Film Review – Richard Iii Essay, Research Paper

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Richard III

Director: Richard Loncraine

Screenplay: Richard Loncraine and Ian Mckellen

Starring: Ian Mckellen as Richard

Annette Bening as Queen Elizabeth

Kristin Scott Thomas as Lady Anne

Maggie Smith as Duchess of York

Date: 1995

Time: 1 hour 44 minutes

“Civil war divides the nation,” the first caption we see at the onset of this adaptation of

Shakespeare’s Richard III sets the tone for scenes to come later in the movie. It starts by focusing on Shakespeare’s underlying tone regarding Richard as somewhat an outlandish character to be mocked and amused by. Enter Richard to “stab” Edward in his war room at Tewkesbury in his tank. He then fills Edward full of holes with a gun rather than a sword to start the play on words that Richard is known for throughout the play.

Set in the midst of a Nazi-like Britain during the 1930’s, it provides more art deco and imagery than is actually in the text. It uses this as the opening focus to show Richards’ ascent to power and his eventual downfall more as the leader of a fascist regime, than someone cunning for the role of King. Here big band jives lay the groundwork to the victory ball of King Edward where we are introduced to many of the characters not seen until much later in the text, Rivers, King Edward, Queen Elizabeth, Duchess of York, young York, etc. Richard then begins his soliloquy, “Now is the winter of our discontent…” He partially addresses the crowd to show support for his newly indoctrinated King and brother and the first half of his speech is received by warm applause at his play on words. The second half is completed at the urinal of the palaces’ bathroom partly mumbled to the wall. His focus on his villainous ways addressed to the camera. Then he meets Clarence on his way to the Tower to await his execution. The Richard speaks of the forthcoming death of Clarence and his need to marry the Lady Anne, addressed to the camera.

This differs greatly from the text, which opens immediately with his speech addressed to the audience only, and is completed before any other characters are introduced. We do not meet Lord Hastings here as he is released from the Tower.

The next startling visual encountered is by Lady Anne as she walks the halls of a blood-riddled hospital in search of her dead husbands’ body. Richard finds here in the morgue where she speaks of the holes (gunshots, not sword) that killed here husband. The wooing of Lady Anne is completed amongst the corpses, but not without Richard offering her equipment used for an autopsy to stab him in the neck to pay for his murderous deed. Than for the austerity of the ludicrous nature of this film, Richard pulls his wedding band out of his mouth.

This also varied tremendously from the text as we do not encounter the funeral procession King Henry VI, but are shown his son instead who has been deceased for sometime. The following scene after Richard asks Lady Anne to bid her farewell and he agrees to deliver the King’s body are, cut completely from the script.

The next few scenes are highlighted by the burning of the pardon for Clarence at the hands of Richard, but not before we see Queen Elizabeth breakfasting with young York and her brother in full Indian headdress and Tyrell feeding a boar at the stable. These scenes are not a part of the original text and have been added as a means of introduction to various intricate characters. Here Richard meets Tyrell and discusses the “execution” of a friend. This scene is out of order and cut drastically from its original format. A page introduces Tyrell, in the text, after Richard is already King to commit the murders of his nephews, the princes. .

Clarence is the fetched from the catacombs of the Tower and brought to an enclosed circle where he delivers his soliloquy on his dream of drowning while it rains. This differs from the text as Clarence does not tell Brackenbury about his dream entirely, nor is it done in his cell. The rain is added as perhaps a means to cleanse his soul.

The next few sequences have been spliced and melded together too perhaps keep the movie flowing more efficiently and to show the directors focus on food. We are introduced to the remaining noble men over at dinner to discuss the health of the King and to hear Richard and Queen Elizabeth’s heated exchange. Lady Anne (not part of the group in the text) accompanies Richard and seems bemused by his interactions with his relatives rather than being frightened by him. Interspersed are scenes at the Tower where Tyrell, not two unknown murderers, cuts the throat of and drowns Clarence, as his dream prophesized. Only this occurred in his bathtub rather than by wine in his cell after being stabbed. Then to prove the deed is done, Tyrell sends Clarence’s spectacles to Richard’s home where Lady Anne awaits at the bottom of the staircase for her husband. This is a major discrepancy in the script, as it does not occur in the actual text of the play.

King Edward does not request the company of his kinsmen here, but rather they are located on the balcony at an oceanside house (Brighton Beach) to make peace and love one another. Richard enters with his bride, also not part of the text, and delivers the news of Clarence’s death. This causes King Edward to die at the thought of killing his “innocent” brother.

Here Richard’s schemes are unfolding with the help of minor characters as he slowly devours the remains of his family. He manages to kill Rivers by stabbing through a mattress than by having him held prisoner with his kinsmen at Pomfret.

Young York’s description of Richard’s growth as a young boy is cut dramatically by the announcement by Richmond and Stanley of Rivers murder by Richard, followed by the murderous Tyrell for the young York‘s departure to the train station. This does not occur in the actual text, nor does Buckingham and Catesby discuss Hastings’ stand on the murder of the two princes at the arrival of Prince Edward. Here, though, the director uses the text words to create an actual allusion for us to envision. The use of the toy train and the arrival of the prince show the small train and large train by a large locomotive.

The hanging of Hastings follows Lord Stanley’s dream where he envisions Richard with boars’ tusks, by Tyrell, after the meeting for the “coronation” of Edward. He then bids those to follow him and to insinuate the young princes bastards. This scene is cut and changed, as there are not two meetings, the bishop if present at all times and Tyrell is not part of the text yet, nor do we see, but only hear of the murder of Hastings.

The next few scenes with Lady Anne cut up her dialogue about her state of marriage to Richard and her “cursed soul” while watching her using drugs to allude to her upcoming death with a spider on her face. This refers back to the allusion of Richard as a bottled spider whose evil doings have been released.

Richard, as a penitent follower of Christianity, is cut down with his only holding a prayer book in his deformed arm when the citizens to bid him take the Kingship address him. After which, it is Lord Stanley, not the Queen Elizabeth that bids Dorset to flee for his life. The announcement of Richard as King to the citizens alludes to his Nazi-like status as he appears at the pulpit and banners wave while cheers are heard. Richard’s self-love is shown by his watching of his coronation over and over while he makes plans for the murder of his wife and the young princes while treating Tyrell to chocolates.

After all this has occurred, the Duchess of York enters to berate Richard as to the deaths of his kinsmen, than she departs to France instead of Queen Margaret whose entire role has been cut from the film and handed to other character to recite. Queen Elizabeth’s confrontation with Richard regarding the death of her babes and the marriage or Richard to young Elizabeth does not follow immediately.

Finally, as we reach the closure of this movie, the text becomes even more jumbled as Stanley delivers news of Richmond’s approach and Tyrell kills Buckingham instead of his first fleeing and then being murdered. Richmond than marries Elizabeth before the battle begins instead of after Richard is dead. The only close semblance of act 5, is those Richard dreams of being tormented by those who he had murdered before his camp is attacked. Richmond’s dream is completely cut and exchanged for a scene with his new bride in bed. The director continues to show how his play on words works as Richard’s jeep becomes stuck during battle and he curses, “A horse, a horse, and my kingdom for a horse.” Finally Richard dies at his own choice by falling in to a pit of flame, rather than being killed by Richmond.

The director’s interpretation of this film focuses more on the use of metaphors in a comic state of humor amongst the villainy in a Hitleresque setting with Richard at the helm of this tyranny. Loncraine uses Shakespeare’s play on words to make scenes more memorable, (i.e., trains, spiders, food,). He shows the abuse of power, greed and corruption of Richard with flare. The actual dialogue heard is true to the original text, as nothing was added, it is only severely out of order. Loncraine took an ordinary, simple play and made it into something enjoyable to watch. Although the scenes tend to be out of order and cut, this is still a successful adaptation of Richard III as the overriding theme is developed and enjoyable to watch. Richard is humorous in life as he lies, cheats and steals the throne from anyone in his way.