



"Where's the money? Show me the money!" has been the mantra in many "hustle" films but in *Norman*, written and directed by American-born Israeli Joseph Cedar (*Footnote*) it takes on a new meaning: "Where's the donation? Show me the donor!" This is what runs the world of philanthropists, synagogues and politicians.

Richard Gere's Norman hustles the inner circles of the New York Jewish elite trying to match-make connections that will mean, not money, but political prowess and prestige. The Deputy Prime Minister of Israel, Eshel (Lior Ashkenazi), arrives in New York to support the campaign of the current Prime Minister, and Norman is there searching for a way in to have influence. No one knows who Norman is, where he gets his money, where he lives. And yet a whole synagogue relies on him to find them a donor. It's the mystery of Norman that keeps us engaged, as down to earth in the heart of New York City as Dustin Hoffman's Ratso was in *Midnight Cowboy*.

Norman: The Moderate Rise and Tragic Fall of a New York Fixer is a mouthful for a title, and states up front the direction of the story, perhaps warning us that it is not the story we need to follow, but the connections that lead to nowhere and to no one, except Norman. He is anonymous. Truly. As such, this is a perfect film for New Yorkers who are always on the search for that next important networking relationship that will change their status.

Richard Gere plays Norman to the hilt, with his ever shifting pitches and switches, playing whatever role another New Yorker might want him to play. While a public nuisance to most, he manages to get under the skin of Eshel, buying him an expensive pair of shoes for \$1100 - where did that money come from? When Eshel becomes Prime Minister three years later, suddenly Norman is launched into the exclusive inner circle of Israeli politics, and his tragic fall begins.

Charlotte Gainsbourg plays Alex, an intrigue Norman meets on a plane. Out of curiosity she entertains his hustle while digging into the mystery of who he is. She doesn't get far. Steve Buscemi as a Rabbi Blumenthal has no compunctions tossing Norman into a pile of garbage for leading him on about a \$7 Million donation, that mysteriously appears in the end as a surprise, but we never know where that came from.

"Money rules the world!" shouts Peachum, the pawnbroker and leader of the homeless shelter in Bertolt Brecht's satire *Threepenny Opera*. Not so in this film, even when Rabbi Blumenthal comes after Norman shouting for that anonymous donation. Underscored by Kurt Weil-like music by Japanese composer Jun Miyake (*Pina* by Wim Wenders) that interrupts and underscores every action, we are constantly alienated from sympathizing with any character, making us stand back in order to figure them out - politically.

Norman is an exquisite farcical puzzle, that will have you guessing at every moment who the invisible anonymous donor is all the way to the end. Reminding us that it is not money but philanthropy, that invisible egoless force, that truly rules the world.