us that Richard needs to do more convincing. Later in the speech, he comes closer to the camera in a medium close-up and moves his hand in such a way as to pull the personified camera in his direction. McKellen creates this same sort of relationship in his use of the camera. McKellen's opening soliloquy is divided as he delivers the first half of it to the court of Edward IV at the inaugural bash and the second half in the lavatory, it seems, to no one in particular at first. Film critic David Denby describes the scene:

[The latter part of the soliloquy] continues, sotto voce, in a royal bathroom, where Richard, sighing as he sinks into a heavy piss, speaks of himself in quiet tones of disgust. He glances into a mirror and spots us looking at him; a gleam comes into McKellen's eye, and he turns, delighted (just like Olivier) to have a companion, taking us into his confidence as he explains his plans. From that point on, we know he is telling us, and only us, the truth. We are flattered, and, in turn, we repay his trust by withholding absolute judgment of his crimes. (48)

McKellen's Richard shows off to the camera, particularly when he pulls off a crafty lie. In Edward's reconciliation scene, Richard enters late and pompously shakes hands and flatters all who are present. He walks toward the camera and delivers in an aside, "I

thank God for my humility" (2.2.73), with a tone of self-conscious sarcasm. In this same scene, after he tells King Edward that Clarence died by Edward's first order because, "Some tardy cripple bore the countermand" (90). Richard slides by the camera, making eye contact with us for a split second to remind us that *he* is that tardy cripple. Another time Richard addresses the camera to let us in on the inside joke is the scene in which Buckingham and Catesby try to convince the mayor and citizens that Richard should be crowned. Taking Buckingham's orders to "play the maid's part" (3.7.51), Richard refuses once to "buckle fortune on [his] back" (228), but, mock-persuaded by Catesby, Richard assents and while Catesby rushes off to call again the citizens, Richard faces the camera and says, "I'm not made of stone" (224).

McKellen also quotes Olivier stylistically in his use of shadow imagery. As was discussed in the first chapter, Olivier borrows from film noir by casting Richard's evil deeds in shadow. In Olivier's film, the camera captures the action of the shadows rather than the actions of the characters in a kind of filmic synecdoche. McKellen uses shadow imagery only once, but it is an obvious textual echo of Olivier's film. After McKellen's Richard has wooed Lady Anne at the morgue, he excitedly dances his way through the hallway of the hospital to a jazzy rendition of Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd" (first heard at King Edward's inaugural party), all the time delivering his soliloquy at the end of 1.1. He enthusiastically turns to the camera and says, "Shine out, fair sun, till I have bought a glass, / That I may see my shadow as I pass" (263-4). Richard runs up the stairs at the camera briefly captures his shadow before it blends in with the shadowed steps of the hospital. This scene echoes Olivier's rendering; after Olivier's Richard has recited the lines, the camera pans down to view his shadow.

Although McKellen quotes from Olivier in his presentation of the film, the pupil challenges the master by implicitly confronting what Olivier's film represents. Olivier's *Richard* is an art film, an attempt to extend British national culture's literary dominance onto the new genre of film. In its own way, Olivier's project is a form of manipulating mass culture—it takes solace in the fact that Shakespeare's artistic superiority translates into the film's artistic superiority. McKellen abandons this aestheticism, this "myth" of Shakespeare's timelessness. Instead, he assigns Shakespeare to a specific, though anachronistic, time period and appropriates one of the play's major themes—Richard's manipulation of the masses—to fit with a twentieth-century recasting of the play.

Shakespeare's thematic use of mass manipulation occurs not only in *Richard III* but also in a number of his histories. We find this theme used for "good" in *Henry V* and for "evil" in *Richard III*. Precisely because in Shakespeare political manipulation can be used for either good or evil, the theme of politics as stagecraft takes with it a certain ambiguity. McKellen seizes on this theme and incorporates modern elements of political stagecraft made possible by twentieth-century technology. McKellen's *Richard III* is not only a critique of mass media and mass persuasion in general, but it is also a commentary on film as a genre of mass media, implicating both Olivier's *Richard* and film itself.

In the original play, Shakespeare explores the theme of politics as stagecraft. One of the best illustrations of the theme occurs in 3.4 of the text in which Richard orchestrates Hastings's "betrayal" and uses it as a means to legitimize his execution. McKellen establishes the scene as a sort of board meeting involving England's key players—Hastings, Stanley, Buckingham, Catesby, the Archbishop, and Lord Protector Gloucester—to discuss the crowning of Prince Edward. Hastings is imagined here as the

British Prime Minister, a man who “loves” the princes too well to participate in Richard’s plan to seize the crown. Richard, who knows where Hastings’s loyalty lies, purposely arrives late to the meeting, allowing the bumbling and oblivious prime minister to agree to speak on Richard’s behalf, the first of his sins of naivete. Richard takes his seat at the head of the boardroom. He then looks down at the table, playing distraught and preoccupied. Seconds that last an eternity pass as the others wait for Richard to begin the meeting. Richard begins solemnly, “I pray you all, tell me what they deserve / That do conspire my death with devilish plots, and that have prevailed upon my body with their damned witchcraft?” (59-62). Hastings takes Richard’s bait and says, “I say, my lord, they have deserved death.” Richard removes his deformed hand from his pocket, rolls up his sleeves, and proceeds to wave the “blasted sapling” in the face of all who are present and accuses Queen Elizabeth of bewitching him. Hastings defends the queen, “If she has done this deed, my noble lord”—to which Richard interrupts, “If? You protector of this damned Elizabeth, Talk you to me of ‘ifs’? You are a traitor.” Richard slaps Hastings’s back with his mangled limb, “Off with his head” (adapted from 59-76). In this scene, we see how powerful Richard has become. Everyone present at the meeting fears Richard and refuses to speak up on Hastings’s behalf. Further, Richard now can sanction an execution without a legitimate reason.³⁷

Shakespeare also presents the theme of politics as stagecraft in 3.7 in which Catesby and Buckingham entreat the citizens to make Richard their ruler. Buckingham failed to sway public opinion in favor of Richard, but he has persuaded the Mayor and the

³⁷ In the play, Richard capitalizes on Hastings’s romantic affair with Edward’s former mistress, Jane Shore, as a reason to execute him. Richard accuses not just Elizabeth, but Elizabeth and mistress Shore, of

citizens to ask for Richard's consent to rule. Buckingham announces to the mayor and the citizens that Richard "is not an Edward! He is not lulling on a lewd love-bed" (71-72). Instead, Richard is in Christian meditation. When he finally comes on stage, the Mayor notes that Richard "stands... 'tween two clergymen!" Buckingham echoes, calling the bishops, "[t]wo props of virtue for a Christian prince" (95-96).

McKellen takes this scene a step further by imagining the scene as a modern stage for mass media; he converts the meeting at the castle to a press conference. While Richard is in a green room having make-up applied, Catesby and Buckingham stand in the pressroom awaiting the media. Once the citizens enter, the two men stage a conversation about Richard's piety. Richard comes out of the green room, Bible in hand, and reacts coyly to Catesby and Buckingham's requests. He mock-refuses once, and Buckingham storms off, taking the media with him. After Catesby and Richard have a staged exchange about Richard's "duty" to rule, he calls back the mayor and the citizens and agrees "to have patience to endure the load." He adds with false humility, "[f]or God knows, and you may partly see, how far I am from the desire of this" (adapted from 230, 234-35).

Immediately following the press conference, McKellen's film shows Richard's rise to power as he employs *mise-en-scene* to conjure parallels with Nazi Germany. George L. Geckle notes that the scene is patterned after Nazi rallies. He quotes from a program of the film that "[t]he barren, concrete lower levels [of Earls Court Exhibition Center] provided the behind-the-scenes area of the arena where Richard held a Nuremberg style rally" (56). Further, Geckle makes this observation of the 1990 play

conspiring against him: "Edward's wife...[c]onsorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore, / That by their

that applies equally to the film: "The London production's depiction of Richard accepting the crown at the end of 3.7 included clear parallels to Hitler's mass rallies, complete with armbands, Sieg Heil-type chants, microphones, and spotlights" (56). The scene begins with a shot of battle drums being played by Richard's militia. Stanley and the Archbishop walk behind the drums, and the camera follows them as they walk to greet Buckingham who stands near a podium. Buckingham approaches the podium and announces, "Long live King Richard" to which we hear cheering. Buckingham moves to his right. As Richard moves towards the podium, the camera slowly dollies back to reveal that the podium is an enormous structure that bears Richard's symbol, the boar. A spotlight flashes and sustains its gaze on Richard, and a red banner bearing the boar symbol unfolds behind the platform. The scene culminates in a extreme long shot with Richard distantly waving at the crowd as armed guards surround the platform. The camera cuts to another extreme long shot, this time of the crowd—a mass of black uniforms surrounded by red banners.

These scenes—the board meeting, the press conference, and the rally—build on Shakespeare's theme of politics as stagecraft and locate it within twentieth-century forms of mass persuasion. If Shakespeare was commenting on how easily the public could be duped, then McKellen reminds us of how twentieth-century audiences (particularly the Germans) *were* duped. McKellen's relocation of the text in semi-historical Britain between the wars further warns that tyranny could happen to "Allied" nations as well. In all three staged scenes, McKellen demonstrates mass persuasion through different forms of political spectacle.

While McKellen uses the details from Shakespeare's text to create political spectacle, he also incorporates twentieth-century tools of mass media to comment on how dangerous these tools can be when they are manipulated. Photography as a modern form of mass media recurs throughout the film. McKellen gives us visual cues that photography will play a part in the adaptation early as he captures before the Yorkist party a snapshot of the royal family. At the party, we see Clarence first in a darkroom developing pictures, and at the party, he busies himself with playing amateur photographer. In these two instances, photography serves as a harmless diversion. Only when the camera falls into the hands of Richard does photography become nefarious.

Richard uses photography with Machiavellian intentions. After he has sentenced Hastings to be hanged, Richard and Buckingham meet with the Mayor and explain to him that Hastings "forced [them] to this execution." While Richard and Buckingham stand and deliver their case, Catesby sits on the couch with the mayor and passes him images of Hastings's noosed head. The mayor concludes that Hastings "deserved his death," shakes hands with Richard, and exits. Buckingham and Catesby follow, leaving Richard alone in the room. He puts on a record, lies down on the couch and taps his jackbooted foot to the tune of the muted jazzy trumpet while he flips through the same images that the Mayor perused. Photography serves a dual role in this scene. First, it is used as "verification" of Hastings's supposed treachery, verification that has the potential to become amplified through mass mediums such as partisan newspapers or other forms of propaganda. Second, photography is harnessed by Richard to satisfy his need for morbid

entertainment, a need that closely resembles a craving for pornography.³⁸ Later in the film, we see photography as a more explicit manipulation of mass media. Before the press conference, Richard and Buckingham pose shaking hands for a member of the paparazzi, both assuming false smiles and then taking them off once the shot is taken so that they can discuss, ironically, Buckingham's failure to manipulate the masses.

By elucidating modern manipulations of mass media, McKellen's *Richard III* challenges Olivier's method of approaching Shakespeare. Olivier sold his film as an intellectually and culturally superior art form extending from Britain's rich literary tradition. McKellen attacks this very notion of "culturally superior" art forms, claiming that all popular art becomes part of the state's tradition. In other words, Olivier's "aestheticism" of Shakespeare could be nothing more than British nationalistic propaganda. McKellen's film offers a visual example, suggesting that art serves as nationalistic propaganda, namely the enormous painting that hangs behind the desk in his war-room. The painting frames Richard's whole body, dressed in Fascist military attire complete with three-quarter-length jacket, as he stands rigidly braced for battle while a storm brews in the background. McKellen's film implicitly attempts to validate the cultural materialist notion that what is considered "high art" depends on what the dominant ideology sanctions. In this film, art must support the ideology of the pseudo-Fascist British state (which is to say that of Richard) in order to be understood as such.

³⁸ The inference that Richard is pornographically fascinated with pictures of Hastings's dead corpse is especially true when viewed in light of Richard's pattern of attraction to and companionship with men. Richard's preference of men over women is best understood in light the scene after Clarence's murder where Richard is shown in ecstasy receiving an arm massage from Ratcliff. A knock on the door summons Ratcliff from performing "hand-job" on Richard. He returns to his master with Clarence's glasses. Satisfied, Richard dismisses his male servant. Lady Anne enters and remains at the foot of the steps, scantily clad in lingerie falling gently off her shoulders. Richard notices her, walks over in what we expect

While McKellen's *Richard III* offers a critique of the dangers of mass media and its effect on mass culture, it is also an active participant in that realm of mass media. As we have already observed, one of McKellen's aims for the film was to make money, essentially to persuade a mass audience to buy tickets. McKellen appeals to a popular audience in his film by weaving images and suggestions of sex and violence into a relatively sexless text.

McKellen adds images of illicit and legitimate sexuality to stimulate and manipulate the viewer. From the opening montage showing the Yorkists ready themselves for the party, we see King Edward's nurse giving him a pill. After popping it in his mouth, his hand wanders underneath her skirt, visually portraying Edward's lasciviousness underlined in the text. Also, McKellen has Richmond marry young Elizabeth before the Battle of Bosworth Field. The filmmaker gives us a scene between the two young lovers presumably after they have consummated their wedding vows.³⁹ The scene pictures both Richmond and Elizabeth naked but selectively hidden by white sheets.⁴⁰

to be a sexual embrace, but instead, he switches off the light and turns to resume his spot in his chair. Sexually rejected, Anne skulks back up the steps.

³⁹ The scene between Richmond and Elizabeth seems to echo Zeffirelli's employment of this same visual tactic in his *Romeo and Juliet*.

⁴⁰ It should be noted that some discretion was taken in making the film less sexual than it could have been. From the published screenplay, this scene was cut from the film:

26 INT. CATESBY'S OFFICE
Sir William Catesby, the King's private secretary, is on the phone to Lord Hastings, the Prime Minister.

CATESBY

The King's physicians fear him mightily.
Prime Minister, the King doth call for you.

27 INT. HASTINGS' PRIVATE APARTMENT AT 10, DOWNING STREET
Hastings, 60 years old, is answering the phone, as his teenage mistress massages his fat body towards orgasm.

HASTINGS

Catesby, I come! (quoted in Buhler, 42)

Violence, too, pervades the film, satisfying viewers' collective bloodlust. The film opens with Richard shooting Prince Edward in the middle of his forehead and then moving to kill King Henry at point blank range. Next, we observe the murder of Clarence in a bathtub. Tyrrel splashes water in his victim's face, puts Clarence in a headlock, slits his throat, and pushes his struggling body underneath the water. A high angle shot captures the bathtub's water turn red with blood. Then, we witness Hastings's execution as it is recorded from a low angle shot of a trap door that drops open. The body swings loosely down towards the camera and snaps into rigidity in synchronization with Hastings's neck. Later, McKellen shows us Tyrrel strangling a bloody Buckingham with a thin wire in the back of a military truck while Richard sits in the front, calmly puffing on a cigarette. Finally, at the Battle of Bosworth Field, filmed like a ground battle in Operation Desert Storm complete with tanks, jeeps, and horses, Richard's jeep gets stuck in a ditch. After screaming his famous line—"A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!"—while pressing futilely on the gas pedal, Richard turns around in the vehicle and shoots Tyrrel in the head. Contradicting McKellen's own explanation of Richard's character—"Richard III is not a mass murderer. Richard III doesn't actually kill anybody in this movie, nor in the play. He orders other people to kill and they agree to do it. He's a tyrant. That's the difference"⁴¹—in this scene, Richard becomes a cold-blooded killer of his ally throughout.

Most tellingly of McKellen's appeals to the visual tropes of sex and violence is his fusion of the two in a scene involving the queen's brother, Rivers. We see a maid delivering towels to the outside of a hotel room from which she hears sexual noises.

⁴¹ This quote comes from the McKellen interview provided by the Richard III Society homepage:

Embarrassed, she smiles and walks away. Tyrrel urgently marches past her and past the camera. The camera cuts from outside the hotel room's door to inside the room where we observe a shirtless Rivers handcuffed to a bed in his hotel room while a stewardess aggressively kisses his chest. Rivers and the stewardess grunt with passion as the stewardess crawls out of the camera's view to perform fellatio on him. Suddenly, Rivers stops panting. He looks down and sees a blade emerge from his stomach. The camera cuts to a high angle shot of Rivers with the stewardess at his lap. The two lovers watch in horror as the blade thrusts up through his stomach from under the bed. The two scream in synchronization as the scream becomes a train whistle in a morbidly orgasmic audio match. The scene cuts from the bedroom to a tunnel through which we see a train rushing to deliver Prince Edward to be crowned.⁴² The scene manipulates the viewer as it first commands visual and aural attention with its near-pornographic depiction of Rivers' and the stewardess's lovemaking. However, Rivers' nervous pause as he looks down at his torso signals an abrupt change in action. Instead of the cries that we heard earlier as Rivers was anticipating his orgasm, McKellen shifts dramatically from sex to violence as the later cry signals both shock and pain. Further, without giving the viewer time to absorb the action, McKellen's cut to the tunnel suggests the oral or vaginal pleasure that Rivers had been enjoying. The train rushes through, recalling the violence that interrupted that pleasure.

I suggest that the two opposing stances on mass media—an admonition of its abuses on one hand and a vile use or exploitation of it on the other—combine and

www.r3.org/mckellen/film/mckella.html, p. 5.

culminate to communicate an essentially ambiguous message on the nature of mass media and mass culture. The message mirrors McKellen's own ambiguous twist on the film's ending. The film ends in a shootout between Richard and Richmond. Richard is on the run, where he comes to the top of an uncompleted building. Seeing nowhere to run, Richard tightrope walks to the middle of one of the beams. Richmond finally catches up to him. Richard, aware that he is caught, extends a hand to Richmond and delivers this part of his battle speech: "Let's to it pell-mell; / If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell." He then jumps into a pit of flames. Richmond shoots his gun at the grinning Joker Richard as Al Jolson's "I'm Sittin' On Top of the World" plays in the background.⁴³ Richmond turns to the camera—the only character to address the camera besides Richard—to deliver a subtle smirk. This smirk symbolizes the ambiguity of the film's stance on the Shakespearean/Tudor paradigm. This paradigm posits that during the War of the Roses, power shifted, from legitimate ruler (Richard II), to illegitimate rulers (Henry Bolingbroke-Richard III), to legitimate ruler once again. Richmond's smirk suggests that Richmond might have learned the lesson of politics as stagecraft from Richard and that he might repeat the Machiavellian pattern.

McKellen's *Richard III* has a sense of self-awareness about it. The film makes the audience aware that film, itself, is a form of mass media in the scene of Richard's coronation. We see Richard being crowned in color to regal music playing in the background. The film then shifts to black and white, a few seconds back, as we watch

⁴² This sequence of scenes also seems to allude to two films by Alfred Hitchcock. In *The 39 Steps*, Hitchcock makes an auditory echo as he makes the sound of a scream match that of a train whistle. Also, in *North by Northwest*, we see the same train and tunnel imagery.

⁴³ McKellen's use of this image alludes to the gangster film, *White Heat*, in which Jimmy Cagney says "Top of the World, Ma" before he is gunned down.

the scene again. The camera dollies back to reveal that the film is a projected image that Richard, Buckingham, Catesby, and Anne are all watching. Anne stares blankly at the screen, a cigarette dangling from her lips as now she has become a pacified member of "mass culture." The use of the film-within-the-film communicates the message that if McKellen's *Richard III* delivers an ambiguous message on the nature of mass media, then it does so knowingly. McKellen, like the winking and nodding Richard, tells us exactly what evil deeds he is up to.

In my analysis of McKellen's *Richard III*, I have understood the film as both a continuance of and a reaction to Olivier's Shakespearean film tradition; McKellen follows in Olivier's footsteps, but critiques each step as he goes. McKellen undermines the very reverence for Shakespeare that guides Olivier's project. Instead, McKellen uses the play to comment on mass media's influence on contemporary culture.⁴⁴ At the same time that McKellen issues a warning about the dangers of mass media in the hands of a tyrant, he subtly manipulates the viewer by taking advantage of the very media forms that he admonishes, creating witty yet biting irony.

Thus far, I have looked at two British film versions of *Richard III*. In the next chapter I examine an American adaptation of *Richard II*, Al Pacino's *Looking for Richard*. Like McKellen's *Richard III*, Pacino's film defies and embraces the notion of tradition that Olivier's film represents. However, it does so by embracing both its American roots and the search that guides the narrative.

⁴⁴ McKellen argues that Shakespeare used history in the same vein: "Shakespeare himself was perhaps only interested in historical fact insofar as it might illuminate the present. He was much more concerned with

Chapter III. Shakespeare and Tradition: An Outsider's Perspective in Pacino's *Looking for Richard*

In October 1996, a year after McKellen's film was released, American actor Al Pacino distributed yet another film version Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Pacino's *Looking for Richard* poises itself between two film genres—the full-length feature film and the documentary—resulting in a faster, looser Shakespeare. Pacino both dismantles and reconstructs the Shakespeare's dramatic structure, fragmenting the spatial boundaries and temporal logic of the play and weaving in a parallel, and not wholly unrelated, plot line: Pacino's own quest narrative. Pacino struggles to film and to perform Shakespeare as Richard strives for the English throne. Although Pacino's *Looking for Richard* seems “haphazard”⁴⁵ in its reconstruction of the play and “funny, inventive, and self-depreciating”⁴⁶ in its tone, the film is more than just a playful homage to Shakespeare. In this chapter, I understand the film in three distinct ways: first, I focus on the film as an American response to a British-dominated tradition, a tradition headed by Sir Laurence Olivier and continued by Sir Ian McKellen; second, I discuss the critical reception of the film as a deconstructive text; and third, I argue from a deconstructive standpoint that although the film attempts to find its “center” in Medieval and Renaissance historicity, it actually fills that void with Pacino's previous acting experience as a villain in Brian DePalma's *Scarface* (1983).

It has been generally assumed that the British “own” Shakespeare. Indeed, Shakespeare embodies the strong literary tradition on which England prides itself. In his

politics generally than the accuracy of historical events, which he happily reconstructed to suit his storytelling” (www.r3.org/mckellen/film/mckella.html 1).

review of *Looking for Richard*, British film critic Richard Corliss writes, "The film is really just one vast luvvie fest, but somehow more forgivable because the luvvies in question are mainly American rather than British, and because you can't help being touched to see how meekly they come to kneel at our feet looking for guidance about Shakespeare" (89). Here, we see the cultural elitism assumed by a British reviewer in the name of Shakespeare and the reviewer's perceived inferiority complex on the part of American actors. Corliss's comment is a response to the introductory framework that Pacino sets up to justify his "Americanization" of a British-dominated tradition.

In stark contrast to Olivier's 1955 *Richard* that aims to bring a specified knowledge of British history and legend to the viewer and McKellen's updated 1995 *Richard* that disregards the history of the War of the Roses as obsolete and essentially rewrites history, Pacino's film works from the outside in. Olivier's and McKellen's British identity allows them to assume a pedagogical (in the case of Olivier) or creative (regarding McKellen) stance with respect to British national history. Pacino's American identity makes him an outsider to this tradition and deprives him of some of the freedom felt by his British counterparts. In response to this unfamiliarity with the British literary and theatrical tradition as embodied by Shakespeare, Pacino endeavors to "Americanize" *Richard*, paralleling his own quest as an American actor to become part of Shakespeare's tradition with Richard's quest to assume the throne.

Pacino constructs a dichotomy between British and American ways of understanding Shakespeare through his quest narrative. Pacino's quest as an American

⁴⁵ Geoffrey McNab uses this adjective to talk about the film's casting procedures, citing Alec Baldwin's line from the film—" \$40 a day and all the doughnuts you can eat"—however, "haphazard" seems, too, to apply to Pacino's structuring of the project.

actor and filmmaker inside the world of British theatrical tradition begins with Pacino's filmic metaphor of an actor first going onstage. Set in the backstage of a London theatre where *Richard III* was performed three hundred years ago, Pacino, seated at a table with costar Kevin Spacey, jokes with director of photography Robert Leacock (who is invisible to us) about who should call "action." The camera cuts to Pacino standing up with his back turned to us. We hear "action" and Pacino turns to address the camera and asks self-consciously, "Do I look all right?" The camera follows Pacino as he stumbles through the backstage corridors mumbling about how dark it is. He gathers his confidence, saying to himself confidently, "This is my entrance." After making gestures that suggest that he is trying to collect his composure, Pacino swipes the curtain out of his way and the camera cuts to a medium shot of him standing onstage against a red curtain. The camera cuts to a point of view shot as Pacino looks towards the audience. The audience consists of an actor dressed as Shakespeare himself, staring remotely away from Pacino's gaze. Upon his first acquaintance with the British literary and theatrical tradition as personified by Shakespeare, Pacino mutters, "Fuck," under his breath and turns to exit the theatre. Clearly, Pacino wants to illustrate the intimidation factor that this tradition holds in this opening scene.

Pacino emphasizes this theme of American intimidation in the face of the lofty British theatrical tradition through his sessions of interviews with American and British actors, directors, and critics alike. In a scene shot at what looks like a cast party, Pacino asks costar Richard Cox, "Americans—what is that thing that gets between us and Shakespeare? That makes some of our best actors just stop when it comes to

⁴⁶ See Richard Corliss's review of *Looking for Richard* in *Time*, 11/4/96, p. 89.

Shakespeare?" The camera cuts to an American actor who responds that Americans feel an "inferiority complex," then to British director Trevor Nunn, who explains that "Americans have been made to feel inhibited," and finally to the internationally famous British actor John Gielgud who locates the problem with the "fact" that, "Americans don't read books." Through this series of interviews, Pacino confirms the cause of the anxiety he feels as an American actor approaching a British text and demonstrates the fact that prejudices exist concerning the ability of Americans to perform Shakespeare.

However, in confronting the intimidation factor that Shakespeare's text holds over American actors and filmmakers, Pacino discovers his own individual contribution to the Shakespearean tradition. T. S. Eliot helps elucidate this point in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." In his discussion of poetry, Eliot asserts that poets need to engage with and move beyond the poetry of their predecessors in order to extend the tradition. In the work, Eliot writes that individual talent involves a negotiation between preexisting works and the artist's innovation and appropriation of these older works. Discussing the poetic tradition, Eliot observes, "Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice [i.e., that of praising a poet because he least resembles anyone else] we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously." Eliot admonishes that we should be cautious of praising an artist solely on the basis of novelty. Instead, we should consider the contribution of the work to the tradition as a whole: "The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and

this is conformity between the old and the new" (2173). Eliot confirms, at this point in the essay, that any "advancement" of the tradition necessarily involves a rejection of previous works. The logic that Eliot applies to literary predecessors pertains in significant ways to the issue of adaptation. A film adaptation of a theatrical text (especially one that spans three hours-plus) must translate the text into the medium of film. This process necessarily involves either cutting the text or representing the written word through filmic images. Since Olivier and McKellen had already adapted the play, the challenge for Pacino was this: how was he going to differentiate himself from the previous adaptors? Furthermore, like McKellen, Pacino had to confront Olivier's theatrical and cultural "authority." The way that Pacino creates a space within the tradition is by stressing his American-ness. Using Eliot's model, Pacino's Americanization of Shakespeare enters the tradition by overtly dismissing its constructed superciliousness.

Pacino rejects the intimidation posed by the British tradition when he tackles the use of iambic pentameter. He sets up the scene with an interview with American actor Kevin Conway, who mentions that classically trained Shakespearean actors "have certain things that they can use at a moment's notice." Conway then mentions iambic pentameter. The camera cuts to the streets of New York where Pacino is walking with fellow actor Frederick Kimball and producer Michael Hadge. Pacino asks them, "Everybody says all the time, 'Iambic pentameter in Shakespeare. Iambic pentameter.' What is that supposed to mean?" The camera then crosscuts between interviews with various British actors and the street scene involving Pacino, Kimball, and Hadge. The

scene culminates as Kimball tries to explain an iamb using the simile of an anteater.⁴⁷

The camera captures a close-up of Pacino, who looks to us, raises his eyebrows as if to suggest that the subject has grown tedious and, as if to confirm the gesture, slowly shakes his head. Despite Kimball's efforts to make this concept accessible, Pacino's gesture makes the point that an extensive knowledge of the rhythms of Shakespeare's language is not necessary to uncover its semantics.

This anecdote, this rejection of the "technical" knowledge of Shakespeare, is part of Pacino's larger project to construct and to set in opposition British and American cultures. At first, Pacino makes the British seemingly omniscient in their understanding of Shakespeare. Besides his use of British actors to explain their intimate knowledge of Shakespeare's text—a prime example is Vanessa Redgrave and her explanation of Shakespeare's "iambos of the soul"—Pacino also incorporates the British scholars Emrys Jones and Barbara Everett into the film to offer critical, and presumably, authoritative commentary. Very early in the film, Everett comments on Shakespeare's growth as a playwright and his precocious insights into human motivation and his early allegorical understanding of the stage. However, an unmistakable shift in attitude regarding British authority occurs when Pacino's costar, Frederick Kimball, in a melodramatic diatribe, challenges the authority of the scholars that Pacino consults. In the midst of a discussion between Kimball, Pacino, and actress Wynona Ryder as to what circumstances necessitate the meeting of Richard and Lady Anne, Kimball offers his take on the matter. Kimball proposes that since Anne's political future is unstable with the deaths of her husband and father-in-law, Anne's appearance in the London streets is a deliberate ploy

⁴⁷ According to Kimball, an anteater is a visual metaphor for an iamb because its body is small in the front

to attract Richard. Pacino asks, "Does anyone have a better thing than Frederick on this?," to which Kimball theatrically responds:

You're making this entire documentary in order to show that actors truly are the ... possessors of a tradition, the proud inheritors of the understanding of Shakespeare, for Christ's sake! And then you turn around and say, I'm gonna, I'm gonna go get a scholar to explain it to you? This is ridiculous!

Despite Kimball's protestations, Pacino cuts to an interview session with British Shakespeare scholar, Emrys Jones, where Pacino and Kimball ask why Richard needs to marry Anne. Jones replies, "I really don't know why he needed to marry her historically. I simply don't know." The camera then captures Pacino and Kimball eagerly leaning toward the scholar's words. Kimball smugly smiles as Jones fails to elaborate, validating his initial point: that actors know as much as scholars. However, this exchange works to support Pacino's implicit thesis on which his forced entry into the British theatrical tradition is based: that knowledge of Shakespeare is not based on nationality.

Pacino capitalizes on his outsider status in his quest narrative. He constructs his subject position as an American, an actor, and a Shakespearean novice who seeks to break into the institutionalized Shakespearean tradition.⁴⁸ However, what complicates this relatively simple narrative is the actual play that Pacino seeks to perform. Just how does Pacino understand *Richard III*? Further, how does he understand the starring role of Richard that he takes on? And moreover, how does Pacino reconcile two competing

and big in the back.

⁴⁸ In his book, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen*, Kenneth S. Rothwell describes Pacino's subject positioning as "adopt[ing] a Socratic pose of ignorance." (227).

narratives: Pacino's quest to understand and make accessible Shakespeare's text and Richard's quest to actualize his dream upon the crown? One of the major problems with understanding the play, both for Pacino and for us, is the element of history, the four hundred-plus years that stand between Shakespeare's text and Pacino's.

Douglas Lanier explores this problem of the history gap in his article, "Now, the Presence of History in *Looking for Richard*." Lanier notes that, "one [problem] is historical, concerned with (re)assembling the historical events and archaic cultural conventions which Shakespeare would have assumed his audience knew." By examining Pacino's street interviews at the start of the film, Lanier concludes that Pacino and the viewer "recognize that the prior knowledge once shared by audience and author has now been lost" (42). However, Pacino asserts in the film that the problem of historicity can be overcome through a holistic reading of Shakespeare's language. He tells us, "You don't need to understand every single word that's said, as long as you get the gist of what's going on. Just trust it and you'll get it." Interviewee Vanessa Redgrave echoes this sentiment. She concedes that in Shakespeare's language, there are centuries of "words divorced from Truth," but asserts that Shakespeare's iambs are "the iambs of the soul." In other words, by speaking and performing Shakespeare's text, actors and viewers alike can decipher the *universal meaning*. H. R. Coursen comments on Pacino's film in this way:

If all of that is taken into account—the old church with the playground in front of it, the ignorance and the intelligence of the intended audience, the debates in which the actors engage as they read the script, the ways in which the script has to be translated into a modern idiom before the

reasons for Shakespeare's words become apparent, the script itself may come in to view. If so, it will emerge in a context that allows it to make sense—of itself, of the context, and of the relationships between script and context that are the meanings communicated by any production of Shakespeare; that is, unless the play is hidden from its audience behind layers of velvet diction and reverence. Here, the finished production—the goal—is a function of the process. (155)

According to Coursen, the assumption guiding the film is that by placing the performance and discussion of *Richard III* in a late twentieth-century context, the “original” late sixteenth-century context can be retrieved. In Coursen's reading of the film, Pacino's quest narrative becomes what might loosely be called a “structuralist” attempt to find the center of the text.⁴⁹ In some ways, the film seems supports Coursen's structuralist analysis. Indeed, at points in the film Pacino uses historicity as a means of “discovering” the text. Dissatisfied with the scenery that New York has to offer, Pacino relocates the film in London—first to the site where builders were reconstructing the Globe, then to a stage where the play was performed four hundred years ago.⁵⁰ However, in contrast to Coursen, I suggest that the film follows a *deconstructive* rather than a structuralist paradigm: the imaginary center of *Looking for Richard* that Pacino tries to fill with historicity dissolves as the present alienates the film from the play's past.

⁴⁹ I use this term to suggest in Coursen's understanding of Pacino's underlying assumption and methodology—that by studying the language and structure of a specific Shakespeare play, one can make generalizations about Shakespeare's culture and further discover universal truths—the film imitates the critical approach that structuralist critics take towards literature.

⁵⁰ It is at this second setting that Pacino rehearses Richard's dream sequence, justifying the change of locale as a way of practicing “method acting-type stuff.” Pacino's method acting is his way of trying to channel the character that Shakespeare intended.

In, *Shakespeare in the Movies: From the Silent Era to Shakespeare in Love*,

Douglas Brode dedicates an entire chapter to *Richard III* adaptations. His analysis of Pacino's film is entitled "Deconstructing Pacino: *Looking for Richard*." In the article, Brode speculates on the nature of Pacino's project:

The results [of the film's stress on researching, rehearsing, and shooting] might alternately have been titled *Deconstructing Pacino*, revealing as much about the well-regarded star as his favorite author. As Pacino argues his theories about the play with colleagues, we learn about how he perceives the world—just as everyone's take on a favorite figure from Shakespeare is, however unconsciously, a medium of self-expression.

(38)

Similarly, Kenneth Turan writes in a review of the film in the *New York Times* that *Looking for Richard* is "an attempt, at least in theory, to deconstruct Shakespeare's 'Richard III' and communicate its essence to a mass audience" (1). From these two statements, it is obvious that both Brode and Turan do not understand "deconstruction" in the way that literary critics do. Both apply the term to mean, "to take apart." Both think that there is a center to their respective "deconstructions": Brode posits that the film works to signify Pacino's psychological motivations, while Turan observes that the film endeavors to uncover the "essence" of the text. This irony between the lay usage and the critical usage of "deconstruction" is the very irony that guides a deconstructive reading of the film.

In his seminal deconstructionist essay, "Différance," Derrida begins by defining his term, "*différance*," as the structuralist element that links the original context of a text

with its current meaning: “*Différance* is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each element that is said to be ‘present,’ appearing on the stage of presence, is related to something other than itself but retains the mark of a past element and already lets itself be hollowed out by the mark of its relation to the future” (394). The second part of this definition, this process of “hollowing out” by the future context, makes any type of historicity, from a deconstructive perspective, impossible. Derrida emphasizes this point later in the essay: “The economic character of *différance* in no way implies that the deferred presence can always be recovered, that it simply amounts to an investment that only temporarily and without loss delays the presentation of presence, that is, the perception of gain or the gain of perception” (400). Derrida understands historicity in terms of illusion. To borrow his metaphor, even if we “invest” in historicizing a text, we only “temporarily” get a return because even our investment occurs within the bounds of history. Further, our discernment of a text itself could be illusory—perhaps we only *think* that we understand a text. In any event, Derrida understands the quest to locate the center, the universal meaning of a text, as a process of infinite regress. Moreover, the present and future context in which a text is examined fills that center with contemporary meaning.

Pacino’s overarching thesis in *Looking for Richard* seems to acknowledge Derrida’s notions on the irretrievability of historical context. Early in the film, Pacino elucidates the goal of his film through voice-over narration:

It has always been a dream of mine to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to other people so I asked my friend Frederick Kimball, who is an actor and a writer, and our colleagues Michael Hadge and James

Broad, to join me and by taking this one play, *Richard III*, analyzing 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 that communicate a Shakespeare that is about how we feel and how we think today. That's the effort that we're going to give it.

In this statement, Pacino alludes to historicity, but locates the film firmly in the present. According to Pacino, the purpose of the quest is not to uncover *the* historical Shakespeare, but "to communicate *a* Shakespeare that is about how we feel and how we think *today*." In other words, Pacino in effect acknowledges the deconstructive notion that the present hollows out and fills the text's imaginary center. Further, incidents in the film itself support the idea that the present persistently invades the perception of the past. Film critic Douglas Lanier observes the limits of Pacino's attempts at historicity:

In each [use of historical surroundings], he [Pacino] seems to be looking for a direct connection with the past... Each promises contact with the historical real thing. And yet each encounter seems doomed to disappointment: at the Cloisters, a hodge-podge of medieval architecture plopped in the midst of modern New York, Pacino must struggle to keep starstruck tourists out of his improvised performance space; at the Globe, he performs for modern workmen who are assembling the half-finished reconstruction as he speaks; and at Shakespeare's birthplace, he and Kimball discover not the aura of Shakespeare's historical presence but an absurdly disappointing bed and an overly-sensitive fire alarm.

Further, Lanier notes the Pacino becomes aware of the perils of historicity as the film punctuates the point that the center of the *Richard III* will remain forever mysterious. The present prevents Pacino from recovering the play's deferred presence. In Pacino's second and final use of the Shakespeare character at the film's end (after Pacino has finally killed off Richard) the camera cuts to Shakespeare again, this time "shaking his head in dismay" (50). Here, the film becomes self-reflexively deconstructive as it lightheartedly acknowledges that an "authentic" Shakespearean reading of the play can never be reached.

The two competing narratives that structure *Looking for Richard*—an American filmmaker's quest to enter into the British tradition and an actor's quest to bridge the historical gap—collapse upon one another thematically and influence the central narrative: Pacino's portrayal of Richard's quest for the throne. As an American filmmaker, Pacino's outsider status, in part, already places him "in-character." He, like Richard, stands at the other side of the glass, looking in at a tradition that promises power and prestige. However, what prevents Pacino from taking part in the tradition is, first of all, his American identity, and, second, his lack of familiarity with the social structures that govern Shakespeare's writing. However, what Pacino *does* understand is villainy. Throughout his acting career, Pacino has been attracted to roles in which he plays evil characters—from Michael Corleone in *The Godfather* to Satan in *The Devil's Advocate*. Pacino's approach to Richard's character as filtered through his own quest narrative suggests that he wishes to play Richard as an outsider whose evil stems from his very

inability to assimilate, coupled with some sort of trauma.⁵¹ Pacino's performance as Tony Montana in Brian DePalma's *Scarface* demonstrates this formula for evil. By paralleling *Scarface* with *Looking for Richard*, we observe how Pacino fills the imaginary deconstructive center of Shakespeare's text with his late twentieth century understanding of evil.

According to film historian Neil Sinyard, "[i]t has sometimes been suggested that the narrative paradigm of the classic gangster film, from *Little Caesar* (1930) and *Public Enemy* (1931) to Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* movies, is *Richard III*" (66). Film critic Linda Bradley Salamon elucidates this point by noting the similarities between two films: DePalma's Cuban gangster film, *Scarface*, and Ian McKellen's Shakespeare adaptation, *Richard III*. Although it is not the main focus of her essay, Salamon does briefly discuss Pacino's *Looking for Richard*; however, she dismisses the film with this harsh criticism:

At the end, Pacino stands alone not in the well-deserved isolation that provides catharsis to a tragedy, but in pathos that closes in on self-pity... [Pacino's Richard] is perilously close to a victim for whom the audience is asked to make therapeutic allowance. The *jouissance* of this movie lies in what we learn about acting, not about human evil. (58).

The purpose for even mentioning *Looking for Richard* in her essay is to lead into a discussion of Pacino's performance as a Cuban drug dealer in *Scarface* in comparison to McKellen's film. Salamon begins her analysis by suggesting that Shakespeare's *Richard*

⁵¹ Pacino's digression during Richard's opening soliloquy in which he stresses Richard's deformity suggests that Pacino understands evil as a result of trauma.

III serves as a prototype for American gangster films.⁵² The similarities between the play and the film genre include a central anti-hero who operates according to this code: “Murder—deliberate, violent death—directed by a larger-than-life figure who himself then dies violently.” Salamon follows up this observation by noting that “unquenchable desire drives both anti-heroes as they claw their way to the top of their respective worlds” (59). While Salamon is writing about *Scarface* in comparison to Shakespeare’s *Richard* in general and McKellen’s *Richard* in specific, her argument may be applied to Pacino’s film as well.

Salamon notes the structural similarities between *Scarface* and *Richard III*. She first observes that, “as part of his [i.e., the antihero’s] rise, each man acquires ‘the boss’s woman,’ one who would conventionally seem to be far beyond him” (60). I suggest that precisely because of these structural parallels Pacino’s portrayal of Tony spills over into his depiction of Richard. Indeed, both characters are imposters who usurp power: Tony as a Cuban immigrant who rises to the top of the cocaine industry by killing his boss and Richard as the youngest brother of the king who maneuvers towards the throne by a series of executions. In her essay, Salamon parallels Tony Montana’s illicit courting of Elvira in *Scarface* with Richard’s wooing of Lady Anne in McKellen’s *Richard III*. While, indeed, the theme suffuses both works, McKellen’s *Richard* includes a scene near the end in which Richard attempts to “woo” Queen Elizabeth into allowing him to marry her daughter. Pacino’s film, conversely, omits this scene from Shakespeare’s text. In

⁵² Salamon writes, “The relation of McKellen’s *Richard III* to American gangster films of the 1930s and ‘40s has been well elucidated by James Loehlin, whose essay “Top of the World, Ma” is inspired by the close parallels between the flaming self immolations that bring an end both to McKellen’s Richard and to James Cagney’s Cody Jarrett in Raoul Walsh’s 1949 film *White Heat*” (59).

this way, Pacino's *Looking for Richard* more closely resembles *Scarface*'s structure than does McKellen's film.

Beyond this thematic/structural parallel, the presentation of the wooing scene in Pacino's *Looking for Richard* seems informed by his earlier performance in *Scarface*. Tony's wooing of Elvira in *Scarface* works as a template from which Pacino draws his interpretation on 1.2 of Shakespeare's text. Tony's boss, Frank, has invited Tony to join him, his wife, and a friend, to enjoy a night out at the Babylon club. Frank's wife, Elvira (Michelle Pfeiffer), asks Frank to dance with her. When he refuses, Elvira stands up, looks at Tony, and asks, "How about you?" to which Tony responds by following her out on the dance floor. This scene in the films echoes Kimball's insight in *Looking for Richard* that Lady Anne's encounter with Richard out on the street is not an accident. Both films suggest, in an almost demonic vein, that the woman is partly responsible for her downfall; she, the victim, is the one who invites the victimizer.

Further, in both films, the woman is initially repulsed by the male anti-hero. In *Scarface*, Elvira dances aloofly, always facing away from Tony as he tries to make small talk. Elvira ignores him. Tony finally gets a response from her when he appeals to her vanity: "What's your problem baby? You got a problem? You good looking. You got a beautiful body, beautiful legs, beautiful face with all these guys in love with you." Elvira smiles. Tony continues, "Only you got a look in your eye that you haven't been fucked in a year." Tony's vulgar use of language draws a strong response from Elvira, "When, how, and who I fuck is none of your business." Pacino uses this same strategy in his portrayal of Richard wooing Anne (Winona Ryder). Pacino omits most of the word play

that Shakespeare provides and focuses on Shakespeare's own vulgarity, beginning the exchange between Anne and Richard with these lines:

Anne: And thou unfit for any place but hell.

Richard: Yes, one place, if you will hear me name it.

Anne: Some dungeon.

Richard: Your bedchamber. (1.2.111-14)

Here, we see how Pacino's edited version of Shakespeare's language echoes the dialogue of his earlier film, *Scarface*.

In *Scarface*, Tony, immediately after being rebuked by Elvira's hostile response, aggressively taunts his dance partner, "Now you're talking to me baby. That I like. Keep it coming baby!" Offended, Elvira says sternly to Tony, "Don't call me baby. I'm not your baby." Tony responds confidently, "Not yet, but you gotta give me some time." Similarly, after Richard's sexually suggestive comment in Pacino's adaptation, Pacino cuts to Richard's lines at the end of his meeting with Anne, telling the viewer, "I'll have her, but I will not keep her long" (232). Here, we see how Pacino's choice of dialogue in *Looking for Richard* follows a framework set up by *Scarface*.

Similarly, Salamon notes the structural parallel between DePalma's *Scarface* and McKellen's *Richard III* involving the murder of the anti-hero's second-in-command:

Richard and Tony each bring about the death of the single close associate—the Duke of Buckingham, Manny Ray—who has known his secrets, paved his way, but finally requested more in recompense than these grasping figures are ready to surrender. The second-in-command, a new Lucifer, dares to query the god-like status that the leader has achieved

in his own mind; that pride, in its turn, goes before a fall prefigures the leader's own fall. (62)

This argument applies, too, to Pacino's *Looking for Richard*, but even more significant than the similarities in plot line is the way that Pacino transfers the element of Aristotelian reversal, irony if you will, from one film to the other. DePalma sets up scene leading up to Manny's death as the director shoots a scene where Tony, away on a trip, calls his headquarters in Miami from a payphone. His henchman on the other line tells him that Manny has disappeared and so has his sister, Gina. In the next scene, Tony is back in Miami, where he steps out of a limo and walks up to the door to Manny's house. He knocks. Manny opens the door in a bathrobe and cordially greets him. DePalma switches to slow motion cinematography as Tony, filmed in a close-up, looks past Manny. The camera makes an eye-line match to Gina, who stands at the top of a balcony in Manny's home, herself, too, clad in a bathrobe. The camera cuts back to Tony; his beady dark brown eyes fill with hate as he stares down Manny. We hear gunshots as Tony kills his best friend, unaware that the two had married.

Pacino uses this same sort of blindness in his rendering of Richard's betrayal of Buckingham in 4.2 of the play. Pacino plays out the scene until Buckingham asks for "some little breath, some pause" (21) in order to deliberate as to whether he should agree with Richard's plan to murder the princes. Pacino cuts to a discussion between actor Kevin Spacey and himself, in street clothes and out of character, try to make sense of the scene. Spacey offers this interesting interpretive question: "When he [Buckingham] went away, did he agree to do it, or was he gonna come back and say, 'I can't, but give me what you promised me'?" The camera cuts to another discussion, this time between

Kimball and Pacino. Kimball answers Spacey's question: "I have a feeling that he comes back and says, 'well, okay—we have to do it, let's do it. Let's bite the bullet; let's do it. But it's too late.'"

Considering the comments made by Spacey and Kimball, Pacino constructs the scene in such a way that leads us to believe that Buckingham has consented to Richard's will as Spacey's Buckingham amiably approaches Richard saying, "My lord, I have considered in my mind / the late request that you did sound me in" (83-4). Pacino's Richard, embittered by what he perceived to be rejection by Buckingham, ignores Buckingham's pleasant mood and sinks into his own isolation. Paranoid, Richard jumps up at Buckingham from his throne, yells, "I am not in the vein," and metaphorically stabs his former ally with his staff. This blinded, violent action mirrors Tony's shooting of Manny. Further, this stabbing of Buckingham foreshadows Buckingham's own demise, presented in Pacino's film in the dream sequence.

Pacino's experience with playing an anti-hero in *Scarface* predicated and shaped both his performance in and production of *Looking for Richard*. At times, Pacino's Richard is his Tony Montana incarnate; he yells at the three messengers in 4.4 with the same ferocity that Tony unleashes on his subordinates.⁵³ If Pacino's understanding of his Tony character in *Scarface* informed his understanding of his Richard character in his

⁵³ Further, Pacino's rendering of Richard's isolation at the end of the dream sequence in 5.3 matches the emotional intensity of Tony's isolation in the bathtub scene of *Scarface*. In *Scarface*, DePalma shows Tony lying in an enormous bathtub while Elvira and Manny stand outside the tub and take turns talking to him. Elvira is the first to desert Tony, insulting him as an "immigrant Spic." Manny leaves Tony moments later, claiming that he has a date. Tony, left by himself and paranoid that the world is against him, screams in futility at his wife and friend. The camera pans upward to capture the tub from a bird's-eye view, punctuating Tony's isolation. Conjuring this same sense of paranoia and isolation, Pacino's Richard yells at the imaginary spirits in his dream. Punctuating this is the camera's high angle footage of a waking but disturbed Richard lying on his back.

adaptation, then would it not follow, too, that Pacino understood Tony and Richard as having similar psychological motivations?

The question that *Looking for Richard* raises about Shakespeare's play and attempts to answer is: what drives Richard to commit such heinous acts? I suggest that by paralleling the two films, *Looking for Richard* and *Scarface*, inference as to the nature of Pacino's own understanding of radical evil can be drawn. The problem with Pacino's film is that it matches the emotional intensity of DePalma's *Scarface*, but it gestures towards but never completes its psychological portrait of Richard. This is the very problem that Eliot had with *Hamlet*. Eliot writes:

Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison lie and obstruct action. (125)

Here, Eliot provides the concept behind his notion of the objective correlative. In other words, Eliot feels that *Hamlet* fails, in a sense, because it lacks an objective impetus that justifies later incidents within a text. In the same way, in *Looking for Richard*, Richard's murderous deeds and strong emotions far exceed the motivation that Pacino attributes to him. Pacino suggests that the etiology of Richard's diseased soul lies in his deformity. We see this in a montage sequence of fast cuts interrupting Richard's opening soliloquy. When Richard comes to the lines, "Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time" (20), Pacino echoes the word, "deformed," through voice-over narration, omnisciently

suggesting that this word sums up Richard's inadequacies.⁵⁴ However, in my appropriation of Eliot's insight, Richard's struggle with his own deformity is not enough to justify his actions.

Conversely, in *Scarface*, Pacino's Tony does have an objective correlative. While the scar on his face perhaps causes him to feel some sort of inadequacy—the Miami police department uses it as an excuse to question and abuse him at the start of the film—it is the early traumatic experience of watching a friend get killed in front of him (by a chainsaw no less) that actualizes his inadequacies in the form of violence. The objective correlative that *Looking for Richard* lacks is that initial trauma experience. I suggest that this trauma would justify, within the text, Richard's use of violence. Further, although the trauma experience is missing from Pacino's text, I think that it is central to his understanding of radical evil.

Obviously, Tony Montana and Richard III are vastly different characters; each occupies a different world and exhibits varying capacities for evil. Further, Tony Montana's psychological portrait seems more intricate than does Richard's, at least from the single text *Richard III*. However, the fact that Pacino grafts a psychological reading onto the play opens up a new critical door for Shakespeare's text itself. This occurs primarily because there exists within Shakespeare's oeuvre the necessary materials to extract a detailed trauma narrative as a way to explain Richard's diabolism. Though it is rarely touched upon in performance, and Pacino completely misses it in his performance,

⁵⁴ The montage sequence involves a series of fast cuts: from Richard cast in full costume facing us, to Richard's back as he turns to face us, to Richard's shadow to drawing of a madman on antiquated yellow paper, to a long distorted shot of Richard, to a drawing of a club foot on the same yellow paper, and finally, to a drawing on the same old-looking paper of a thin boy's torso with a hunchback.

Richard suffers the trauma of hearing of his father's cruel murder at the hands of Margaret in 4 *Henry VI*:

Messenger By many hands your father was subdued,
But only slaughtered by the ireful arm
Of unrelenting Clifford and the Queen,
Who crowned the gracious Duke in high despite,
Laughed in his face; and when with grief he wept,
The ruthless Queen gave him to dry his cheeks
A napkin steeped in harmless blood
Of sweet young Rutland, by rough Clifford slain.
And after many scorns, many foul taunts,
They took his head, and on the gates of York
They set the same, and there it doth remain,
The saddest spectacle that e'er I viewed. (2.1.56-67)

In light of Freudian notions of trauma and repression, this spectacle of death may be something that future adapters might want to explore, especially when coupled by Richard's reaction:

I cannot weep, for all my body's moisture
Scarce serves to quench my furnace-burning heart;...
To weep is to make less the depth of grief.
Tears, then, for babes; blows and revenge for me!
Richard, I bear thy name. I'll venge thy death,
Or die renowned by attempting it. (79-88).

Here, Richard internalizes the trauma, almost witnessing it as he hears it. Further, he grows calloused and becomes a Hamlet who does act, who acts hyperbolically, to avenge his father's death.

Pacino's *Looking for Richard* attempts to bridge gaps, both cultural and historical. However, what the film uses to bridge those gaps is another issue entirely. I have argued that Pacino uses a number of tools to get into the mind of Richard: he takes advantage of his outsider status as an American striving to become part of a British tradition, and he fills what for the deconstructive critic is the always imaginary center of Shakespeare's play with structural and psychological elements from Brian DePalma's *Scarface*. At first glance, these two strategies seem diametrically opposed—like the immeasurable psychological discord between *Looking for Richard's* "Pacino" character and its Richard character. However, the two strategies blend and overlap as they contribute to Pacino's understanding of Richard's character: Richard, like the American actor and the Cuban immigrant, is always the outsider looking in. Considering Richard's outsider status as a given, the task of looking for Richard is the attempt to grasp Richard's motivation to commit such evil acts.

Richard III is a play that internally leaves questions into Richard's psychological make-up unanswered; this is largely due to its origins in the genre of the medieval morality play where absolute good and absolute evil co-existed. In contrast, at the close of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, we question moral absolutes and look for psychological motivations. By paralleling *Looking for Richard* with *Scarface*, we see just how much the present informs the interpretation of the past as Pacino creates a profile for Richard, not based on research of the past, but based on late

twentieth-century conceptions of villainy. Yet conversely, the parallels between these two films also open up new ways of looking for Richard.

Conclusion

Over the course of this study of film adaptations of *Richard III*, I have observed and analyzed how filmmakers have appropriated Shakespeare to appeal to modern audiences. Because of the time constraints that film features impose, each filmmaker needed to cut lines and whole scenes from the text, thus shaping the narrative to his respective vision of the text. In the process of adapting the play, each filmmaker manipulated narrative elements (Shakespeare's text) and stylistic elements (*mise-en-scene*, cinematography, editing, and sound) to facilitate his own understanding of Shakespeare and of *Richard III*. Olivier revered Shakespeare and molded his film into a high culture art form. McKellen explored and exaggerated the offensiveness of Shakespeare's material, stressing and visually representing the sex and violence that permeate the text. And Pacino seized on Richard's talent as an actor, filmically recording his transformation into the character. All three versions demonstrate just how marketable and how malleable Shakespeare's words are. But more importantly, these films illustrate our strange fascination with Shakespeare, and our use of him to illuminate our own preoccupations. Though Shakespeare's entire body of work is certainly valuable, the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century has its favorites. In part, *Richard III* continues to be popular because, like *Hamlet*, its central character dominates the play, reflecting Western culture's stress on individualism. However, *Richard III* becomes even more appealing as it takes that individualism to its (il)logical extreme.

When I first approached the project, I understood Olivier's film as the "authentic" reading of Shakespeare—the structure seemed to follow Shakespeare's text, and the setting seemed medieval enough. However, as I began to understand McKellen's

Richard III and Pacino's *Looking for Richard* as exponents of the mid-90s popular culture, I started to realize Olivier's film, too, promoted its own brand of popular culture. These other films helped me realize that Olivier's film, itself, was not canonical. Despite Olivier's attempts to market the film as a high cultural representation of the "authentic" Shakespeare, the film's very quest for authenticity removes it from Shakespeare's original vision of the play, a vision on which we can only speculate. The other filmmakers seem more aware of the cultural distance between themselves and Shakespeare: McKellen's film self-reflexively demonstrates how nationalistic movements can manipulate the masses, and Pacino's film sees through the veil of the high culture British national tradition to which Olivier appealed. In Olivier's "high culture" *Richard*, Olivier presented not Shakespeare's Richard, but a Richard that incorporated Olivier's own generation's popular culture. The result is a Richard who is primarily concerned with his sex-symbol status—consider the wooing scene where Olivier's Richard gives Claire Bloom's Anne an extended kiss, only to follow her to her bedchamber as a hint of sexuality.

However, the purpose of viewing Olivier's film in light of the other two is not to dismantle and to reject it as antiquated British nationalistic propaganda. The purpose is to discover how filmmakers and audiences understood Shakespeare in the mid-50s versus the mid-90s. In this way, each film reveals just as much about the culture surrounding the film as it does about Shakespeare. Some general conclusions can be reached in contrasting the films.

Most obviously, in contrast to Olivier, McKellen and Pacino seem more willing to question Shakespeare's inherent worth. Both become concerned with what Shakespeare

can contribute to their world. McKellen appropriates the play to show the dangers of the influence of mass culture and comments on the events leading up to World War II.

Pacino wanders the streets of New York and London asking the question, is Shakespeare applicable to the modern world? To signify their break with tradition, McKellen and Pacino radically alter elements of film form, veering from Olivier's more conservative rendering: McKellen alters the play's setting, while Pacino manipulates the play's narrative structure.

Less obviously, though, are the meanings that mid- and late- twentieth century readings bring both to the filmmakers and to the text. The play, *Richard III*, deals with the question of evil, most generally stated as: why do bad things happen to good people? However, in the play, evil is embodied in the character of Richard another question emerges as central to the action: why do people do bad things? In Shakespeare's conception within the play, answer to the question was embedded in Shakespeare's providential understanding of history: following a Satanic paradigm, radical evil was God's way of avenging past wrongs. In accordance to Margaret's curses, Richard was put on earth to punish the both houses for usurping Richard II's rule. In this providential view of history, there are no good people. In contrast, by the twentieth century, pop psychology began to permeate the intellectual climate. Richard was no longer a monster; he was a human who needed to compensate for his deformity. In the mid-50s, Olivier made Richard's deformity the etiology of his disease, rather than an outward manifestation of his sick soul. Similarly, McKellen hints at repressed homosexual desire as a motivating factor for Richard's crimes, and Pacino echoes Olivier's theory that

Richard's mental illness began with his deformity and, as I have suggested, leaves room for a trauma narrative.

Radical evil, or at least the perception of radical evil, will always exist. On June 11, 2001, Timothy McVeigh was executed for destroying the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, in an explosion that killed 168 people. Politics regarding the death penalty aside, the most disturbing element of the execution was in the midst of McVeigh's silence, the warden began to recite the charges brought against McVeigh, trying to get a last-minute response out of him. McVeigh stared remorselessly at the camera recording his execution. The act of the warden seems to exemplify the consensus of those who followed the media coverage of the event—he and they both wanted an answer, a reason to justify his actions, an objective correlative, if you will. But the act of seeking that answer—just moments before McVeigh's death—attests to the twentieth-century pop psychology understanding of evil. It can be explained in terms of trauma, like child abuse or sexual repression. Because our contemporary culture unavoidably informs our perception of events, so too will it inform our understanding of texts. Filmmakers will continue to reflect their contemporary contexts in their works, and future adaptations of *Richard III* will continue to reflect its generation's perception of radical evil.

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