Richard III and Looking For Richard

An insubstantial Pageant

Module A: Textual Conversations

From the syllabus

In this module, students explore the ways in which the comparative study of texts can reveal resonances and dissonances between and within texts. Students consider the ways that a reimagining or reframing of an aspect of a text might mirror, align or collide with the details of another text. In their textual studies, they also explore common or disparate issues, values, assumptions or perspectives and how these are depicted. By comparing two texts students understand how composers (authors, poets, playwrights, directors, designers and so on) are influenced by other texts, contexts and values, and how this shapes meaning.

A conversation between two different worlds - Four central ideas

Student Notes

1) General observations about the texts and the unit
   a) Richard III in the news (picture)
   b) Complexity of the text – politically and practically
   c) His villainy (or otherwise)
   d) Long history of performance
   e) Pacino’s (self-indulgent) labour of love

2) A conversation across time

Anything in Shakespeare that made you think it’s not close to you... And by taking this one play, Richard III...
- ...or connected to you in any way? ... analyzing it, approaching it from different angles...
- Yeah, it's boring. ... putting on costumes, playing out scenes...

Who's gonna say, "Action"?
Should I say it, or should you?

... we could communicate both our pasión for it...

It has always been a dream of mine...
... to communicate how I feel about Shakespeare to other people.
So I asked my friend Frederic Kimball, who is an actor and a writer...
... and also our colleagues Michael Hadge...
... and James Bulleit, to join me.

... and in doing that...
... communicate a Shakespeare that is about how we feel...
... and how we think today.
3) More from the syllabus

Students identify, interpret, analyse and evaluate the textual features, conventions, contexts, values and purpose of two prescribed texts.

Beginnings and Endings

Beginnings – the world the seasons and the stage

Endings – resolution?

So – from these we can make some conclusions about the purpose of each text – and the changes in context

Why is this a difficult textual conversation to have?

4) Contextual shifts and the purpose of each composer. There is of course, the danger of reducing complex belief systems to simplistic statements but there are some broad comments we can make:
   a) Theism and Post-modernism – world views that shape our values and our societies
   b) Explicit purpose,
      Artistic purpose – to lend their own voice and creativity to an exploration of Richard the Third – his rise and fall
      Personal goals- Shakespeare – moral purpose - affirmation of Tudor rule in general and the reign of Elizabeth I in particular
      For Pacino – there is his stated aim of ‘peddling [Shakespeare] on the streets’ – of advocating the relevancy of Shakespeare

Main Points of Conversation

Power

Resonances
   a) Corruptive nature of power – our uneasy relationship with power
   b) The transient nature of power and our tenuous hold on power
   c) That in this pursuit of power, truth is rendered powerless

Dissonances
   a) The nature and structure of power
   b) The consequences of usurping power
   c) The disempowerment of women and the public – does Pacino address this?
Relevant quotes and techniques:

**RIII**

‘Now is the Winter of our discontent’
‘...since I cannot prove a lover, I am determined to prove a villain’
‘foul devil’, ‘cacodemon’
‘earth gapes, hell burns, fiends roar’
‘Put in their hands thy bruising irons of wrath,
That they may crush down with a heavy fall
The usurping helmets of our adversaries!’
(Richmond)
Now civil wounds are stopp’d, peace lives again:
That she may long live here, God say amen!
LFR
‘He has let the pursuit of power totally corrupt him’
‘Every time there’s an election in this country, whether for mayor... president or city council...the fact is people are tired of the way it’s been and want a change.’

‘A person has an opinion. It's only an opinion. It's never a question of right or wrong. There's no right or wrong.’
A person has an opinion.

**Techniques:**
References to the changing seasons, from the 'glorious summer' to the 'winter of our discontent' – transience of power
Shakespeare: use of iambic pentameter, heraldic symbol of the boar, recurring references to the diabolic and angelic powers
Margaret’s prophetic speeches – women seen as powerless (yet all she says comes to pass)
Richard’s dominance of the play and movie – and the contrasting use of Richmond at the end
Darkened face (and clothing) of Richard – motif of darkness – Richard entering a darkened doorway
Pacino’s group being moved on by the police

**Human Nature**

Resonances

a) There is a tragic dimension to our nature
b) Complexity of human nature – a strange mixture of noble and base elements
c) Richard as an archetypal character – embodying elements common to humanity

Dissonances

a) The nature of that tragedy
b) Control over our destinies

Quotes

**Richard III**

*But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,*
*Nor made to court an amorous looking-glass;*
*I, that am rudely stamp'd, and want love's majesty*
*To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;*
*I, that am curtail'd of this fair proportion,*
*Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,*
Deformed, unfinish'd, sent before my time
Into this breathing world, scarce half
made up,
O coward conscience, how dost thou
afflict me!
The lights burn blue. It is now dead
midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling
flesh.
What do I fear? myself? there's none else
by:
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am:
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason
why:
Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?
Alack. I love myself. Wherefore? for any
good
That I myself have done unto myself?
O, no! alas, I rather hate myself
For hateful deeds committed by myself!
I am a villain: yet I lie. I am not.
Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not
flatter.
My conscience hath a thousand several
tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.
Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree
Murder, stem murder, in the direst degree;
All several sins, all used in each degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! guilty!

Slave, I have set my life upon a cast,
And I will stand the hazard of the die:

England hath long been mad, and scarr'd
herself;
The brother blindly shed the brother's
blood,
The father rashly slaughter'd his own son,
The son, compell'd, been butcher to the
sire:

LFR

'alienated from his own body... and his
own self'

'does not have his own humanity, that he's
lost it'

I love the silence.
I love the silence.
After silence, what else is there?
What’s the line?
- "The rest is silence."

Techniques

Shakespeare’s use of asides – mostly by
Richard – creates an empathetic bond
between Richard and the audience – we
are privy to his plots and plans – and we
recognise in ourselves our own special
brand of human villainy

Characterisation of Richard/Pacino
creates a blurring effect – between
Richard the villain and Pacino the
director/hero/friend to
strangers/Shakespearean cheerleader

Appearance and Reality
Resonances

a) Consummate ability of Richard to ‘act’ or adopt roles – both composers seem to
relish this

b) Gap between outward appearance and inward reality
Dissonances

a) Questions of morality or a question of reality?

b) Solid truth or ‘It’s an opinion’?

Quotes
Richard III
‘Naked villainy’
‘dissembling looks’
‘It is a reeling world indeed my Lord’
‘Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time’
LFR
We’ll have different people read
different roles. Hopefully somehow...
...the role and the actor will merge.
Our revels now are ended.
These our actors, as I foretold you...
... were all spirits
and are melted into air...
... into thin air.
And, like the baseless fabric
of this visión...

... the cloud-capp ’d towers...
... the gorgeous palaces...
... the solemn temples.
... the great globe itself...
... ye all which it inherit...
... shall dissolve... and, like this
insubstantial pageant fade... leave not a
wisp behind.

We are such stuff
as dreams are made on...
... and our little life
is rounded with a sleep.

Techniques
Pacino’s destruction of the fourth wall –
his insights into the way we construct our
own ‘reality’

Art
Resonances

a) Both composers have overt agendas

b) Both composers have created their own Richard to suit their purposes

c) Both composers see art as central to human endeavour – and in its ironic ability to
reveal truth

Dissonances

a) The boundaries of art are different
b) The idea of the creator – Pacino and God

Quotes

LFR

You are making this documentary to show that actors...
...truly are the possessors of a tradition...
...the proud inheritors of the understanding of Shakespeare

Techniques

Both texts include a degree of self-reflexivity – for Shakespeare it is the character of Richard who reflects on his own role and ‘play-acting’ within the confines of the play. For Pacino it is much more overt.


Writing essays

1) Shakespeare first – then Pacino – think of it as a conversation – how would it go?
2) You must deal with the ending of the texts
3) Pacino paragraphs are harder because they integrate references to Shakespeare and you are dealing with a more complex philosophical base
4) The number of questions available are limited – but you need to be flexible
5) The intro can be a bit longer
6) Refer to ‘bigger’ techniques

Sample question and how to approach it:

Your answer will be assessed on how well you:
• demonstrate understanding of how composers are influenced by another text’s concepts and values
• evaluate the relationships between texts and contexts
• organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form

Example A (20 marks)

You have studied a pair of prescribed texts in Textual Conversations.
How has the context of each text influenced your understanding of the intentional connections between them?

**Example B** (20 marks)

Never again will a single story be told as though it is the only one.

To what extent is this statement true in the light of your exploration of Textual Conversations? In your response, make close reference to the pair of prescribed texts that you have studied in Module A.

**Example C** (20 marks)

The house lights dim. The audience quiets.

ON THE BIG FLATSCREEN: Jagged yellow lettering on black: THE TEMPEST By William Shakespeare

Margaret Atwood, *Hag-Seed*

Explain the centrality of the motif of performance in the textual conversation between Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Margaret Atwood’s *Hag-Seed*.

In your response, refer to the quotation and your understanding of the prescribed texts.

From the old Module A HSC 2014 HSC

Section I — Module A: Comparative Study of Texts and Context

In your answer you will be assessed on how well you:

- demonstrate understanding of the meanings of a pair of texts when considered together
- evaluate the relationships between texts and contexts
- organise, develop and express ideas using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form

Question 1 — Elective 1: Exploring Connections (20 marks)

(a) Shakespearean Drama and Film

*The pursuit of individual recognition is an idea which connects King Richard III and Looking for Richard.*

How is this idea shaped and reshaped in these texts from different contexts?
Introduction: Answer the question and outline your thesis – here you might suggest that both texts accept that Richard’s pursuit of power was a means of obtaining individual recognition. You could also allude to the ‘appearance and reality’ point by saying that in both texts, Richard seeks to shape his own destiny. This allows you to bring in a broader point, rather than just focusing on the narrow idea of ‘individual recognition’.

The body of your essay can then be around four paragraphs long – dealing with two main points and each point is divided into the two texts.

Questions tend to focus on either the text – its ideas or characters, OR the context. This is why it is important to start your paragraphs with the purpose of the composers – it is the purpose which ties the text to its context.

BUT . . . 2016 HSC . . .

An exploration of intertextual connections reveals the relationship between context and key values. Discuss this view with detailed reference to the extracts below and your pair of prescribed texts.

Margaret: From forth the kennel of thy womb hath crept
   A hell-hound that doth hunt us all to death:
   That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes
   To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood,
   That foul defacer of God’s handiwork

Redgrave: In the midst of these noble concepts and these treaties and diplomatic pacts, he was saying, the truth beneath all this is absolutely the opposite. The truth is that those in power have total contempt for everything they promise, everything they pledge. At that’s really what Shakespeare’s great play is all about.