

Themes in *Slumdog Millionaire*

Slumdog Millionaire lends itself to a thematic reading, in part because it deals with so many, and in part because it does so in such a complex way: innocence and malice might collide, but there are no black-and-white delineations of Good and Evil here – as in life (less often in the movies) moral fault-lines run through every character, every social structure.

Childhood:

- Told from a child's perspective
 - a perspective that it equates with a native understanding of truth – this is a film about childhood.
 - In this world, to be a child is to live like a free man even if you happen to live in a prison.
- It is to live, without any kind of power, as king of all you survey.
 - It is their very powerlessness that gives them freedom;
 - for power corrupts and constrains all who grasp for it as they grow into adulthood.
- Disturbing though it is to be confronted with young children scavenging out an existence on the rubbish dump, it is no less disturbing to be confronted with their zest for life, their peals of laughter.
- Poverty holds up a mirror to affluence, and affluence is found to be equally oppressive
 - Jamal does not go on Millionaire for the money, but to be seen by Latika, in hope of rescuing her from that very oppression.
 - In denying our children means to make their small contribution to the family oikonomia (economy of the household);
 - in denying our children freedom to play unsupervised;
 - in denying our children the room to risk (can you imagine children travelling on the roof of a train!);
 - as an affluent society have we denied our children too much...childhood?

Adulthood:

- Adults in this world are essentially malicious and spiteful, with the exception of Jamal's mother
 - who saves her boys first from the wrath of the policeman
 - and from the wrath of the rioters who kill her
 - and one or two passing characters,

- Children are seen primarily in economic terms
 - as competition to be removed
 - Or commodities to be exploited.
- Policemen and gangsters alike mistreat them.
- Disturbing world, but not an alien one.
- According to United Nations, and the Children's Society, British children are the most unhappy in the Developed World:
 - born as accidents, or fashion accessories;
 - marginalized by parents pursuing their own lives;
 - demonized by the press;
 - Moved on by the police...

Prejudice:

- Prejudice lies at the very heart of this film,
 - articulated most clearly in the opinion that someone from the slum could not possibly possess knowledge. The quizmaster – who himself has gone from rags to riches - presents this belief to the audience, and their response shows them to be complicit in it.
 - The police move to torture in response to this belief, and so are shown to not only lack knowledge themselves, but also to be morally bankrupt – until Jamal fills in their knowledge-gap and restores their moral judgment.
 - A trap is set for the viewer. For the viewer has more education than the quizmaster and the police, and is subtly persuaded to view him- or herself as more upstanding. Like the child Jamal in the privy, the door is wedged shut, and the only way out is to embrace the humiliation of dropping down into the cess pit...

Inter-textuality: (relationship between texts: the relationship that exists between different texts, especially literary texts)

The 'millionaire' questions not only introduce flashback episodes of Jamal's life; they also introduce a series of inter-textual connections.

Perhaps most important are two questions Jamal does not know the answer to:

- one, for which he asks the audience, the text that 'truth alone will triumph' and the
- two, the final question, for which he makes a guess, identifying the third musketeer.

- What difference does it make to how we understand the story that (without Jamal's knowing) **truth alone will triumph**?
- What difference does it make to how we understand Salim, Jamal and Lakita to see them cast (even without their knowledge of the characters' personalities) as Athos, Porthos and Aramis?
- And what difference do the texts woven into the construction of the viewers make, not only to how we interpret the film but also to how we respond to the themes it confronts us with?

Story of human achievement

India might be an emerging economy but sadly imbalances are overwhelming and it hurts the poor the most. Personally, the gap between poor and rich will only narrow by mitigating the class barrier, providing good education and re-distribution of wealth and by giving unconditional opportunity to the poor.