

Shakespeare's *Richard III: The Terrible Reign* November 2012

smart

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These study materials are produced for use with the Classic Players production of *Richard III*.

AN EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH OF BOB JONES UNIVERSITY



Classic Players 2012

Richard III: The Terrible Reign: Plot Summary

As King Edward IV suffers declining health, his youngest living brother, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, devises a scheme to eliminate everyone who stands between him and the crown.

First Richard has his other brother and the heir presumptive to the throne, George, Duke of Clarence, imprisoned. Then he uses his persuasive skills to woo Lady Anne, the daughter-in-law of the late Henry VI, to marry him even though he is responsible for the deaths of her husband and father-in-law.

Margaret, Henry VI's widow, pronounces a curse on Richard as "a murd'rous villain" and an evil spirit and denounces those who stood by him in his killing spree. She predicts that heaven has a "grievous plague in store" for them all.

Thus in the Tower of London, Richard's henchmen drown Clarence in a trough filled with wine. The charge Richard makes against him is that he has sought Edward IV's death.

When King Edward IV dies, Richard as Lord Protector has his young sons, Edward, Prince of Wales, and Richard, Duke of York, imprisoned in the Tower of London on the pretense of

protecting their lives. He also has several of his enemies falsely charged with crimes for which they are executed.

The Duke of Buckingham, acting on Richard's behalf, convinces Londoners that the little princes in the Tower are not King Edward IV's legitimate sons. Thus the final obstacles on Richard's path to the crown are removed.

Although Richard seems reluctant to accept the crown, he does so under the pretense that Edward IV was, in fact, illegitimate himself. While Richard III works to unite his supporters, one by one they defect. Even Buckingham, unwilling to arrange for the murder of the princes in the Tower, revolts and joins forces with Henry, Earl of Richmond, who seeks to claim the throne.

Richard and his forces confront Richmond and his army at Bosworth Field, where Richard III is eventually killed, and Richmond is crowned Henry VII, England's first monarch in the Tudor dynasty. Richmond proclaims that after 30 years of civil unrest, the War of the Roses has come to an end. He will marry Edward's daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, uniting the houses of York and Lancaster. ☺

Ron Pyle as Richard III; *Classic Players* 2012 production



Introduction to *Richard III*

For over 400 years artists and audiences have admired Shakespeare's *Richard III*. The last of England's kings from the house of York, Richard was a morbidly fascinating villain. The playwright had access to a number of sources when he began writing *Richard III* around 1592. Scholars believe that Thomas More's *History of King Richard III* (1513) provided information in biography form that served Shakespeare well. More provides the following detailed account of Richard's appearance and character:

Little of stature, ill-featured of limbs, crook-backed, his left shoulder much higher than his right, [Richard was] hard-favored of visage, and such as is in [rulers] called [warlike], in other men otherwise; he was malicious, wrathful, envious, and, from before his birth, ever froward. ... [To] friend and foe he was ... indifferent; where his advantage grew he spared no man's death whose life withstood his purpose.

Andrew Dickson makes the following observation about the relationship of Richard's natural handicaps to his atrocious behavior: Shakespeare's *Richard III* is "extremely bold in his determination to wreak revenge. ... It is clear that Richard seizes on the monstrous aspects of his appearance and makes them into a source of malevolent power." In spite of modern attempts to cast Richard as a good king who has been maligned through the ages, he is still regarded as the epitome of arrogant tyranny.

Richard III is the final king Shakespeare depicts in his first cycle of history plays, after three plays about King Henry VI. The tetralogy deals with the nation of England during the 15th century and the eventual fall of the house of York. It ends with the death of the tyrant Richard III at Bosworth Field, which signals the rise of Henry, earl of Richmond, afterwards Henry VII.

In Shakespeare's hands the tyrant Richard is a multi-faceted character, at once witty and diabolical, charming and cruel. Ambition and a lust for power are the chief of his vices. His role in the play is second only to Hamlet's in Shakespeare's canon in terms of the number of lines he speaks. Richard is also a forebear to Hamlet in the highly theatrical nature of his character. He brings the audience under his spell through his soliloquies for a large portion of the play. He is a type of Proteus, that great shape-shifter, who can "frame [his] face to all occasions," "change shapes" and "add colors to the chameleon" [3, *Henry VI*, 3.4.86-88].

Like Thomas More, Shakespeare weaves the theme of Providence into the resolution of his plot. Once the strife between the houses of York and Lancaster ceased at Richard's death, England enjoyed the peace and fruitfulness that attended the reign of Henry VII and his young wife Elizabeth, daughter of Edward IV. They established the dynasty of the Tudors. They became the parents of Henry VIII and the grandparents of Queen Elizabeth I. ♪



Darren Lawson as Buckingham; *Classic Players* 2012 production

Buckingham: Cohort and Victim

When the action of Shakespeare's *Richard III* begins, the Duke of Buckingham (Henry Stafford) is Richard III's confidant and co-conspirator in the crime spree concocted to secure the crown for Richard. Like Richard, Buckingham is ambitious and immoral. He is responsible for bringing both the young Edward V, heir to the throne of his dying father, Edward IV, and his brother, the young Duke of York, out of safety to London, where they will be killed. He imprisons Rivers and Grey, brother and son of Edward IV's wife, Queen Elizabeth, and arranges for their execution.

After the death of Edward IV, the bishops offer the crown to Richard, who feigns reluctance to accept it. It is Buckingham whose begging ostensibly persuades Richard to receive it. But later when Richard would have Buckingham devise the deaths of the young princes in the Tower of London, he recoils. Buckingham defects to the army of English noblemen who have flocked to the side of Richmond, who threatens to strike down the tyrant Richard in battle. Buckingham's defection marks the first stage in Richard's loss of control of his own destiny.

On the field Buckingham is captured by Richard's army and led away to his execution. Realizing that it is All Souls Day, the day upon which the Roman Catholic mass focuses on the Day of Judgment, Buckingham acknowledges his wrongdoing and turns his thoughts toward repentance. His final words confirm that Margaret's curse has fallen "heavy on [his] neck."

In the standard Shakespeare text of the play, Buckingham is second only to Richard III in the number of lines he speaks. ♪

Playgoer's Guide

Early Title (Q1 title page): *The Tragedy of King Richard the Third, Containing, His treacherous Plots against his brother Clarence: the pittiefull murder of his innocent nephewes: his tyrannical usurpation: with the whole course of his detested life, and most deserved death.*

Date of Composition: 1592-93

Date of First Publication: 1597

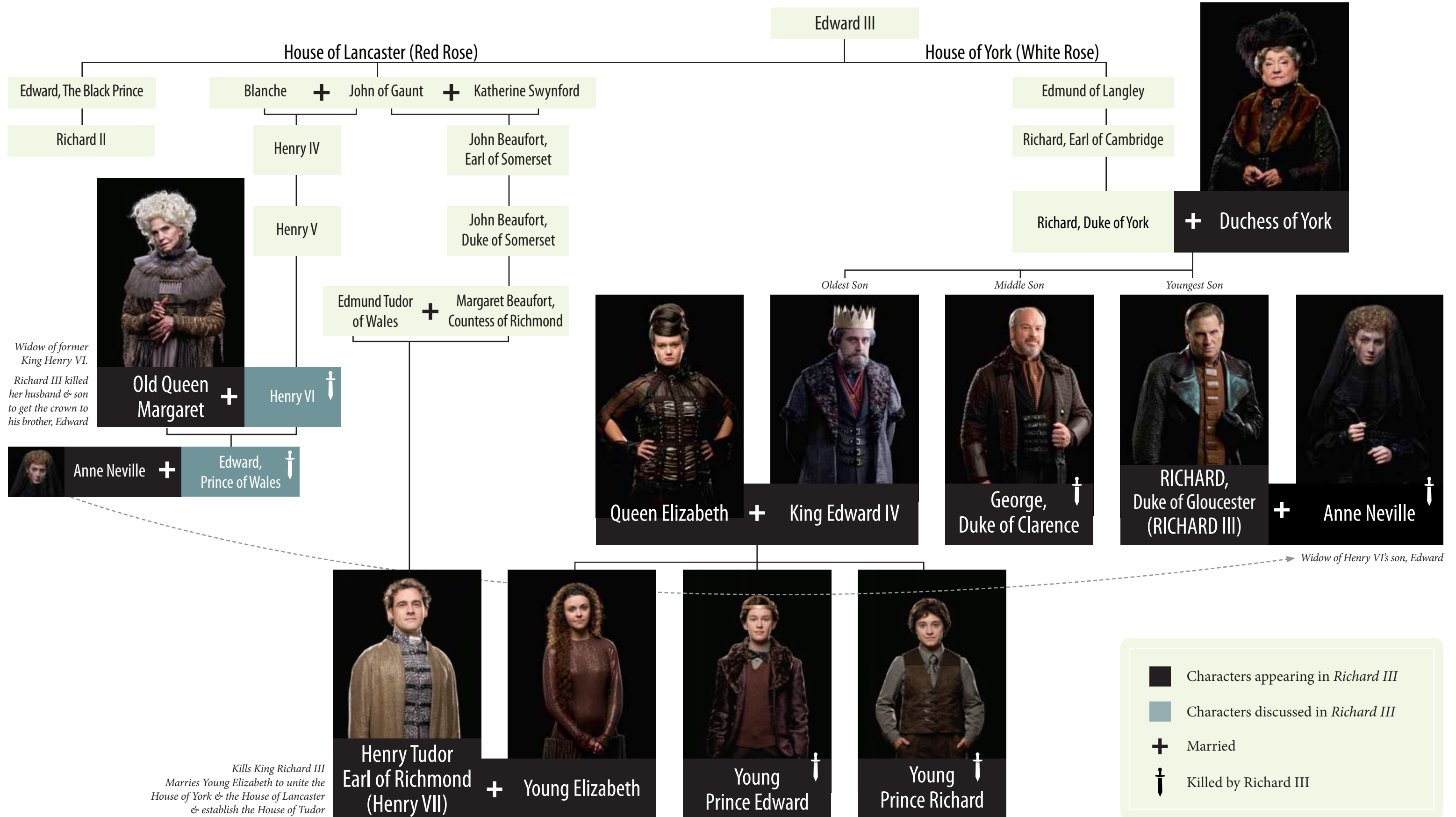
Place in Chronology of Shakespeare's Plays: probably among first four or five plays in canon of 37 plays

Setting: England around 1485

Subject: historical events that occurred in England from around 1471 to 1485. But Shakespeare has no regard for historical accuracy in the play. He compresses time, creates motives, changes some of the facts of history, and exaggerates some events and characters.

Plot: Richard's hunger for power prompts him to attempt to remove all obstacles standing between him and the throne: his brother, King Edward IV, who dies a natural death near the beginning of the play; Edward IV's young sons, Edward, the Prince of Wales and Richard, the fourth duke of York; Clarence, his older brother; and Princess Elizabeth, the oldest of Edward's surviving daughters. ♪

Genealogy in *Richard III*



The Women in Shakespeare's *Richard III*: Three Queens and a Duchess

Even though it's a man's world in *Richard III*, Shakespeare includes in the cast female characters who raise their voices against the immorality and sufferings brought about by war and Richard's treachery. In the words of Shirley Galloway, "The women are presented as being on the sidelines to grieve, complain, or bury the dead."

Anne, Elizabeth, the Duchess of York and Margaret are all victims of the turmoil that has dominated England since the long civil war, known as the War of the Roses, began some 15 years earlier. Eight of Shakespeare's 10 English history plays occur in this setting. *Richard III* compresses the chaotic events of the final 15 years of the war. This bloody civil conflict was largely a struggle for the crown between the dynasties of Lancaster and York. In the context of the culmination of the strife, Shakespeare employs three queens and a duchess to emphasize moral truths and to predict the downfall of Richard's evil forces as necessary to the restoration of a higher moral order in the nation and the family. The women lament the war and treachery that have cost them their husbands, sons, fathers, and they plead for God's retribution to crush Richard and the forces of evil.

Lady Anne Neville, the widow of young Prince Edward, hates Richard because he is responsible for the deaths of both her husband and her father-in-law. In Shakespeare's account, Prince Edward was stabbed to death by the brothers Edward IV, Clarence and Richard, and Henry VI was stabbed in the Tower of London by Richard. But after cursing Richard, Anne allows him to persuade her to marry him for his own political gain, even as she grieves for her husband. She is clearly the unwilling victim of Richard's scheming. No one, it seems, not even those who have attained to high position, is untouched by the disasters that plague a nation in civil strife. Ironically, the curse Anne pronounces on Richard eventually falls on her as Richard's miserable consort. Richard eventually has her poisoned.

Queen Elizabeth, wife of King Edward IV and mother of his three young children, is the second mourner to appear in the play. After the death of her husband and the subsequent murders of her two young sons, the queen is entirely at the mercy of Richard. He regards her as an enemy because she is intelligent and outspoken. As the action of the plot unfolds, Richard also has her brother, Rivers, and her son, Grey, arrested and executed. Ultimately she foils Richard's plan to persuade her to let him marry her young daughter, Princess Elizabeth, whom he regards as his means of removing the last obstacle in his path to the throne.

Shakespeare, ignoring the historical facts, brings the aging Queen Margaret of Anjou, widow of Henry VI, back to England from France to haunt Richard in the play. After her husband and son were killed some years earlier, she was banished. Thus she makes her first appearance at the English court many years after having been a major player in the events of the war. She proves a chilling voice against the suffering and destruction brought about by decades of war and political treachery. Margaret wanders around the court lamenting her losses, cursing Richard, and calling for God's vengeance to fall upon him and all those who have been implemented in the fall of the house of Lancaster.

The fourth of the mourning women in the play is the Duchess of York, mother of King Edward IV, Clarence and Richard. She laments the deaths of her husband, three sons and two grandsons. At the same time Margaret taunts the Duchess of York as the woman who has given birth to "a hell-hound that does hunt us all to death."

In some productions of *Richard III* the young Elizabeth of York, sister to the little princes who are killed in the Tower, appears onstage although she has no lines in the play. The daughter of Queen Elizabeth, she eventually becomes the instrument who unites the warring houses of Lancaster and York. ♡



Berneth Jones as Queen Margaret; Classic Players 2012



Bob Jones Jr. played the role of Richard III with Classic Players in 1940, 1945, 1948, 1955, 1963 and 1972.

Richard III

[In *Richard III*, Shakespeare] "is more concerned with moral meanings than with the recording of events. ... As a Machiavel who takes evil for his good, and whose twisted body signifies his moral nihilism, Richard is a freak. He is not a good man who, when tempted, falls, and who, when fallen, hopes to find redemption. He is a 'poisonous bunch-backed toad,' a 'bottled spider,' an 'abortive, rooting hog,' [He] sins with ... bravado and exhilaration ... [T]here is a sportive streak in Richard. And his crimes reveal a kind of antic cunning that both he and we enjoy. But that they are crimes is clear, and finally we recoil. Despite his string of quick successes, which seem to sweep the kingdom up into a spiral of corruption, the play is built upon a mounting sequence of crime and retribution—Clarence's, the Woodvilles', Hastings', and Buckingham's—that finds its climax in the master-villain's death."

—Herschel Baker ♡

Director of Education, Janie McCauley, interviews Designer/Director of *Richard III*, Jeffrey Stegall



JM: *How and when did you become acquainted with the play? Have you seen productions that you responded to very positively or very negatively?*

JS: Twenty-five years ago I saw a production at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival. They started the play with everyone out of character and as the performers saw the actor playing Richard, they came into character and quickly left the stage in disgust. When all had left him, he turned to the audience and began the famous opening monologue "Now is the winter of our discontent. ..." I now realize that they missed the meaning of the opening speech, but it was the beginning of my thinking that the opening moments of a production are extremely important. I also saw our most recent Classic Players' production in 1989. I was away at grad school at the University of Oklahoma, and I came back to Greenville to visit friends over Thanksgiving. I saw the production three times because I was so happy to be back in town and to breathe Rodeheaver air again. I must admit that for over twenty years I have thought about how I would approach

the story conceptually if I ever had the chance to be a part of a production of it. I wouldn't say the play has haunted me these many years, but I have had a respect for the story and a bit of fear in approaching it. It is not the easiest of stories to tell. That is part of why I love this project. The challenge!

JM: *Exactly what hats are you wearing for this Richard III?*

JS: I adapted the story from Shakespeare's play. I designed the sets, designed the costumes and am currently directing the show. As director, I also work with the lighting designer and sound designers.

JM: *When did you begin work on the designs? How much time did you spend on them?*

JS: I started the designs in 2011, worked on them off and on throughout the year, and finished them in 2012. I did the costume designs first and set designs later.

JM: *Do you simultaneously work on design, blocking, acting and many of the other things you do for a production? Or what do you focus on first?*

JS: Sometimes I think about some of the blocking while I am designing the sets. Ideally, I like to focus on production concept, then scene design to determine the mechanics of how the set might function, and finally the costumes. (In this case the costume designs came before the final scene design.) That seems to be the new norm in my design schedule. →

JM: *In what period have you set the play? How do the time setting and locales influence the audience's understanding of the play?*

JS: Concerning period, I have taken somewhat of a different approach than I have used before in creating the world of the play. Research was done from the 15th century (period in which the historical Richard lived), Victorian (the 19th century is a time period I have come to love for many of Shakespeare's plays), and modern/futuristic (mostly modern materials from this period). There are anachronisms in the costuming such as zippers on otherwise Victorian-looking garments as well as modern elements such as shoes fashioned after 15th-century research. I also experimented with Neoprene rubber in costuming for the first time. See some of my recent blog posts at yorickco.blogspot.com.

JM: *Have you used color symbolism in the design?*

JS: Because of the tone of the play and the emphasis on death/mourning, black is an important part of the designs, especially in the set. There is glossiness to the set, like the tile in a morgue. It reminds me of the slick side of Richard. So many in the story comment about how good (clean) he is. He is a dark character.

JM: *Did you cut Shakespeare's text to create the script for this production?*

JS: Yes. Nearly half of the original text is gone.

JM: *What were your criteria in making the cutting?*

JS: I wanted a lean text that focused on Richard's journey and terrible reign. I wanted to make the story clear by making the family (and other) relationships easy to understand. One of the ways I tried to do this was by adding direct addresses to clarify the relationships. Shakespeare does this a good bit already, but I added even more.

JM: *Have any characters been cut?*

JS: The original play has one of Shakespeare's largest speaking casts of sixty plus. This adaptation has brought the number of named speaking characters to under twenty. As an audience member, I like fewer characters to keep track of in a story.

JM: *Why?*

JS: I don't want the audience to open the program and see sixty characters to figure out and keep straight. It can be fatiguing.

JM: *Have any scenes been cut?*

JS: There has been some moving of lines, and one scene was moved to a different location from the original order, but I think most of Shakespeare's scenes are there and in nearly the original order.

JM: *Have any scenes been added?*

JS: A few lines from *Henry VI, Part 3* have been added near the top of the show to help establish Richard's goal in the story. In rehearsal we are also toying with the idea of adding a phrase from *Henry V*. I am still not sure if that one will make it in the show. Listen for it. It's a famous line.

JM: *Have any characters been added ... Or combined?*

JS: Yes. To get fewer characters, some of the Lords went away while other characters (Catesby and Ratcliffe) grew as they picked up some of the obligatory lines once delivered by the characters who were cut.

JM: *Are there fight scenes?*

JS: The battle at Bosworth will be fought by Richard and Richmond alone. One single fight with surprises.

JM: *What kind of weapons are used?*

JS: Swords and daggers.

JM: *Is there a romance/love scene in this play?*

JS: There are two wooing scenes. I wouldn't call them romantic or love scenes. They both seem political, but especially the second when Richard woos Queen Elizabeth to talk her daughter (young Elizabeth) into marrying him.

JM: *Do you include any character who is alluded to but does not appear onstage in the text?*

JS: Yes. Young Elizabeth (last scene as a child in *Henry VI, Part 3*) doesn't actually appear in Shakespeare's *Richard III* but shows up early in this adaptation to help the audience see Richard's older brother Edward IV's full family (Queen Elizabeth, young Elizabeth and the two princes).

JM: *What role in Richard III would you like to perform if you were auditioning for a production yourself?*

JS: All of the brothers (Edward IV, George and Richard) interest me as an actor. And Buckingham. He's very complex. Either murderer would be fun because I never saw a clown part I didn't want to try on. And if I ever found myself in an all-male production (historically accurate that is), watch out for Old Queen Margaret. She's a little crazy, you know.

JM: *What are your guidelines for casting this production?*

JS: BJU is an amazing place to cast a play. I think being able to cast age-appropriate, veteran actors such as Ron Pyle (Richard), Beneth Jones (Queen Margaret), Corretta Grass (Duchess of York), Darren Lawson (Buckingham) to name a few, gives our productions a real depth. Nearly half of the roles are filled with faculty/staff and the other half by students and grad students. The student actors are strong in this show, and for some of them, this is their debut with Classic Players. It is great to see the young actors working alongside the seasoned ones. That kind of collaboration can be amazing. ♡

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