



Otherness: Essays and Studies 8.2

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June 2021

Edited by Anne Sophie Refskou

Special Issue:

Representing 'Richard':

Shakespeare, Otherness and

Diversity in Global Settings

Otherness: Essays and Studies

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Introduction

Representing ‘Richard’: Shakespeare, Otherness and Diversity in Global Settings

Anne Sophie Refskou

This short special issue of *Otherness: Essays and Studies* brings together a cluster of analyses and conversations about representing (and misrepresenting) the title characters in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and *Richard III*, produced by scholars and creative practitioners in locations from Mexico to Australia, the UK and Denmark, and reflecting on a range of processes of cultural and theatrical othering. Global lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic have meant the pausing of live theatre and many of the other events such as literary festivals and conferences that would usually bring people together around the cultural cauldron known as ‘Shakespeare’, but, at the same time, creating such activities online has meant that scholars, performers and audiences have moved momentarily out of their separate physical spaces and into a shared virtual space. Many of the conversations that have resulted in this special issue have taken place in that shared space; they have benefitted from the ambiguity of recognisable boundaries and barriers in cyberspace and been able to look for knowledge exchange in new ways. The issue participates in such exchange through its cross-media collaboration with the podcast series [‘Women and Shakespeare’](#), created and

hosted by Varsha Panjwani, now in its second series. As a platform where scholars and creative practitioners meet to discuss and showcase women's engagement with Shakespeare and produce inspiration and resources for teaching, the podcast exemplifies a particularly generous kind of space-sharing. Such space-sharing initiatives online have facilitated conversations about diversity, disability, inclusion, and the questioning of cultural prejudices – subjects also addressed in this special issue.

The choice to focus on Shakespeare's two 'Richards' in *Richard II* and *Richard III*, however, was independent of lockdown conditions. It was partly inspired by pre-lockdown theatre productions of each play and partly by the fact that the history of representing both title characters invites critical scrutiny of different forms of cultural prejudice and of the ways in which such prejudice can find its way into (mis)representation and manifests as recycled tropes on the stage and screen. In the case of *Richard II*, there is a longstanding tradition of representing Richard as gay, often with stereotypical effeminate mannerisms. In the case of *Richard III*, examples of stage and screen productions, both historical and recent, demonstrate problematic and fraught conceptions of disability. The recent use of prosthetic disability in the second *Hollow Crown* BBC series starring Benedict Cumberbatch as Richard III (2016) has been thoroughly analysed by Sonya Freeman Loftis, who argues that whether Richard's disability is fetishized in performance or denied as being historically possible or plausible, as is also often the case, the result is a refusal to include disability into categories of the human (Freeman Loftis 2021, 19). The cases of misrepresentation in productions of *Richard II* and *Richard III* are naturally very different and need to be analysed from diverse perspectives and critical vantage points, but a key connecting factor between them is the, usually unconsciously, implied link between disability or queerness and the title characters' moral unsoundness and unfitness to rule. Misrepresentation, in this context, is what occurs when stage or theatre

productions unconsciously perpetuate longstanding cultural prejudice by using tropes that might imply such acts of 'othering'. Yet, as the conversations in this issue show, staging these two plays may also offer the possibility to ask questions about otherness and encourage conversations about inclusivity.

In terms of genre, both plays have swung back and forth between history and tragedy, although frequently leaning more towards tragedy: In the 1623 First Folio they are grouped together with the histories, but in earlier quarto editions they are presented as tragedies, and they are mostly studied and performed as individual plays, even if they form part of the cycle of histories referred to as the eight-play *Henriad*.¹ The audience-involving charisma and tragic demise of both title characters also contribute to a popular perception of the plays as tragedies, and contemporary productions may choose to emphasise tragic elements in their interpretation and box-office marketing. Nonetheless, explicitly situating *Richard II* as a history play for contemporary audiences was a key aspect of the deliberately diverse production of the play at Shakespeare's Globe in London in 2019, which featured an all women of colour cast and creative team, co-directed by Lynette Linton and Adjoa Andoh (the latter also took on the title role as Richard). As Andoh explains in a conversation with Varsha Panjwani included in the article following this introduction, this production of *Richard II* claimed the right for women of colour to represent English history by performing the Shakespearean play most frequently associated with national imagery – the

¹ The playbill advertising David Garrick in the title role in *Richard III* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1776 presents the play as a tragedy, while a 1790 playbill for a performance of *Richard III* at Kibworth Theatre presents the play as a "historical tragedy". Early nineteenth-century productions – an 1815 *Richard II* at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane featuring Edmund Kean in the title role, or an 1836 *Richard III* at the Theatre Royal, Exeter, also featuring Kean – present both plays as tragedies. An Old Vic Theatre company production of *Richard III* at New Theatre, London in 1949 presents the play as a tragedy, although Peter Hall and John Barton's 1963 adaptation of the first tetralogy, *The Wars of the Roses*, re-inserted *Richard III* into a history play context, as did Michael Pennington and Michael Bogdanov's later *The Wars of the Roses* for the English Shakespeare Company in the late 1980s, which also included *Richard II*. Most recently, the BBC's television series *The Hollow Crown* (season one in 2012 and season two in 2016) may have contributed to a broader reception of both plays as histories.

famous example being John of Gaunt's 'This sceptred isle' speech with its paean to England in the play's second act. This claim is presented by the production's poster, which features a headshot of Andoh against the flag of St. George.² By using the flag as background, the poster signals dissatisfaction with the kinds of historiographical segregation that insist on differentiating between hegemonic history and 'other' histories, whose representatives are usually women and marginalized communities. The notion that history can be understood and represented as shared and collective is not a given and can be difficult to achieve, as Ayanna Thompson explains in her recent book on the history of blackface minstrelsy and its legacies in American society (2021, 2-3), but the 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe emphatically staged history as collective. Or as Andoh herself puts it in the conversation with Panjwani: "I don't want Black History Month, you can keep it, you can tear it up and put it in the bin. I want all the history all the months, everybody's history all the time."

The question of who is entitled to represent history – and how – has become pertinent in the current political climate in which we have seen the formation of global movements such as Black Lives Matter or #MeToo. The 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe was a timely expression of how Shakespeare – and history – can be made to feel more inclusive and relates to ongoing critical discussions, but we are also reminded that some of these discussions build on previous and ongoing scholarly efforts. As Farah Karim-Cooper and Eoin Price argue in their introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Shakespeare*, the word 'timely' in relation to Shakespeare and the subject of race is in fact potentially problematic, both because it risks occluding a longstanding tradition of existing scholarship and because it forecloses future study by over-emphasising

² On the production's motives for using the flag of St George see also: Andoh, Adjoa, and Greg Morrison. 2019. "Making sense of history: Adjoa Andoh on *Richard II*." Shakespeare's Globe. <https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/discover/blogs-and-features/2019/09/12/making-sense-of-history/>.

the present (2021, 1-2). As Karim-Cooper and Price note, Kim F. Hall's path-breaking study of racial epistemologies in Shakespeare and early modern English culture, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*, was published in 1995. The publication date does not make Hall's book any less timely to the present moment, as its indispensability to scholarship in the field continues to prove, but what calls for reflection, as Karim-Cooper and Price write, is the fact that this critical discussion is longstanding (2021, 3). When introducing today's students to premodern critical race studies together with Shakespeare and early modern literature it is thus clearly also important to stress that what might seem 'timely' right now has been built and developed over several decades.³

Representing Shakespeare on the stage and screen has increasingly become a matter of ensuring diversity thanks to major theatre and cultural institutions making diversity a key aspect of their practice and profile. But in this case too, previous work should be remembered and acknowledged. As Delia Jarrett-Macauley showed in her 2016 edited collection *The Diverse Bard: Shakespeare, Race and Performance* – and as she discusses in her introduction to the 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe in this special issue – the UK has a longstanding history of diversifying Shakespeare which includes theatre companies and institutions founded in the 1970s and 1980s such as Tara Arts and Talawa Theatre Company. These theatre companies worked hard at carving out a space for ethnic minority artists and continue to do so.

But a conversation about Shakespeare and diversity naturally extends beyond a British and Anglophone context. One of the aims of this special issue

³ Other early and key scholarly contributions include Eldred Jones's *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (1965) as also noted by Jarrett-Macauley in the following article and Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (1989). For a detailed and helpful analysis of the timeline of premodern critical race studies, see also Kim F. Hall and Peter Erickson's introduction to the seminal special issue of *Shakespeare Quarterly* on Shakespeare and race in 2016.

was to find different geographical and cultural cases so that knowledge and inspiration might also be gained from a comparative perspective. One of these cases was a production of *Richard III* at Kronborg Castle in Elsinore, Denmark in 2019, which featured an international cast of disabled and able-bodied actors. The production was part of the annual Shakespeare festival at the castle organised by the resident theatre 'HamletScenen' and directed by HamletScenen's artistic director, Lars Romann Engel, with the explicit wish to focus on diversity and inclusion, both in the theatre's own practice and in Danish theatre more broadly. Recognising that Denmark has a shorter legacy of working with disabled performers than for instance the UK, Romann Engel sought advice from international experts, notably the Graeae Theatre Company, who have pioneered theatre productions involving disabled artists in the UK since 1980. As Romann Engel observes in a conversation with the production's dramaturg, Nila Parly, in this issue, this kind of access to cross-cultural knowledge exchange is important. Caitlin Mary West's analysis of Australian theatre productions of *Richard III* in this issue adds another perspective to the comparative conversation, as do Alfredo Modenessi's views on the representation of social diversity in Mexican theatre.

The contributions to the issue open with a collective perspective on the 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe, introduced by Delia Jarrett-Macauley, followed by conversations with Adjoa Andoh and Dona Croll curated by Panjwani and concluding with a review by Emer McHugh of the filmed version of the production. The collaborative format and structure of the article reflects the collaborative spirit of the production as described by Andoh and Croll, as well as the contributors' individual assessments of the production – what it meant and what it has changed. Jarrett-Macauley traces the cultural pre-history of the production and its moment, providing an overview of key names and events in British Black Shakespeare, to which her own prize-winning novel, *Moses Citizen and Me* (2005) contributes. In the conversations with Andoh and Croll, Panjwani

discusses how questions of Englishness, identity and belonging informed the production. Both Andoh and Croll emphasise how the production generated a sense of liberation to work as an artist regardless of gender and race. As Andoh succinctly remarks, one of the several disadvantages of being a woman of colour in the theatre and cultural sectors today is somehow being tasked with having to represent everyone of one's race or gender immediately upon entering the rehearsal room. Clearly, any conversation about diverse representation needs to be aware of the danger of stripping artists of their individuality and undermining their right simply to "be a person", as Andoh puts it. Emer McHugh's review highlights how the production's focus on ensemble work and collaborative creation impacted its reception, noting how it shifted from traditional usages of the title role as a star vehicle to instead allowing proper scope for all the characters and their relationships to develop. As McHugh puts it, "I do not think I have seen a production where I have even cared about what happened to Thomas Mowbray, and yet India Ové's interpretation of the role is one of the most memorable I have ever seen." She also offers a compelling analysis of how the production portrayed queerness in ways that avoided binary conceptions and stereotypes.

Collaboration, collectivity and freedom are also central to Elena Pellone's analysis of a director-less production of *Richard II* by the Anørkē Shakespeare theatre company with performances in 2018 and 2019 in the UK and Germany. As a scholar-practitioner who participated in this theatrical experiment, Pellone argues that the play became what she describes as "a site for egalitarian exploration and distributed ownership" for the actors involved. She also utilizes the production, its methodology and reception, as a case-study for addressing wider questions about otherness in Shakespearean rehearsal and performance spaces and suggests that allowing actors to retain full creative agency helps to avoid negative processes of othering. She presents Anørkē Shakespeare's method

of colour- and genderblind casting as a means to move beyond tropes and misrepresentation, both by challenging mimesis-related audience expectations and, at the same time, involving the audience in the conception of the character during the performance.

The next contribution shifts from a director-less conception of *Richard II* to a director's experience of working diversely in a production of *Richard III*. In a frank conversation with Danish dramaturg Nila Parly, artistic director of 'HamletScenen' at Kronborg Castle in Elsinore, Lars Romann Engel, describes staging *Richard III* in 2019 with a Danish-British-Irish cast of disabled and able-bodied actors for the annual Shakespeare festival at Kronborg. Parly sets up the conversation by introducing the background and concept of the production, which developed over the course of a year and involved working with external and international collaborators and consultants in ways that were new to the theatre and in several ways changed its perspective on its societal role. The conversation that follows with Romann Engel is about the politics, the practicalities and the learning curves of that project; about an attempt to enhance accessibility in the theatre, making mistakes, setting future targets and, not least, about how working diversely can take – and shake – directorial practice out of its routines and comfort zones.

This is followed by an analysis of contemporary theatre productions of *Richard III* in Australia by Caitlin Mary West. Focusing on the concept of implied stage directions, West argues that productions of *Richard III* can find successful ways to resist the play's implied connection between Richard's disability and his behaviour, as exemplified by productions by Siren Theatre Co. and The Sydney Theatre Company, both in 2009. The early modern understanding of physical disability as a manifestation of moral deviance continues to present a challenge to contemporary theatre practitioners who wish to engage with *Richard III*. West's analysis demonstrates both the potentially problematic consequences for

productions that follow textual signifiers uncritically, and the ways in which productions might resist the text in a productive manner so that “the friction between the written and performance texts is not smoothed over or done away with. Rather, it is brought out into the open, the meaning suggested by the text is challenged, and a new interpretation is offered”. Her analysis is situated within the context of Australian theatre and offers insights into local cultural politics but the discussion has “broader implications for performing Shakespeare in the twenty-first century” and offers opportunity for comparative exchange with other geographical and cultural locations.

The issue concludes with a conversation with Mexican Shakespeare scholar and translator, Alfredo Michel Modenessi, about translating Shakespeare – and specifically about translating *Richard III* and Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II* for contemporary Mexican theatre productions. As Modenessi notes, the Shakespearean translator continues to be an overlooked presence, even in contexts where the aim might be to generate visibility or inclusivity, perhaps because the translator, in so many ways, continues to operate under a Shakespearean authorial shadow. Moreover, when the conversation about Shakespearean translation takes place within a Global South context, where colonial histories continue to leave their mark on the present, the implication of the translator as non-Anglophone, or non-European ‘Other’ clearly begs critical confrontation. Modenessi also describes the process of translating *Richard III* and Marlowe’s *Edward II* for recent Mexican productions of these plays in ways that provide insight into how translations may transport these early modern English plays to a very different local, historical and cultural setting, but without resorting to overly explicit local signifiers or patronising the theatre audience. As Modenessi puts it “when the Mexican audience hears Richard speak with our own rhythms and accents, the language is more than enough; the language performs the connection by itself.”

Each of the contributors to this special issue thus offers a set of local perspectives on what will surely be an increasingly global and cross-cultural conversation about Shakespearean inclusivity. Pre-lockdown live productions such as the 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe contributed to an impetus that led to similarly collaborative and diverse Shakespeare productions online, such as Robert Myles' [*The Show Must Go Online Project*](#), with the added advantage of the ability immediately to include and reach actors and audiences on a global scale. As scholars and teachers, performers and audiences begin to return to physical spaces in many locations – although not everywhere – some of the experiences and discoveries that were shared in virtual spaces during the pandemic will hopefully still be with us.

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***Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe 2019**

A Collective Perspective

Delia Jarrett-Macauley, Emer McHugh and Varsha Panjwani – with Adjoa Andoh and Dona Croll

In 2019, Shakespeare's Globe theatre in London ran a production of *Richard II* in the indoor space of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse which was co-directed by Adjoa Andoh (who also played the title role of Richard II) and Lynette Linton and featured an all women of colour cast, both on the stage and in the production team. As Varsha Panjwani remarks in this article, this production represented a “wonderful glass ceiling shattering moment” in British Shakespearean performance traditions. It was also remarkable in being a consciously collective creative effort: Andoh and Linton chose a directorial approach that took the idea of ensemble-acting to a new level, working in line with current Globe director Michelle Terry's anti-hierarchical philosophy, as noted by Emer McHugh, also in this article. The following pages reflect that collective spirit by experimenting with a collaborative critical practice that also includes illuminating conversations with Andoh and with Dona Croll (who played John of Gaunt in the production). The first part is an introduction by Delia Jarrett-Macauley which traces the cultural pre-history of the production and its moment.¹ The present moment has seen increasing recognition of creative engagement with Shakespeare by artists of

¹ Jarrett-Macauley's introduction is based on excerpts from her pre-show talk at Shakespeare's Globe in 2019.

colour, although discrimination persists in many areas, but, as Jarrett-Macauley demonstrates, artists of colour in the UK have been engaging with Shakespeare for a very long time and their work provides an important context for the *Richard II* production at the Globe. The introduction is followed by curated excerpts from conversations with Andoh and Croll, recorded by Varsha Panjwani for the podcast series ‘Women and Shakespeare’, created and hosted by Panjwani, both of which provide backstage insights, explore creative decision-making, and discuss what it means to thoroughly diversify Shakespeare.² Emer McHugh’s review of the filmed version of the production, later made available on YouTube, then analyses its key moments and contextualises its reception.³ The three parts thus work together in a productively unorthodox manner, combining scholarship, creative insight and access to multimedial sources, to reflect what was a ground-breaking moment in the history of representing *Richard II* on the Shakespearean stage.⁴

How did we get here? By Delia Jarrett-Macauley

On seeing *Richard II* performed by a company of women of colour whose backgrounds span Africa, the Caribbean and Asia: as audiences and scholars, we are bound to ask is this: what does their presence, what do their origins bring to the performance of Shakespeare? *Richard II* raises questions about nation and belonging, and with the Windrush scandal still fresh, one is bound to ask what are the feelings of those who came to Britain after World War II?⁵ And what do their descendants now think about the state of the nation? I want to trace the cultural

² The excerpts have been especially curated and edited for this article. The original podcast versions of both can be accessed on the [‘Women and Shakespeare’ podcast](#) created and hosted by Panjwani.

³ The production was recorded by Andoh’s company ‘Swinging the Lens’ and is available on [YouTube](#).

⁴ Editorial note by Anne Sophie Refskou.

⁵ The Windrush generation in the UK is named after *HTM Empire Windrush*, the ship that brought nearly 500 Caribbean immigrants to the UK in 1948. In 2018, it was revealed that many members of this generation had been deported in error, or threatened with deportation, or been the victims of other discriminatory treatment. This became known as ‘The Windrush Scandal’.

history that sets out how we got here – to an all women of colour production at Shakespeare's Globe. For me, the starting point is the pioneering work of the elder statesman of race and Shakespeare studies, Eldred Jones, who wrote *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* at a time of colonial upheaval, the 1950s, when Africa's radical thinkers were striving for independence. Jomo Kenyatta, Nkrumah in Ghana and other political activists across the continent were seeking to end the colonial ties with Europe and establish independent states. It was fitting that Jones should have been examining Shakespeare's significance for Africans because language and literary canonisation are not cultural displays but political matters to do with identity, power and nation building.

The story of Black Shakespeare performance in the UK starts with the African-American actor, Ira Aldridge, (1807-1867), who became known as the 'African Roscius', most famous for his Othello, though he played Titus Andronicus and many other leading roles. Aldridge's story, as a trailblazer of Black British culture, was recovered in the 1980s, and in 2012 playwright Lolita Chakrabarti honoured him in her play *Red Velvet*, which opened at Tricycle Theatre, London with Adrian Lester, her husband, in the lead role. However, as Ayanna Thompson remarks in her introduction to the play text, Aldridge's story is largely forgotten; his name does not adorn streets or theatres. As Thompson suggests,

Aldridge's story does not fit easily with the familiar refrain that Shakespeare is for everyone. Aldridge's story, in fact, forces us to confront the fact that while we may want Shakespeare to be for everyone, all too often Shakespeare has been used as a gatekeeper; that is as a barrier to exclude and subjugate people of colour. (Thompson, 2014, n.pg.)

When Aldridge played the lead in *Titus Andronicus*, a play known for its vicious racism, amongst much else, the text was cleaned up and much of the racism removed, and the critics found that quite acceptable. Sometimes the actor himself did not fit his surroundings. In one of the companies where Aldridge worked, the manager found his talent far exceeded that of the other cast members. In the 1930s, Ira Aldridge's daughter, Amanda, was a piano teacher in London. She gave Paul Robeson (1898-1976), the celebrated African-American singer and actor, the earrings her father had worn when playing Othello with the express wish that he would wear them when playing that role: a good wish token!⁶ The environment of the 1930s in which Amanda Aldridge and Paul Robeson found themselves decried the mixing of the races. The 'colour bar', as everyday racism was rather quaintly called, acted as a barrier to black people entering hotels, restaurants and public facilities; it prevented their access to some professional roles, the senior levels of the forces or the Civil Service, and generally served to keep alive the notion of white racial supremacy. Against that backcloth, Robeson played Othello with Peggy Ashcroft as his Desdemona. Robeson won great critical acclaim for his acting and international respect for his performance. Today the representation of black faces on multiple sites and screens is commonplace, but in Robeson's era, the invisibility of black creative talent was the norm and the picture of a black man sitting alongside a white woman would have been highly contentious.

Looking at the history of black women artists who have embraced Shakespeare and made him their own, two women stand out for me. First, the African-American writer Maya Angelou, whose first awe-inspiring autobiographical work, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* was first published in 1969. In it, Maya, a young girl in Arkansas, a victim of sexual abuse, observes the

⁶ Robeson became the first African-American actor to play Othello since Ira Aldridge with landmark performances in the US and the UK. For further analysis of the performances and legacies of Aldridge and Robeson, see also Jarrett-Macauley (2016); Newstock (2021) and Chakravarti (2021).

racism and sexism in the community. She also explores the family relationships, the dynamics between the generations and writes poignantly about the separation from her parents. In painting a picture of her early life, and showing the stages of growth, coming of age, the value of literacy and her love of literature stand out as important aspects of her story. She refers to many literary works, but Shakespeare is central. Her playful approach is captured in the sentence “I pacified myself about his whiteness... he'd been dead so long it couldn't matter to anyone anymore” (1984, 14), while her later oft-quoted statement “Shakespeare was a black woman” connects the young black female with the Bard and is valuable precisely because it shrinks the vast gulf – in time, space, gender, power and experience – to nullify it.⁷

Around the time that Virago, the women's publishing house, decided to take a punt on Maya Angelou with a small print run which led to several reprints, another black woman pioneer, Yvonne Brewster, was forging the black theatre company in Britain: Talawa. This is how Jamaican-born director Brewster described pulling Shakespeare's plays into the heart of Talawa's offering:

I did *Antony and Cleopatra* (1991) because I really wanted to see what a Cleopatra I envisioned would look like.⁸ She was Egyptian. And then we did *King Lear* (1994). Norman Beaton was supposed to be in *King Lear*, and it was so sad... he was too ill, and he died soon after. So, we had to do a different kind of *King Lear*, a modern *King Lear* in black leather... And it did produce us David Harewood, Cathy Tyson, Lolita Chakrabarti, lots of people who are now on our television screens every evening. ... We did *Othello* (1997) and we haven't done any since because I realised that the people we were using were being snapped up by the people who had the money. Shakespeare is expensive, and why is the

⁷ This reference is included in Eaglestone (2000, 66).

⁸ Cleopatra in this production was played by Dona Croll, who played John of Gaunt in *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe, as she describes later in this article. Croll discusses her experience of both productions in [episode 2, season 1](#) of the podcast 'Women and Shakespeare', while [episode 1, season 1](#) features an in-depth conversation with Jarrett-Macauley.

Black theatre company doing Shakespeare except to give people the opportunity to act? (Qtd. in King-Dorset 2014, 35).

David Harewood played Edmund and was seen by Vanessa Redgrave who later took him on tour for Antony and Cleopatra, and when the National Theatre ‘scooped him up’ for *Othello*, Yvonne Brewster felt her work was done in showing that black actors could do Shakespeare.

In writing my own first novel *Moses, Citizen and Me* which used Shakespeare, I was also questioned over whether the Bard belonged in Africa, and specifically in the mouths of a company of child soldiers. *Moses, Citizen and Me*, which is set in post-civil Sierra Leone, centres around a family in which the youngest member, 8-year old Citizen, has been a child soldier. In the course of the novel, he is joined by other former child soldiers and they perform *Juliosh Siza* in the rainforest to an international audience. Their shortened version of the play in Krio was based on the translation by Thomas Decker, a civil servant who, in the 1960s, recognised the value of having African versions of Shakespeare. Like many other black artists before me, I reached for the Bard to explore universal themes and in particular the tragic nature of civil war. Long before I wrote *Moses, Citizen and Me*, I found adaptations of Shakespeare’s verse in the 1930s poetry by the Jamaican feminist, Una Marson. We are not always conscious of our cultural and literary influences. Black British artists of stage and screen are frequently urged to look towards the US for employment and even for inspiration. But while our American cousins count several scholars of race and Shakespeare among their numbers and highly-regarded companies such as the Oregon Shakespeare Festival are producing modern versions of Shakespeare’s play, this British *Richard II* production is still a first in many respects. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival has yet to stage an all women of colour Shakespeare production and no black woman in the US has yet played a king in one of history plays. It takes courage and imagination to step outside the norms. Adjoa Andoh’s decision to direct *Richard*

II with Lynette Linton builds upon the courageous adventures of other women artists: Angelou, Brewster, Marson and many others.

Directing *Richard II*: Adjoa Andoh in conversation with Varsha Panjwani

Varsha Panjwani (VP) ...The landmark production, *Richard II*, which you co-directed with Lynette Linton in 2019 at Shakespeare's Globe, and which you also played the lead part in: To begin with, I want to talk about the show's poster which was really arresting. It has your face in the foreground and the flag of St. George of England in the background. You've said in interviews that we, and by that I think you mean Black and Brown women, own this flag too, because we built this England, but over the years, how has England treated you as a black woman and as a black actor?

Adjoa Andoh (AA) Well, I went to see Michelle Terry (Shakespeare's Globe artistic director) about a different play, which wasn't available. But she said to me, "We have *Richard II*." And *Richard II* was going to be running during Brexit; when we were officially supposed to Brexit the first time (and then we didn't). At the time, the country was in this ferment, saying, "do we want to be in Europe? Do we want to be independent from Europe? Who are we? Are we Europeans? Are we British? What does that mean? Are you Scottish Irish, Welsh or English?" All of that. And so, when Michelle said that *Richard II* was available, the play that has the "This sceptred isle" speech in it – the great play that people take as their glorying of England and Englishness – I just thought, "That is a thrill. Give me that, I'm going to do that play."

Michelle said, "Well, so what's your concept of it?" And I said, "We are in the middle of this conversation (Brexit) about who is part of this nation, about what it means to be part of this nation. I want to shake that conversation up, and the way I want to it is I want to have a cast of all women of colour and I want those women of colour to be from every part of the globe that Britain colonized." Because people from this country, Britain, went somewhere else, uninvited, made

huge profits from their activities, and we've ended up having a relationship with this country. Having 'a relationship' is a nice way of putting it, I suppose. Basically, because of the brutality, the kidnapping, the rape, the enslavement, the indentured-ness of adventurism from this country, the money was made that allowed Britain to become great. I mean, you can do simple equations with, for example, the number of black bodies trafficked from the coast of West Africa, into the West Indies, sold to the West Indies and America and the money that comes back to Bristol, and with that money, you build Queen Square, you build Park Street, you build beautiful Georgian crescents, and you bring in the industrial revolution. You bring in manufacturing, you bring in scientific discoveries, you bring in more exploration. Britain was fantastic at doing that at our expense. There is no Great Britain without the enslavement of people from across the Asian continent, from across the African continent and various other bits of the world, right across the Middle East. Everywhere there is a horrible mess, pretty much it's either Britain or Europe that's gone in there and stuck their oar in straight away.

So, I wanted to have this thought experiment: who is usually at the bottom of the heap everywhere? Women. And who was at the bottom of that empire? People of colour. So, let's have women of colour, the most powerless demographic within that empire, let's have them tell the story of that empire, because for me it is not enough to have people on the stage. It's not enough to have the brown window dressing. You have to have people in position of power and decision-making and in creative areas other than on the stage. That was my thesis with that production. And when Michelle said, "Who's going to play Richard", I was like, "I'm not doing all that work and not play Richard, are you kidding?". I was filming in Canada and I spent nearly all the shoot in Canada editing the play, because we only had 10 actors available, because the Sam Wanamaker Theatre was quite a small space. I had to get 26 characters in the play into 10 characters on the stage. So, I had to re-edit the text and that took a long

time, but it was great, because it's a great way to get to know the play and also to get to know the lens of the play that you choose. I conceived that poster, because I wanted it to be arresting and I wanted it to be the challenge that goes, "See that flag of St. George? We made that. We had a part of that and we're going to be on it." And the other reason was that I wanted to make an invitation to people of colour that this *Richard II* was available to them. I wanted to make that strong invitation. So that was the reason that I did it like that. And I knew that I wanted everybody involved in production to be a woman of colour, which caused its own aggro, But I went, "Yes, you can find all women of colour musicians. I'm getting a composer, photographer, designer, lighting designer, stage management, costume supervisor..."

VP All of those claims of, "Oh, there aren't enough photographers or there aren't enough people of colour who are musicians and so on": your production proved them wrong. Your production proved that that is not the case. And I agree with you about the show's poster. I think it was making a statement, something that is often forgotten, because Britain doesn't like to think of itself as diverse when it clearly is.

AA I think the other thing to just say is that *Richard II* is a history play. My mother is a history teacher. I love history. And one of the things that I find most frustrating about the Brexit debate and any debates we have about citizenship in this country is that nobody teaches all the history. I don't want Black History Month, you can keep it, you can tear it up and put it in the bin. I want all the history all the months, everybody's history all the time. So yes, you can talk about how marvellous it was that we had 'The Flying Scotsman', or you can talk about great discoveries of this, that, and the other. But if you don't talk about kidnap, rape, disenfranchisement, the Opium Wars, indentured labour in the West Indies, indentured labour in India, if you don't talk about the violence, repression of the Mau Maus in Kenya; if you don't talk about all the history, then you don't get the

full context. Talk about the facts of stuff that was really happening here in terms of people's existence in this country. I mean, there was a black Roman general BC who was over here, who was involved with the building of Hadrian's Wall. You look at Nelson's column in Trafalgar square an iconic British symbol: Nelson is being held by a black sailor. Why? Because at the time of the Battle of Waterloo, a fifth of the British Navy were black. George III's wife, Charlotte, was mixed race. She was descended from a relationship between Alfonso III of Portugal and his African mistress. And when she was born, there were complaints about her thick lips and her flat nose and that she looked like a Mulatto and how dreadful it was. And then, she becomes the Queen of England. Everyone goes, "Oh, Meghan Markle." You kind of go, "Queen Charlotte."..

VP Yes. A history play makes that statement: "Look at your history again, look at what was there: rediscover it". I also have heard some really amazing things about the rehearsals of this particular production. So, Dona Croll was on this podcast and she was talking about a lot of dancing and an evening of cultural sharing and so on. But at the opposite end of the spectrum, I have often heard from black actors, again from Dona Croll, but also, I've read Dawn Monique Williams, who was saying, that, sometimes, white directors just don't know how to engage with or direct black actors, because they're either too afraid or they don't know how to bring in those cultural references. Is there any advice that you can give someone who is directing a black or a brown cast? What should they do?

AA So here's the thing. What often happens when you are the only person of colour, or if you're the only woman (because both things do happen quite a lot) is you feel that you are responsible to represent everybody of your race or everybody of your gender. And I hate that, all my life I've hated it. I'm like, "I'm not a thing, I'm Adjoa, I'm this unique person. And there is nobody else like me. And there was nobody else who would like the things I like in all the multifaceted ways that I do, (or don't like them). And there's nobody else with my flaws. And there's

nobody else with my gifts.” How should a white director direct a black actor? I don’t know: be a person, direct a person, because there isn’t a black actor or a brown actor. There’s just a person there who hopefully has some silky skills as an actor. Direct the person, work out how to work with them, because I can have a room full of black actors and each one will leave me to direct them differently, because they’re a person. I mean, we have to come back to the conversation always that race is a social construct, because just scrape it off and underneath, it’s Shylock, isn’t it? “If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh?” Skin colour is not the thing. What society does with it is the thing. So, this is all a social construct. The social construct is created in order to ‘other’ people. And when people are not regarded as being of equal value with you, then you can do what you want to them and you can feel less guilty about it. So, I would say, “Get to know people.” I mean, in our rehearsal room, I did the cultural sharing, because I have a belief that when people have ownership of what they’re engaged in, they commit to it. They’re not doing it to please teacher. They’re not doing it because they’re scared, they’re doing it because it’s theirs. I had a theatre company for 12 years, ‘Wild Iris’, this was a while ago. And one of the things that we always said was everybody gets paid the same, because it’s everybody’s work. Everybody has to own it, we all have to be at the party, or else it’s not a party. So, in our rehearsal rooms, I wanted to start off by everybody coming with something that resonated with them; I called it a cultural sharing. But I said, “You could bring a dance, bring a piece of music, bring a piece of fabric, poetry, a joke, a song, a film that you like, anything. But I want to know how you personally engage with this play that we’re all embarking on together.” Interestingly, what people brought knitted us together as a family, like you wouldn’t believe. Everybody had something to say about what they brought: “This was my grandmother’s. And when she was fleeing [XYZ], she brought it with her.” So, we had a woman who was our fight director, and was Israeli-Jewish. We had Iraqis,

Iranians, Guyanese, Bajan Trini, Ghanaian, Nigerian. It was endless, Chinese, Filipina, the variety of people who came with something deep and precious and it's like everybody put it in your bank account. And they said, "Here's my investment", and then when we did the play, we drew on all our investments to make it work. And first day of rehearsals, we cried. Hard-bitten, old lags, like me who's been in the business for three and a half decades, we all cried. And we cried for the relief of just being in a room as an artist, not a woman, not a woman of colour, just an artist.

Performing in *Richard II*: Dona Croll in conversation with Varsha Panjwani

Varsha Panjwani (VP) I just want to know from you, what does the term black signify?

Dona Croll (DC) It means a specific experience something that people who are non-black will never have and will never understand or appreciate. And more importantly, the vast majority of non-black people don't acknowledge the experience. That's a huge difficulty.

VP It's much more, you're saying than say a political label, it's much more than even a cultural label, it's much more about that every day lived experience with all these inherited histories as well.

DC Yes. In Europe, certainly, and in America, absolutely. But if you live in a country where there is a majority black population, you don't realize you're black, because everyone's having the same experience. You only realize you're black when you rub up against non-black people. Being black in an all-black environment is joyous, if you have being black in a European environment to compare it with.

VP We did have this wonderful glass ceiling shattering moment didn't we, very recently in 2019 when you played John of Gaunt in *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe with an all women of colour ensemble. [...] Before we discuss the role and your take on it, what was your experience of working with that company of actors?

DC Well, just glorious. Totally liberating to be in a room full of people who have the same experience as you of life in Europe, to have the similar backstories. So, you say something and you're not thinking before you say, "Oh, can I say this because it might upset him or her or the director. They'll take it the wrong way". So, you keep quiet. But in that room, anything that anybody said, was understood...was taken on board...wasn't judged because we all understood it was a common language. We all knew what we were talking about. So that was fantastic. And then having this shared experience, which is what I guess most rehearsal rooms are like, but not for us because usually we're the one black person in the room. So usually that's our experience, but to be with a load, it was, it was superb, I loved it!

VP John of Gaunt is an old man. And so how did you approach that?

DC As an old person; none of us played men. We played human beings who have objectives, who know what they want to do in the play, what they need to get done and some of them should plot away to get it done. But it didn't seem odd that I was playing a man. I'm just playing a person who has seen this in their lives and now sees the future differently and wants to get back to how things were. I think that's how I approached it.

VP ... And talking of what he has seen: In the 'sceptred isle' speech he talks about England as now "bound in with shame" due to its own leadership. And you were playing this when the Brexit negotiation ...

DC ...Was at its height, yes. The line is: "That England that was wont to conquer others/Hath made a shameful conquest of itself". When do people usually applaud during a Shakespeare speech? On that line, they applauded. It was extraordinary. Everybody on stage went "what, what?" And then after that, and on the press night, it happened almost every night. Who claps during a Shakespeare speech? But suddenly Brexit hit everybody.

VP But that night, the audience was with you. They did get a very different style of audience as well in the Sam Wanamaker at that time and I realized that everyone was attentive. They were with you...on that night.

DC I think Adjoa's publicity made sure we got out to the right people, because we didn't want just to sit on stage and look out onto a sea of old white faces. But the reaction...Nobody imagined that black women could tell a story. Nobody had seen that coming in the same way that they didn't see Maya Angelou coming or Toni Morrison coming or Bernadine Evaristo coming. It's not because they haven't seen it before. They can't imagine it.

***Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe. Review by Emer McHugh**

Since Michelle Terry's arrival as Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe in 2017, a larger focus has been placed on the formation of a Globe Ensemble for its summer productions at the main playhouse. As Will Tosh has explained, "taking inspiration from the ways in which early modern companies might have managed their own business of playing and business of performance. And that is (from our point of view and modern theatre) quite unhierarchised" ("Such Stuff" n.pg.). Whereas there has not been as much a focus on this experiment in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse's series of programming, the idea of the ensemble is integral to Adjoa Andoh and Lynette Linton's production of *Richard II* in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse in 2019. In the case of this production, where every member of the creative team was a woman of colour, this was a matter of equity – as Andoh puts it,

...We wanted to create a space where women of colour could for once just come and be artists. A space where you could leave all the "Oh my god, I'm the only woman in the room", "Oh my god I'm the only person of colour in the room" or a combination of the two at the door and, for once, just come and practise your art. (Andoh and Morrison n.pg.)

At this point, too, I note Lynette Goddard's point that "[i]t is assumed that actresses will work their way up to playing more prominent and leading roles within the company, but such a progression is more difficult for black actresses due to the dearth of roles available because of tendencies to more readily cast white actresses in Shakespeare's leading roles" (Goddard 2017, 80). Whereas she writes specifically about casting women of colour in Royal Shakespeare Company productions, Goddard also illustrates a more-widespread problem of the pervasive whiteness in most mainstream Shakespeare performance institutions. Andoh and Linton's production, led by a Black actress – Andoh herself – in the title role, challenges this pervasive whiteness. The poster for the production displayed Andoh's face against the backdrop of the St George's flag: a flag all too often co-opted by English white nationalists: indeed, Andoh herself declared she was "reclaiming the flag" (Andoh and Morrison n.pg). In the words of Jackie Kay, "[i]t seemed to Adjoa the right time for this story to be told by the people who are often told they have no right to claim the flag. (The posters on the Tube are striking. Adjoa's beautiful and uncompromising face against the red and white.)" (Kay n.pg).

This ensemble emphasis in Andoh and Linton's production also enables us to read this play anew. *Richard II* is often seen as a star vehicle for whoever plays Richard (and Bolingbroke, on occasion), one of the many hoops that an actor must jump through in order to be considered a 'Shakespearean'. But this production is not just interested in the contrasts between Andoh's Richard and Sarah Niles' Bolingbroke, even though those contrasts between Richard's need to perform and Bolingbroke's impassiveness are drawn out with nuance and care. It is interested in the royal court and how that court operates – how members of that court relate to one another, and how that court splinters apart as a result of what happens in the play. As much I enjoy watching this play in performance, too often are Richard and Bolingbroke's friends and supporters filled with anonymous white

men: *get to the next scene!*, I find myself thinking, *I don't care about these people*. In these productions, the lack of interest in the rest of the court is abundantly clear. It is rare that a production of this play emphasises that Richard's whims and Bolingbroke's uprising have consequences beyond just the main players. Watching Andoh and Linton's production on YouTube made me realise that *Richard II* is best played similarly to the *Henry IV* plays: the play might be named after one king, but it is truly an ensemble drama. I do not think I have seen a production where I have even cared about what happened to Thomas Mowbray, and yet India Ové's interpretation of the role is one of the most memorable I have ever seen. Ové's Mowbray is all brash swagger and trash talk, a stark contrast to Niles' stoic strength, only for that façade to collapse when Richard decides to banish him from the kingdom. Ové, in one of the production's strongest turns, then effortlessly switches from the flamboyant Mowbray to the imperious Northumberland, Bolingbroke's smug right-hand man impeccably dressed in royal blue, all too happy to help engineer Richard's downfall. But in her scenes with Niles' young Bolingbroke Ové's Northumberland takes over where Dona Croll's John of Gaunt left off: an unshakeable loyalty to his chosen king, and a strong sense of camaraderie. Croll too is impressive and magisterial in her brief time on stage as Gaunt: whereas I am aware that theatre requires you to suspend your disbelief to varying degrees of success, I note that, here it is Gaunt's over-exerting himself that leads to his collapse and death, which seems like a more realistic scenario than Richard being roughly violent with him.

Elsewhere, this production finally does something with the Queen (a strong performance by Leila Farzad), and grants her agency (and a personality) through a simple production choice: having Richard genuinely be in love with her. Many modern productions focus on the king's relationship with Aumerle as a romantic subplot – but then, to play the king as someone completely disinterested in women, scenes that then feature the Queen feel like empty air. There is no

urgency, then, to the stolen moments Richard has with her towards the production's end; it is hard to care about her when she overhears the gardeners gossiping about her husband. We do not care about her, because these productions do not care about her either. But Andoh and Linton's production, in its emphasis on the royal court as a whole, cares about how she feels about her husband, and cares about how she feels about the production's series of events – by placing her into Richard's close orbit. At the show's outset, we see Richard, his Queen, and Aumerle (Ayesha Dharker) play a puppet show together as the court assembles, and throughout the production Richard and the Queen publicly display their affection for each other: dancing together, holding each other, stolen kisses. The tenderness in their final scene together feels earned, feels genuine. I do not want to suggest that we all cast Richard as a straight man from now on, though – indeed, loving the Queen does not make Richard straight. After all, we cannot fully quantify or conceive Shakespearean queerness, or queerness in general, along a gay/straight binary: “Homosexuality and its historical placement become synonymous with the queer. [...] If queerness can be defined, then it is no longer queer—it strays away from its anti-normative stance to become the institutionalized norm. Queerness is not a category but the confusion engendered by and despite categorization” (Menon 2011, 7). Andoh's Richard certainly is not straight: he kisses Mowbray before the duel commences, and is very affectionate with Dharker's Aumerle (indeed, according to Hailey Bachrach during the Twitter watch party organised by Varsha Panjwani, the two kissed during the show one night). Rather, this production re-emphasises that non-monosexuality (bisexuality, pansexuality) is its own distinct queer experience, especially one that is quite similar to the Shakespearean queerness that Menon defines. In any case, Andoh and Linton's engagement with the Queen, as well as Farzad's performance in the role, renders both Richard and the Queen as more complex, human characters.

Andoh and Linton's *Richard II* is a ground-breaking landmark in contemporary Shakespeare performance, as well as striking new ground for women of colour theatre-makers and artists. It is also a sharp, careful reading of the play that tells us much more interesting things about the play, about Shakespeare, about Richard and Bolingbroke, and about the foundations of English rule than a production with anonymous cis het white men has in quite some time.

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Directorless Shakespeare

Richard II, Embracing Alterity and Decolonising Theatrical Practice

E.M. Pellone

The best-spoken, most emphatically and efficiently performed production of *Richard III* I have seen since Steve Berkoff's much showier and conceptually stylized 1994 production in London and New York.¹

So let us march ahead! Away with all the obstacles! Since we have landed in a battle, let us fight!
... Before one thing and another there hangs a curtain: let us draw it up!²

Is there a way to uncover something new about Shakespeare's plays? Have centuries of performances, responses, and criticism mapped out plays that seem so familiar to us that all that is left is to re-appropriate, re-interpret, re-adjust, do something radical? And is there anything radical left to do? Shakespeare is other. His plays are other: written for performance conditions four centuries ago, in a language from which modern English speakers are increasingly alienated, replete with the historical embeddedness of uncanny voices which should render their easy appropriation by twenty-first century sensibilities problematic. And yet his canonical status, unlike any other author, means – especially in English-speaking

¹ Tom Cartelli, unpublished review of Anærkē Shakespeare's *Richard II*, The Rose Theatre, Kingston-upon-Thames, 24 March, 2018.

² Bertolt Brecht, *A Short Organum for the Theatre*, 1949, para. 32.

countries – that he is ingested, whatever the dietary requirements, into the mouths of students. Further, his theatre, or derivatives of his theatre, colonise and occupy commercial stages. And yet, one often feels estranged in that theatre. Unrepresented. Unspoken to.

So, where do we meet this otherness with our otherness and make theatre that is meaningful with Shakespeare's text? This article considers the many faces of otherness, in expected and unexpected places. How the text can be othered, the audience, the actors, the characters othered, how gender and mimesis are forms of otherness, and even how Shakespeare is consistently othered through saturated assimilation. It asks how to destabilise the entrenched hierarchies that inform Shakespeare, the insistence that he needs to be interpreted through the medium of a director – this single dominating vision forcing an audience to ingest a pre-digested meal. It focuses on Shakespeare's *Richard II* performed by Anørkē Shakespeare, a UK-based company that works internationally and interculturally. The *Richard II* production was a theatrical experiment with three stagings in the UK and Germany between 2018-2019, in which I was both a practitioner and a scholar.³ The productions were ensemble driven, non-mimetic, embraced alterity, and directorless, in which relevance could be free and subjective rather than predetermined and imposed. Anørkē Shakespeare's fluid gender and race casting applied pressure to the notion of representation. All representation is difference. Representation is a repetition necessarily other to its initial iteration. It is different from the previous occasion and defers the final meaning (Derrida 1984, 1-28; 1988). This is especially true of theatre and exemplified by Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's theatre was created and performed without the figure of a director. Within a mindset of collaboration, distributed authority and dispersed

³ This case study relies on unpublished material, such as interviews with other practitioners, scholars, conversations with company members, audience members, email correspondence, unpublished reviews and comments. Permissions were granted to the author to use this material for the dissemination of the research.

responsibility: “a process of joint decision making in a collective enterprise” (Wiggins 2018). But Western theatre is steeped in the tradition of the director. Of autocratic and hierarchical structures. Contemporary avant-garde theatre, moving towards post-humanism, is even pushing past the need for an actor.⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein reminds us that we always construct meaning against a hidden background. Before any change or revolution is possible we must expose what is there, we must see the invisible structures – the assumed structures – that keep us locked in unquestioned repetition: “What is inexpressible (what I find mysterious and am not able to express) is the background against whatever I could express has its meaning” (Wittgenstein 1984, 16). The hardest thing is to make this background apparent. This article, using as a case study Anrøkē Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, seeks to do that.

Directorial, design-driven work has taken a hagiographic hold, a hold that has colonised even the acting process. The “Original Practice” work at Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre, London, which focused on the materiality of original staging rather than practical and structural aspects of rehearsing a play, had actors employ “a broadly Stanislavskian approach [...] and indeed some actors may have utilized it, not because they were asked to do so by Globe directors (though Mark Rylance and Mike Alfreds certainly encouraged its use) but because it is widely taught in modern actor training” (Purcell 2017, 69). The undisputed hegemony of the director exists deep in the colonisation of the actor’s mind, right back to the training institutions, before the rehearsal room or the performance stage. Stanislavski – a director – breaks down the process, once belonging entirely to an actor, into a series of signposts on the road the actor needs to tread. Thus, the theatrical space, once inhabited by a company of collaborative actors, has been colonised by directors, who usurp authority, occupy the territory of

⁴ See, for example, the work of Rimini Protokoll and Royal Shakespeare Company (2016).

decision making, relegating actors to a servile function – blank canvases which directors paint on. Anǫrkē Shakespeare seeks to decolonise that territory, restoring autonomy to the original occupants. The hierarchical configuration of Western theatre, that lay with actors and playwrights till as late as the nineteenth century, has now shifted into the hands of directors, designers and producers. Actors are often the last consideration of a project that is well defined before they are invited to join: once conceived, the actors are cast into that conception. Acclaimed British theatre director Lucy Bailey engaged, at the time of her interview with the author of this article, in a five-month development for a new play with her designer, feels “the tools of the director and designer are brilliant at excavating certain worlds and not always are actors as brilliant as that, so what you are trying to get to with the actors is a playground that they can play in” (pers. comm. 20 January, 2020). Her resistance to directorless Shakespeare also lies in a well touted truism that “at all points there would have been some form of leader [...] I’m sure he [Shakespeare] was very directorial in his approach to plays” (pers. comm. 20 January, 2020).

Moreover, British commercial theatre habitually relies on casting a famous actor, one often recognisable from the visual media of television and film. The character becomes even more estranged from the play and the audience: no longer Shakespeare’s Hamlet, but Benedict Cumberbatch’s Hamlet, or rather the director’s notion of Benedict Cumberbatch’s Hamlet. This conundrum is captured in Michael Billington’s review of the 2015 *Hamlet* at the Barbican Theatre, London: “My initial impression is that Benedict Cumberbatch is a good, personable Hamlet with a strong line in self-deflating irony, but that he is trapped inside an intellectual ragbag of a production by Lyndsey Turner that is full of half-baked ideas” (2015).

Simon Russell Beale discloses that an actor needs to approach Shakespeare’s text without “memory or desire” (2019). A director, by definition,

approaches the text with both. As much as an actor may try to free themselves to serve the text, they are confined by another's memory and desire. Working experimentally on the *Henriad* at the Globe, in Michelle Terry's criticised attempt to re-empower ensemble driven work,⁵ Philip Arditti captures these invisible walls that surround an actor, hemmed inside someone else's mind, not the outer parameters of the text:

I've been an actor 20 years I've done lots of shows at the National Theatre and in the West End, you know, big parts small parts, and I think this is really, you know, this is a really great way for me to work, it works much better [...] the other element is also that directors decide on things, the other element is what we wear and the set and the whole concept of the production, which really bears heavy [...] So the other element is directors decide all of that and that is decided even before you've been cast and it's likely that you have been cast according to those things as well, so the other kind of maybe cage potentially, I mean some things are really liberating about that as well, but I think another thing that also happens is you find yourself inside someone's idea. (Arditti, pers. comm., 6 March, 2019)

The actor is othered completely. In a binary dialectic the director as 'Self' uses the actor, to reflect a projection of their fantasies, as 'Other'.⁶ By contrast, the early modern theatre of Shakespeare had no director to other the actor. The theatrical profession was a tight and small community. According to John Astington "the total population of actors in London in the first decades of the seventeenth century must have stood between a hundred and fifty and two hundred people" (2010, 8). It was a somewhat exclusive membership with no vacuum created by the absence

⁵ "If ever there was an argument for director's theatre it is this production of Hamlet which is so muddled, so various in style, so completely incoherent in action, that Terry finds herself beached in the centre with nowhere to go" (Tripney 2021). See also (Waugh 2018).

⁶ The self/other concept is attributed to G. W. F. Hegel [1807] (1976).

of the figure of director. The cross pollination among companies was notable in plays of the period, which referenced one another's work, in an industry fuelled by "imitation, borrowing and competition" (Clare 2014, 1). The culture of collaboration thrived across the whole structure – not only between players, but also poets and playwrights. G. E. Bentley notes nearly two-thirds of the plays that are in the accounts of Henslowe's diary are the work of more than one author (1971, 199). Theatre was created in a non-individuated process that did not require single locations of leadership and authority.

In the manuscript of *Sir Thomas More* we observe different authors adapting, rather than cutting, to Tilney's suggestions (Keenan 2014, 72). Even with the evidence of censorship and adaptation we see that "the relationship between players, playwrights and censor was collaborative" (Ibid. 85). The myth that Shakespeare as author directed his plays can be disabused by this multi-dimensional access and dispersed authority over a living and changing performance document, and the relationship of playwrights to acting companies. Playwrights were commissioned agents or willing merchants, often not actors in the company. Simply, Shakespeare would not have known what a theatrical director was. He would have had neither the word nor the concept.⁷ His plays were conceived for, and created in, a theatrical, collaborative mindset, Shakespeare working in partnership on roughly a third of his canon.⁸ The *actors* staged and performed the plays. Together. His plays did not require interpretation *before* they were performed, but *as* they were performed. This dynamic interchange meant "audience members could be highly active and independent agents when it came to shaping the meaning of contemporary plays" (Ibid. 157).

⁷ Although the function of a director first emerged in the figure of the actor-manager in the 19th century, it took even longer to establish itself as an independently named role: "The OED records 'director' as a term of American origin. Its first example dates from 1911. The first example in British usage from 1933, from a film review in *Punch*. And it's first example in a theatrical context occurs in 1938, in Somerset Maugham's memoirs" (Wiggins 2018).

⁸ The *New Oxford Shakespeare* (2016) records the number at 17 plays.

There is evidence that “the spectators’ ‘judgement’ [...] would shape what was to be altered or cut from the play” or even determine whether the play should be performed again (Stern 2012, 86). Now plays are generally interpreted before they are staged.

The still-prevailing fashion for director-led conceptualisation of Shakespeare’s plays, to make them supposedly more relevant and attenuate their datedness, misogyny and racism, often enlivens the text in far less radical or accessible ways than the plays are in themselves. It others the otherness of the text in an attempt to render it recognisable. It begets a kind of egocentrism on the part of the theatre maker that passes up nuanced and democratic collaboration with an audience in favour of didactic and pre-digested interpretations imposed upon them. We need look no further than the famed *Julius Caesar* in Central Park, New York, with Caesar as Trump, to find a striking example (Paulson and Deb 2017). Once Caesar is reduced to a populist tyrant, there is no agony for Brutus, no obstacle for Cassius, no ambivalence for Mark Antony in his movement from friendship with “the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times” (3.1.282-3) to the political machinations of a public incitement for revenge and civil war. Once one piece is solidified, set in contemporary concrete, Shakespeare’s moment-to-moment myriad mindedness is simplified, rendered singular and, worse, irrelevant, dating more quickly than the texts directors are trying to contemporise. *Measure for Measure* at the Donmar Theatre, London 2018, which offered a historical rendition followed by a contemporary retelling, exemplified this paradox (Pellone 2019): “the pertinence of the play to our own time emerges far more strongly when it is done in period” (Billington 2018). The contemporising of Shakespeare can be an attempt to obliterate its otherness under a layer of supposed familiarity.

So, is it possible to discover something inside Shakespeare’s texts that has been consistently obscured by conceptual imposition, starting in the Restoration

(with its fashion for changing ending and amplifying female provocation with newly allowed actresses performing on stage) and reaching its apotheosis in the recent century? Anærkē Shakespeare's directorless productions aim to do just that. To re-embody Shakespeare's texts on the modern stage, without a director. Not in an attempt to re-create historical theatre, but to re-orient the entry position of inquiry. To start at a different beginning and to discover a different end. And to be unsure what that end will be. This is not authorial nostalgia. The actors freely respond to and imagine the plays in relationship to the nuances of the text, on the floor and in rehearsal, in order to engage in democratic complexity, and free the actors from a culture of servility. The text is part of the ensemble but is not a director. Directorless theatre does two things that are paradoxical and in tension. It recognises and engages with Shakespeare's otherness, but at the same time renders the otherness recognisable by attending to the subtleties of the play without imposing concepts upon that play by a single, authoritative figure. To pay attention to what the text is saying is not an imperative to do what the text is saying. Shakespeare's texts are full of complexities and contradicting theses. Anærkē Shakespeare's directorless experiment is an attempt to pay close attention to things that may have been missed or misunderstood, as so often we have inherited our understanding from performance traditions, and landmark productions. We think the plays are familiar, but, surprisingly, they may not be.

Directorless Shakespeare offers a response that is ensemble driven, effects diversity in casting, re-instates distributed authority to actors and text, and creates a living theatre that is myriad minded and not restricted to the nineteenth-century introduction of the singular vision of the director.⁹ It destabilises entrenched hierarchies using scholarly research and experimental performance to challenge the way theatre is created and received, and to share Shakespeare's texts in

⁹ A cultural phenomenon that also coincided with the rise of the conductor. See Norman Lebrecht (1997).

democratic ways. Embracing the otherness in another way of doing things. It exists in small moments: the nuance of thought and feeling, in reaction, in interaction. And that is the fillip. The play is not completed when read, but it is also not completed when acted; it is only in its fullest stage of realisation when it is performed with an audience: the audience responsible for the final interpretation. It is the Brechtian notion of un-anesthetising and waking up the critical engagement of the spectators:

For such an operation as this we can hardly accept theatre as we see it before us. Let us go into one of these houses and observe the effect which it has on the spectators. Looking about us, we see somewhat motionless figures in a peculiar condition [...] They scarcely communicate with each other, their relations are those of a lot of sleepers [...] True their eyes are open, but they stare rather than see, just as they listen rather than hear [...] Seeing and hearing are activities, and can be pleasant ones, but these people seem relieved of activity and like men to whom something is being done. (Brecht 1977, 187)

To make the contemporary theatrical process democratic, to awaken critical engagement, it is not enough to empower the actor and free the text; it is also necessary to reinstate the status of the audience. Throughout Shakespeare's plays there are continual references to an audience-driven engagement: Hamlet, an audience member, tells the players to perform, what to perform and even how to perform; the Chorus in *Henry V* desires the audience to work their imagination; the epilogue in *As You Like It* appeals to a common hu(wo)manity for understanding; the aristocratic spectators in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* comment unabashedly on the mechanicals' play and Puck, in his final moment, begs forgiveness, friendship and a lending of hands; Prospero's epilogue owns that only the audience can set him free. The plays internally and circumstantially are strewn with examples of the audience's power; the players their servants. Anǝrkē Shakespeare's directorless productions, not conceived to please a single

figure in the rehearsal room, release the audience from passive spectators to active participants, served by the company. Without a director to ‘excavate’ the play, the audience is free to decide where their mind falls and how their loyalties lie. We must stop othering the audience.

To lift Brecht’s curtain – “Before one thing and another there hangs a curtain: let us draw it up!” (1949, para. 32) – we must clear the static, the distractions, the affectations, the amendments. We must focus more sharply and fine-tune the ear to the text. Beyond mimesis. Beyond a ‘contemporary’ concept. Jerzy Grotowski, rigorously testing theatre, alchemises it down to its purest and essential elements:

By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous, we found that theatre can exist without make-up, without autonomic costume and scenography, without a separate performance area (stage), without lighting and sound effects, etc. It cannot exist without the actor-spectator relationship of perceptual, direct, “live” communion. This is an ancient theoretical truth, of course, but when rigorously tested in practice it undermines most of our usual ideas about theatre. (1967, 62)

But Grotowski has not considered taking himself out of the equation. He, as a director, is responsible for its purification, and not listed as one of the superfluities. The hierarchical structure, so deeply entrenched, is invisible. Even Billington, reviewing theatre productions for *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK for 50 years, had never seen a directorless production prior to Anørkē Shakespeare’s *Richard II*.

The directorless Shakespeare project has evolved into a philosophical concern to recover a mindset that seems an anathema to much contemporary performance practice: the mindset of distributed authority. There remains a conviction that a leader will always emerge, that Shakespeare *must* have directed his own plays and that, in the words of the British actor Dame Janet Suzman, it is human nature to

follow a leader. To work without a director is not simply eliminating the figure. It is eliminating this mindset. The way actors are trained today, and 400 years of theatrical developments, means they look for a director. Again, we witness the imposed servility of the colonised space. Many actors define their job as doing what the director tells them to do. Or as actor Christopher Eccleston puts it: “Actors don’t tend to be boat rockers. They might want to impart a little motion, but they’d be worried they’d be thrown overboard somewhere down the road. There is a definite idea that you can say and do what you want to actors because they are desperate for work” (2019, 173) Actors will look for reassurance, for information, for external authority; they have little practice in being responsible for costume or set design, which has become the domain and worry of other people. In order to give actors freedom, you increase their worries. In a directorless production the ingrained assumptions mean any act of authority and assertion in the room is tarnished as directorial. Interest in these other layers were once the provenance of early modern actors. However self-conscious the contemporary actor feels when offering a firm opinion, the collaborative process must not be apathy or an abdication of responsibility to anything other than their roles, but rather an increase in assertion and care for the entire production. Anthony Renshaw, member of Anørkē Shakespeare, remarked:

I’ve been a professional actor for thirty-six years now and been very lucky to perform in numerous productions at the National Theatre, the RSC and various tours all over Britain. I can honestly say this project of directorless Shakespeare has been the most exciting and invigorating and sometimes frightening thing I’ve ever done. Normally on the first day of rehearsal the company meets and everything has already been decided. The set design, costumes, even script cuts which may be deemed necessary. The director will have a very clear idea of what the play means and how he or she wants each actor to take their character. With Anørkē Shakespeare this is completely decided by the actors! Which is the most

liberating thing ever. Also, it's a huge responsibility. Some actors will thrive having that much input. It's not for everyone. I know some actors have declined to take part in this process finding the idea too intimidating. The fact is, it is a forgotten, extraordinary way of working that is so fulfilling and rewarding. The actual performance results have been wonderful too. So many audience members have said to me that the story and character relationships are so clear. I think that's what happens when actors work for each other and not a director. It's woken my creative soul up again and reminded me why I wanted to act. (pers. comm.)¹⁰

We are dealing with different, sometimes conflicting kinds of alterity. The historical, linguistic and formal otherness of Shakespeare's text that is paradoxically both attenuated and exacerbated by concept-driven authority; the colonising of the actor's active role by that authority; the relegation of the audience to Brecht's passive spectators; and the need to render Shakespeare more familiar by expurgating his otherness. Anærkē Shakespeare's working process to mount a directorless production of *Richard II* offers an alternative to this multiplication of otherness in the modern theatre by a collaboration of a myriad of minds on the alterity of Shakespeare's text.

Anærkē Shakespeare's *Richard II* premiered at the Rose Theatre, Kingston-upon-Thames, London, March 2018. The company was named in response to the strongly held opinion – expressed concisely by Joe Dixon, associate actor of the RSC – that without a director there would be “chaos” and “anarchy” (pers. comm.). Devoid of a synonymy with chaos, the etymology of “anarchy” is ironically appropriate. The word stems from ancient Greek, meaning “without ruler”.¹¹ The phonetics variably interrupt the negative connotations associated

¹⁰ All citations from the Anærkē ensemble are from discussions, recorded memos or written correspondence.

¹¹ Anarchy as a philosophical principle and secret centre of power is explored in Giorgio Agamben (2019).

with “anarchy”, evoke the idea of “*arke*” (Greek word for origin), and remind us that Shakespeare’s words need to be spoken to reveal their multiplicity. Nine diverse actors, spanning three generations, gathered: four women, five men, from South Africa, Trinidad, Italy, Australia/Italy, Wales, Sri Lanka/Netherlands, England. Jim Findley, a member of the company, captured the radical novelty of the work: “I realised the other day, it was my 40th anniversary of being a professional, that I have never done a project [...] without a director. I’ve always had somebody tell me where to stand, what to wear, what to say, how to say it, and how loud. So, I’m really excited by this” (pers. comm.). The text was cut collaboratively to avoid privileging a single interpretive eye. All staging and creative ideas were debated in an intensively short rehearsal period of six days.¹² There was a fluidity and ease in which all the actors used their experience and instinct to agree on the strongest staging and textual choices. The material requirements of the production were minimal. The costumes contemporary with a historical gesture. The lighting a single state. The set composed of variously sized solid wooden packing cases, the throne stamped FRAGILE:

The starkness of the studio staging, shared lighting, shrewd cutting of the text, continuous group engagement, and the lightning reflexiveness of the central performance, combined to make this production a revelatory X-ray of the deep structure of the play. (Wilson, unpublished review, 12 April, 2018).

Jack Klaff, a veteran RSC actor, remarked that every seven minutes he was discovering something new about the play (pers. comm.). The reason, according to another participant, David Schalkwyk, was that there was no single interpretive vision. People were unearthing the play without any table talk led by a director or

¹² The main obstacle to a rewarding rehearsal period were the financial restraints. It is not ideal to place actors under so much pressure, but the funding did not allow for a longer rehearsal period. This is something that needs to be considered when attempting directorless work. Until it can be institutionalised commercially, there is always the hurdle of it being financially undernourished.

dramaturg (pers. comm.). The play was not othered to the actors. It became a site for egalitarian exploration and distributed ownership. Theatre director Robert Icke, citing psychologist Douglas Winnicott, argues that “all dynamics are parent child dynamics [...] ultimately the actor will always be a child role, and I don’t mean that in a patronizing way [...] there is a level of release required for great acting and a there is a level of fearlessness and abandon requisite in all really truly great actors [...] something out of control about it, something sort of sublime about it [...] all of those actors need someone to be the parent to enable them to be the child” (Icke, pers. comm., 25 November, 2019). But no one was parenting the actors in Anærkē’s *Richard II*.

In act 4, scene 1 Richard is deposed by Bolingbroke and calls for a mirror to read his sins in the book that is himself, and see what face he has once it is bankrupt of his majesty. At the crucial moment in rehearsal, a masking tape roll was grabbed for to stand in for the mirror, no prop having been pre-designed. And that transformed into the actual mirror. A metal, hollow circle, resonant with the crown, and, as Richard looks through it, the audience is his glass. In a directorless environment, the actors responded unrestrictedly to an offer, opening up a myriad of possibilities, rather than being modulated or externally conducted:¹³ “in this play particularly, the actors are musicians and the instruments they play are themselves” (Howard, pers. comm., 6 April, 2018). Like a jazz ensemble improvising on a particular theme. This is supported by the textual construction of the play. Lines mirror each other, inverted in ironical responses and rhyming puns. The thirty-seven speaking roles were distributed by actors choosing the characters they wished to play, whilst facilitating the logistics of doubling.

¹³ There are directors who encourage collaboration and improvisation through rehearsals, such as Sam Mendes, but the salient point is that they are ultimately responsible for curating an over-all aesthetic and interpretation, and their word is usually regarded as final.

Casting themselves gave strength to the framework of collaboration, the bridge of empathy to character central to unlocking text, more than overriding aesthetic and gender considerations. The authority to cast themselves and embody the thought-to-thought process of lines and interactions, released actors from an imperative umbrella, such as Rupert Goold's conception of Richard as Michael Jackson:¹⁴ “Having the freedom to follow our instincts as actors was so refreshing. Not having someone trying to push you in a certain direction because that's their idea of where you should be was a great thing (Renshaw, pers. comm.).

The casting resulted in a female Richard and Bolingbroke among other nonconventional decisions:

To say that cross-gender casting in the two main roles made no difference in a performance of *Richard II* would understate the difference it did make in relieving the performance of the predictable imbalancings of hormonal masculinity that are only too thoughtlessly replicated in two recent stage productions that went on to become films, featuring a delicately poetic Richard in one version and an overtly effeminate Richard in the other, played by Ben Whishaw and David Tennant, respectively, with a solid-as-a-rock man's man occupying the role of Bolingbroke. Elena Pellone in the role of Richard presented the character with an assurance and self-possession, even under duress, that was positively refreshing while never having the audience think for a second that she was anything other than a she portraying a him. (Cartelli, unpublished review 24 March, 2018)

When Richard is played by a woman he is othered, and yet paradoxically we can be drawn closer to him as a character. The audience is challenged to accept a picture that is supposedly incoherent or in conflict with the text. But who, other

¹⁴ “I wanted to do a Michael Jackson themed RII and the monkey (King Richard has a pet monkey) is a tribute to that.” Goold (2012a n.pg.).

than the historical Richard II himself, well entombed, is the closest candidate to represent him? We must put pressure on the notion of representation itself, for, as stated in the introduction, all representation involves difference. In treating actors as varying identities of other we obfuscate that all actors are other, and not other, to every character. All as close and far as expectation, convention, and prejudice place them. But mostly they are as close as their ability to imbue the role with something of their human spirit. The diversity that ensued from the casting process in Anørkē Shakespeare's *Richard II* was not based on a conceptual design or interpretation, but obviated biases and preconceptions of gender and race as identity. There is a compelling contention that casting is never 'blind', nor should we desire to be 'blind' to our differences. "Fanni Green argued one could erase too much: '[...] I don't want you to forget that I was a black woman that played that man. Because otherwise ... I get invisible'" (Qtd in Howard 2007, 295). But Anørkē's directorless work attempts to dislocate categories of definition by commencing with human actors playing a character as human. We are not blind to difference but interrupt the constructs of what the difference signifies. This challenges a fixation with the concept of mimesis, for what really can be regarded as the right casting or a coherent and visually acceptable tableau? In the Royal Shakespeare Company's newly commissioned work, *Imperium* (2017-2018), out of twenty-three actors only four were women. There were no female actors playing senators because there were no female senators in Rome. The inexpressible, hidden background lies in casting white English men or even a black Caesar. What is comprehended by mimetic casting? We are never able to achieve mimesis, in a Wittgenstein conundrum, we just assume it has meaning, but rarely question what our assumptions are. All mimesis is other. We must take a Heraclitan view: that one can never step into the same river twice. Professor Tony Howard reflected on Anørkē Shakespeare's non-mimetic casting:

The diversity of the performance was an unalloyed and uncomplicated success [...] The male-female casting wasn't an issue [...] Similarly, the production made questions of ethnicity completely irrelevant. There is always an argument about casting black actors as English aristocrats in the Histories because of 'truth to the facts' [...] And with a few exceptions even modern stage productions of *Richard II* tend to limit BAME presence to background roles - despite the fact that the anti-illusionist Shakespearean stage can be a crucible for change. But this production again benefited hugely from the experience and authority of its multiracial cast. That can't be overstated. (pers. comm. 6 April, 2018)

The Shakespearean stage as a crucible for change means that a lack of conceptual force externally determining interpretation and a tapestry of actors with no single congruent race, theme or political motivation could be revelatory.

The lack of fuss about mimetic casting, so that one simply set aside any concern with the identities of the actors and listened to the characters instead, cleared the way for the play to shine radiantly through. (Michael Dobson, pers. comm., 16 April, 2018.)

Academics in the audience reconsidered a play they knew intimately with newly awakened perceptions: "Richard's vulnerable dependence on his court, in a rapidly changing political environment, had never hit me so much before" (Wilson, pers. comm. 6 April, 2018). The directorless work proved that it is possible for things consistently obscured in the text to be noticed:

It also made a point I'd never thought of - that Aumerle is in the same generation and situation as Richard and Bolingbroke. I've always seen him played as a handsome, probably gay, young hanger-on/minion of Richard, as (often) were Bagot and co. And there's a lot of 'weakness' and 'dependency' built into those stereotypes. Now I've looked him up and see he was only about six years younger than his cousins Richard and Bolingbroke - and that makes sense of his

rebellion scenes - it's not just a comedy with funny parents in a tizzy. He is a serious threat to the new King himself. You may have thought about that in rehearsal - I only realised it on Sunday (after many years!) because of the non-type casting, which can truly free the spectator's imagination. (Howard, pers. comm., 6 April, 2018)

The general public also responded to this revelatory aspect and paradoxically found the story-telling clearer without reliance on conceptual hooks and “realistic” casting: “The characters came across strongly without any thought of the gender etc.”; “It made the production feel live + interesting”; “Made me think about the roles rather than the personalities”; “Perhaps heard the words better - simpler to understand the meaning rather than focus on the personalities” (anonymous audience feedback, unpublished data).

The production also disputed the need to rationalise with conceptual handles, such as staging Shakespeare in a women’s prison to justify female actors,¹⁵ or in Africa to justify black actors.¹⁶ There is no way to create historical accuracy nor any desire to do so in a play, which, as Shakespeare reminds us constantly, is what we are watching. A play as reflection and refraction. There is imaginative permission in Shakespeare’s plays, written for an audience unresistant to roles being played by the opposite gender, that permits serious as well as playful interrogations of identity. Actors are complex humans on stage, thinking, having relationships and affecting one another in transitive ways: “Showed that Richard is a person, undergoing an experience. ‘Character’ needn't come into it at all. Gender certainly doesn't” (Howard, pers. comm. 6 April, 2018).

The directorless process allows for the otherness of the text – that is, its nuances, grey areas, ambiguities, liminalities, shadows lurking around its corners – to have space and breath on the stage. It circumvents Bailey’s notion that the

¹⁵ See for example Lloyd (2012).

¹⁶ See for example Doran (2012); Godwin (2016).

director needs to create “a coherent, well thought through, understood, utterly excavated world” and “the moral framework of the play” (pers. comm. 20 January, 2020). Let us take as test case the historical performance practice of playing Richard as homosexual. Productions of *Richard II* on stage and screen are frequently pressured by the conceptual imposition that Richard is a weak, effeminate, gay man with ineffectual political advisors, who are his camp lovers.¹⁷ The obvious problem is that this propagates a prejudice that equates weakness with being female or gay, but there is also little textual evidence to support this. Shakespeare invents a love scene – the historical Richard II was married to a nine-year-old at the time of deposition (Saccio 2000, 22) – marked by shared rhyming couplets, in which Richard and his wife exchange hearts. This is Shakespeare’s familiar convention of love language, immortalised in the preceding play *Romeo and Juliet*. This moment, between Richard and Isabel, is all but ignored by some contemporary productions: the lines are cut or the romance underplayed.¹⁸ The single reference to Richard’s homosexuality occurs when Bolingbroke lists reasons to wash the blood from his hands at the execution of Green and Bushy, their capital punishment an act of treason while Richard remains King (3.1). The ambiguous homosexual charge is notably the only capital offence on the list: “You have in manner with your sinful hours / Made a divorce betwixt his queen and him, / Broke the possession of a royal bed, / And stained the beauty of a fair queen’s cheeks / With tears drawn from her eyes by your foul wrongs” (3.1.11-15). This accusation is contrasted with the sympathetic relationship between Bushy and the Queen (2.2) and the aforementioned parting love scene (5.1). It is Bolingbroke who finally stains the fair queen’s cheeks, Richard’s lament mirroring Bolingbroke’s discourse: “Doubly divorced! Bad men, you violate / A twofold marriage -- twixt my crown and me, / And then betwixt me and my

¹⁷ See for example Goold (2012b); Doran (2013).

¹⁸ See for example productions in footnote above as well Warner (1995).

married wife” (5.1.72-4). By not overtly suggesting sub-textual relationships, but investing in textual relationships, a directorless company can allow the audience shifting viewpoints, the empathy and the freedom either to credit or to dismiss Bolingbroke’s accusation.

Anerkē Shakespeare’s rendition of Shakespeare’s historical tragedy without imposing an explicitly contemporary concept still offered a platform to reflect on unstable political machinations (UK in the throes of Brexit, Teresa May’s deposition by Boris Johnson, his subsequent fall from grace once he assumed power, and the rise of autocratic and conservative governments in Europe), gender fluidity, and the tension between solipsism and shared grief. Interactive elements, working for and against each other, were released so that no single thesis or point of view was privileged:

These ideas came together in the permanent onstage presence of the seasoned company, whose varied reactions to Richard’s unfolding disaster, whether of apathy or agitation, had the gripping compulsiveness of a Greek chorus. And they were personified by Elena Pellone’s quicksilver performance as the doomed king, which was riveting not for its domination of the space, but for its responsiveness to the actions of the other characters. Much was projected through the actor’s eyes: aptly, given the imagery of the play. The political complexity of the role of Shakespeare’s Sun King, historically torn between absolutism and parliamentarianism, was brilliantly caught by this realisation of the company’s collective thinking. (Wilson 2018)

Richard is defined in Shakespeare’s play by his relationships. In Goold’s adaptation for the first episode in BBC *The Hollow Crown* series, Ben Whishaw’s highly affected Richard leaves the jousting field in the first act, interrupting the challenge between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, in a seemingly capricious moment to feed his monkey and decide – by himself – to banish them both. In the play, this decision is made after a parliamentary committee, to which Gaunt gives a

party vote. Compressed to a few moments on stage, this historical council lasted two hours (Saccio 2000, 25). In othering Richard by turning him into Michael Jackson, as Goold and Wishaw do (and Tennant did in 2013), there is a danger of again fetishizing individuality. The crowning lines of Richard's plea for his shared humanity in the "hollow crown" speech, is that he "need[s] friends" (3.2.81).

Two powerful and related intellectual ideas seemed to motor the production: that the dynamics of a Shakespeare play can best be explored by an ensemble working without the 19th-century imposition of the director; and that in this particular historical drama, the protagonist has to be viewed within the matrix of social relationships that comprise Shakespeare's representation of the Ricardian court. (Wilson 2018)

In a Q&A after one of the Anærkē Shakespeare performances, an audience member pointed out the fitness of a play about deposition performed by an ensemble seeking to depose the director. But the true deposition must happen in our minds. The crowning can then be of the collective enterprise, joint decision making and plurality of ensemble-driven work.

After the London premiere, Anærkē Shakespeare's *Richard II* toured to Würzburg, Germany, with a site-specific performance to over three hundred students and members of the public in 2019. The performance took place in a three-tiered liminal space of stairwells and thoroughfares, partly a cafeteria (the throne a metal food trolley), thus evoking the early modern practice of itinerant players who transformed spaces – such as manors, halls, inns, courtyards, squares – meant for another purpose. This raw form of theatre was received with a standing ovation, and Zeno Ackerman, Professor of British Cultural Studies, Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg, noted how the directorless process of emerging meaning could be a more striking and provocative offer than German directorial theatre:

In a more direct and less artificial way than the usual directorial midwifery would have admitted of, the significance and the meanings of the play could be seen to emerge from a (certainly well-rehearsed) process of interaction – a process of interaction that unfolded before the audience's eyes and on the very floor of the auditorium ... This Richard was not 'effeminate'; his fragility was the inescapable fragility caused by masculinist fictions inhabiting a human being. However, the insight into the historical constructedness of such masculinity – and thus of its necessary vulnerability in the face of human History – could be seen to be raised by the presence of a historical text, and not by the forceful imposition of directorial will. As a result, the Anærkē performance – in spite and by force of its limited expenditure or extravagance – proved to be considerably more convincing, striking and provocative than many artfully calibrated or outrageously daring instances of (German) directorial theatre. (2018)

The third production of Anærkē Shakespeare's *Richard II* took place in the historical foundations of the Rose Playhouse, Bankside, London in August 2019. The company now comprised of seven actors, making the doubling and concentrated collectivity even more acute, with Richard playing several smaller roles. Again, the audience responded to the fluidity and transparency of the meta-theatrical storytelling. A spectator, unfamiliar with the play and worried that she would not be able to follow it with the unconventional casting and numerous doubling (especially without the aid of a programme due to technical difficulties on opening night), responded that, where she usually found herself in difficulty, even with plays that were familiar to her, the story-telling was lucid. Additional audience feedback captured this central response (unpublished data):

* the text sprang out with real immediacy [...] Seven actors performing all the roles between them, yet it was never confusing, because they allowed the text itself to tell us who they were.

*seamlessly performing each with a variety of roles distinguished only by different crowns, hats, jackets and shawls. The handover of items of clothing marked each change to a different character and provided important cues to audience and performers.

*At the end of the play, Richard says “Thus play I in one person many people.” This excellent, director-less production really takes this remark to heart, with doubling of parts (marked by quick-fire clothes changes) used to very good effect.

Actors changing on stage, and dressing each other, allow for the veil of pre-digested illusion to slip in a meta-theatrical complicity that means the audience see an ensemble in service of the play that exists as other to the cast in the space. The actors are not the play. The play always remains other through each iteration. But directorless work can make the other of Shakespeare familiar to the audience with all its complexity by exposing unabashedly its inherent meta-theatricality. Shakespeare transitions us constantly from a reminder that we choose to suspend disbelief and that it is our complicity that transports us. The actors and the audience face the shared moments of otherness in the liminal place between the theatrical experience and its meta-theatrical self-reflexivity. We are all players on the stage, in connection rather than estrangement. The final two-page soliloquy of *Richard II*, (usually truncated, but left wholly intact in our collective cutting) expresses a need for connection when Richard, once surrounded by the court, is othered in his cell, alone. He turns thoughts into words, words into a populus, casting away the performativity of self, moving from shadows to substance:

This utterly exposed and powerless man has performed to us in solitary intimacy. It is a completely different performance from the formulae of the challenge scenes or the commanding histrionic ironies of the deposition scene. Now the performance of self, the shadows of those performances, is the substance that he

thought ineffable, hidden within, in the private consumption of grief. In the final soliloquy Shakespeare has forged a way for Richard to lament and to share that lament, not in public show but in our willingness and capacity to *follow* Richard, along the lines of a unique theatrical power that, miraculously, makes “that within” something shared. (Pellone and Schalkwyk 2018, 117-18)

On the Shakespearean stage, in the solitariness of despair, the connection between the actor and audience means that we are no longer other alone.

Directorless Shakespeare challenges the entrenched practice that elevates a star controller as the focus of attention, in the place where one would expect democracy to flourish. By dismantling habitual structures plays can be built on altered structures: forging a new(old) mindset that is arguably closer to the mindset of the world in which the play was created. What is revealed if the text is not bruised by external concepts impressed into it? If the director no longer imposes themselves between the text and the actor, and between the actor and the audience? That there are still things to be discovered in Shakespeare. A major resistance to directorless work is that an external eye needs to ensure the unity of the piece. We are fixated on unity. Scared of the rogue, unstable element. Of the other. And is there a single concept of unity? Anærkē Shakespeare’s productions lack unity in a traditional sense. They included a conflation of non-mimetic casting, different accents, different genders, different performance techniques and even different languages. But we must ask ourselves, is unity intrinsically necessary and valued in and of itself, or are we displeased when it is absent because that is what we have come to expect when we see a theatrical event? A neatly packaged, well-thought out, decided, conceptual meal, already eaten and digested before it arrives on our table? We may discover that unity on stage is not necessarily worth striving for. That it is not reflective of the world we live in and can never be the “mirror up to nature” (*Hamlet*, 3.2.23-24). That we always are other and living with otherness.

Let us fight against a fixation with unity. Against the star individual.
Against the homogenisation of thought and theatre. Let us lift the curtain together.
In a collective enterprise of group decision making.

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Casting and Directing Disability in *Richard III* at Kronborg Castle

Lars Romann Engel and Nila Parly in Conversation

Nila Parly

***Richard III* at Kronborg: Background and Conceptualisation**

The fundamental premise of this production was to establish an inclusive theatre practice which would work with disabled actors and make itself accessible to disabled audiences, actively seeking diverse representation on the stage and in the audience. From the earliest phases of the project, Lars Romann Engel consulted disability experts, and the production ran alongside a series of workshops, lectures and talks organised by HamletScenen and the Copenhagen-based disability consultancy Enactlab to explore inclusivity and accessibility in a broader social context. Conceptually, the production sought to investigate disability as a condition generated by the encounter with an environment created by and for able-bodied people (as opposed to a condition in and of itself). It was crucial to try to avoid stereotypical representations of disability and the problematic practice of ‘cripping up’ which has so often been seen in the case of playing Richard. Richard was played by an able-bodied actor who, together with the director and creative team, developed an interpretation that would represent disability as a stigma primarily effected by language; in this case, the language of Shakespeare’s play. That is, Richard’s ‘otherness’ was only shown as tangibly ‘real’, when it was

articulated by the dialogue spoken by other characters or by himself. At these moments Richard, played by Danish actor Casper Crump, would signal physical and psychological distress. The dual concept of stigmatization and self-stigmatization thus became an important tool in the characterization of Richard: Crump's interpretation portrayed Richard as (acutely) experiencing how language excludes and limits empathetic response. By casting an able-bodied actor as Richard, while casting disabled actors in other roles, the production sought to focus on agency rather than on limitation: the disabled actors were cast to bring artistic nuance, diverse training and international professionalism to the production.

Diversity and Disability

Nila Parly (NP) What does the term 'diversity' mean to you, personally and professionally, in relation to the process of staging *Richard III* at Kronborg in 2019?

Lars Romann Engel (LRE) For me personally, it means that I've had a serious eye-opener with regard to my self-perception and my limitations when it comes to working diversely. At a human-to-human level, it means I've re-developed my understanding of working with people who might be different and see things differently from me. I've had opportunity to train my 'empathetic muscle'. There's an overlap with the professional side: professionally working diversely is extremely instructive, especially when the work takes place in a group setting, where everyone's world view is challenged; everyone must re-negotiate their view of what they think is possible, who they are and how they define their artistic identity. The fact that everyone is pushed beyond their usual comfort zone is important and that no one should be able to fall back on playing any particular 'role' in the group – such as being the 'funny one' or the 'cool one' etc. Those kinds of behavioural patterns were broken down during the rehearsals of *Richard*

III in a productive way, I think, because gradually nobody could insist on being their 'usual' self.

NP Could you give an example of this?

LRE Yes, absolutely. I remember very clearly when we held auditions for actors with disabilities in London – I'm very grateful, I should say, to Graeae Theatre Company for letting us hold the auditions there and offering us their guidance – I was very nervous, both about how to behave and 'how be the director', because I had not worked with disabled actors before. I was also worried about how the actors would respond to our concept for the production – would they like it, or would they disagree with it? But I remember that when we auditioned an actor who was missing both legs it seemed completely natural to get down on the floor when they did, so that we were literally seeing eye to eye. And I guess that's what you do when you work in the theatre and what I always try to do when I direct: I try to get a sense of the person in front of me. So maybe that exemplifies how you adapt to a situation but also how the situation makes you change your way of being in the world. Later, I remember situations where I had to re-negotiate the tempo within rehearsals, because we were using both spoken language and sign language and everyone had to adapt to that. It was challenging, but I think the final artistic product is far more interesting when we are willing to place ourselves in challenging situations.

NP Can you talk about the process of working with disability as a central concept in the production?

LRE I was very conscious of being new to working with disability and I wanted advice from experts, both in Denmark and internationally. Graeae Theatre Company artistic director, Jenny Sealey, was invaluable and provided lists and lists of actors for us; I would never have been able to find the right people without her. We also had some very helpful conversations: I expressed my nervousness about being a beginner in a field that she's worked in for forty years, and I think

being honest about these things is important. That is, I tried to explain that I was a theatre director who wanted to collaborate and learn from her work, and that I would probably say and do some wrong things along the way, but that I would like to be told directly when that happened and what to do instead. Among many things, she taught me to use the correct terminology: beforehand I would use 'disabled' as a noun on its own, instead of saying 'a person with a disability', for example, not realising the implications. Generally, I think we need to show willingness both to learn and to teach (by 'we', I mean the whole theatre sector), because, if we want truly diverse representation, different kinds of theatres need to work together, pooling our different resources and showing the world that solidarity and collaboration are possible.

NP What else made your preparation as a director different from what it usually is?

LRE I had lots of meetings with the Danish Association for Disabled People and the director of communication at the Enactlab group. We created a manual for communication, for example, and had conversations about how to communicate about disability without making blunders or offending people.

NP Do you think it was a mistake that we didn't know more about the different kinds of disability that the actors had? Some of the actors involved in the production gave feedback on things that worked less well, such as lighting or the need for stage management with experience in working with disability access. They also noted the need to increase accessibility for audiences with visual or hearing disabilities.

LRE Absolutely. Even with all the help we had, we still made mistakes, but I hope we've learned from those mistakes. I simply lacked proper insight about, say, the difference between having a visual disability or a hearing disability. We could have planned better and paid better attention, if I had had more insight, there's no doubt about that. Not least practically speaking.

NP One of the actors signed their lines by using a combination of British Sign Language and Vocal Vernacular, which is a mime-based sign language and which we worked with in rehearsals. Their lines were also made available to read as surtitles, but this presented a problem, didn't it? The moments of silence when they signed their lines had an interesting artistic effect and encouraged a heightened awareness of the visual aesthetic of the production, but for audiences with a visual disability they were not accessible; they were simply moments of silence.

LRE Yes, that's another good example of how I wish we had had more foresight as well as more time and resources to plan.

NP How did audiences react to the diverse cast?

LRE I had a conversation with some audience members after one of the first shows, and during the conversation it turned out that they hadn't actually paid attention to the fact that some actors had a disability. I guess my ego wished they had been more aware of what we were trying to do, but on the other hand I hope it means that the artistic concept worked and that these audience members were looking at the people on the stage as people rather than as 'disabled'.

NP How did you move from a dramaturgical concept focused on disability – the exclusion of Richard by his surroundings and his self-stigmatization – to applying that in the casting process? You didn't plan to do that initially, did you?

LRE No, that's true. I think it came from getting a gradual sense of how complex a self-perception people with a disability might have. I mean, the complexity of having to both live with a disability and having to fight for your right to be who you are, but at the same time finding that the politics of that fight mean that you're still seen as different and 'other', you're still excluded. There's a paradox there, which is both extremely interesting and difficult. I think that kind of reflection led to the decision *not* to cast a disabled actor as Richard. I didn't want to fetishize Richard's disability, or create the kind of situation where people

would be able to look at the actor in a patronizing way and think things like “Oh, look, he can play the lead, *even if* he has a disability”. That’s why we wanted actors with disabilities throughout the ensemble, so we could at least try to prevent prejudice from taking over. We wanted to force our audience, and ourselves, to confront prejudicial expectations. And I do think that worked, because nobody simply labelled the production as disability theatre.

Rehearsals

NP Coming back to *Richard III* and our rehearsals: early in the process we had a memorable voice workshop where everyone participated, including you as director and me as dramaturg. Why was that an important moment, do you think?

LRE It’s not usual for creative teams to participate in exercises during rehearsal or make themselves available to the whole group in a way that shows their vulnerability, but I think, as an artist, if you presume to engage with – or ‘disturb’ – other people’s lives, the least you can do is make yourself available, even if those voice exercises were quite challenging for me.

NP It was also the first time we heard the voice of one of the actors who is Deaf. I remember that as a very powerful experience.

LRE Yes, one of the non-Deaf actors was so moved that they actually broke down in tears.

NP What do you think it was about that situation that touched us so deeply?

LRE It’s very difficult to say exactly. I think it was somehow the privilege of suddenly hearing a voice that the speaker couldn’t hear themselves. Like we were given access to something they didn’t have access to, but were still willing to share with us.

NP But I also remember that the Deaf actor didn’t think they were having that effect on us and explained that the emotional effect was quite ‘one-sided’ so to speak.

LRE Yes, they laughed at us for being so pathetic! But I think, for me, some of the emotion also came from seeing someone who was brave enough to let go and give it their all without showing any fear, and then asking myself if I would be as courageous as that.

NP Yes, I too learned a lot about myself and my own limitations from witnessing that kind of courage.

Sign Language and Gender Dynamics

NP Do you think the fact that Jean St Clair, who played Queen Elizabeth, signed her lines had an impact on how the gender dynamics of the play appeared on the stage? Did it affect the power struggle between her and Richard, for example?

LRE I absolutely do. I mean, within the horribly patriarchal structure of the play, Queen Elizabeth is already struggling, so seeing her fighting that fight without being able to use her voice made patriarchal repression stand out even more. I think it provided a new and heightened impression of gender inequality for audiences.

NP But one of the reviewers also noted that the role did not appear as victimized, because Jean forced the other characters, including Richard, to look at her when she signed her lines. They couldn't ignore her, because if they did, they simply wouldn't be able to 'hear' her.

LRE Yes, isn't that interesting? She also ended up being centre-stage a lot of the time.

NP The non-Deaf actors actually encouraged that.

LRE Yes, that's true.

NP And she taught some of the non-Deaf actors Sign Language in the Green Room, I remember. On stage, she would improvise a lot of her signing, but she always made sure to let the non-Deaf actors know their cue in the dialogue. It demanded heightened concentration from everyone.

LRE Yes, and it sharpened everyone's performances.

PR and Communication

NP There were some dilemmas about the publicity material and how the project was to be presented and communicated to potential audiences, right? What are your thoughts on that now?

LRE Politically speaking, I think we were right not to over-emphasize the production as working with disability or use that aspect to create some simplistic publicity stunt. People have asked why we didn't make more of the concept in the PR material, and of course we could have done that, but then we would again have fetishized the disabled actors and used that fetishizing to promote the production. We wanted to avoid that. On the other hand, I was sorry that we didn't reach more disabled audiences.

NP Precisely.

LRE So we could have been more explicit in that sense.

NP So in future would you do things a bit differently, PR-wise, to reach disabled audiences?

LRE Yes, clearly. I can't say that I know precisely what yet, because I still want to avoid the implicit stigmatization. I think it's more a case of ensuring that HamletScenen explicitly works with diversity, inclusion and accessibility on all levels, so that potential audiences know that that's who we are. That way it will be clear to anyone what to expect from our productions. So I think it's a long-term project.

NP Might we have created some kind of introduction to communicate the concept more clearly to audiences?

LRE I think so, yes. We should have spent more time investigating how to communicate the concept to everyone. I mean, we tried to develop inclusion on

the stage, but in the auditorium we failed to some extent. Mainly because we simply didn't know how to do it. So that's an aspect to research and test. We rebuilt the auditorium to create easy wheelchair access, and we'll keep that in place of course, but it wasn't really used. It's clearly a question of time before things change, so we'll just have to keep working.

(Lack of) Diversity in Danish Theatre and Breaking Down Barriers

NP Productions of *Richard III* almost always engage with disability in some form, but surely we don't just want to cast disabled actors when the play is 'about' disability?

LRE No, absolutely not. I think it would be wonderful to always think in terms of diverse casting. To keep challenging prejudice. The strange thing in Denmark is that what we see in the theatre doesn't reflect what we see in the street every day. I mean, it's almost as if the theatre only wants us to see able-bodied, white actors. As artists, we claim to be mirroring society, but that's clearly nonsense, because we aren't. I don't know what we think we are mirroring. Ourselves, maybe. It's not easy to change things and it takes time and effort, but we must do it.

NP Yes. How long do you think it will take Danish theatre to get to the level of diversity that we see in London theatres, for example?

LRE We know that London is about thirty years ahead of us when it comes to diverse casting, so it might well take a couple of generations. But it won't happen on its own, especially not if we all just stick to what we know and what we feel is safe. I mean, it's very easy for me just to hang out with people who look like me and it's easy to find excuses to avoid working in a way that will challenge myself and others. I don't think there's much courage around at the moment. I think we're being very conformist – I'm saying 'we', but of course I can only really talk about my own practice and I think I'm being too conformist.

NP What is needed for us to become more courageous? Would it help to collaborate more across the theatre sector?

LRE Definitely. What are the real barriers to achieving diverse representation that we're talking about here? We don't even know yet, so we need to have that conversation. Our society is diverse, but as soon as we go to the theatre that diversity is nearly non-existent.

NP What else can we do? Could we create seminars and workshops alongside new theatre productions?

LRE Yes and make the agenda very clear: we want to work diversely, and by that we mean that every production needs to engage with diverse representation. We need advisory boards that help us ensure this and help us do it right. Otherwise it's still just white heteronormativity 'explaining' to the world what the world is supposedly like.

NP HamletScenen has an advantage in that its productions are done in English which means you can work with extremely professional international artists and maintain a high artistic level. But what other measures could we take in Denmark specifically?

LRE I think we need to provoke change at an earlier stage in the artistic 'food chain'. Education and vocational training for actors – and directors and set designers need to 'set the scene' for diversity, so that we have a larger pool of professionally trained actors with a disability.

NP What would you say has been the most important lesson from the *Richard III* project?

LRE To stop falling back on what I know and feel comfortable with. We all tend to get stuck doing the same old things, because it's easier to keep doing what we know will work. But that stops creative development, and I think, as artists, we are obliged to evolve our practice. With all due respect, I don't think we're very good at acknowledging that in the Danish theatre sector; there's a lot of 'copy-pasting'.

NP After *Richard III*, what would you do differently, if you had all the time and money available to you?

LRE I would love to create a truly diverse ensemble, where we could develop a shared methodology and collective set of references over time. That would be a dream scenario.

Resisting Processes of Othering **Implied Stage Directions in Australian Theatre** **Productions of *Richard III***

Caitlin Mary West

Shakespeare's plays, in line with early-modern playwriting conventions, contain stage directions embedded in the dialogue. These "implied stage directions" (E. A. J. Honigmann 1998, 187; Michael Cop 2019, 31) set limits on what the performer can do on stage and disobeying them may create confusion or even incoherence. For this reason, many theatre directors and performers prefer to carry out their demands. However, implied stage directions, by suggesting a physical and auditory context for the performance of the dialogue, indicate what the words should come to *mean* on stage. By following implied stage directions, performers reproduce not only the words of the text but also the meaning embedded in it. This may not matter if that meaning is compatible with a particular performance context, but this is not always the case.

In this article, I demonstrate the potentially problematic consequences of following implied stage directions by analysing contemporary Australian stage productions of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. It is well known that implied stage directions in this play describe Richard as having a "hump, withered arm, and limp" (David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder 2014, 102), and the play's dialogue repeatedly suggests that these physical aspects are both the sign and the source of Richard's deviance, in line with the early modern concept of 'deformity'

which supposed a relationship between physical disability and immorality. However, in a contemporary performance context the early modern conception risks perpetuating prejudice and processes that “other” physical disability, similar to the processes involved in “the labelling and degrading of cultures and groups outside of one's own” (Fred E. Jandt 2010, 50). In Australia, an increased awareness of the need to represent disability in more inclusive, positive, and three-dimensional ways has meant that the play's treatment of Richard sits uneasily with contemporary performers. In the Bell Shakespeare Company's 2017 production of *Richard III* (titled *Richard 3*), dramaturgical, casting and marketing decisions were used to re-frame the play and suggest that Richard's deviance was not a product of his disability but rather the product of his being rejected and abused by others. However, the fact that actor Kate Mulvany performed Richard's physicality in this production exactly as it was described in the text meant that the suggestion of a link between disability and evil remained available to the audience on a subtle or even subliminal level. This raises the question: how can performers respond to the implied stage directions in *Richard III* so as to avoid a problematic representation of disability while also ensuring that the performance is intelligible? I address this question by briefly offering two examples of performances of *Richard III* that were staged in Sydney in 2009. In these productions, Richard bore little-to-no physical resemblance to the character as he is described in the script. Rather than rendering the text incoherent, however, this performance decision drew out new meaning by entirely closing off any direct link between Richard's physical appearance and his behaviour. I conclude by suggesting that a willingness to challenge or disobey the direct demands of the text can be productive and even necessary for directors who do not wish to uncritically represent ideas embedded in Shakespeare's plays that are considered problematic in a contemporary context.

Implied stage directions

It is widely acknowledged that Shakespeare embedded stage directions in the dialogue of his plays. Although recent scholarship has focused on the role and presence of *explicit* stage directions¹, implied directions were in fact the most common form of stage direction in early modern English theatre. Tim Fitzpatrick writes that, in Shakespeare's plays, "the relevant information for the actors is not in the stage directions, but in their dialogue" (2011, 10). John H. Astington writes that Shakespeare "leads and directs the actor's gesture through the logic of the text" (2006, 258). Aston and Savona, describe a range of performance practices described by what they term "intra-dialogic stage directions" (1991, 75), including the actor's physical appearance, their gestures, facial expression, and movement, as well as design elements such as costume, sound, set and properties (1991, 82-89). Examples of implied stage directions include descriptions of onstage action, such as "What, dost thou turn away and hide thy face?" (*Henry VI Part 2*, 3.2.74), and the location of the action, such as "Well, this is the Forest of Arden" (*As You Like It*, 2.4.13). Implied stage directions were a necessary feature of the early-modern theatre world, in which, according to Tiffany Stern, actors only received their own lines and not a full copy of the play (2007, 2). Because implied stage directions are spoken aloud on stage, ignoring or disobeying them can lead to incongruity and even incoherence. Evelyn Tribble gives the example of "Macbeth's plea to the ghost of Banquo to 'shake not thy gory locks at me'" and points out that "if the actor playing Banquo does not perform the required gesture [...] the effect is unintentionally comic" (2011, 66). Tim Fitzpatrick explains that disobeying an implied stage direction can lead to "nonsense" (2011, 1), and Jean Alter writes that it can create "ambiguity" (1990, 181). In other words, breaching the performative directions or limits set by the text can disrupt the spatial or

¹ See Dustagheer, Sarah and Gillian Woods (eds.). 2018. *Stage Directions and Shakespearean Theatre*. London and New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare. This volume focuses exclusively on explicit stage directions and makes no reference to implied ones.

logical coherence of the performance in a way that is often immediately and distractingly obvious.

An awareness of this at times underlies the language of contemporary theatre directors. In 2012, the historical King Richard III's body was discovered in a car park in Leicester, UK. Following the discovery, the *Sydney Morning Herald* asked prominent Australian Shakespearean directors and performers if their approach to performing Richard would be affected by the fact that the exhumed body bore "no evidence of hump, twisted leg or deformed arm" (Elissa Blake 2013), although it did confirm that the historical Richard had scoliosis. In almost every case, the answer was no. Bell shrugged off the discovery, saying that "it doesn't make much difference, frankly [...] Whatever the evidence is, we'll keep on playing the text" (quoted in *ibid.*). Actor Mark Kilmurry, who was at the time preparing to both direct and star in *Richard III* at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre, insisted that "Shakespeare has written him as a deformed villain. Playing him with just a slight limp would undercut the play" (quoted in *ibid.*). Kilmurry's response is particularly interesting because it suggests that the desire to perform Richard as he is written does not arise merely out of a naive reverence for Shakespeare, but is the consequence of an implicit belief that resisting the text will somehow violate it or disrupt its coherence.

By 'playing the text', however, directors concede not merely to a series of practical demands, but also to the values and ideas that those demands bring with them. W.B. Worthen writes that "plays become meaningful in the theatre through [...] acting, directing, scenography" (2003, 9), and these are the practices that implied stage directions dictate. Alter acknowledges the link between implied stage directions and meaning when he writes that a "heavy accumulation" of implied stage directions "restricts the freedom to change meaning" (1990, 181). Of course, the meaning embedded in the written text and communicated in a performance might be compatible with the director's vision for the production, but

this is not always the case. When clashes occur, directors often seek to find creative ways to reinvent the text. And in the case of *Richard III*, this has become something of a contemporary imperative, given the play's representation of Richard's body.

Implied stage directions in *Richard III*

In recent years, scholars have argued that references to Richard's physical appearance in *Richard III* are vague and indefinite. Katharine Schaap Williams argues that "Shakespeare's play differs from other texts in refusing to specify the exact details of Richard's form" (2013, 760), and Marcela Kostihová writes that "Shakespeare's text [...] is surprisingly ambiguous in describing the physical nature of Richard's deformity" (2013, 136). While it is true that the play does not contain the degree of descriptive detail that we see in, for instance, *Henry IV Part 2*, the idea that it is "ambiguous about [Richard's] physical form" (Williams 2009) is not entirely accurate. An analysis of the function of implied stage directions function will help to clarify the ways in which the play does set a series of definite boundaries for how Richard's physical appearance may be represented on stage.

Identifying and interpreting implied stage directions can at times be difficult, since they are not distinguished typographically, and their demands can be non-specific. David Bevington argues that implied stage directions are often "far from unequivocal on [their] requirements of gesture" (1983, 95). He also notes that lines can be interpreted differently in different historical periods and contexts; for instance, a line like "My hair doth stand on end to hear her curses" (*Richard III*, 1.3.303) cued the use of a fright wig in eighteenth-century (Bevington 1984, 88). However, although the demands of implied stage directions are not always fixed and obvious, this does not mean that they do not influence on-stage action. Rather, their openness in these moments simply causes them to perform a more *proscriptive* than *prescriptive* function. A line may not tell the performer exactly what they should do, but it does place a *limit* on what they can

do. The words “My hair doth stand on end”, suggest a performance of fear or horror, which may be expressed in any number of contextually appropriate ways, including through the uses of facial expression, gesture, or props (such as a fright wig). However, although there is room for interpretation, there is a limit to what the performer can do on stage. It would likely seem incongruous, for instance, if they spoke the line without showing any sign of emotion.

Returning to *Richard III*, it is clear that implied stage directions in this play perform a *proscriptive* function. They leave the performer free to some extent, while still placing a definite limit on what they can do. In the dialogue of *Richard III*, three key physical characteristics of the title character are described: a hunched back, indicated by the line “bunch-backed toad” (1.3.246); a pronounced limp, referenced both in the line “dogs bark as I halt by them” (1.1.16-23) and in Richard’s description of himself as a “cripple” (2.1.90); and a withered hand, indicated by the words “my arm is like a blasted sapling, withered up” (3.4.68-9). These three physical features may be exaggerated or played down to some degree, and they may be represented using prosthetics, costume, or the actor’s physical performance. However, performing Richard without any semblance of a hunched back, limp, or withered arm would seem incongruous, particularly considering the regularity with which Richard’s appearance is referenced throughout the play. Williams notes that the text presents a “multiplicity of viewpoints” about Richard’s appearance, and that Richard himself exaggerates and “performs” his disability at times, using “his body as a kind of prop” (2009). She highlights the fact that there is a degree of malleability in terms of how Richard’s body is represented on stage. However, the actor’s performance is ultimately tethered at these three key physical points, which have been perpetuated in both scholarship (Mitchell and Snyder 2014, 102) and on the stage, where the vast majority of high-profile performers of Richard, (including Laurence Olivier, Ian McKellen, Kevin Spacey, and Lars Eidinger) have retained these physical features.

Susan L. Anderson notes that, in Shakespeare's play, "[Richard's] disability is both sign and signified as it both causes and represents his moral perfidy" (2019, 145).² When Richard describes himself as "rudely stamp'd", "curtailed of this fair proportion", "Deform'd" and "unfinished" (1.1.16-20) and explains that "since I cannot prove a lover [...] I am determined to prove a villain" (1.1.28-30), a common conclusion is that, "finding little in the way of salvation for his 'lowly form,' [Richard] throws in his lot with the misshapen and disfigured realm of demonic nature" (Mitchell and Snyder 2014, 100). Moreover, according to Mitchell and Snyder, the play signals that Richard's disability did not only cause his moral deviancy but is also a sign of it. They explain that Shakespeare's "metaphorical tactic", is to create a character whose "physical differences underline his own metaphysical unfitness to govern." (2014, 101). This idea arises out of an early-modern belief in a relationship between physical difference and moral deviance³. In a contemporary context, however, such a relationship is problematic, in part because the notion of deformity has been replaced by the concept of disability. In particular, the "social model" of disability distinguishes between physical impairment and disability, suggesting that "many of the problems which disabled people face are generated by social arrangements, rather than by their own physical limitations" (Tom Shakespeare 2013, 14). The social model of disability suggests that impaired body's "aesthetic and ethical value" (Williams 2013, 767) is not inherent but is subjective and imposed on it by external forces. Williams points out that the concept of disability does not map

² See also Tobin Siebers: "Shakespeare's Richard III is a hunchback, but his disability represents deceitfulness and lust for power, not a condition of his physical and complex embodiment" (2008, 48).

³ As scholars have long observed, the early modern concept in question here is that of 'deformity'. As Williams writes, the notion of deformity" existed "before a social construction of disability" (2013, 759), and it was underpinned by an "interpretive judgment about aesthetic and ethical value" which was often negative (2013, 767). See also Davis who argues that Shakespeare, "clearly holding to all these opinions" of the relationship between deformity and deviance, implies that Richard's "behaviour is the result of his appearance" (2002, 53).

onto the early-modern idea of deformity (2009), and this necessarily presents a problem for contemporary performances of *Richard III*, including the Australian examples, which I will analyse in what follows. How can contemporary performers critically engage with and resist the othering of the disabled body that Shakespeare's play so explicitly articulates?

Performing disability in contemporary Australia

Historically, Australia has lagged behind other Western countries when it comes to the representation and inclusion of artists with disabilities. According to Bree Hadley, "It is only in the last 5 to 10 years that problematic representations of disability, roles for disabled people, and the problem of 'cripping up' have begun receiving mainstream media attention in Australia, in alignment with similar critiques in the US, UK, Europe, and elsewhere" (2017, 309). This slowness to engage can be seen in the fact that there is a clear under-representation of artists with disability in the creative sector. According to a report from the 2018 Meeting of Cultural Ministers entitled *Research Overview: Arts and Disability in Australia*, 18% of Australians overall reported having disability in 2015 (9), while only 9% of employees in creative and cultural spheres reported the same (3). Artists with disability face numerous barriers to participation in Australia, including negative attitudes, a lack of awareness, and minimal access to training and professional development opportunities (DADAA 2012, 18). This lack of access to professional opportunities has been exacerbated by the fact that characters with disabilities have often been played by actors without disability. A glance at recent performances of *Richard III* confirms this fact: in the last ten years, two of the three professional Australian stage productions of this play featured an actor without disability in the title role.

However, in the last few years there have been signs of a (slow) shift in some of these attitudes and behaviours. Hadley notes that in recent years,

“references to disability, disabled artists, and disabled arts practices have become a regular part of theatre training, production, policy, funding, and critique” (2017, 305). There has also been a growing body of research and reporting on disability and the arts from sources such as Screen Australia and the Australian Council for the Arts over the last decade, and particularly in the last five years. Disability-led theatre and performance has become increasingly visible; productions such as Back to Back Theatre’s *Ganesh Versus the Third Reich* (which toured in Australia and internationally from 2009-2014) and Emma J Hawkins’ solo show for the Melbourne Comedy Festival titled *I Am Not A Unicorn!* (2015) have been performed at popular festival venues around Australia. Professional opportunities for artists with disability have slowly begun to increase, and there has been a greater awareness of the need for disabled roles to be played by actors with disability. In 2017, Melbourne’s Malthouse Theatre staged a new play about Joseph Merrick entitled *The Real and Imagined History of The Elephant Man*. In this production, the lead actor Mark Leonard Winter was replaced by Daniel Monks, who has a disability, when it became clear to the cast during rehearsals that the role of ‘The Elephant Man’ should not be played by an actor without a disability (Bailey 2017). Although the novelty of the incident was evidenced by the consistency and enthusiasm with which the media pointed out and praised the casting change, it signified a step in the right direction.

This growth in visibility has led to more nuanced representations of disability on Australian stages. In a 2019 production of *The Lord of the Flies*, Monks was cast in one of the lead roles. He described the role as “exciting” because the character was so unlike the “meek and vulnerable” characters he was used to being cast as and did not fit the “disabled character trope of the Tiny Tims” (qtd. in Linda Morris, 2019). Discussing her show *I Am Not a Unicorn!*, Hawkins explained that her aim was to “take creative control of [...] defying stereotypes, talking about what it is to be ‘normal’ and ‘average’ in this life and

questioning if any of us really want to be that?” (qtd. in Myron My, 2018). The desire to have actors with disability perform disabled roles on stage, and to represent disability in empathetic and complex ways, was reflected in Bell Shakespeare’s 2017 production *Richard 3*.

Bell Shakespeare’s *Richard 3*.

In recent years, the Bell Shakespeare Company has deliberately explored the experiences of people who have been othered and marginalised, including people with disabilities. When beginning his tenure in 2015, Artistic Director Peter Evans made it clear that he wanted to cast actors in his productions who have been marginalised, explaining that he was “really interested in further exploring colour-blind casting, cross-gender casting and the role of women inside these plays” (quoted in E. Blake 2015). In 2016 Evans cast Samoan-Australian actor Ray Chong Nee in the role of Othello; in 2018 he assembled a racially diverse cast for a production of *Julius Caesar*; and in 2020 he cast a female actor, Harriet Gordon-Anderson, in the title role of *Hamlet*. Evans stated that “Having a woman play a major ‘male’ role as a man allows the audience as well as the actor to explore different facets of the character” including his “misogyny” (qtd in Ron Cerabona 2019). This desire to represent and explore the experience of marginalisation was evident in his production of *Richard 3*.

Evans avoided the practice of ‘cripping up’ by casting Kate Mulvany in the title role of *Richard 3*. Mulvany, according to Leslie Dunn, is one of six actors with disabilities who have played Richard internationally in the last twenty years (2020, 304-5). As a result of treatment for childhood cancer, Mulvany has “the exact same spinal curvature” as the historical Richard III (quoted in “I have the exact same spinal curvature as Richard” 2018). This has left her with one leg shorter than the other, with what she describes as a “wonky” standing and sitting position, and in “chronic and debilitating pain” (Mulvany 2017). The parallels

between Mulvany's physical experience and that of the historical Richard III were emphasized throughout the promotional campaign. The main promotional image for the production depicted Mulvany standing in a corset, with the top of her back exposed and arched forward, emphasising the curve of her spine. In an essay written for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Mulvany explained how this shared physical experience would influence her performance, stating that "while pretending to be the 'bunch-back'd toad', I finally won't have to pretend to be straight-backed. I won't have to hide anything. I'll get to embrace every curve, creak and quirk of my body. With pride" (Mulvany 2017). Mulvany (who was also the production's dramaturg) rewrote a line in the play (3.4.68), replacing the word "arm" with "body", and spoke the line "Do you see how I am bewitched? Behold, my body is like a blasted sapling" while standing naked with her back to the audience, exposing the natural curve of her spine. By emphasising the physical similarities between Mulvany and the historical Richard III, the production shed the past practice of 'putting on' disability and required the audience to acknowledge the parallels between Mulvany's body and Richard's body.

This production also sought to resist the idea implicit in the play that Richard's evil character is inextricably linked to his physical disability. Rather, it suggested that his malevolence was a consequence of the way others had treated him. Evans, in his programme notes, described Mulvany's approach to Richard as "confronting because what she brought into the rehearsal room is the belief that he is created, not born. She sees the victim in him, so there is a sense of empathy" (Evans 2017, 11). This idea of Richard as a victim was highlighted in the final moments of the performance, when Mulvany remained on stage alone and performed an excerpt from Richard's well-known soliloquy in *King Henry VI, Part 3*:

I have often heard my mother say
that I came into this world with my legs forward:

[...]

I have no brother, I am like no brother;
And this word 'love', which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in men like one another,
And not in me: I am myself alone. (5.6.70-83)

Mulvany explained that her motivation for splicing these lines into the performance was “to question the audience on whether he was born a monster or made one by his family, and by society” (quoted in “I have the exact same spinal curvature as Richard” 2018). Richard’s malevolence was not questioned in this production, but there was a clear attempt to emphasise the idea that Richard’s behaviour was a reaction against the way he had been treated by others.

Mulvany’s performance was received with enthusiasm by audiences and reviewers, and it won her a Helpmann award for best female lead (“2017 Nominees and Winners”, 2017). Many critics noted the production’s emphasis on the exclusion and mistreatment that Richard had experienced as a cause of his malevolence. One reviewer wrote that the “bitterness that has developed in response to an unloving and cruel world seems almost justifiable in Mulvany’s hands” (Ben Neutze 2017), while another claimed that, “Mulvany’s Richard comes across so human and vulnerable that you can’t help wonder if, had he been spared the systematic abuse and rejection, the horror and bloodshed might have been avoided” (McPherson 2017). It seemed as if Richard in this production had not been reduced to a caricature of a malevolent villain, whose actions could be explained away by the mere fact of his disability. Rather, the critical response signalled that Mulvany and Evans had successfully encouraged a more sympathetic and complex reading of Richard and his psychology. However, if we return to the earlier discussion of the relationship between implied stage directions and meaning, we can see how this production retained, on a subtle level, some of the very attitudes that it was trying to dispel. Despite the emphasis placed on the

physical similarity between Mulvany and the historical Richard III, Mulvany was not playing the historical Richard. Although the discovery of Richard's body confirmed that he did in fact have scoliosis, there was no evidence that he walked with a limp, that he had a withered hand, or even that his back was noticeably hunched. In a medical analysis of the historical Richard III's skeleton, Appleby et al. state:

The physical disfigurement from Richard's scoliosis was probably slight since he had a well- balanced curve. His trunk would have been short relative to the length of his limbs, and his right shoulder a little higher than the left. However, a good tailor and custom-made armour could have minimised the visual impact of this [...] we identified no evidence that Richard would have walked with an overt limp. (2014, 1944)

Appleby et al. make it clear that it is unlikely that King Richard III was quite the hunch-backed, halting, withered man described by Shakespeare. And although the physical experience of the historical Richard was commented on in the publicity for the production, it was not reflected in the performance itself. Rather, what was performed was Shakespeare's vision of Richard. Mulvany did not merely perform the scoliosis that the historical Richard had. Rather, in the vein of many other performers of the role, she played Richard with a hunched back, a noticeable limp, and – even though the line featuring a reference to Richard's withered hand had been excised from the script – with her hand twisted and tucked by her side.

By performing Richard with the characteristics implied in the written text, the Bell Shakespeare production subtly undermined its own reinterpretation of the play. When Richard accurately describes how he looks, and then tells us that he is going to be a "villain" because of the way he looks, there is no immediate, obvious suggestion of any other factors at play, and no need for the audience to look further than his disability as the cause for his villainy. Of course, many

audience members will look further, and in this production a more complex (and arguably more convincing) explanation for his behaviour was offered, but that explanation did not cancel out the original one and audiences were not required to accept it – the door was left open to a reading that concluded that Richard’s disposition was a consequence of his disability. Mitchell and Snyder write that “whether or not the relationship between physical disability and psychic malfeasance is reconfirmed, as in many performances of *Richard III*, or refuted [...], comes to be beside the point – filmed [or, in this case, staged] disabilities beg the question of their suspected linkage, and thus moral decrepitude shadows physical anomaly” (2014, 117). Or, as Lindsey Row-Heyveld more succinctly puts it, “incessantly asking the question keeps the possibility alive” (2018, 138). Regardless of how well the production was able to emphasise the treatment of Richard as a causative factor in his malignancy, the question of the role that his physical disability played, and the suggestion that it was the cause of it, remained present as an undercurrent. This was demonstrated in the reaction of a reviewer writing for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who praised Mulvany for her “masterful” portrayal of Richard, and enthusiastically described how “from the outset, she clutches fast the twin keys to Richard’s character: the limbs twisted in deformity and his charisma” (Woodhead 2017). Woodhead’s use of the term “deformity” suggests that the specifically early-modern concept of physicality and its relationship to psychology seems to have been subliminally communicated to and accepted by the reviewer. Moreover, referring to “limbs twisted in deformity” as a substitute for something like “psychopathy” or “malevolence” attests to the fact that this production did not preclude a problematic reading of Richard’s character.

Resistant readings of implied stage directions

The question then arises: what are our options when performing this play in the twenty-first century? Should *Richard III* be avoided entirely because of its

problematic and historically specific attitudes towards disability? I would argue that it is possible to perform Richard in a manner that does not leave the door open to a what in the present-day context is a problematic representation of Richard, but that this requires a willingness to challenge and resist the demands made by the text. Such resistance has the potential to create moments of incongruity, disruption, or dissonance, as described by Fitzpatrick and Tribble. However, as I argue, dissonance need not necessarily equate to incomprehensibility, but might allow the performance to draw out new meaning in the text. Indeed, *Richard III*, a play in which there are very few specific and prescriptive implied stage directions describing Richard's physicality, lends itself in a particular way to such a resistant approach. In order to explore this idea, I will briefly analyse two Australian performances of *Richard III* that have reimagined Richard's physicality and in so doing brought new meaning to the text in performance. In Siren Theatre Co.'s 2009 production (also titled *Richard 3*), the idea of disability was still explored, but the causative link between it and moral deviance was disrupted. In the other, performed as part of the 2009 production of *The War of the Roses* at the Sydney Theatre Company, Richard's physical disability was excised from the production entirely, and instead the production explored how the power structures Richard is functioning within generated his malignancy.

In Siren Theatre Co.'s *Richard 3*, directed by Kate Gaul, the title role was played by Thomas Campbell. Campbell was interested in exploring the source of Richard's psychology, but did not play him exactly as he is described in the text by adopting a limp or a hunched back. Rather, the only point of physical connection between Shakespeare's Richard and Campbell's performance was the fact that Campbell was born without a left hand:

In terms of physicality, I basically played it as myself. The only explicit reference Richard makes to his appearance, apart from 'halting by', is that he has a

withered hand. Everything else – people saying he’s a toad and vulgar and so on – that’s all lines of other characters. Most of the descriptions of him are things other people say about him. I wanted to make a point about people’s projections onto other people. I was hoping that audiences would get that this guy has been so trodden on he’s come to a point where he doesn’t care how other people are treated because he’s been treated so badly. (Campbell 2020).

As with the Bell Shakespeare production, Campbell’s interpretation highlighted the role of Richard’s treatment by others in the generation of his psychological deviance. However, this production went further and cancelled out the possibility of a reading that blamed Richard’s behaviours on his physical appearance. Kostihová writes that “a theater audience needs to be both told *and* shown Richard’s deformed body to subscribe to the larger early modern ideological linking between bodily and psychological evil” (2013, 136). By choosing not to perform Richard’s physicality exactly as it is described in the text, Campbell made a literal understanding of a causative link between Richard’s disability and his psychology impossible. This becomes clear when we consider his opening soliloquy. When Richard describes himself as “deformed, unfinished, sent before my time / Into this breathing world scarce half made up” (1.1.20-21), but in reality is standing before the audience looking very much like everyone else on stage, except for the fact that he doesn’t have a left hand, it is immediately clear that Richard’s idea of himself as completely disfigured is unjustified and not grounded in reality. This makes his assertion that his malignancy is caused by his physical appearance unconvincing. Rather, the implication is that he is engaged in an act of self-othering, which immediately invites the audience to ask where he learned to see and speak of himself in this way. Later in the play, labels such as “hedgehog” (1.2.104), “bunch-backed toad” (1.3.246) and “abortive, rooting hog” (1.3.228) also take on a metaphorical significance. They do not refer so much to Richard’s literal appearance as to a projection of others’ ideas onto him. Campbell’s Richard

was “a guy who’s deeply, deeply hurt, and has always felt rejected and othered” (Campbell 2020) and has responded with anger and eventually with violence to this experience.

In Benedict Andrews’ 2009 production *The War of the Roses*, Andrews and actor Pamela Rabe (who played Richard) set aside the idea of a physical disability entirely. Dressed in a “t-shirt and black trousers, her hair curtaining her face like an evil Joey Ramone” (Alison Croggon, 2009), Rabe adopted a shambling, loping walk that was less reminiscent of a limp than it was of a teenager’s lazy shuffle. One reviewer described her performance in *Richard III* as follows:

Equal parts sociopath and Machiavel, Rabe’s Richard is shabby, brilliant, impulsive, conniving, bestial and disarmingly funny [...] Eschewing traditional portrayals of the character’s limp and deformities, Rabe occasionally delivers mocking impressions of what such a performance could have been, as though revelling in her (his) inner freak. (“The War of the Roses”, 2009).

As the reviewer notes, Rabe and Andrews did not ignore the indicators of Richard’s physical appearance. Rather, these indicators took on a metaphorical significance, becoming a means to express and explore Richard’s psychology, rather than being a description of his physical appearance. According to Rabe, “we decided that a disability in this context didn’t have a place. You can actually see the construction of this monster in the Henry plays so to just give him a hump would be too easy” (quoted in E. Blake 2009). Here, Rabe recognises the link that is drawn in the play between Richard’s disability and his psychology and indicates that refusing to play him with a physical disability removes the possibility for this “easy” explanation to be assumed. Andrews’ *The War of the Roses* was concerned less with questions of physical otherness, and more with exploring broader political questions around “the nature of the relationship between the vulnerable

human body and the processes of sovereign violence” (Griffiths 2013, 94). Croggon writes that “in *Richard III*, we see what happens when desecralised power is put into conscious action” and called the production “a terrifying vision of amoral brutality” (2009). Dispensing with Richard’s physical disability altogether meant that *Richard III* could participate in a more meaningful way in the broader aims of the production. These two examples offer different but equally interesting possibilities for performing *Richard III* in a twenty-first-century context. In the first, questions around the relationship between physical disability, otherness and deviant behaviour were still asked. However, Campbell’s refusal to comply wholly with the text’s implied stage directions meant that disability became a metaphor for perceived otherness, and the othering of Richard became the implied cause of his violent behaviour. In the second, the idea of physical disability was resisted altogether, and this created an opportunity for *Richard III* to participate in a more complex, political exploration of the questions of how a ‘monster’ is created.

Perhaps one of the factors that made resistance possible in these performances is the fact that the implied stage directions that needed to be overtly resisted were so few. As previously noted, many of the descriptions of Richard in the play text are open and ambiguous, while the indicators that set specific boundaries around the actor’s performance are few and far between. Kostihová writes that *Richard III* “invites a series of stagings” and “challenges each production to invent its own bodily projection of Richard’s evil interiority” (2013, 137). Kostihová somewhat overstates the degree of freedom afforded the performer; as previously noted, there are key points at which Richard does become specific when describing his physical appearance, and at these points the text needs to be deliberately resisted if the production is to avoid making an implicit link between bodily impairment and moral perversion. However, the fact that this specificity is not reinforced throughout makes it easier for performers to

reimagine Richard's appearance, and thus disrupt the value judgements embedded in the play.

Conclusion

Australian directors and performers often reinterpret Shakespeare's plays via design, casting, marketing, and performance decisions that recontextualise and reinvent the text. However, there often remains a lingering unwillingness to resist any specific, clear demands for performance that the text makes. This instinct to comply with the text is influenced by the fact that Shakespeare's implied stage directions sometimes place seemingly immovable boundaries around what can and cannot be done on stage. Performing within these boundaries, however, means that the performance will retain, even if only on a subliminal level, the historically-specific ideology of the play. The Bell Shakespeare's 2017 production *Richard 3* attempted to avoid a reductionistic reading of Richard by casting Kate Mulvany, an actor with the same spinal curvature as the historical Richard, as well as using dramaturgical, staging and performance devices to suggest that Richard's malfeasance was a product of the way he had been treated. On one level, this production provided a refreshingly nuanced vision of Richard and complicated the play's implication that he is simply a bad person because he was born with a disability. However, Mulvany's physical performance was obedient to the demands of the text, and in this way, it was unable to truly close off access to a reading that blamed Richard's disability for his moral deviance. As my examination of productions of this play by Siren Theatre Co. and The Sydney Theatre Company show, performances of the Richard that have been more successful in this regard have been able not only to recontextualise the text but to challenge it and its embedded assumptions on a deeper level by refusing to concede to the physical demands it makes.

This discussion has broader implications for performing Shakespeare in the twenty-first century. *Richard III* is by no means the only play in which

characters are othered in ways that are problematic by contemporary standards. This case study suggests ways to respond to aspects of these plays that are challenging to twenty-first-century audiences. The productions of *Richard III* performed by the Sydney Theatre Company and Siren Theatre Co. openly refused to concede to the performance demands of the written text, and thus reimagined its meaning for a contemporary audience, inviting them to critically engage with the text. When resistance is overtly staged in front of an audience, the audience is invited to participate in that act of resistance. The friction between the written and performance texts is not smoothed over or done away with. Rather, it is brought out into the open, the meaning suggested by the text is challenged, and a new interpretation is offered. Resisting implied stage directions can provide an opportunity to treat Shakespeare's plays as one half of a conversation, rather than as hallowed artefacts that need to be preserved wholly intact for contemporary audiences.

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Translating Richard

A Conversation about Shakespeare, Otherness and Mexico with Alfredo Michel Modenessi

Anne Sophie Refskou with Alfredo Michel Modenessi

Anne Sophie Refskou (ASR) I would like to begin this conversation with a big and broad question about otherness and translation. Critics have long questioned the validity of the ‘original’ versus ‘derivative’ binary, in conversations about translations or adaptations – I’m thinking not least of Linda Hutcheon’s path-breaking work in adaptation theory – and thankfully there is a certain consensus about viewing translations as creative works in and of themselves. But, as a someone who is both a critic and a practicing translator, do you ever find your translations – and yourself as translator – being ‘othered’ still? And is there a Shakespeare-specific version of that? I mean, Shakespeare’s global status is in large part thanks to his global translators, but, at the same time, the many translations can be taken as confirmation of his unique status in the first place.

Alfredo Michel Modenessi (AMM) Translators, including myself, are certainly continuously overlooked, which works as a kind of ‘othering’, yes. To give an example: I had done a translation for a Shakespeare festival, and after the show the organizer gave a speech to thank everyone involved. My daughter was there and I told her “No one is going to mention your dad’s work; just wait and see.” She didn’t believe me, but I’m afraid I was right. The translator wasn’t mentioned.

The director, the actors, the musicians, all got their well-deserved praise, everyone, in fact, except the translator.

ASR So it was a “who’s that? Oh, nobody, it’s the translator”-moment? To risk a *Shakespeare in Love* misquote.

AMM Precisely. And there have been many such moments. I’m sure it’s because in those people’s minds, the words are Shakespeare’s, not mine. But of course that’s wrong for a very simple reason: Shakespeare didn’t write in Spanish. I do. So, yes, translators are struggling against invisibility. That is the term we’re permanently fighting: invisibility, which is of course also a keyword for any kind of marginalised community. The problem is that translators have historically been expected to work towards being invisible; to present the translated text to the target audience without imposing their own presence on it, as if the original had not been written in a different language. We’ve had to combat this notion, which, among other things, has led to long-standing debates about concepts such as foreignization versus domestication, popularized by Lawrence Venuti.¹ In that case, the response to the demand for invisibility was to theorize translations that somehow highlighted the ‘foreignness’ of the original in the translation, in opposition to ‘domesticating’ the original, that is, in opposition to translations made to sound as if they had been written in the target language in the first place. But I don’t think these concepts are very useful either. To be honest, the reasoning behind them sounds – to me, anyway, a translator from the global South – as if it’s coming from what is effectively a white, ‘first-world’ perspective: so, if we mustn’t appropriate the foreign language (and its culture), then the alternative is highlighting what is ‘foreign’ – very often English? That comes straight from the redeeming heights of white wisdom; it’s as condescending as some Shakespeare productions that presume to pay tribute to ‘exotic’ cultures.² Rather, by

¹ See Venuti (1995).

² See Modenessi (2019).

‘foreignizing’, we’d likely end up reinforcing the stranglehold of the power language over our own. Sure, in my own practice, I sometimes do drop in something that may not sound entirely familiar to readers and listeners in the target language; something that signals a kind of disconnection to our usual way of expressing ourselves, because of course what I’m writing is fiction, it’s not what you might call ‘natural’ language. But fundamentally I subscribe to the understanding of language as a conglomerate of sounds that, emitted within a certain context, performs a certain act of speech. So, when I translate I must create a new speech act to render the ‘original’ one, and the only tool I have available to me is my own language. This makes me an ‘other’, necessarily, yes, but with regard to the ‘original language’, not regarding my own. I remain joyfully bound to my own language and my culture, and I work according to their character and ways. Then again, as a Latin-American, ‘my own’ language is an ‘other’ with respect to its European ‘original’, which adds an interesting layer to the discussion, doesn’t it?

ASR It does. So, in talking about translation in a Latin-American context, we can’t simply talk about English and Spanish as source and target languages without also paying attention to the histories of colonialism and their legacies. But as you have also suggested elsewhere, certain Latin-American cultural traditions excel in resisting the continuous (post)colonial processes of othering they may be subjected to.³ This partly involves staging a self-conscious and self-assertive recognition and celebration of otherness, doesn’t it? One that pre-empts patronizing exoticisms. Is this perhaps helpful to sketch out how translation might resist being ‘othered’ in a wider sense too?

AMM Yes, absolutely! Because the moment we recognize our own otherness is when we become visible as translators. Translation is always about otherness; otherness is at the core of what we do, and, crucially, we should celebrate that

³ Ibid.

otherness. What does a translation do? It liberates things confined within the original text. Where do you place the translator? In the position of the player. What I mean is that, as a translator, you ‘play’ the original, you ‘perform’ it. You’re not the composer, but the player. And in that process, you liberate meaning. You also free the text from its own constraints, problems and mistakes. The things I’ve had to tweak or touch up in Shakespeare and others... You’re doing the writer a favour, when you ‘help out’ the original...

ASR Yes, I imagine you must find a way to convey the meaning to the audience, and if Shakespeare’s meaning is a bit inaccessible to begin with...

AMM Yes, and of course if the translation is bad, the translator gets the blame, not the author! I must make it work. And make it work in the text. I can’t explain the jokes in footnotes. At the same time, I can’t stand the idea of translation as a pedagogical enterprise! Translating is a creative practice that seeks to obtain, in another language, the experience that the source induces in its own. The translator’s job is not to explain the original. If we think that, we’re still stuck with the misconception that venerates the original and imbues it with authority, we remain mired in stale notions of fidelity, betrayal, subordination, and whatnot – notions that reduce translations to the category of embarrassing, though indispensable, acts.

ASR If we extend your description of the translator as ‘playing’ or ‘performing’ the text, I imagine the performance would be very dull if it’s main purpose was explanation...

AMM Which also relates to a key advantage of the translator: the fact that, like the player, I can repeat my performance. I can keep improving my text. If I’m unhappy with a sonnet or a piece of dialogue, I can change it (which Shakespeare cannot), so we should also see translation as constant flux.

ASR I would like to talk a bit about your translation of *Richard III* and how you experienced the process of translating this play as well as the subsequent stage production of it in Mexico.

AMM I did the translation in 2014, while I was actually staying in Stratford-upon-Avon, so by a strange coincidence I was surrounded by all the trappings of Shakespeare's Englishness. The translation was then staged in Mexico City in 2015 and again in 2016. The Richard who emerged from my translation and in the stage production was audibly Mexican. By that I mean that he had our speech rhythms, but not necessarily our colloquialisms. You don't need colloquialisms in the text or on the stage; you don't need to 'domesticate' Shakespeare in a way that talks down to the local audience, because they will understand anyway. I mean, *Richard III* is a play about power struggles and the violence around and behind them – you don't think that will resonate with people in Mexico? Of course it will. You don't need to spell it out with explicit local references, because when the Mexican audience hears Richard speak with our own rhythms and accents, the language is more than enough; the language performs the connection by itself.

ASR Could you give an example of how the speech rhythms worked to perform that connection, which clearly localised the play, but without, as you say, patronizing the audience?

AMM Our Richard was played by the splendid Mexican actor Carlos Aragón and I remember that instead of representing Richard as sort of regally cynical, he infused his speech rhythms with what the audience would have recognised as the ingrained spite and derision that upper classes have for others lower down the social scale in Mexico. He performed his role with that sense of superior disgust that is a post-colonial legacy in Latin America, when the ruler demonstrates their disgust at being merely the ruler of such a measly little place as Mexico, or El Salvador, or other such places. I say that the actor performed Richard in this way, and I think it was ingrained in the director, Mauricio Garcia Lozano's

interpretation too, but it was also reflected in my text. I think my translation steered that way, because the voices of power that I hear when I translate Shakespeare are not European voices, but those of privileged Mexicans, living in sub-urban mansions or high-rise buildings who treat the lower classes with such contempt. Mexico is a country where such people have domestic staff – almost always women – of indigenous descent whom they treat inhumanely, literally. So, when Richard spoke with the attitude of those people, the audience would connect and understand, without the translator or the director or the actor having to explain anything!

ASR That's a hugely interesting example of how much the translation potentially offers the production, if the production listens. Literally. And there's clearly nothing conceptually wilful or overthought about that kind of 'localizing' of the play.

AMM If the language fits the character who is despotic and has total disregard for life around him, it works. There were only two aspects of the production which made local references quite explicit – or in the second case quite broad and parodic – and I think they were appropriate and effective. At several points, and increasingly, the dead bodies of Richard's many victims were seen hanging suspended from the ceiling wrapped in plastic in the way that bodies sometimes hang from bridges in crime-ridden areas in Mexico.⁴ I remember those moments very distinctly, and of course the connection was immediate for the audience too. Secondly, the scene in act three when Buckingham and the Mayor of London enlist the citizens of London as 'extras' in their staged entreating of Richard to take the crown, was played as a parody on how local elections take place in certain towns in Mexico, where the locals are taken out to political rallies and given a lunch (which always includes a banana). So suddenly here on stage,

⁴ Images from the production are available on the Performance Shakespeare 2016 blog: <http://performanceshakespeare2016.org/blog//richard-iii-ricardo-iii-inba-mexico>

were a bunch of people screaming for Richard to be king while clenching their bananas. The farcical potential was brought out superbly by the Mexican comedian Haydeé Boetto, who played the Mayor. It was a very broad representation, like I said, but apart from these two examples, there was nothing in the production to explicitly or specifically signal that Shakespeare and England had been transported to Mexico, even if that was so blatantly the case.

ASR This special issue is interested in representations of *Richard III* and *Richard II* and in how stage productions might challenge processes of ‘othering’ instead of perpetuating prejudice. The representation of Richard III’s disability has a long and troubling history of being stereotyped on stage and screen and, as Sonya Freemann Loftis has recently explained, the stereotyping of Richard’s disability in performance works as a kind of cultural disability denial (different from the one which simply denies that Richard is disabled) because it fetishizes - or we might say ‘others’ - disability (Loftis, 2021, 19). Did these questions affect the production in any way?

AMM The simple and regrettably short answer is that Mexico is a long way from addressing those questions. Mexican society is extremely diverse, but segregation is rife and marginalised groups are still struggling with visibility and representation. The production of my translation of *Richard III* did not overstate Richard’s disability, in fact it downplayed it.

ASR Performances of Shakespeare’s ‘other Richard’, *Richard II*, have also sometimes participated in cultural prejudice, by representing Richard as gay and implicitly linking his sexuality to his incompetence as king. You have not (yet) translated *Richard II*, but you have translated/adapted Marlowe’s *Edward II*, a play which is often read alongside *Richard II* and which is arguably much more explicit about sexuality than Shakespeare’s play. I’m really interested in hearing why you decided to translate *Edward II* and in what you think contemporary performance can do with this play? Do you think performances of *Edward II*

might work to challenge homophobic prejudice in ways that performances of *Richard II* have not been able to?

AMM I translated *Edward II* in 2002 for a project that fell through, but in 2008 it was used for a Mexican production which wanted to do exactly that: challenge homophobic prejudice and address questions about violent masculinity.⁵ I remember that the director, Martín Acosta, wanted to break away from a fixation on the idea of ‘coming out’ in the gay movement, nor did he want to represent Edward or Gaveston in ways that would look deliberately camp. Instead it became a question of telling the story of their relationship against the background of the violent, toxic masculinity of the locker room, with its adjacent showers and urinals, all of which were used in the set designs. So, rugby was used as a conceptual device in the production; the English nobles were all playing rugby at the opening of the show. At the same time, the production exposed the hypocrisy of that masculine culture. I remember that whenever the queen crossed the stage, the nobles would cover their genitals and bow respectfully! Another subtle and striking moment, was when the director had Edward and Gaveston dancing a beautiful tango. The noblemen were first watching them and then started to dance themselves, but so as to mock and parody Edward and Gaveston. The point, however, was that we got to see this whole group of male couples dancing together. However, the most memorable and also most horrific moment in the production was the end of act one, when the noblemen capture Gaveston, because the capture was staged as a gang rape of him, of Gaveston. It was extremely powerful, because the production didn’t try to de-politicize Edward and Gaveston and victimise them, but it showed the noblemen as inhuman, emphasising what violent masculinity does. I did the translation strictly in verse, line by line, because Marlowe doesn’t lend himself to the kind of rhythmical prose I have

⁵ See production trailer on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xosHkPyKVmM>. See also Magun (2008) for an analysis of the production.

sometimes used for Shakespeare, but this also made the passionate exchanges between Edward and Gaveston stand out very strongly. That was, however you look at it, one of the best productions that I have been part of: a powerful demonstration of what the creativity of our verbal, stage, and body languages can accomplish in unison – and in collaboration, as equals, with a magnificent text from a time rife with similar turmoil and artistic energy. That’s what translation is about: conveying the other to your otherness for a fertile encounter, albeit ephemeral.

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ABSTRACTS

***Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe 2019:**

A Collective Perspective

Delia Jarrett-Macauley, Emer McHugh and Varsha Panjwani – with Adjoa Andoh and Dona Croll

Abstract:

In 2019, Shakespeare's Globe theatre in London ran a production of *Richard II* co-directed by Lynette Linton and Adjoa Andoh (who also played the title role of Richard II) and featuring an all women of colour cast, both on the stage and in the production team. In this collaborative article, Delia Jarrett-Macauley introduces the production and places it in the context of historical engagement with Shakespeare by artists of colour. Varsha Panjwani contributes a set of curated conversations with Adjoa Andoh and actor Dona Croll (who played John of Gaunt in the production) recorded for the 'Women and Shakespeare' podcast, and Emer McHugh reviews a filmed version of the production subsequently made available on YouTube.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Richard II*; race; gender; performance; directing; collaboration.

Directorless Shakespeare:

***Richard II*, Embracing Alterity and Decolonising Theatrical Practice**

E.M. Pellone

Abstract

Where do we meet Shakespeare's otherness with our otherness and make theatre that is meaningful? This article considers the many faces of otherness, in expected and unexpected places, and how Shakespeare is consistently othered through saturated assimilation and conceptual impositions when staged. It asks how to destabilise the entrenched hierarchies that inform Shakespeare, and the insistence that he needs to be interpreted through the medium of a director, by focusing on the case-study of Anørkē Shakespeare's *Richard II*, a UK-based company that works internationally and interculturally. Anørkē Shakespeare's production of *Richard II* was a theatrical experiment with three stagings in England and

Germany between 2018-2019. The productions were directorless, ensemble driven, non-mimetic, embraced alterity and applied pressure to the notion of representation through fluid gender and race casting.

Keywords:

Directorless; Anǫrkē Shakespeare; *Richard II*; otherness; director; non-mimetic casting; representation; race; gender

**Casting and Directing Disability in *Richard III* at Kronborg Castle:
Lars Romann Engel and Nila Parly in Conversation**

Nila Parly

Abstract

In 2019, HamletScenen, the resident theatre and Shakespeare Festival organisation at Kronborg Castle in Elsinore, Denmark, staged an outdoor production of *Richard III* with a Danish-British-Irish cast for that year's festival programme.³⁸ The production was directed by HamletScenen's artistic director, Lars Romann Engel, and focused on creating an ensemble that included actors with disabilities. An overall conceptual framework was developed together with set designer, Catia Hauberg Engel, and dramaturg Nila Parly and with advice from national and international partner organizations with longstanding experience in creating theatre with Deaf and disabled actors, notably Graeae Theatre Company in London, UK. Here, dramaturg Nila Parly introduces the background and concept of the production and discusses the process and its outcomes with director Lars Romann Engel.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *Richard III*; performance; directing; disability; accessibility; diversity

**Resisting Processes of Othering:
Implied Stage Directions in Australian Theatre Productions of *Richard III***

Caitlin Mary West

Abstract

Implied stage directions indicate what the words of a play should come to mean on stage by suggesting a physical and auditory context for their performance. Because these directions are spoken aloud as part of the performance, they can also be difficult to dismiss or ignore. Problems may arise when the meaning

³⁸ See: <https://hamletscenen.dk/forestilling/richard-iii/>

suggested by implied stage directions is incompatible with its performance context. This article explores three recent Australian productions of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, each of which attempted to resist the idea embedded in the text that Richard's immorality is a result of his physical impairment. The Bell Shakespeare Company's 2017 production complied with the play's implied stage directions, depicting Richard exactly as he is described in the text (i.e. with a hunched back, a limp, and a withered arm). In this way, it subtly undermined its own attempts to suggest that external factors were the cause of Richard's deviance. In contrast, two separate 2009 productions of the play, staged by Siren Theatre Co. and The Sydney Theatre Company, presented a Richard who bore little-to-no physical resemblance to the character described in the dialogue. These productions thus closed off any direct link between Richard's physical appearance and his behaviour. I suggest that a willingness to challenge or disobey the direct demands of the text can be necessary for directors who do not wish to uncritically represent problematic ideas embedded in Shakespeare's plays.

Keywords:

Shakespeare; *Richard III*; implied stage directions; disability studies; contemporary theatre performance; Bell Shakespeare; Sydney Theatre Company; Australian theatre.

Translating Richard

A Conversation about Shakespeare, Otherness and Mexico with Alfredo

Michel Modenessi

Anne Sophie Refskou with Alfredo Michel Modenessi

Abstract

Shakespearean scholar and translator, Alfredo Michel Modenessi, talks to Anne Sophie Refskou about translating Shakespeare into Spanish in a Mexican context, about the translator as 'Other', fighting against invisibility and celebrating the otherness of the translation. He also refers to his translations of *Richard III* and of Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II* and subsequent Mexican productions of both plays.

Keywords:

Shakespeare; translation; performance; Mexico; otherness; *Richard III*; Christopher Marlowe, *Edward II*.