SEDUCTIVE INFIDELITY: SHAKESPEARE PLAYING THE PARATEXT IN *LOOKING FOR RICHARD*

Martin John Fletcher (martinjohnfletcher@hotmail.com)
University of Sussex, United Kingdom

Abstract: Although Shakespeare's universal status as a literary genius seems assured, very few people today are able to grasp the complexities of his dramatic output. This paper exposes the challenges of attracting new audiences for Shakespeare and producing modern adaptations of his plays by focusing on the 1996 movie, *Looking for Richard*, directed by Al Pacino. By expertly blending documentary footage of rehearsals for a production of *Richard III* with scenes from the play and interviews with Shakespeare scholars, the movie reveals how actors, directors and academics themselves are often baffled by Shakespeare's archaic language. The essay argues that Pacino 'democratises' the famous author by confronting Shakespeare's daunting 'aura' in a disarming manner, and thereby winning over cinema audiences.
Keywords: William Shakespeare. *Looking for Richard*. Cinematic adaptation.

INFIDELIDADE SEDUTORA: SHAKESPEARE COMO PARATEXTO EM *RICARDO III – UM ENSAIO*

Resumo: Embora a reputação universal de Shakespeare como um gênio literário parece assegurada, poucas pessoas hoje são capazes de compreender as complexidades de sua obra dramática. Este artigo expõe os desafios de atrair novos públicos para Shakespeare e produzir adaptações modernas de suas peças, concentrando-se no filme 1996, *Ricardo III – Um ensaio*, dirigido por Al Pacino. Através da hábil mistura de material documental de ensaios para a produção de *Richard III* com cenas da peça, e entrevistas com estudiosos de Shakespeare, o filme revela como atores, diretores e os próprios acadêmicos ficam muitas vezes perplexos com a linguagem arcaica de Shakespeare. O ensaio argumenta que Pacino 'democratiza' o famoso autor, confrontando a assustadora 'aura' de Shakespeare de uma maneira desarmante, e cativando, assim, o público de cinema.
Palavras-chave:William Shakespeare. *Ricardo III – Um ensaio*. Adaptação cinematográfica.

Artigo recebido em 30 set. 2015 e aceito em 26 out. 2015.

It could be argued that no other author in Western literature carries as much iconographical force as William Shakespeare. Most serious students of literature, even if they are not intimidated by the name, realise that they must, at some point, confront at least half a dozen of the Bard's most famous plays together with a vast array of painstaking scholarship. To add to this formidable challenge, the language Shakespeare uses is not only archaic, it also, at times, revels in its own poetic complexity, the more to showcase the talents of its author. In short, Shakespeare is, with reason, notoriously difficult.

And yet it is not difficult to find champions of his work: scholars, academics, theatre directors and actors who assure us that reading Shakespeare is a rewarding and enlightening experience. The critic Harold Bloom has famously claimed that Shakespeare's influence is so profound we should regard him as at least partly responsible for the way we understand ourselves and make sense of the world as human beings (BLOOM, 1998, p.10). Certainly Shakespeare's most well-known plays have maintained their central position in the literary canon, though their modern treatment both in the theatre and cinema can provoke controversy: some of Shakespeare's champions, even today, insist that the original plays should be revered as almost 'sacrosanct' and that the texts should not be tampered with for the purpose of improving accessibility.

I would like to examine one such modern, cinematic treatment of a Shakespeare play, albeit one that does not attempt to offer a new version of the play, but rather chooses to reveal the difficulties of doing so. In Al Pacino's 1996 film *Looking for Richard* (henceforth referred to as *LFR*) the actor-director exposes his own anxieties about Shakespeare by documenting the doubts he and his fellow-actors have about interpreting the playwright's language during rehearsals for a performance of *Richard III*. The film also intermingles the production of the play with more documentary footage showing Pacino interviewing Shakespeare scholars, well-known actors and the public to discover what they know or feel about Shakespeare in general and *Richard III* in particular.

I want to focus on the concept of 'paratext' as I believe this approach is particularly relevant to *LFR*, a film which foregrounds Shakespeare's daunting 'aura' as an unavoidable cultural fog which precedes and pervades

any performance of the plays. I also intend to consider *LFR* in terms of how it constitutes a new and unique narrative form by asking the question: what is the story in *LFR*? Although the film contains a number of scenes from *Richard III* and the planning and rehearsals for those scenes, I hope to show that ultimately *LFR* registers a much larger, over-arching narrative concerned with the impossibility of performing a "faithful" reproduction of a Shakespeare play without confronting the competing cultural discourses that surround the Bard. In a sense, *LFR* not only 'deconstructs' Shakespeare, it also constructs a new pathway which contextualizes the Bard's high-cultural position while at the same time exposing the hypocrisy of such a position: only a very tiny proportion of people in the USA (or any other country) ever see a Shakespeare play today and even fewer attempt to tackle the texts. Even actors and scholars openly admit to finding many Shakespeare passages bewildering, and yet his status seems secure.

I would like to begin, however, by considering the question of authorship as it appears in two famous essays by Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes. This is particularly relevant to my argument as the paratextual baggage on display in *LFR* centres around the haunting spectre of William Shakespeare, the Elizabethan playwright whose cultural status is so high that those words spoken by Ozymandias, "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!", in Shelley's famous poem could be attributed to Shakespeare himself. This eerie, author-presence is encapsulated by Foucault in his essay *What Is an Author?* when he writes that the author's name, unlike other proper names, "seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 179) We may conclude that there is nothing essentially superior about the works of Shakespeare: the elevated 'status' of those texts depends upon a system by which that status is always in the process of being reasserted by certain cultural discourses. Foucault goes on to introduce a category of author whom he describes as "founders of discursivity", naming Marx and Freud as examples. "Freud is not just the author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* or *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*; Marx is not just the author of the *Communist Manifesto* or *Das Kapital*: they both have established an endless

possibility of discourse." (FOUCAULT, 2000, p. 183) Foucault suggests that these authors should not be confused with "'great' literary authors". However, in the case of Shakespeare, and particularly when we consider the claims of Harold Bloom, it would seem that Shakespeare has indeed established "an endless possibility of discourse". For example, it could be argued that certain notions of 'romantic love' or 'existential angst' have been highly influenced by the cultural centrality of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet* respectively, and the endless discourses produced by and surrounding those texts. In this sense, the concept of "author" in the case of Shakespeare could be seen as allied to the more powerful and imposing idea of 'authority', which clearly has serious ideological implications. Indeed, there is a sense in which all the actors in *LFR* defer to the unquestionable 'authority' of Shakespeare's legacy as if they were acting under the controlling power of 'sacred', irrefutable texts (and the discourses by which those texts are esteemed).

For Roland Barthes, "The image of literature to be found in ordinary culture is tyrannically centred on the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions," and that "The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it [...] the voice of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us" (BARTHES, 2000, p. 147). In a sense, Barthes is setting up what he calls the "Author-God" (with the implied ideological force contained within such a configuration), only to curtly dismantle him again, telling us "We now know the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning", but rather, "a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (BARTHES, 2000, p. 149). Although Barthes performs this painful debunking of the "myth" of the author with consummate ease, his prior arguments about the author being likened to a 'human person' are not easily ignored. It is as if the "Author-God" may have the power to resurrect himself and recapture our imaginations as readers of literature; as if we are constantly drawn to the notion of a fellow human being talking to us through the mists of time. Certainly, as we shall see later in *LFR,* actors and readers humbly defer to the Bard, as if Shakespeare, the man, the playwright-genius, were a living force not to be reduced, unceremoniously, to any "tissue of quotations". When Barthes says, "The Author is thought to *nourish* the book, which is to say that he exists before it,

thinks, suffers, lives for it, is in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child" (BARTHES, 2000, p. 148), he is offering this idea as an out-dated fallacy. Yet, for Al Pacino, Shakespeare the man is very much part of the legacy. So much so, that he welcomes Shakespeare as a kind of ghostly co-director in the film, forever putting off the performance of *Richard III* to ruminate once more on the artistry of the 'man' who wrote and felt such things more than four hundred years ago. The seductive power of 'Shakespeare' as an elusive and yet omnipresent icon that somehow 'speaks' as human to fellow-human is the inspiration for Pacino to produce a personal, searching documentary that seeks to understand this lasting, powerful and pervasive literary phenomenon. The use of this questioning, documentary-style as a basis for a film that contains within it an attempt to perform a number of scenes from Richard III brings us to the concept of paratext as a tool for examining *LFR*.

Gérard Genette, in his essay *Introduction to the Paratext* uses a quotation from Philippe Lejeune to describe the paratext as "the fringe of the printed text which, in reality, controls the whole reading" (GENETTE, 1991, p. 261). In the notes to the essay, Genette then elaborates by offering a list of paratextual elements also provided by Lejeune as "name of author, title, subtitle, name of collection, name of editor, up to and including the ambiguous play of the prefaces" (GENETTE, 1991, p. 272). In this way, we can see that all texts are, in a sense, 'diffused' in a number of ways by the means in which they are 'packaged' for consumption by the reader. Even the cover of a book or a DVD plays a role in processing the interpretation of the contents. The importance of the concept of paratext within the domain of literary studies is to make readers (and film-viewers) aware of this array of extra-textual elements which affect the reception of a novel or film and, by association, the *reading* or interpretation of the written or film text. Genette refers to the critic J. Hillis Miller, who examines the prefix of the word 'paratext' in order to describe how paratextual elements act as a kind of 'screen' through which the text is viewed or comprehended. Hillis Miller writes: "A thing in para is not only at once on both sides of the frontier which separates the exterior and the interior; it is also the frontier itself, the screen which creates a permeable membrane between the inside and the outside" (quoted in GENETTE, 1991, p. 271).

There is certainly a "screen" which filters the performance scenes from *Richard III* in *LFR*. So much so, that the "frontier" becomes crucial to the film's success; in a sense, the paratext is incorporated into the movie itself; the paratext – how to make an accessible adaptation of a Shakespeare history play – *becomes* the text. Ultimately, the actors' self-conscious deliberations about how to seduce a cinema audience with a plot that is defiantly complex and speeches that are archaic and poetic become part of a totalizing narrative. However, as the film shows, this experimental approach, a kind of hybridization of documentary and play-performance, does not convince all those involved in making the movie. Producer Michael Hadge reveals his scepticism when he complains about the ever-increasing length of the production and shooting process of *LFR*:

> It's becoming a movie about a play. We are making a documentary about making Shakespeare a little bit more accessible to people, those people out there, the people on the street. They are not going to get *Richard III*. I can't even get *Richard III*: it's too complicated.

Hadge appears to be suggesting that 'Shakespeare' is not viable subject matter; that any movie carrying that auspicious name is going to draw a blank from cinema audiences. The name 'Shakespeare' and what it represents – antiquity, complexity, poetry – appears to be the problem. Interestingly, Genette admits he is not certain whether the name of the author (and the title) should be considered part of the text:

> One does not always know if one should consider that they belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to present it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning: to make it present, to assure its presence in the world, its 'reception' and its consumption. (GENETTE, 1991, p. 261)

This suggests that, although the author, as we have noted, may have been 'erased' by Barthes, the "consumption" of the text for Genette depends on the "presence" of the author as its "strongest meaning". In terms of making the movie *LFR*, we notice here a fundamental dilemma: Shakespeare is

widely accepted as the greatest playwright in the English language and yet the mere mention of his name is enough to deter cinema audiences. Pacino's passion, however, refuses to accept the terms of this classic irony. Instead, he decides to start with the name and the legend: to turn the irony on its head and foreground 'Shakespeare' in *LFR*. Pacino carries the word 'Shakespeare' around with him like a banner, calls out the name in the street to gauge reaction, allows the sound of the word to resonate. In this way, he confronts the difficulty of Shakespeare's legacy and the text of *Richard III* in a disarming, amusing manner, allowing audiences to see the actors themselves getting confused by the language and plot.

At this stage, it is worth asking the question: what exactly does it mean to suggest that 'Shakespeare' is the paratext in *LFR*? Don't all texts have authors; is there any qualitative difference in knowing that Shakespeare is the author of *Richard III*, rather than, say, knowing that Graham Greene is the author of *Brighton Rock* or that Arthur Miller is the author of *Death of a Salesman*? I would suggest that the name 'Shakespeare' presents us with a particular phenomenon that is unlike all other categories of 'author'. Certainly, Shakespeare's 'greatness' is not absolute, and his critical standing must be constantly reaffirmed for it to carry weight, especially in this post-modern age of cultural proliferation and the attendant debunking of value-systems. However, the name 'Shakespeare' does not appear to us as simply an author from the distant past: it cannot be comprehended without what Shakespeare himself called "the bubble reputation", which, in the Bard's case, consists of a colossal number of assertions which elevate him to his lofty position as a high-cultural icon. "We shall never overestimate Shakespeare," wrote William Quayle, American professor of Greek, "because we cannot. Some men and things lie beyond the danger of hyperbole. No exaggeration is possible concerning them, seeing they transcend all dreams [...] Genius is as immeasurable as space. Shakespeare cannot be measured" (QUAYLE, 1900, p. 33). The writer and critic Anthony Burgess asks: "Wherein chiefly lies Shakespeare's greatness?" and then answers: "His greatness was summed up by Dumas: 'Next to God, Shakespeare has created most'" (BURGESS, 2000, p. 82). And the actor and director Laurence Olivier is quoted as claiming that, with Shakespeare, we have "The nearest thing in incarnation to the eye of God." These assertions leave us with the impression that we

are dealing with the reputation of a 'God-like genius' that is unique in literary culture. Shakespeare's plays are perceived of almost as 'sacred' texts which maintain the power to enlighten us despite their historical particularity. In *LFR* itself, Oxford professor Barbara Everett says:

> This extraordinary development and maturing and death of drama. In twenty years, Shakespeare is over. You have our greatest drama. And Shakespeare learns incredibly fast. Already, in this very early play, he is thinking about people as actors, and about the stage. And the imagination as a bit of life.

Here the use of the word "our" in the phrase "our greatest drama" does not necessarily limit the assertion to 'English' drama: Shakespeare has been saddled with a global reputation. What is unique about *LFR* is that it confronts this overwhelming reputation precisely in order to disarm its force in a democratising way, diminishing the audience's intimidation and winning its sympathy.

One Shakespeare scholar alludes to this 'democratising' tone adopted by *LFR* when he describes how the film challenges those members of the audience who are more knowledgeable than most about Shakespeare:

> By constantly dramatizing the tension between those who know and do not know Shakespeare, the film criticizes its presumptuous viewers even as it compels them to set aside their knowledge, to join Pacino in his experiment to see what would happen if they seriously searched for Shakespeare. (SIRCY, 2013, p. 63)

Sircy also reminds us that Pacino is not looking for 'Shakespeare' in the singular, as if one example of the species existed that could be tracked down and, ultimately, understood:

> Each engagement with Shakespeare is always already an engagement with a different Shakespeare, so it is a mistake to look to Pacino's film for either an adaptation formula or a method to extract a predictable set of deliverables. What Pacino's film demonstrates is that the object of our quest must be at

> stake in our search. Without that possibility, one which includes the stakes of our own knowledge, our position is no different than that of the authorities we so often critique. (SIRCY, 2013, p. 76)

What is interesting here is that Sircy concurs with the approach taken in *LFR* in the sense of admitting that all attempts at interpreting and understanding Shakespeare should be seen as "quests", as the object pursued is never the same. This is only a small step away from another critical position that *LFR* presents us with: that all attempts at interpreting or performing Shakespeare which *presume* to have identified the object of that performance – in this case 'Shakespeare' and the play *Richard III* – are over-reaching their capabilities without acknowledging this to the audience. We could say Shakespeare performances that fail to reveal their partiality as limited interpretations mislead the audience into believing they are watching a definable, commonly understood phenomenon: 'Shakespeare' or 'a Shakespeare play'. As Sircy points out, *LFR* boldly exposes the ignorance of its participants, from academics to supporting actors, and this becomes the *sina qua non* of the movie itself: "The fundamental inclination for the entire project, then, is a dedication to **not know** the object of study before the search begins, an impulse which the film invites critics to take up as well" (SIRCY, 2013, p. 63).

Sircy argues, then, that *LFR*, as its title suggests, is always "looking" but never finding. It is a "quest" to discover something that is missing; the film begins from a position of 'absence' or 'lack', of not having reliable and verifiable information. "The film's theory of communication depends upon a perpetual state of not knowing" (SIRCY, 2013, p. 71). Sircy focuses on the various scenes in which Pacino attempts to perform the play's opening soliloquy, particularly when the speech draws a blank from the young student audience he has assembled in a small theatre. Pacino realises the students are bewildered by the famous opening ("Now is the winter of our discontent…"), but he does not offer his own interpretation as a way of enlightening his audience. According to Sircy, this is because:

> Pacino is just as much in the dark about what he is saying as his audience. He has to rely on assorted people to clarify what words are puns (the multi-

> valent "son of York"), which words should be emphasized ("now" or "discontent"), and the general context for the entire statement (The Wars of the Roses). (SIRCY, 2013, p. 71)

Near the beginning of *LFR*, Pacino does a voiceover to explain the basic idea of the film and its particular approach. The director stresses that he wants to share how he and others "feel" about Shakespeare and *Richard III* rather than what they might know. "It has always been a dream of mine to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to other people [...] 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". Sircy argues, however, that *LFR* does not leave the audience with a sense of relief because they are only required to "feel" something through their encounter with Shakespeare and not expected to 'know' anything: "The film thus works toward an affective relation to the audience that is not simply an exaltation of feeling over knowledge. The two are connected" (SIRCY, 2013, p. 71). What Sircy is suggesting is that the barometer of one's "feeling" for Shakespeare will be the spur that launches you on the "quest" to try to understand more about the Bard, a journey that, for Pacino, does not have a destination. "Rather the film documents the process of looking, and with no final performance product visible and no more than one fourth of the original play text used, the quest shows no signs of ending" (SIRCY, 2013, p. 71). Again, we are left with the impression that 'Shakespeare' is essentially elusive, and that all attempts to distil a particular meaning from the plays or close-off the interpretive process are misguided. Shakespeare – the man, the plays, the legacy – all reside in the historical imagination.

This idea of a "quest", of searching for something elusive is, of course, acknowledged in the title of the movie, *Looking for Richard*. However, as I have suggested, *LFR* is not a vehicle for the actors to understand more about Shakespeare's King Richard and perform a credible version of *Richard III*. As Elaine Indrusiak points out, "*Looking for Richard* is, in practice, a search for Shakespeare, and not exactly for his most caricatured historical character" (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 22, my translation). Indrusiak goes on to define LFR as "a translation or an interpretation, not only of Richard III,

but the entire Shakespearean canon" (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 31). There is a sense in which this preoccupation with Shakespeare is less part of the fabric of the film and more the central focus, or over-arching narrative. As I have argued, it is not as if a preponderance to dwell on the 'Shakespeare myth' somehow distracts the actors from performing *Richard III*. It is more that Pacino does not presume to accurately interpret either *Richard III* or the Shakespeare canon, but to reveal the impossibility of doing so. Indrusiak explains how Pacino's documentary fragments, instead of functioning somehow as extra-textual elements, conspire to give the movie a unique power:

> Pacino's reading, as a true "deconstruction" of the text, brings up the different levels of meaning of the work, including its significance as an integral and inseparable part of the Shakespearean universe. By transposing all these elements to the cinema, however, Pacino reshuffles and restructures them, no longer as overlapping, but as juxtaposed across a plural and fragmented narrative. Thus, deviations, ellipses and interpolations become more significant than the actual staging of the play, because it is they who lend *Looking for Richard* innovativeness and significant depth, which differentiates it from ordinary renditions of *Richard III* and other Shakespeare plays. (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 31)

As we have already noted, *LFR* does not attempt to reproduce *Richard III* (which would require a much longer film) but confines itself to presenting and staging key scenes from the play. The choice of scenes, and how much emphasis is given to them, can appear haphazard unless one accepts that Pacino's goal is not a faithful re-enactment of the play but an attempt at contextualising Shakespeare. At one point, for example, (34 minutes into the movie), Pacino interrupts the development of the play by cutting to a visit he and fellow-actor Frederic Kimball make to the house in England that purports to be the birthplace of Shakespeare. However, by this time in the film, it has already become clear to the audience that what they are watching is as much about Shakespeare the legend as it is about *Richard III*. As Indrusiak explains:

> By interrupting the progress of the action of *Richard III*, as well as the questions that constitute what we call the 'making of' the play, Pacino breaks the rhythm of dramatic narrative to introduce the scene 'The birthplace of Shakespeare', apparently unconnected. This device, however, is vital to the achievement of his original proposal: to speak of the whole of Shakespeare's work by taking as a starting point (but not a single reference) the play *Richard III*. (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 41)

In this sense, the context *becomes* the paratext: Pacino is presenting the play through a "screen", to use J. Hillis Miller's word, a kind of filter of documentary sequences which attempt to make Shakespeare accessible by demythologising him.

> Pacino re-contextualizes [the play] in the Shakespearean and Elizabethan universe, stressing its great merit, its renewed relevance and importance in the cultural context of the present, both as a literary work itself, but also as part of the export product and tourist exploitation which the Shakespeare 'myth' became. (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 41)

Indrusiak refers to the critical work of Edgar Allan Poe to make an interesting observation about the implied audience for *LFR*. Poe posits the notion of an 'ideal spectator' (originally drawn from the role of the chorus in Greek drama) as part of his *Theory of the Effect*. As Indrusiak explains, "According to the storyteller, the creation of the tale must be guided by and given a final effect on the reader, the whole narrative should be condensed and structured according to this" (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 55). Although this concept is associated with storytelling and readership (rather than cinema and the film audience) it has a useful application to the movie *LFR*, as Pacino is forced to set the 'tone' of his film very carefully towards a cinema audience, the great majority of whom will know little about Shakespeare and even less about *Richard III*.

> Thus, the establishment of an ideal spectator derives from the identification of the least ideal readers possible, those who least identify with the work of Shakespeare. As a result, [Pacino's] documentary about one of the most

> highbrow and complex topics of literary and cultural studies establishes a bridge between two once well-defined and distant worlds, inserting itself voluntarily into so-called mass culture, without, however, losing the acumen, objectivity and critical characteristics of academic investigations. (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 56)

Here we return to what I have referred to as the 'democratising' tone of Pacino's movie, without reducing it to the status of 'lowbrow' or 'populist'. Despite its witty asides and comic sequences, *LFR* is a serious attempt to deal with a complex problem. In fact, the movie confronts the academic establishment head-on, at times revealing the experts as less than sure about aspects of their specialism. To use the *LFR* producer Michael Hadge's expression, neither 'Shakespeare' nor *Richard III* are easy to "get": all renditions and interpretations are approximations. As Pacino realises ('looking' but never finding Richard or Shakespeare), it is in the search or "quest" that a form of personal enlightenment may settle on the actor, reader or audience.

As we have seen, *LFR* is a fragmented movie, a kind of montage which mixes together documentary footage, interviews, rehearsals, background information and several key scenes from *Richard III*. With this 'cut and paste' technique in mind, we might infer that the film does not have a consistent or identifiable narrative structure; it is not a movie with a 'story' that could be retold to someone unfamiliar with it. However, this presumes that a possible 'archetypal' narrative structure for *LFR* has somehow been flouted by Pacino; that the director has chosen not to tell a story, but to foreground all the out-takes of the movie in order to frustrate the narrative process. Or, we might say, by importing the paratext so it becomes part of the text we no longer have a text. In fact, we do have a text, one which is essentially improvisational, but this does not preclude attempts to graft onto the movie a narrative structure. As Indrusiak points out:

> It is true that due to the lack of a script (a written text that guides the creation of the film narrative) and the inclusion in the movie itself of several passages in which the rights and wrongs of creative options are discussed, the result is an apparent improvisation. With this, we have the impression that the final composition of the film's plot corresponds to the

> exact sequence of its shots, the scenes being filmed as they are thought up, or are necessary. (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 56)

There are two points to make here. Firstly, the importance of the editing process, one that may have left the impression of an "improvised" movie, but which no doubt took very careful consideration of all the available material. In this sense, the narrative of the film depends upon editorial choices. Secondly, this new 'narrative', derived from an array of filmic 'fragments', should not be seen as any less credible than a more conventional narrative. As Indrusiak says, the narrative of *LFR* corresponds to the "exact sequence" of those shots chosen in the editing process.

LFR is not a 'frustrated' narrative hampered by constant interruptions; it is the sum of its constituent parts; an assemblage of statements, mini-dialogues and discussions which taken together make up a longer statement. There is no definitive story – "the rise and fall of Richard III", for example – contained within the movie that we could identify and draw out. The story is in the searching, the "looking for" of the title. However, as Indrusiak points out, Pacino's attempt to perform at least some of the play *Richard III* within the movie at the same time as questioning the efficacy of his portrayal creates dramatic tension for the audience:

> The fact that almost all the major scenes from *Richard III* are presented as condensed into a single 'act' of the film presents us with a double meaning: firstly, it emphasizes the secondary character and even the subsidiary role of dramatic narrative within the film structure; secondly, it considerably increases the tension levels of the narrative, establishing, through constant dialogue with the documentary narrative, an interesting game of tension and release. (INDRUSIAK, 2001, p. 58)

Although I hope to have shown how *LFR*, with its unique mixture of documentary, drama, interviews and miscellaneous clips, does not have a conventional narrative structure, I began this essay by saying I would at least attempt to answer the very simple question, 'What's the story?' At this point I am reminded of a scene from Robert Altman's film *The Player* in which film studio executive Griffin Mill (Tim Robbins) demands that writers

who want to make a "film-pitch" should be able to do it in twenty five words or less, since "movie bosses' time is just that valuable". One possible "pitch" for *LFR* might be, '*A Hollywood star with a passion for Shakespeare, films himself interviewing experts and the public about the Bard while rehearsing and performing scenes from Richard III'* (26 words). This brief description may not be enough to win financial backing from even a sympathetic movie executive. It could be argued, therefore, that the film only gets made because Pacino is a movie star with his own private funds and important contacts in the film industry. However, my 'definition' misses several important elements about the finished production. The first is the 'tone' of the movie, by which I mean the rhetorical style of the documentary sections and the overall impression the film makes upon its audience. Pacino, by necessity, adopts an ironic persona because of his lack of expertise and insecurity about Shakespeare scholarship. This mixture of "passion" and modesty when confronted with the weight of the Bard's legacy is not merely an element of the movie: it is the essence of the project, the self-mocking tone which carries the complexity of Shakespeare lightly on its shoulders. Pacino's approach unwittingly disarms the hubris of the Shakespeare scholars, reassures his fellow-actors and diffuses the audience's intimidation. In short, the director's incarnation of Shakespeare is shot through with humour. Secondly, as Indrusiak has pointed out, the movie's improvisational feel is seductive. The audience is not only allowed to go 'behind the scenes' (in the mode of 'reality TV' which has become a hugely popular genre in the past decade), but is also carried along by the apparent unpredictability of the film-in-the-making. When producer Michael Hadge complains about the never-ending filming schedule, there is a sense that the movie project is somehow doomed, and this stimulates audience curiosity. Almost by accident, it seems, Pacino also manages to make *Richard III* comprehensible. In a sense, the audience enters the cinema not to be enlightened about Shakespeare, but to see Pacino struggle with the demands of Elizabethan drama. However, by the end of the film, viewers leave with a sense of achievement, having acquired some new knowledge about one of literature's most infamous characters, Richard III, and his creator.

I believe Pacino has pioneered a new form that makes an important contribution to the poetics of cinema, especially in terms of the relationship

between literary complexity and popular moviemaking. Despite its knockabout style, LFR throws down the gauntlet for movie directors who might be considering making an adaptation of a Shakespeare play. By foregrounding the formidable 'aura' of England's greatest poet – the implied 'paratext' of any production of Shakespeare – *LFR* forces a reassessment of literary iconography and the power of 'authorship' and 'authority'. The public interviewed in Pacino's movie represent potential theatre and cinema audiences who are likely to flinch at the mere mention of the name 'Shakespeare', despite the Bard being a global household name. Part of the reason, as Pacino and his colleagues reveal, is that most people are intimidated by the legacy and baffled by the language of Shakespeare. What *LFR* does, over the course of the film, is to neutralise and 'democratise' Shakespeare's threatening aura, while at the same time showing how, with a little interest and application, the Bard's insights and poetic mastery can be appreciated. Perhaps the movie's greatest triumph, however, is to highlight the hypocrisy of anyone, including actors, who claim to grasp Shakespeare's 'meaning', as if such a thing were possible. Pacino's film, in a sense, should be a blueprint for all movie directors wanting to take on the Bard, as it clearly demonstrates how traditional adaptations merely mystify and confuse their audiences. *LFR* resurrects and revolutionises Shakespeare, breathes new life into the old Bard and shatters the crusty Victorian image of Shakespeare plays as long-winded melodramas full of leaden speeches and watched by solemn audiences.

WORKS CITED

BARTHES, R. The Death of the Author. In: LODGE, D. & WOODS, N. (eds.). *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Harlow: Pearson, 2000.

BLOOM, H. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.

BURGESS, A. *English Literature*. London: Longman, 1978.

DUNTON-DOWNER, L. & RIDING, A. *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*. London: Dorling Kindersley, 2014.

FOUCAULT, M. What is an Author? In: LODGE, D. & WOODS, N. (eds.). *Modern Criticism and Theory*. Harlow: Pearson, 2000.

GENETTE, G. & MACLEAN, M. Introduction to the Paratext. In: *New Literary History, Vol. 22, No. 2, Probings: Art, Criticism, Genre*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1991.

GREER, G. *Shakespeare*. Oxford: OUP, 1986.

INDRUSIAK, E. *Looking for Richard e Shakespeare in Love: Shakespeare pela ótica do cinema hollywoodiano pós-modernista*. Dissertação de Mestrado. Instituto de Letras da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, 2001.

MUSIM, R. *Looking for Richard*. Easton: Youth Media International, 1996.

QUAYLE, W. A. Some Words on Loving Shakespeare. In: *A Hero and Some Other Folk*. New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900.

SIRCY, J. Looking for Shakespeare: Taking Pacino's Quest Seriously. In: *Shakespeare Bulletin,* v. 31, n. 1. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2013. p. 63-78.

Filmography

Looking for Richard. Dir. Al Pacino. With Al Pacino, Alec Baldwin and Penelope Allen. Twentieth Century Fox. 1996.

The Player. Dir. Robert Altman. With Tim Robbins, Greta Scacchi and Fred Ward. Fine Line Features. 1992.