

Richard the Third

Performance Study Guide

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Original Practice and Playing Shakespeare

The Atlanta Shakespeare Company (ASC) at the New American Shakespeare Tavern is proud to call itself an 'Original Practice' company. In a nutshell, 'Original Practice' means the active exploration of the Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques that Shakespeare's own audiences would have enjoyed nearly four hundred years ago.

So what does this mean for an audience member at one of our Shakespeare productions? You will see an exciting performance featuring period costumes, sword fights, actor-generated sound effects rather than pre-recorded ones, and live music played on the stage of our Elizabethan-style playhouse.

But most important of all, our actors are trained to speak Shakespeare's poetry directly *to you*, the audience, instead of using the more modern acting convention of ignoring the audience's presence. To Shakespeare's original audiences theater was an active event that engaged and included them (think sports event, rather than the movies,) and he wrote his plays accordingly. This, more than any other reason, is why those plays are written to be experienced in live performance rather than just read out of a book...as we hope you'll agree when you see ASC's Richard III!

Who's Who in Richard III

Richard, Duke of Gloucester: Brother to the King, self-admittedly 'subtle false and treacherous.' Later becomes King Richard III.

King Edward IV: King of England at the play's beginning, Richard's eldest brother.

George, Duke of

Clarence: Brother to King Edward and Richard. Almost always referred to as

'Clarence.' Imprisoned by King Edward after Richard frames him. *Murdered.*

Henry VI: He's already been murdered by Richard at the play's beginning, but we see his body taken to burial in Act I and his ghost appears to to Richard in Act V.

Lady Anne: Dead Henry VI's daughter-in-law. Richard and King Edward also killed her husband. She later becomes Queen after Richard seduces her. *Presumably murdered.*

Margaret: Henry VI's widow, and thus the former Queen. While Queen she ordered the death of Richard's father and little brother. In return, he killed her husband and, with help from Edward, her son. She resists exile to 'slyly lurk' and give 'quick curses' to members of the court.

Queen Elizabeth: Edward's Queen, whom he married despite the fact that she was not of suitable noble birth to be a Queen. Many in court are still bitter about that.

Prince Edward and Richard, Duke of York: 'Tender babes,' young sons of King Edward. *Murdered.*

Earl Rivers and Lord Grey : Elizabeth's brothers. *Murdered.*

Marquis of Dorset: Elizabeth's son from a previous marriage.

Duchess of York: Mother to Richard, Edward and Clarence. She is ashamed of Richard, knowing him to be 'subtle, sly and bloody,' and is horrified when he kills her son and grandchildren.

Henry, Earl of Richmond: Still in exile at the beginning of the play, 'courageous Richmond' brings an army from France to conquer Richard III's. He then becomes King Henry VII. Almost always referred to as 'Richmond.'

Lord Stanley: Richmond's father-in-law. Still at court, he secretly supports Richmond's attack on Richard.

Duke of Buckingham: Ignores Margaret's 'gentle counsel' warning him of Richard's treachery.



He becomes Richard's right-hand-man, but Richard eventually turns on him. *Murdered.*

Lord Hastings: Enemy to Queen Elizabeth and her family but, unfortunately for him, doesn't support Richard's rise to power. *Murdered.*

Sir Catesby: Assists Richard in his rise to power until Richard is killed in battle.

Archbishop of York and Cardinal Bourchier: They attempt to protect Clarence's child and Elizabeth with religious sanctuary, but are overruled by Richard's supporters.

Sir Tyrrell: Agrees to kill the 'tender babes' in exchange for 'corrupting gold.'

Sir Brakenbury: Lieutenant of the Tower of London (in charge of prisoners there.)

Two Murderers: Hired by Richard to kill Clarence in the Tower of London, they first have a discussion about ethics.

Servants, Messengers, Bishops, Lords, Soldiers

Richard III: The Story

Richard opens the play by describing to us a peaceful England: 'the winter of our discontent'—the long years of war that have recently ended—is 'made most excellent summer by this Son of York'—that Son being his oldest brother, Edward, who is now King of England (Edward IV, to be precise.) Richard reveals to us his secret bitterness at this state of events. Because of his physical deformities he feels he has no place in courtly life and a country not at war. Plus, he has ambitions to be King himself.

Clarence, Richard's second brother, enters under arrest by order of the King—right after Richard has just told us that he deliberately started false rumors suggesting that Clarence planned to kill the King's son. Richard pretends to be concerned for Clarence but secretly delights in his imprisonment. Richard next tells us that he further plans to seduce Lady Anne, the widowed daughter-in-law of the last King, Henry VI, whom Richard himself murdered (he also murdered her husband.)

Lady Anne, mourning behind Henry VI's body on its way to burial, vents her grief

about his death and her hatred for Richard. Richard approaches her and, against all odds, successfully convinces her to become his wife.

Back at the royal court, where the King has fallen ill, tensions run high and things look worrisome for Queen Elizabeth, Richard's enemy, and her family. Richard succeeds in further sowing distrust throughout the court by starting a battle of insults with Elizabeth and framing her as responsible for Clarence's imprisonment. Margaret, the dead and deposed Henry VI's bitter widow, then appears and rages at all in the court, cursing most people present and prophesying more horror to come at Richard's hand.

That night, while imprisoned in the Tower of London, Clarence awakes from a nightmare about his own death. As if in response, two murderers hired by Richard enter the Tower and murder Clarence.

The gravely sick King Edward attempts to patch up the growing distrust and bad blood between different factions in his court. But when the news of Clarence's murder proves more than he can bear (Richard makes it sound like the death was Edward's fault,) Edward dies, leaving vulnerable his extended family: the distraught Queen Elizabeth, Clarence's child, who has just arrived in court, and Edward's own children, including the young Prince (also named Edward.)

Richard now moves quickly, imprisoning lords who support the Queen and Prince. Realizing that she and her family are in danger, the Queen flees to religious sanctuary with her youngest child. But Richard now has official custody of Prince Edward, who is still too young to be crowned King, and convinces the boy to stay in the Tower of London 'for his protection.'

As the Prince's 'Lord Protector,' Richard already wields enough power as though he himself were King. With the help of Buckingham and Catesby, his supporters, Richard uses that power to execute lords who oppose him, among them the Queen's

brothers (Grey and Rivers) and the Lord Hastings. Next he must publicly declare the late King Edward's children to be illegitimate bastards, and thus unfit to take the throne—this will finally clear his way to take the throne for himself. In a showy protestation staged for the citizens and Mayor of London, Buckingham uses weak arguments to prove the illegitimacy of Edward's children and publicly offers the crown to Richard, who pretends humility and refuses it for sake of image. Buckingham insists, and Richard publicly agrees to become King.

When Lady Anne (now Richard's wife,) the Duchess of York (Richard's mother), and Elizabeth approach the Tower of London to visit the Prince and his brother, who are still living there, they learn not only that the children are now prisoners but also that Richard is about to be crowned King. Elizabeth sends her last living son to flee to France and seek shelter with the Earl of Richmond, who fled there when her husband (King Edward, from the play's beginning) first became King.

Richard, now King, knows that his claim to the throne is insecure as long as Edward's true heirs still live, so he suggests to Buckingham that the young Princes in Tower should be killed. Buckingham hesitates about murdering children, thus angering Richard, who hires another man to do the deed. Buckingham, sensing that he should get out while he still can, asks Richard for the land and titles he was promised in return for helping Richard gain the throne; the new King has already turned on him, however, and denies Buckingham his due.

While Elizabeth and the Duchess of York grieve over the children's deaths, Margaret, the bitter deposed Queen from the beginning of the show, returns to gloat over their misery.

In an attempt to cement his claim to the throne, Richard now has the gall to approach Elizabeth and propose marriage to her daughter (the only child she had with Edward that Richard has not murdered yet.

Lady Anne is dead now—probably also murdered by Richard.) Elizabeth ultimately pretends to relent, but secretly plans to marry her daughter to Richmond, the exiled Earl in France and Richard's enemy.

Meanwhile, Richmond is leading an army from France to attack and depose Richard who, hearing of this, prepares his own army for battle.

The night before engaging the rebel army at Bosworth field, King Richard is visited by the ghosts of those he has killed, and during the battle the following day his luck turns. After Richard has been knocked off of his horse ("A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!") Richmond kills him in battle. Richmond, a member of the Tudor family, then takes the crown to become King Henry VII, decisively ending the Wars of the Roses at long last.

Before a Performance, Talk and Think About This:

Physical Actions Revealed:

--Suit the deed to the word, the word to the deed. Where are there examples of the text itself telling the reader what the physical action on stage should be? Examples: "Why dost thou spit at me?" (Act I, Scene ii) or "Bear to her my true love's kiss"(Act IV, Scene iv.)

Theatergoing Then and Now:

--Find out what the typical Elizabethan audience was like and imagine what a performance might have been like back then. What is different about theater-going nowadays? The answers may surprise you! For example, what would this play be like to watch outside, in the light of day?

Right to Rule and Societal Rules:

--In Elizabethan society and for centuries before and afterwards, kingship was inherited by being handed down to the eldest living son of the monarch (once all the sons

had run out, then it could be passed through daughters—hence Elizabeth I, Queen during Shakespeare’s time.) This system is but one of the many social traditions that Richard disregards to seize power. Research or discuss social roles (of brothers, wives, children, etc) in Elizabethan England. How many Elizabethan social taboos does Richard commit or attempt to commit throughout the play?

During a Performance, Watch And Listen For This:

Prophecy and Curses:

Prophecy and the act of cursing someone (as in casting a spell on them) were both taken very seriously in Shakespeare’s time. *Richard III* explores these supernatural activities.

--Margaret, the bitter queen of Henry VI who turns up to rant in court in Act 1, casts curse after curse at those present—and is largely ignored. Yet later on, characters call her a ‘witch’ and a ‘prophetess.’ Pay close attention to the curses and predictions she makes, then watch as each one eventually comes true.

--Curses and prophecies appear everywhere in this play. At times characters even end up unintentionally fulfilling a curse they themselves cast! Listen for curses throughout the play. Who ends up fulfilling his or her own prophecy or curse?

Power Play:

--Notice the different methods that Richard uses to seize power (not all of them involve physical violence.) Which methods seem to be the most effective? When do they work, or not work? Why do you think they work or don’t work?

--Richard is one of Shakespeare’s most complicated and charismatic villains. As the play progresses, are there moments when you feel sorry for Richard? Hate him? Why?

After a Performance, Talk About This:

Original Practice Theatre:

--Does directly addressing the audience affect what you think and feel about the characters? Does it affect your understanding of what is going on onstage? Does it interfere? Why do you think Shakespeare wrote his plays this way? What are the benefits to the actor and/or audience? What are the risks?

Throughout the Ages:

--Pretend that you are producing this play, and that you may set the play in any time period. Which time period would you choose? What parallels exist between Shakespeare’s story and the time period you chose? In your version, would famous historical figures become characters in the play? Who?

Spinning History:

--Research the historical figure of Richard III. How similar was he to the figure that Shakespeare portrays? Why do you think Shakespeare made the choices that he did in telling this story? (Hint: check the lineage for Queen Elizabeth I, who was Queen while Shakespeare wrote this play.)

For Further Exploration of Shakespeare and <u>Richard III</u>:

Websites:

The Shakespeare Globe Centre USA: <http://www.shakespeareglobeusa.org/>

Mr. William Shakespeare and The Internet: <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>- This site contains excellent resources and is a great 'meta'-site.

Books:

Shakespeare A to Z by Charles Boyce

1599 by James Shapiro

Shakespeare by Bill Bryson

Staging In Shakespeare's Theatres by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

Shakespeare and Co. by Stanley Wells

Our performance text is:

The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type, edited by Neil Freeman

For more information on the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays go to:

<http://web.uvic.ca/shakespeare/Annex/DraftTxt/index.html>

Movie Versions of Richard III:

Richard III (1995)—Ian McKellen plays Richard in this adaptation of the play, set in 1930's London.

Looking for Richard (1996)—A documentary by Al Pacino in which Pacino explores the play with fellow actors.

Richard III (1955)—The classic version starring Laurence Olivier as Richard.