Creating the Role of Richard III for Richard III

Travis Grey Robertson

*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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CREATING THE ROLE OF RICHARD III FOR

RICHARD III

by

TRAVIS GREY ROBERTSON

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
MANKATO, MINNESOTA

FEBRUARY 2023
Date

Creating The Role of Richard III for Richard III

Travis Grey Robertson

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the student’s committee.

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This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree in Acting. It is a detailed account of author Grey Robertson’s artistic process in creating the role of Richard III in Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Fall 2022 production of Richard III. This thesis follows the actor’s process through pre-production analysis, an historical and critical perspective, journals detailing the rehearsal and performance process, a post-production analysis, and process development. Appendices and works cited follow the process development.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As this thesis serves as a culmination of my time and studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato, I need to thank those who provided their support along the way. I would like to give a very heartfelt thank you to the entire faculty of the Minnesota State University, Mankato’s Theatre and Dance department. I learned something instrumental from each of you when struggling with what it means to be a student, a teacher, an artist, an academic, and a professional.

I have received such support from all my graduate cohort and undergraduates during my time here, but I would be remiss not to mention my fellow graduate student Ruby Carlson and Costume Shop Manager Scott Anderson. Your kindness and endless laughs helped keep the wheels on and moving forward during my most trying of times.

Finally, my family has proved instrumental as always. I cannot be thankful enough for my dad’s grounded advice, the love and support of Greg Sidell and Blake Berlin, and my mom’s unending willingness to listen and workshop everything with me. Mostly, I would like to thank my wife Tyler who proved the best of anything I gained from this period of my life. Your boundless belief, love, and support powered me to get through the hardest of days and made me long to come back to our little red house knowing my best friend was always waiting for me.
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CHAPTER I

PRE-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

*Richard III* by William Shakespeare is one of the Fall 2022 productions at Minnesota State University, Mankato. The creative staff includes Heather Hamilton as Director, Finley Alexander as Stage Manager, John Paul as Scene Designer, Steve Smith as Lighting Designer, and David McCarl as Costume Designer. This paper explores my process in creating the character of Richard III and includes chapters on pre-production analysis, social and historical context, journals, post-production analysis, and process development.

When it comes to Shakespeare, there are different versions of the same texts since Shakespeare’s plays were not published in his time. Our production will use a cutting of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology online publication. For the purposes of this paper, the citations will come from the Folger Shakespeare Library Edition of *Richard III* and refer to the cuts made in our production in the synopsis of the play.

*Richard III* centers on Richard of Gloucester ascending to become king during the English War of Roses in late Fifteenth Century England. Richard reveals himself and his true ambitions in his opening monologue where he describes how life has evolved for his family since his brother was crowned
Edward IV. Because of his disability, since birth Richard has suffered emotional abuse and ostracism. Speaking, he exhibits his true manipulative behavior, “And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover, To entertain these fair well-spoken days, I am determined to prove a villain” (Shakespeare 11). Richard makes his prophetic claim for the entire play, as he proceeds to portray the villain throughout the rest of the play. He lies, cheats, murders, and brutalizes his way to becoming King and continues his savagery to hold onto power once crowned. Mercilessly, he allows no one to obstruct his goal including friends, family, women, and children. Richard only begins to understand the depths to which he has sunken to gain and hold onto his power the night before the Battle of Tewksbury, when he envisions the ghosts of his victims, as they confront him with his crimes. However, when he wakes, Richard doubles down on his own ruthlessness and dies as the villain in battle he claimed to be from the very beginning.

*Richard III*’s message rings true for today’s modern world as much as it did during Shakespeare’s time: a cautionary tale against tyrants and despotism. From the very beginning of the play, Richard sinks his claws into every person and circumstance he can in order to achieve his goal to become King. He mourns Clarence’s imprisonment and death publicly after ensuring them privately. Richard, unlike the wannabe despots of today, is politically savvy, a good actor, and skillfully manages the levers of power, thus eventually bringing the kingdom
under his ruthless grasp. *Richard III* relates so much about how quickly society can fall to tyrants and how to safeguard democracy in our own modern world.

After the Minnesota State Mankato 2022-2023 Theatre Season was announced, I immediately looked to Richard as a hopeful prospect for my thesis role and began my exploration of Richard of Gloucester in June of 2022. *Richard III* would provide more than enough material, work, and potential growth for a hearty thesis role. Purchasing a copy of the Folger Shakespeare Library Edition, I began reading. The Folger Shakespeare Library Editions of Shakespeare’s works are my preferred editions of Shakespeare’s works, as they have strong prefaces, synopses, and detailed footnotes. The Folger Edition of *Richard III* provides an easier access point for Shakespeare’s second longest play, a complex history play with many rival factions and shifting alliances.

Richard’s journey is a pretty simple one upon first viewing: he seeks to become King, hold onto as much power as possible, and protect it at all costs; this marks the character’s super-objective from his first lines to his inevitable death. His sole focus for power colors his actions throughout the play; Richard’s absolute focus can make him come across as two dimensional until further probing.

We see glimpses into the underpinnings of Richard's brutal and unmerciful acts throughout the play. From the very first line, Richard informs us of some of his reasoning, “Now is the winter of our discontent Made glorious summer by this
son of York, And all the clouds that loured upon our house In the deep bosom of the ocean buried” (9). Shakespeare starts the play with Richard’s long monologue saying that this is the beginning of the end of his suffering. It is clear that Richard has suffered for some time before the play even opens. He goes on to describe his brother, King Edward’s enjoyment and merriment at now being King. Richard contrasts himself:

But I, that am not shaped for sportive tricks,
Nor made to court an amorous looking glass;
I, that am rudely stamped and want love’s majesty
To strut before a wanton ambling nymph;
I, that am curtailed of this fair proportion,
Cheated of feature by dissembling nature,
Deformed, unfinished, sent before my time
Into this breathing world scarce half made up,
And that so lamely and unfashionable
That dogs bark at me as I halt by them- (9)

These few lines clearly demonstrate that Richard assesses his “deformity” (historically, scoliosis) as some flaw in moral character. This bitterness and anger aimed inward seem to indicate a lifetime of mistreatment for his physical difference, which makes sense considering the time period of the Middle Ages; it was customary to think of physical disabilities as “punishment for sin” during this
time (“Disability in the Medieval Period 1050-1485”). The abuse Richard endured for his disability undoubtedly embittered him to the world and all the people in it. However, Richard’s language and actions immediately signal a strong mind and political aptitude and provide evidence of Richard’s even stronger inner conflict, knowing that he is more intelligent and superior than most of his peers and consistently being disdained and disparaged for his physical appearance. From here, I can begin to empathize with Richard’s bitterness. Furthermore, Richard was born to a royal family with stringent expectations of behavior and appearance, which would only heighten the cruelty Richard would endure as being judged as inadequate for his royal family. Once this character work is complete, the rest of Richard’s behavior throughout the play begins to make sense: an abused yet intellectually superior royal lives with the constant physical reminder that he is considered inferior and will never be considered their equal. It makes sense that this person would long to be King to seek retribution, the proper respect, and the love he deserves. This perspective and reaction to abuse comprise the core of Richard and are what drive him to do what he does throughout the play. He executes children, turns against his closest allies, and terrorizes Lady Anne until she agrees to marry him, all in the name of becoming King and shoring up his power. Without this power, Richard sees himself as the lowly creature all his abusers describe him to be. He has also made a direct connection between the pain of his disability and how his offenders made him
feel. His torment and disability are a direct connection in Richard’s eyes to his feelings of being shunned and made to feel deficient. He makes the jump in logic that his next action will fix the thing he has been taught to hate about himself, which leads him to do anything and everything to calm the storm raging inside himself for inner peace.

Richard relentlessly and fiercely fights for and protects the crown throughout the play, always championing action and brutality rather than contemplation of his actions. Richard very rarely stops to think about what he is doing or finds remorse for what he has done. He finds his strongest moment of introspection in the dream sequence right before the end of the play. As all the ghosts of Richard’s victims return to terrorize him, we see the most pronounced cracks in Richard’s psyche, hubris, and conviction. After being confronted with all his victims and sins, Richard laments his loneliness and lack of pity for himself.

*Richard III* creates a terrific challenge for my thesis role. Although I have read the play several times and done some research, parts of the play and its language still remain a mystery. Understanding the intricacies of the language and plot will undoubtedly prove an early challenge. Shakespeare’s history plays are denser and less accessible than his other works. I will need to crack the play open to make the language and story not only accessible to me but masterfully understood so I can convey its meaning and message to a modern audience.
Richard will also provide the monumental task of learning lines for the second biggest role in Shakespeare after Hamlet, as the character of Richard speaks persistently throughout most of the play. The cuts Hamilton provided are terrific and definitely reduce the work but still leave me with the task of pure memorization of a mountain of words. Lastly, taking on such an iconic role provides its own challenges of overcoming mental barriers of what the role “should be.” Actors who have played this role include but are not limited to Denzel Washington, Patrick Stewart, Ian McKellan, Al Pacino, Kevin Spacey, Sir Laurence Olivier, Peter Dinklage, Kenneth Branagh, and Danai Gurira, all titans of the acting world who left their mark on one of Shakespeare’s most famous characters in a 400-year-old play. However, I find myself least concerned about this final challenge. At my age and place, I find less of an obligation to the history or legacy of a role and more of a responsibility to the story of our own production. I look forward to jumping into this production with both feet, as there is no other way to take on a role like Richard.
CHAPTER II
HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Chapter two examines the historical and social context of Minnesota State University, Mankato’s production of *Richard III* in the Fall of 2022. This chapter will provide a brief history of The War of Roses and the real-life namesake of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, explore the rise of authoritarianism in modern society, and connect the character Richard’s attributes with his present-day counterparts.

Scholars believe Shakespeare wrote *Richard III* sometime between 1592 and 1594, more than one hundred years after the real Richard of Gloucester died ending the War of Roses (“Richard III”). As iconic as Shakespeare’s version of Richard is, the actual, historic figure proves much different upon further investigation. The monarch Richard III was born on October 2, 1452, in Northamptonshire, England, and died at the age of 32 on August 22, 1485. As in Shakespeare’s play, the real Richard died not far from the Battle of Bosworth Field, and his death marked the end of the War of Roses. Richard of Gloucester was absolutely no saint, but Shakespeare’s interpretation and Sir Thomas More’s distorted historical writings largely besmirched his character (“Richard III”). Sir Thomas More, an English man of letters and public servant, wrote his work *History of King Richard III* between 1513 and 1518 (“Thomas More's History of King Richard III”). More’s work, “dramatized conflicts, provided descriptions of
both body and mind, and looked for causes as well as recording facts” (“Thomas More's History of King Richard III”). More’s slanted historical take became popular with scholars and went on to influence Shakespeare’s play (“Thomas More's History of King Richard III”).

Moreover, Sir Thomas More’s account of Richard served strong political purposes:

Richard III’s Tudor successors from Henry VII onwards had a vested interest in portraying him as a bad, and indeed unlawful, king to increase their own legitimacy as the line who deposed him. More’s account, written under Henry VIII, follows the Tudor propagandist line and paints Richard as a usurper, accusing him of killing the princes in the tower…

(“Thomas More's History of King Richard III”)

This distortion of the real Richard has taken flight in the public consciousness from Sir Thomas More’s account and Shakespeare’s as well. Richard only served as King of England for two years, and his path to power proves much more nuanced when investigating the actual history.

Within Shakespeare’s play, Richard is responsible for the deaths of Henry VI, Prince Edward of Westminster, his brother Edward IV, and his other brother George Plantagenet, Duke of Clarence. In reality, Richard took no part in any of their deaths, as Edward of Westminster died in battle and Edward IV ordered the executions of Henry VI and the Duke of Clarence. In the play, Richard
definitively orders the deaths of Edward V and Richard of Shrewsbury; however, historians today still debate the exact fate of the two young princes, as their bodies have never been found. It is possible that Richard ordered their execution, but all evidence remains circumstantial. When looking at Richard’s place in history, it is important to allow these historical truths to speak for themselves while considering a context of the times. Richard III spent his entire life during the turbulent and violent times of the War of Roses, a product of his time and nowhere near the devious person portrayed in Shakespeare’s play (“Shakespeare's Richard III - Myth or Reality?”). Although Shakespeare and Sir Thomas More’s portrayal of Richard III served as propaganda and dramatic interpretation, real-life despots mimicking the character’s brutality and disregard for the rule of law have frighteningly taken place in American and world politics in our modern age.

Donald Trump announced his campaign for the United States Presidency on June 16, 2015. From the very beginning, he demonstrated exactly who he was by referring to Mexican immigrants as “rapists,” continually praising Vladimir Putin and other despots across the world and making veiled and/or direct threats to political rivals, which does not begin to touch his unabashed use of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia as unrepentant tools to attack and divide (“‘Drug Dealers, Criminals, Rapists’: What Trump Thinks of Mexicans”).
Donald Trump has continually praised tyrants during his time as a candidate, President, private citizen, and now candidate again. He consistently praised Vladimir Putin for their friendly relationship during the 2013 Miss Universe Pageant and told Bill O’Reilly, “I will tell you that I think in terms of leadership, he is getting an ‘A’” (Kaczynski, Andrew, et al). The leadership Trump referred to was one with an undeniable pattern of murdering dissenters including former spies and investigative journalists, invading foreign lands in Crimea, and jailing protesters for the slightest infractions (Landy, Heather, and Hanna Kozlowska). These actions by Putin perfectly mirror how Richard murders his own dissenters, Buckingham, Lady Anne, and others to maintain and strengthen his power.

When Trump was unexpectedly elected President in November 2016, American intelligence services discovered that Russia had interfered in the election to sway the election for Trump (Abrams, Abigail). Trump then sided with Putin and Russia against US Intelligence Services in front of the world at the 2018 Helsinki meeting (“Trump Sides with Russia against FBI at Helsinki Summit”). Trump, in answering a reporter at the summit when asked if he believed Putin interfered as US Intelligence Services, said, “President Putin says it’s not Russia. I don’t see any reason why it would be” (“Trump Sides with Russia against FBI at Helsinki Summit”). With Russia’s internationally condemned invasion of Ukraine, Trump has not eased his praise of the dictator, as
he described the invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine as “genius” and “very savvy” (Benen, Steve). Donald Trump’s continual praise of Putin demonstrates his deep admiration of tyrants, brutality as a method of governing, and his desire to truly wield power within the United States.

Apart from simply praising and admiring dictators, Donald Trump continually threatens and provokes violence against those he deems as political rivals or enemies leading to real-world acts of domestic terrorism. From the beginning of Trump’s campaign against Hillary Clinton, he demonized and made threats against her. When discussing the Second Amendment with one of his typically raucous crowds, Trump remarked, “If she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do, folks. Although the Second Amendment people—maybe there is, I don’t know” (Corasaniti, Nick, and Maggie Haberman). This statement stands on its own as a thinly veiled threat for his supporters to take violent action against his political rival. Although Trump always used veiled threats, his use of inciting political violence and discarding once loyal dissenters mirrors Richard’s own use of brutality throughout the play. Richard’s quick dismissal and execution of Buckingham imitates Donald Trump’s own actions towards once loyal supporters like Mike Pence, Jeff Sessions, and Mitch McConnell. Even though this has become nearly lost in the blizzard of extremist things Donald Trump did or said, it is important to remember what a departure a statement like this is from even charged American discourse and discourse throughout the world.
Statements like this became commonplace for Trump during his time as a candidate and President. These shocking statements served as fodder and a green light for some of his already unhinged followers leading to domestic acts of terrorism.

In October 2018, Cesar Sayoc was arrested for sending homemade pipe bombs to prominent Democratic leaders and media outlets who had been critical of Trump (Gonzales, Richard). Some of the victims who received mailed pipe bombs included Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton, CNN, and Kamala Harris, all strong critics of Donald Trump. During his 2019 trial, “Sayoc’s attorney, all federal public defenders, argued that Sayoc was motivated by his obsession with and his anger at Democrats” (Gonzales, Richard). Donald Trump once again stoke his based to act against his political rivals with violence.

Ricky Shiffer attacked and tried to breach Cincinnati’s FBI office on August 11, 2022. Shiffer wore body armor and tried to enter the visitor’s screening area. After failing to enter, Shiffer fled and exchanged fire with the Ohio State Police; police returned fire killing Shiffer. This event came three days after the FBI executed a search warrant at Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate (“Armed Man Killed after Trying to Breach FBI Office, Standoff”). Shiffer posted in wake of the Mar-a-Lago raids on the conservative social media platform, Truth Social, “People, this is it. I hope a call to arms comes from someone better qualified, but if not, this is your call to arms from me” (Murphy, Paul P., et al). Trump himself
posted on his Truth Social platform fifty-one times in twenty-four hours after Mar-a-Lago was raided (Palmer, Ewan).

One of these posts included:

The 'Special Agent' In Charge of the unprecedented and unnecessary Raid and Break In of Mar-a-Lago, who concealed the partisan nature of evidence to secure the FBI's approval to open an investigation into the 45th President in the first place, was also involved in the hiding and suppressing from the Public and the Media, the 'Laptop from Hell,' the 2020 Presidential Election Scam, and so much more! (Bickerton, James)

This marks only a small fraction of Trump’s demonization of the FBI, as the organization investigated him and stood against him throughout the years of his presidency. Clearly Trump’s raging against the FBI played a role inspiring Shiffer’s domestic terror attack against the FBI. Just as Richard convinced Edward IV of Clarence’s guilt, Trump has done the same with his supporters and the FBI.

These two encounters only begin to scratch the surface of Trump’s fueling domestic terrorism in this country. There have also been countless right-wing, lone-wolf attacks since Trump’s entrance to politics, often targeting people of color, the Jewish population, and people from the LGBTQ community. All of these have been smaller in scale; however, Trump’s attempts to divert democracy
in wake of losing the 2020 election caused the greatest organized act of domestic terrorism in US history: January 6th.

CNN announced on November 7, 2020, at 11:24 a.m., eastern time, Joe Biden as the winner of the 2020 Presidential Election. After waiting nearly four days and wading through an endless, exhausting campaign, America had an answer as to who the next President would be (Johnson, Ted). Almost immediately, Donald Trump came forth to say that the election was rigged, and he was indeed the rightful winner of the 2020 Election. This election denial and the attempted coup on January 6th marked the culmination of a history of denying the outcome of elections unless he won. Trump tweeted after losing to Ted Cruz in the 2016 Iowa Caucus, “Based on the fraud committed by Senator Ted Cruz during the Iowa Caucus, either a new election should take place or Cruz results nullified” (Axelrod, Tal). Trump won the 2016 election against Hillary Clinton; however, he lost the popular vote by nearly three million votes (Begley, Sarah). Donald Trump, unable to accept this result, claimed, “I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally” (Axelrod, Tal). This claim, of course, had no merit and was proven to be untrue (Axelrod, Tal). Trump again echoed baseless claims about fraudulent voting in the 2018 Midterms (Axelrod, Tal). By the time Joe Biden was announced as the winner of the 2020 election, Donald Trump had created a fictitious foundation that any result besides his winning meant that the election was stolen. Trump came in the
night after election day when the tide began to turn towards Biden and claimed, “This is a fraud on the American public. This is an embarrassment to our country. We were getting ready to win this election. Frankly, we did win this election…We want all voting to stop” (Axelrod, Tal). Continuing his election denial into the new year, Trump eyed January 6, a largely symbolic counting of the electoral votes by Congress, as his last stand.

As the Congress convened for the joint session, thousands of Trump supporters heard him speak close to the White House. Trump proclaimed, “We will never give up. We will never concede” (Lonsdorf, Kat, et al). Trump’s personal lawyer and fervent supporter, Rudy Giuliani, incited the crowd further by exclaiming, “Let’s have trial by combat” (“Giuliani: 'Let's Have Trial by Combat'”). After launching his supporters toward the Capitol, Trump returned to the safety of the White House (Lonsdorf, Kat, et al). The first wave of insurrectionists broke through the barriers in front of the Capitol by 1:00 p.m. (Lonsdorf, Kat, et al). As Republican Representatives and Senators began disputing the legitimate returns from certain states, the insurrectionists smashed through windows and breached the building. What followed was an outpouring of chaos of Trump failing to call off the mob or deploy the National Guard, gas masks being provided to Representatives and Senators, and a crowd making it dangerously close to Congress members chanting things like “Hang Mike Pence” and bringing zip ties with them (Lonsdorf, Kat, et al). The attack left five dead,
led to the suicides of four police officers shortly after the attacks, and marked the closest overthrow of American democracy since its inception (Farley, Robert).

This is not just a uniquely American phenomenon as right-wing authoritarian leaders have seized more power across the globe. From Neo-fascist Giorgia Meloni’s election to the prime minister in Italy, to the attempted coup by right-wing factions in Germany, to the modern-day concentration camps of Uighurs in China, tyranny is on the rise as a global trend. This direction is one reason why it is so vital to tell the story of Richard III today. Modern despotic leaders perfectly emulate Richard’s brutality, disrespect for the rule of law, single-mindedness in obtaining and holding onto power, and ruthlessness in attacking all opposition. The parallels are alarming and speak for themselves.

All of this brings to mind Sinclair Lewis's 1935 novel recently adapted into a modern play, *It Can’t Happen Here*. In the play, a Vermont intellectual sits by as he watches a fascist elected to the Presidency of the United States while he is sentenced to time in a prison camp. Although written during the rise of fascism in the 1930s, this work is scarily prophetic (“The Playfinder”). If a fascist coup can almost come to fruition in America in 2021, there is no place and time it can’t happen. It is our responsibility as artists and informed citizens to speak up against these rising tides and remind the public of the truth of despots, their tactics, and nationalistic chants; because, as *It Can’t Happen Here* suggests tyranny cannot take hold in a place like America until it does.
CHAPTER III
JOURNAL

August 23, 2022

I have been cast as Richard in *Richard III*! Luckily, I was hoping to be cast in this part and started this summer with my character breakdown and learning lines. Today, I started memorizing lines and worked on the play for about five hours. I am really trying to throw everything I can at mastering lines, since it has taken me some time in the past, and we have an early “off-book” date. Finding a strong understanding of the context of the material, each scene, and each line is helping immensely. I have also been using mnemonic devices for the first time ever. Hopefully, this will pay off. I am also taking breaks to walk around the building after working on lines for a while because I read this aids in storing memorization. I know what a big show this is, and I am trying to put everything I have into it and do my very best.

August 25, 2022

Today brought the first big hurdle: Covid. After going two and a half years without contracting Covid, I tested positive. It’s disheartening to want to get started and be full speed ahead but make sure I am well enough for rehearsal on Monday. I am still learning lines and doing the best that I can. I think I put
two hours plus into learning lines today. I’m really hoping I feel better tomorrow, so the next day I can spend all day attacking lines. This is the time when even an atheist like me hopes there is some spiritual force guiding me to success. I am going to give my all for this role; I just need to be well enough to do it.

August 29, 2022

Tonight was our first rehearsal, and I was pretty overwhelmed for most of it. Heather Hamilton did her great dramaturgy presentation, and there was just a lot to absorb about how much work this is going to be. I felt better after talking to Hamilton after rehearsal concerning learning lines. My method of learning lines is largely influenced by how Meisner taught actors to learn lines: I do my character work and then learn lines without emotion. I have modified this with every production to find the quickest way to learn lines without getting stuck into doing them only one way. It’s seemingly an almost impossible habit to break once the actors learn their lines a particular way. Hamilton wants the cast to be off-book by September 5, in one week. I told her that I am learning lines in new ways that are helping me learn lines in a night with what would usually take days. I am doing everything in my power to learn the lines quickly and in a manner that will foster my best work, however, this will just take a little time. Hamilton said she understood this and would be my ally, especially since I have by far the most lines in the production. This made me feel better: to know Hamilton will support
me in bringing Richard to life in a way that works for both of us. I left tonight excited to start this process in earnest and really give myself to this play like I have never done before.

August 30, 2022

We began the read-through tonight; and even though I felt good about how off-book I am, I left overwhelmed with the amount of work I have yet to do. I stayed at school working on lines until I could not think, and my hand could not write. I hope these lines go into my head tonight, and I get some much needed rest.

September 3, 2022

I just got back from school after spending five hours learning lines and going over the script. I would love to be off-book for every scene in our first act by Monday. If I accomplish that, I can hopefully be off-book by the last week of September. I am working on lines more intensely than ever before and working on them in new ways. I have adopted using the first letter of each word to create a handy mnemonic device for each line; I write out my lines when I get too tired to quiz myself; and I am doing further scene analysis before memorizing a scene to understand what is really going on.
I have been thinking about some notes Hamilton has been giving me. In particular, I have been thinking about her note on paying attention to the punctuation more. This note makes sense since I typically work by ignoring the punctuation almost entirely to find my own organic way of discovering each line. I often feel playwrights rely on punctuation to almost dictate to actors how lines should be read; this may be helpful for other actors, but at the end of the day the performance is my own, and I like leaving my process to my organic instincts as much as possible while understanding Hamilton’s concerns. Her concerns lie with the communication of the ideas in the lines, and punctuation also serves as a tool to communicate how an idea is being expressed in a line. If I decide to pay less attention to punctuation, then I need to understand that the full communication of ideas falls more on my shoulders, and I need to slow down at times to make sure I accomplish this. This lesson has been a good example of taking a director’s note and putting it through my filters to find compromise in Hamilton’s direction and my process of working.

September 7, 2022

We are moving right along with rehearsals. We began blocking on Monday, and things have been going well. The play seems to be clicking pretty well for the moment. My life has just become learning lines during every free moment of every free day in a variety of ways. I am almost finished memorizing
the lines before intermission. After that, I just have three moderately big scenes and a large monologue afterward. I hope I will be finished memorizing in two-three weeks and just have to review to solidify everything. More than anything, understanding the context, using mnemonic devices, and writing the lines out when I’m tired are proving most fruitful.

September 8, 2022

In the hall, I just spoke with John Paul by chance about Richard III. Paul is our Scenic Designer for the production and also our Disability Advocate and Consultant. We discussed Richard the person, the disabilities of the time period, and displaying characters with disabilities in today’s theatre culture. It was a very insightful conversation that helped me understand his perspective on the issue. Paul and I agreed it was a complex issue that is truly done best when no harm is done, and the disability is not used as a gimmick. Someone’s physical disability should never be the butt of a joke.

September 9, 2022

I just got out of rehearsal where we blocked the final battle scene of the play. It really adds a whole new dynamic and brings fight choreography back into sight for this production. We had been working so much on the text and the staging, I had put out of my mind that we still had this huge battle sequence to
stage and choreograph. Hamilton did a great job in guiding the room through the night. She placed a strong emphasis on speed and simplified the blocking as much as possible so that actors could keep it straight in their heads. Cadence Smith, who plays Richmond, in the final scene is my scene partner for the entirety of the battle scene. David McCarl will stage our entire fight scene later in the process. It was a nice, fun way to end rehearsal for the week.

Now, I have memorized all of Act I of the play and am moving on to memorizing Act II as quickly as possible. I think learning the second act might come more quickly since I am already in the mode of learning so much Shakespearean language and have a much better understanding of the second half of the play now.

September 13, 2022

What a twenty-four hours it has been. I cannot remember working harder on a production than in the past twenty-four hours. It has been stressful, to say the least. I can also never remember being as overwhelmed by a show. I am swimming in learning the second act of lines and am throwing everything I have at it, spending probably eight hours in the last twenty-four hours just drilling lines.

This work obviously leads to high levels of exhaustion and brain fog, which particularly kicked in last night during rehearsal. I went into rehearsal
extremely exhausted just from drilling lines, dealing with a puppy at home, and trying to live a somewhat human life. The first two scenes went well, as I have had these memorized since before school started. The third scene proved to be much more problematic. My exhaustion really kicked in during this scene, and I could not remember the lines, cues, or blocking. I noticed that Hamilton began to get frustrated with this, and in turn, I got frustrated with myself and the entire process. I could not remember the blocking, because I had not internalized it. To me, it felt as if I was trying to arbitrarily go through the scene and hit marks and moments without any connection to character, given circumstances, or objective.

I realized after rehearsal that focusing on blocking without justifying it proves difficult for me. Something about how my brain works does not allow me to be able to combine the blocking and directed moments without connecting them to all the good stuff we actors love: character, given circumstances, and moment-to-moment reality.

I went home pretty defeated that night, even after staying afterward to copy all the blocking Finley Alexander, our stage manager, had taken for me. I decided to go through the scene again at home with the blocking and the lines. After nearly an hour and a half of doing this last night and an hour of doing this today, I am sure this is a useful tool to marry the blocking, lines, and acting stuff in my head in an efficient way. However, it is one more thing to do, when I am already extremely busy trying to get off-book as soon as possible.
I again am really hoping that learning the lines in the second Act will be easier, as they are becoming more familiar each time we work on them. Still, I am beating my head against a wall trying to learn them as quickly as possible. I use the mnemonic device of using the first letter of each word and try to transfer the memory of the words to the letters as quickly as possible. Then, I use the letters to drill the lines over and over, until my brain starts to go, and I feel like I cannot do it anymore. Then, I write out the lines for the section I am working on over and over until I can no longer do it.

Then, I feel like I have to take some sort of break but feel riddled with anxiety the whole time on my break, as I feel like I should be doing something else to get the lines or blocking in my head. These are the times I really do need to break, but I find it impossible to escape my anxiety. Today after working on the script, lines, and blocking for four or more hours, I had to go home to let my puppy out. The drive was labored, and I felt far away from life: a weird, surreal type of exhaustion.

When I got home, after dealing with the initial stress that I should be doing something, I acquiesced that I was too tired to do anything now and needed to take some kind of break. Playing with my dog outside did the trick. I found this relaxing and just what I needed. Instead of exhausting me more, simply playing with my puppy reenergized me. I felt revitalized enough to sit down and
write this journal and feel confident about going into rehearsal tonight; even looking forward to it.

I will take these lessons of running lines with blocking for the scenes on my own and taking necessary breaks forward into the process, as they will hopefully fight against burnout, which I have been feeling a lot of lately.

Lastly, I also realized that I was taking Hamilton’s direction very literally and not allowing my own interpretation of it. After all, the blocking and character should feel like a marriage of our ideas. I need to take ownership of Hamilton’s blocking by taking it and making it my own. I think this will make the blocking and lines stick even more because I will be connected to everything: an essential thing for me. Hopefully, this will be a turning point for me in the process and mark my own “winter of discontent.” Not to say, I am not enjoying the process; I just am overwhelmed trying to tackle the beast, but now feel I have these tools to really help me be more productive and keep a true north of living as the character and making the role my own.

September 18, 2022

I have just spent roughly six hours today learning lines and am calling it quits for the night. I realized recently that I began working on character breakdown and story analysis in June 2022. It is now September, and I cannot remember another time when I have worked so long or with such commitment on
a production. I am really pushing to be off-book by October 3. Learning lines is going more quickly than it had before, but I am still putting in long days to be where I want to be.

I feel in these journals all I talk about is learning lines, exhaustion, and pushing myself to get off-book. This has been much of the reality of the process so far. The rehearsals have gone well, and I definitely feel I have found the character more over time. I really enjoy playing Richard; there’s something so freeing about playing someone so uninhibited.

However, I still feel lines to be my biggest concern. More of the same. I will throw myself at the lines with lots of gusto this week and will hopefully be in good condition to wrap up in two weeks.

I heard a story once that Laurence Olivier had Richard III, Macbeth, and Hamlet in his head at one time. It’s amazing to think he could have had enough space to store all that and still remember how to walk and talk.

September 22, 2022

I am a naturally superstitious person when it comes to thinking bad things will happen to me. I have a neurotic tendency to believe things will negate themselves or turn against me if I talk openly about them. In writing this, I hope to dampen that tendency and give neurotic magic thinking the finger, as today marks a new beginning.
As I wrote in my major project about *Good for Otto*, I attended Playhouse West acting studio in Los Angeles in 2014. They advertise themselves as being a direct descendant of the famed Neighborhood Playhouse and teach “authentic Meisner training.” I started attending Playhouse West early in my time in Los Angeles. I was a young, impressionable kid wowed by a Los Angeles acting studio with alumni such as James Franco. I sunk my teeth in as a hungry actor and wanted to drink all the lessons that a Los Angeles acting studio had to offer.

Soon enough, during my time there, I became more and more confused. Instead of scene work, we worked on what were called “doors” and “activities.” These were always accompanied by instructions to repeat and “work off” your partner. While some of these tenants are strong lessons for any acting student, I left the school more confused than anything; moreover, Playhouse West made an already neurotic person more neurotic about my process and learning lines.

As I was taught at Playhouse West, a Meisner actor learns their lines best by taking out all inflection and “allowing themselves to be open to the impulses of the moment.” A good philosophy with a solid lesson, but in my opinion more of a philosophy than a true practice. Playhouse West quite frankly gummed up my gears for years, especially in terms of learning lines. I became hyper-focused on falling into patterns and tried to unknowingly eradicate any human touch from learning my lines.
I am proud to say it took eight years, but I can say that learning lines the Meisner way does not work for me. It puts me in my head, and more than anything prevents me from really learning lines to the best of my abilities. I understand what took me down this long quest. I noticed times when I or other actors have over-rehearsed and acted a part out in their room with such full emotion and concrete choices, as there was no room to allow partners, spontaneity, or the moment to enter the picture. This is what I was fighting all these years without exactly noticing it. What I realized today is that by learning lines in what I call “read-through voice” with a certain amount of rhythm of the text and even some emotion allows me to learn my lines and bring them to rehearsal and productions with the exact same ability as learning my lines the “Meisner Way.” I have to start with an idea of how I will say them. Learn them that way, know that way, and allow connection to the moment, character, and scene partners to dictate those differences from performance to performance.

Meisner is a great philosophy which tells actors to listen. And I will listen, but I refuse to be in my head, which can be a torturous place, endlessly thinking about listening enough. I will learn lines “The Robertson Way.”

Also, I think this explains why I have been only journaling about learning lines. Of course, that is expected with Richard III, but I have been a slave to a technique of learning lines that doesn’t work for me. Also, today I cried several times from stress and felt such an incredible relief; not to mention rehearsal really
clicked for the first time; and all my fears of not being off-book in time vanished.

“The Robertson Way” is the way for me to be.

September 27, 2022

Only Bex Williams and I were called to rehearsal tonight. We restaged the big “Richard woos Anne” scene. It is definitely a lot more dramatic now; thinking back, I think it was playing a bit casual before which is the opposite of the scene. We restaged it, and I think it is going to work much better now.

I’ve also been having fun with learning my lines. I can’t believe I’m saying that. I’m still learning them “The Robertson Way” but am following my intuition as well. Last night, I worked on memorizing the final monologue by rapping it. I also found that doing something physical with my hands seems to help a lot: like drawing out a circle or consistently rubbing my fingers on the heel of my hand. It seems to work, and I don’t care why.

October 3, 2022

It is Monday, October 3rd, and I am finally off-book. It is such a terrific feeling. I was telling my wife and mom I feel as if I have gotten my life back and gained this superpower in the process. Now, I will run through the play around once a day for maintenance, which should take no longer than an hour or so a day.
Knowing my lines has freed up time for me to start working on the physicality of Richard and memorizing the sword fight at the end of the play between Richard and Richmond. Richmond, played by Cadence Smith, and I have had two three-hour rehearsals with David McCarl, the Fight Choreographer and Costume Designer for the show. The rehearsals have been helpful, and we’ve made real progress; however, I need to put a little more time into memorizing the fight outside of rehearsals. Like with lines, memorization takes a little longer with me. I will try to work every day on this fight and hope to have it memorized by Friday.

When it comes to tackling Richard’s physicality, this is something Hamilton and I have left till later in the process, mainly to be advised by our Disability Consultant and Scene Designer for the production, John Paul. Paul came in to speak with the cast about living with a disability and how we should approach it in the play. Born without a femur, the largest bone in the leg, Paul walks with a prosthetic on his right leg. What I took from this and subsequent talks with Paul is not to make Richard’s disability, scoliosis, a gimmick. I should seek to really understand living with a disability and inject that into my portrayal of the character: not only how he physically carries himself but also how his disability and treatment from society have affected his psyche.

How society treats his disability is something I tackled in my initial character breakdown and feel I have a good sense of it. Hamilton sent me a video
on YouTube entitled, “Richard III The New Evidence.” It explores finding someone with Richard III’s exact form of scoliosis and testing what his capabilities would have been physically on the battlefield and in life.

Amazingly, the documentary producers found a young man living in the UK with the exact form of scoliosis as Richard had. When observing him with clothes on and walking through life normally, there is very little indication that he is a person with a disability. When he takes his shirt off, it is clear even to the laymen that this person has some sort of spinal condition. In playing Richard, I think that it is important to acknowledge that when clothed he would not have appeared that physically different from someone without scoliosis. The “mangled, deformed” physical interpretation of Richard in such past performances and most famously done by Sir Laurence Olivier is not an accurate interpretation of Richard’s actual condition and has not aged well.

To better understand and portray Richard’s condition in our production, McCarl has procured a tight corset for me to wear in rehearsals this week. This tightness and stiffness is something the person with Richard’s condition talks about in the special. It is also clear that this would have made Richard tire easily in strenuous cardiovascular activity, as his spine and ribs would have impeded the natural inflation of the lungs. This will be one of my main tools in tackling Richard’s physicality moving forward. I will also look to Paul and Hamilton to
make sure that the physicality does not become some sort of gross mischaracterization not indicative of Richard’s actual scoliosis.

October 5, 2022

It has been a whirlwind of a few days. Monday night’s run proved somewhat disheartening to me. It was the first rehearsal I had been completely off-book, and I felt like I got a lot of acting notes. I’d try to assure myself that this was a “Building Block Rehearsal” and more “Show Me What You Got Rehearsals” would be soon in the future.

On Tuesday night, rehearsal started out slowly as Hamilton side-coached me through the first monologue of the play. I found this very helpful, since I began to understand what her notes applied to at the exact moment. The note that kept coming up was to “naturalize phrasing.” This took time to click in for some reason. It is not a phrase that I think of often: “natural phrasing.” It took me a minute to understand that she meant: speak like a human being talking to other human beings. I think this is an easy pitfall to fall into with Shakespeare’s poetry and heightened language. At the end of the day, no matter what I’m saying onstage, I am playing a person talking to other people in imaginary circumstances and need to make sure not to lose the human quality of that. Saoirse Ronan said one time something along the same lines of talk like a human being. That clicked with me for Richard for some reason.
Another note that Hamilton gave to the cast during the Margaret scene was to take Margaret’s threats and damnations as seriously as possible since this was in fact the Middle Ages. This sounds silly, but it escaped me the actual time period of the piece. Of course, we had discussed a great deal about dramaturgy and our real-life counterparts; but then, I began to think more about living during those times. They lived then just as much as I live today just with a different set of circumstances. The War of Roses was a time of great turmoil, shifting alliances, and absolute power. Apart from this, there was no understanding of mental health, and the concepts of heaven, hell, curses, and damnation were very real things. I feel like this detail of really living in the time period and speaking like a human being in imaginary circumstances immediately and finally dropped me thoroughly into the style of the piece.

Then, our good old friend Covid-19 peered his head again. We got word that a cast member tested positive for Covid. Almost instantly, we all donned masks and self-administered Covid tests that happened to be in the building. Everyone present tested negative. Hopefully, this will be the last interruption from Covid during this production, as the cast member isolates for five days and returns on Monday. We are in a good place with the show. Now we just have to deal with Covid once again and hope for the best.
October 9, 2022

Tomorrow we start tech week, and I feel pretty good about everything. It will be a long two weeks without a break, but I feel all the work I have put in on the show is really starting to pay off. Now I get to my favorite part: the playing. Of course, obstacles will arise, but we can overcome them. We are in a good place.

October 13, 2022

We are in the middle of tech week and things have been going well. Last night was our first rehearsal where we could not call “line.” Of course, I seemed to jinx myself and had to call “line” once. I had no choice but to go to the top of the line where I had lost my footing. This fix made me feel comforted that, no matter what, I know the script well enough that I can make my way through the show. I’m also really starting to enjoy doing the show. It’s a fun place to be in the process.

October 16, 2022

It has been a very eventful three or four days. The show has been coming together fairly well. Last night was first dress, which went pretty well; however, I have been fighting a pretty nasty head cold for the last three days making slogging along through the two-week extravaganza tougher than ever.
I felt most ill during our final tech rehearsal and first dress rehearsal. The fog of being sick does not help in any way in trying to live Richard III’s journey onstage. More than anything this has taught me one of the most important factors in doing this show: concentration. This play demands considerable concentration just because of the sheer number of lines and the demanding role of Richard. Having great focus while also allowing myself the freedom to explore has been my main focus recently.

October 19, 2022

Tonight was the student preview, and I felt like nerves were high for the cast including myself. I felt the need to go on and “nail it” with the lingering thoughts of the iconic nature of the words, play, and character. From there, I find myself in a little bit of a self-constructed prison, where my work becomes rigid. This is how I felt for a majority of the first act tonight: in my head and wondering what the audience was thinking. Shakespeare is always a barrier for a modern audience and Shakespeare’s history plays provide even more of a barrier. I have to bring my understanding and love of the story, language, and message to this show every time, and still not everyone will get it or like it, and that’s ok.

I think it will really help me moving forward knowing that we as a cast have ownership over the show. Although notes are super helpful, I look much
more forward to finding flow and living Richard’s experience onstage in my way rather than trying to hit a target.

October 21, 2022

We have finally opened Richard III. What a sentence that is to write. I was really happy with how opening night went. I finally clicked into the role and play in a way that I hadn’t before. I felt that all the work I had done came to fruition, and I was finally allowed to live out this complex life onstage.

Tonight, Friday night, went well, but I did not feel as connected. This came from being very tired from lack of sleep and car trouble hours before showing up to the theatre. I drank two energy drinks before going on and sought to connect as much as I could. I was not displeased and thought the show was strong overall.

Tonight also marked the response from our Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival responder, Ben Gonzalez from Viterbo University. Overall, Gonzalez gave strong feedback to the show as a whole. I did not particularly care for his feedback regarding my performance. He talked less about content and choices than I would have liked and more about physicality. Richard’s physical disability has always been the most difficult part of this production for me as portraying someone with a disability is sensitive ground. I tried to take most of my cues for Richard’s physicality from the video Hamilton
sent me of the person with the same type of scoliosis as Richard III. Besides this, there was this idea of acknowledging Richard’s pain. I have done this to the best of my ability but felt I have had to focus less on the pain, as it can inhibit my performance. By allowing whatever pain I have set up to just be there when it comes up, I feel I can more adequately attend to what Richard is trying to do in the play: his objectives, relationships, and actions. All these things are more important to me and help me better serve the play.

I would also like to add that Gonzalez was a very thoughtful, nice responder with whom I simply disagreed, and that is ok. Part of being an adult and professional artist is listening to criticism from people who disagree with you on your work and moving forward. I know what I do as Richard and am proud of the choices I have made and the performance I have crafted. Not everyone feels the same. That is good to know, but it will not affect how I go about this role.

October 23, 2022

We have completed the first week of performances. Just by doing the first week of performances, I have learned so much about performing this role. Opening night was my strongest performance so far, where I felt the most dropped into the character, and all things felt like they were firing on all cylinders. I was more fatigued during the other four performances from two weeks of
rehearsal without a break and fighting sickness. The two days off will provide a
nice respite.

I feel I have a better understanding of Richard and how to tackle the play
now. It’s interesting. The physical pain of Richard’s scoliosis was one of the last
things I added to the character. Since I had done so much internal work of
objective, backstory, and reasoning for his actions, I assumed the pain was not as
important to living the character onstage. I did not drop the pain, but I paid less
attention to it for a few performances.

Today, I really made a point to add the pain back in for myself, even if it
does not always read for the audience. For me, Richard’s pain from scoliosis is
more than just a physical ailment. It is a reminder of the ostracization he has
experienced from society as well as a constant reminder of his imperfection; his
physical disability drives him forward to seek more and more power in thinking it
will make up for his otherness and physical imperfection. This crucial discovery
made me realize how important Richard’s disability was to my portrayal. It made
me think of something Paul told me when discussing living with a disability, “I
am aware of every other step I take.”

I think Richard is also hyperaware of his disability and the pain it causes
him; again, it pushes him forward with strength, concentration, and deadly
determination. I also have been able to relax more into the show, which makes it
feel better. I feel much more confident in my ability to make my way through the
play every night and therefore can engage directly more with the audience during direct addresses and allow an exploration from whatever impulses arise. This has absolutely led to a fuller exploration of the character and play. *Richard III* is the type of show that can really continue to grow every night now, and hopefully, that will be the case.

October 29, 2022

Here we are in between the two Saturday shows. The two days off helped but also provided a predictably rocky Wednesday in entering back into the show. Thursday felt strong again as did this afternoon, but Friday night felt unremarkable.

I have found myself relaxing even more into the role and am really beginning to think of it as just another role and not this giant undertaking of Richard III and my thesis role. Ultimately, it is another role. I have worked to build my Richard III and have relaxed now enough into it that I can go perform without this massive weight on my shoulders, making for a more enjoyable process.

This relaxation has made me find more nuance of Richard’s arc and the masks he wears throughout the show. In the beginning, I relied more on the savagery of Richard to guide me through the play. Now I understand Richard’s acting especially throughout the first act, what he does and how he pulls the wool
over peoples’ eyes to get what he wants. Before becoming King, he uses more tact, as there are real consequences to being discovered plotting a coup in 15th century England. Richard knows how to play politics, especially in the first scene between Richard and Margaret in Act I. By finding a more tactful way to demonize the Queen and her followers, Richard more efficiently persuades Buckingham, Hastings, and Stanley.

I have also discovered more nuance in Act II of our production. Although it may seem like Richard just lets it all go in the second act and shows his true colors, there is a slower decline into desperation as more and more people turn against him, and he tries to outrun the consequences of his actions.
CHAPTER IV

POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

The cast and crew of Richard III completed our final performance with the matinee on October 30, 2022. I left Richard III with several strong performances under my belt and thought I had done justice to such an iconic role in my own way. Although I left the process pleased with my growth, work, and performances, there was still room for improvement.

Beginning my journey with Richard III in the summer of 2022, I decided that Richard would prove a strong thesis role if I were to get it, so I began reading through the script and trying to make sense of this complex play. As with every production I work on, I approach my character analysis in the same way, reading through the piece once to understand the story as a whole. During my second read-through, I focused on Richard, contemplating what makes him act the way he does, and what his possible backstory may be. Doing a close reading of my script, I littered it with questions, notes, observations, and ways I could relate to the material. Before Richard’s first iconic monologue, I wrote, “How long have I been planning this?” As I wrote about in my preproduction analysis, this question sparks my imagination as to everything that happened before the play begins. What was Richard’s life like with a disability during the Middle Ages in a royal family? How did he cope? How was his difference treated? How did he adapt?
One question sparked ten more and sent me toward answers and a fully-fledged human being. After going through the script and noting these questions and thoughts, I answered the questions and wrote a biography of Richard. From here, I had a strong jumping-off point and hoped to find an even deeper exploration of the character in rehearsal.

Even though Richard, the character, had a real-life counterpart, I found most of my inspiration came from the script and the man within the pages. It’s important to know Richard’s real life and how it differs from the play, but I am ultimately tasked to do justice to the character on the page and his story throughout the play.

A lot of this information about the real King Richard came in the first days of rehearsal with Heather Hamilton’s dramaturgy protocol. The information in the protocol provided keen insight into the world of England during the War of Roses and the Middle Ages. One of the strongest pieces of information came when discovering Richard’s skeleton had been unearthed in 2012 in a parking lot not far from Bosworth Field, the scene of the final battle of the War of Roses (“Richard III”). Throughout time, various actors have portrayed Richard as some mangled creature with exaggerated deformity. When uncovered, researchers discovered the real Richard only suffered from severe scoliosis, a far cry from the deformed caricature that has taken root in modern audience’s minds (“Richard III”). This and early conversations with Hamilton addressed how I would go
about Richard’s physicality. We agreed that Richard had been portrayed problematically in the past as someone whose disability marked an inner defect of moral character. This belief was common in the Middle Ages as well, as outward deformity or disability often equated to some sin within the person (“Disability in the Medieval Period 1050-1485”). Hamilton and I agreed to honor the disability that the real Richard had, along with dealing with the issues with all the sensitivity we could to not make the same mistakes of past productions.

The rehearsal process was rewarding and nearly equally as difficult. The first week we spent with table reads, discussions, and historical and dramaturgical information, which was necessary for a complex, history play. This groundwork really provided a strong foundation to move forward with a base understanding of the story. As we got into the first “on-foot” rehearsals, I had already managed to be off-book for the first three scenes, providing me a leg up in tackling the biggest part I had ever taken on.

Hamilton urged us all to get off-book as soon as possible, as she stressed that real performance and acting could only take place when actors could get their heads out of their books and connect with each other. This really proved true throughout the rehearsal process; however, this meant that my entire September became a soul-testing experience to get off-book as quickly as possible for one of the biggest parts in the Western Canon.
How do you approach such a task but by diving in with all that you have? And so, I did. I devoted literally all the free time I could muster to drilling and learning lines. And when I thought I could not squeeze any more time to learn lines in my schedule, I made time. In the past, I have been a slow learner with respect to learning lines and sometimes stupidly sycophantic to Meisner’s method of learning lines: learning the lines with as little inflection as possible. I have found that this has provided me with ample freedom to allow the scene to grow and flourish, however, in this case, it also dropped me into a mental hellscape with a long-deceased acting teacher always telling me I was never doing well enough. That long-deceased acting teacher turned out to be me and the rigid, unrealistic expectations I put on myself. The more pressure I put on myself to learn my lines this way, the more I stressed. Somewhere in the middle of September, I spoke with Hamilton about this problem of being a servant to Meisner’s way of learning lines, and after a few days of panic, I knew I had to break free from the Meisner way of learning lines and transition to the Robertson way of learning lines.

Immediately, I felt a transition and a sense of relief when I decided to let go of learning lines so rigidly. By giving myself the freedom of working my own way, I found a whole myriad of ways of learning lines that works better for me. Firstly, I really worked to make the lines stick rather than just hoping they would via osmosis and saw immediate results from this. I also branched off to exciting
ways of learning lines as well. For Richard’s soliloquy after the nightmare sequence, I went over and over the lines as an Eminem-style rap of rapid verses and phrases. This way worked very effectively and allowed me to even have fun during the process. Learning these lines this way made me confront my neuroses and choose to bypass them to make the progress I needed to. I will take these lessons of learning the lines my own way in the future.

I made my goal almost exactly by being off-book by October 1st. From here, I felt like I could really start to focus more on my performance and aspects I had to neglect to get off-book. For the most part, Richard was not the hardest character to analyze. Once I found the core of a hurt and abused child lashing out and trying to fill himself with something to make him feel lovable, all things stemmed from this one spot. This motivates Richard and his unending quest throughout the entire play.

As we got into October and started to run the show more as a whole, I began feeling more confident since I was off-book. However, I really began to feel the weight of the show on my shoulders. Although I like to think of every show I do as an ensemble show, I was undoubtedly the lead in *Richard III*. This realization and the iconic nature of the character began affecting me. The opening monologue itself is so iconic and really establishes why Richard acts the way he does throughout the play. Discoveries like this definitely added weight to the already heavy task of playing Richard. I tried to relax into all the work I had done.
and know that I would continue searching through the very last run to find anything that made things come alive. At first, the second act (of our production) proved easier for me. After Richard becomes King, he acts out much more brazenly than in the first act of the play. He orders the executions of the young princes, Lady Anne, and Buckingham, and steps firmly on anyone who gets in his way. In the first act (of our production), Richard is much more of a political animal who keenly deceives countless others to become King. He knows how to maneuver the levers of power expertly to get exactly what he wants. Marrying this animalistic nature with measured social and political ability proved challenging. At first, I would just experiment in those initial runs leading to opening night to see what levels of savagery and savviness seemed to fit best. Some runs seemed strong but upon further introspection felt much too savage and revealing in the first half of the play. I kept asking myself whether how I was playing Richard in the first act would really convert the Dukes and Lords to his side. This question proved a “true north” to me along with one other discovery: Richard has been planning his ascent to power for most of his life and therefore has learned the art of untold patience. He possesses the knowledge, political skills, and most importantly patience to become King. These two things really changed the first half of the play for me. Instead of acting like a power-hungry creature chomping at the bit, Richard acts with purpose, patience, and deadly focus to create the life he wants for himself. This discovery really felt good. I
really felt like when I discovered this the whole play began to fall more into place. Looking back, I would have loved to have balanced this discovery with the excitement of becoming King with this strong sense of patience. I think I might have sacrificed some of his excitement of becoming whom he has always wanted to be in order to find more of the calculated Machiavellian.

When it came time to open the show to an audience, I was understandably nervous. I worked like a madman, especially in front of my peers in the department, and felt high expectations, whether true or imagined. The preview for Richard III took place on October 18, 2022, and honestly felt like one of the weakest runs to me. I felt encumbered by the amount I had to do and get “right” throughout the show. I definitely felt like throughout that run I was trying to hit a bullseye instead of perform, live a life, and have an experience.

For some reason, the way I was dealing with Richard’s pain caused me to feel inhibited and stiff instead of aiding me. I think I was focusing too much on the pain instead of just letting it be there, as Richard was born with his scoliosis and lived with it throughout his life. There must be some part of him that was used to it. I also thought of John Paul’s statement on living with a disability, “I’m aware of every other step I take.” Both felt true for Richard as well, always aware of his pain, and yet just a seamless part of him. This notion, along with significant discussions about the importance of using this role as representation for persons with disabilities, made me feel a little more locked up with Richard’s
physicality. I began to feel that I, an able-bodied person, could never do justice to Richard’s life or anyone’s life with a disability. I also found myself hyperconscious of not wanting to do anything offensive to persons with disabilities, as I understood the importance of their representation more than ever. This led me to put Richard’s physicality in the back of my mind for a few runs to mixed results.

For opening night, I did not focus on Richard’s physicality as much and felt it to be one of my strongest runs throughout the process. Of course, there were a number of factors that went into opening night’s run. Coming from a weak preview and knowing that my wife and mom were in the audience aided me in reaching my potential as Richard. For Friday night’s performance, I forgot about the physicality even further and felt the run was weaker. Again, this could be for a variety of factors, but it is helpful to track success and room for improvement through the lens of the physicality which gave me trouble. After Friday night’s run, I began paying more attention to the physicality again and found the place it clicked within Richard. In Richard’s mind, his disability serves as a perfect reminder of his ineptitude, otherness, and constant reminder of the emptiness he can never seem to fill. Focusing on how Richard’s condition affects how he felt about his self-worth really clicked for me in finding not only the reason for the physicality and how it lives but how the physicality serves the character and his journey. This shift in focus also made me aware that I do my
best work when I find how everything best serves the character and is justified.
By justifying everything about Richard, I felt I made him a seamless, authentic person with whom I could go out there and live every night. Furthermore, I discovered this is how I have been working all along without knowing it. When things are generally not clicking with a role or performance, I feel I have not fully justified and integrated the character, an important lesson to understand moving forward.

When we got to the second week of performances, I really began to relax, trust, and enjoy the process each night. No longer nervous about carrying an entire, iconic show, I realized I could find my way through any stumble or flubbed line. It took longer, but I found a strong confidence that I could go out there, do my best to reach the magnitudes of the material, and find something new to hook me every night. This is where the job of an actor becomes so much fun. Richard is a delicious role to play and becomes even more rewarding when I knew there was and always would be solid ground under my feet. Once I found this freedom and confidence, I think the real nuance of Richard began to open up more and more. Moments of regret from betraying his mother, his exaltation at becoming King, utter despair of understanding his loneliness, and sly political maneuverings coalesced into a seamless performance. I walked away from these nights proud of the job I had done.
By the time we closed *Richard III* on October 30, I felt we had really had seven or so very strong performances out of the ten we did for paying audiences. This felt like a huge accomplishment. *Richard III* and Shakespeare’s history plays are not easy productions, and his language still proves a big stumbling block for even the most attuned audiences. Moreover, Shakespeare layers on rich English history with lots of names and places that no one in modern-day Minnesota has any relation to. After the first few performances, I changed my expectations: I hoped that people would walk away intellectually understanding fifty percent of the plot but would leave with a far greater subconscious understanding of the play, their experience with it, and how it relates so vitally to our world of America in 2022. The success of our production of *Richard III* is measured by whether people walk away with an understanding and recognition of the world of the play with the world we inhabit. If the audience walks away drawing parallels between Trump, Putin, Bolsonaro, and how Richard wields power, then the play is successful. We did this much more than we did not and therefore succeeded.

Lastly, I want to talk a little bit about a large stumbling block for me in this production that affected so much: work-life balance. I knew when I began to work on Richard that it would be one of the most demanding roles I had ever undertaken. Shakespeare is always a challenge, and the size of Richard is daunting. When cast as Richard, I knew my personal life would be on hold until
the play was over. This is fine and good as a single person but as a newly married man with a puppy at home, I struggled to find the balance. My wife is an amazing woman who supports me like no one else can. However, I often felt bad for the amount of time I had to spend on this role. My diet suffered. I was short-tempered for a long time with everyone around me. My mental health ebbed and flowed with such irregularities as never before. The stress I placed upon myself was intense. The cost was huge. And yet, here I am stronger than ever and with Richard III on the other side. I wish I could have found a more balanced way to do this role and maintain a better work-life balance, but that’s what learning is. I will definitely make it a priority with future productions; however, I’m not sure anyone has the ability to play a role like Richard without sacrificing some significant portion of a personal life. The role requires it. And to do less for such an amazing role and a play that says so much about our current political reality is a disservice to Richard III and the power of theatre and live performance.
CHAPTER V

PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

It’s an interesting undertaking to track my artistic journey up to this point. I just turned thirty-three and performed in my first play when I was fifteen. Since being cast in the devised piece *Imagining Shakespeare* at fifteen, I have considered myself an actor and worked tirelessly to be better than I was the year before.

Like many, I knew I wanted to act or perform from an early age. After a successful time in high-school theatre, I decided to go to James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, Virginia, to major in theatre. During my time at JMU, I learned so much about what it means to be an actor, including finding a way to connect myself to the material. When I connect thoroughly to the material through substitutions or any other technique, I find I don’t have to act at all. I simply go on stage and live as the character through the performance.

After college, I leaped into the daunting world of pursuing a career as a professional actor but had absolutely no inkling of where to start or how to go about it. Within a year and a half of graduating, I made the plunge and moved to Los Angeles. I grew up with a love of theatre but also a strong love of film from an early age. Furthermore, moving to Los Angeles made sense in order to create a long-lasting career as an actor. My ambition was to make a living wage as an
actor, and so I left for Los Angeles filled with determination and blind naivety. I arrived in Los Angeles on November 5, 2013, and moved in with my friend, Blake Berlin, who had been there for years. The first two years really turned into a challenge just to make a living and find stability in this enormous, expensive city from where I could build a foundation to pursue my dreams.

The thing about Los Angeles and trying to be a professional actor, in general, is there is no road map. You make it up and try to figure things out as you go along. I decided to start my journey by joining an acting class, as it provided community, practice, a strong technique, and something to put on my resume to grab the eyes of agents, managers, and casting directors.

I began by taking classes at Playhouse West in North Hollywood in 2015. Playhouse West sees itself as a spiritual successor to Sanford Meisner’s Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City and claims to offer “authentic Meisner training.” Although I had heard of Sanford Meisner and his technique, I had no direct experience with it. I spent thirteen months at Playhouse West doing biweekly classes and rehearsing Meisner’s exercises as often as I could. Meisner’s technique is multi-faceted but relies heavily on listening and being in the moment, which are keys to any strong performance. My desire was to work more on listening, as I thought it had been a weak point in my technique previously. Playhouse West provided me with tools to be more comfortable in any moment, read subtextual human behavior, and really listen. It also put me
inside my head like crazy resulting in feeling like I was never good enough, leaving me with some obstacles in trying to learn lines with as little inflection as possible. Ultimately, I found Playhouse West to be a mismatch for me and searched for a better studio. However, during my time at Playhouse West, I gathered a group of friends to help shoot a short film I co-wrote and starred in. This experience of making a short film provided so much education about filmmaking, and revealed the countless differences between it and theatre.

After searching for another acting studio, I found and settled on Speiser/Sturges Acting Studio in Los Angeles, California. From the beginning, this place set itself aside as completely different from Playhouse West. Speiser/Sturges used Uta Hagen’s teachings, gearing itself much more towards scene study, with an inviting atmosphere, and most importantly was serious about the work without taking themselves too seriously. I fell in love right away and, they offered me a work-study program. This offer meant my life began to revolve around the studio and working the other four days of the week as a bartender/server. During my work-study program, I not only helped run class but also was able to observe Indrani DeSouza and Shannon Sturges, two incredibly talented mentors and acting coaches of mine. I spent many hours just watching classes during my work-study and dissecting what did and didn’t work and why.

Together with my work-study, I enrolled in the studio’s three-month technique course before getting into Scene Study 1. Although I had a
considerable amount of experience under my belt, the studio’s technique class made me feel free to find great enjoyment in the work again after coming from such a rigid way of working at Playhouse West. Speiser/Sturges gave me the freedom to reapproach acting and trust my instincts. After completing the technique class, I moved on to Scene Study and worked determinedly for five years. During my time at Speiser/Sturges, I worked on more than thirty scenes ranging from *Julius Caesar* to *The Odd Couple* to *Speed the Plow* to *Time Stands Still*. I dedicated myself to the same thorough preparation I use to this day: read through the play twice, write a character biography, then begin learning the lines. This thorough way of working ensured me I was always putting the proper work forward. If the scene fizzled, my work ethic would not be the thing to blame.

Like most actors, I began scene study by dipping my toe more into the comedic side of the pool, which felt safer, as I felt most at home in comedy from my early years of performing. As I advanced with scenes and grew more, I ventured into more dramatic, emotionally taxing, and revealing work. As I grew in the work and learned to allow myself to be present and emotionally available, I grew as a human being as well. My ability to dissect a script and find how I connected to the material grew as well. Speiser/Sturges helped me grow into not only a stronger actor but a professional with a reliable and tested technique.

The other side of being an actor in Los Angeles, finding work, proved much harder. Again, I went into the business blindly naïve with some incredibly
warped perspective that the business would come to me and be happy to have found me. I can say now this is pure hubris and a common experience of many who move to big cities and are met with the same crushing realities. I found out on my own that all those clichés I had always heard about Los Angeles were true. Everyone said they were an actor. Most people in the field I met were vain and self-serving, and there was blatant social jockeying for opportunities and attention. Physical attractiveness and social media followers reigned supreme for all of us without credits to our name. My experience finding some sort of representation to one day join the union proved demoralizing. Once I did find an agent, he rarely sent me out on auditions.

The on-set experiences I had were nothing to write home about either. When cast as a bit part in the feature film *Funny Story*, I showed up to set brimming with utter excitement and determination. However, while on set, I began to really dislike the process of working on film more and more. The waiting around, the hierarchy of the set, and the lack of any concern about acting or performance contrasted strongly with my amazing experiences within the theatre. I began to think less and less of ways to make being an actor in Los Angeles work and more and more of ways to get back to the theatre. In 2019, I made up my mind and began applying to graduate schools. After accepting an offer from Minnesota State University, Mankato, I packed everything I owned
into a rented minivan and drove from Los Angeles to Minnesota during a global pandemic, truly driving into the great unknown.

My time at Minnesota State University, Mankato and the lessons learned are complicated to encapsulate. It has been such an all-encompassing life event and such a time of vital growth as an artist and a human being that it feels hard to pull apart the threads. My classwork has challenged me and pushed me to new creative heights than ever before. I discovered completely new ways of creating a character in Valdimir Rovinsky’s “Advanced Acting Techniques” course. In Heather Hamilton’s Dramaturgy Class, I learned a tremendous amount about how much the history and understanding of a play gives so much more depth to each work. In Matthew Caron’s dialects classes, I gained an understanding of innovative ways to inhabit characters and their dialects from all around the world. However, in retrospect, most of my learning and growth as an actor has come from working on my Minor, Major, and Thesis Projects: The Tempest, Good for Otto, and Richard III.

I was cast as Caliban in The Tempest on the first day of Graduate School in the middle of the first wave of Covid-19. Leaping into the production, I was eager to get started on my first play since 2013. I learned so much during my time with Caliban in The Tempest. Caliban’s physicality posed a large challenge for me, as he deals with physical torture on top of an already animalistic nature. Physical dynamism can be a stumbling block for me in productions, and my
awkward physicality and lack of grace can get in the way. When working on *The Tempest*, I found a way to embrace Caliban’s physicality and make it my own and considered this a success. I also developed more professionalism during this production. Working as an individual in Los Angeles and then returning to an ensemble and part of a collegiate environment proved challenging at first. I had to shift my thought process to really understand and appreciate what was best for the group and production as a whole and best for my colleagues as a learning experience. Both lessons proved valuable, as I moved forward into my career at Minnesota State Mankato.

*Good for Otto* began after being cast as Doctor Robert Michaels in August of 2021. I had auditioned with a monologue from a strong supporting character, Alex, in hopes that I would be cast in that role. When cast as Dr. Michaels, I was a little taken aback. Initially, I did not love the part and found him to be kind of boring. Additionally, Dr. Michaels was also the lead and had the majority of lines. My first reaction was to panic after writing my character biography and highlighting lines. Then, I calmed down and got to work. The number of lines definitely proved daunting, yet I poured myself into learning them as I had never done before. When we weren’t working on a scene I was in during rehearsal, I made my way down to the conference room and tried to get my lines to stick. This play marked one of the first times that I had to release some of the Meisner method on learning lines. By trying to learn my lines without any inflection, I
realized I made learning lines much harder than it had to be. Eventually, I compromised and settled on what I call “Read-Through Voice.” I would give something to the lines but still allow room for exploration and make sure not to get locked into some vocal pattern; this approach worked well. Apart from this, I also had the challenge of taking on a very emotionally taxing role. Dr. Robert Michaels works tirelessly as a therapist to serve a hurting population without enough funding.

From the very beginning of the play, we learn that Dr. Michaels’ mother committed suicide when he was only nine years old. He has taken this pain forward and tries to help his patients who feel as broken as he does at times. Furthermore, his dead mother visits and speaks with him throughout the play. It’s clear Dr. Michaels struggles with his mother’s death but ultimately chooses to stay in the land of hope working to make things better rather than joining his mother. I connected deeply with the character and his circumstances early in the production and found a great depth of experience in living out Dr. Michaels’ journey, which led me to fully embrace living Dr. Michaels’ experience even crying sometimes while onstage. Unfortunately, this made me self-conscious at times. It felt so good to let go and cry that I began to feel that I was only succeeding if I cried onstage. It’s funny because I knew this lesson intellectually: don’t push for an emotional outcome or result onstage. However, I still fell into the same trap as so many others. Eventually, I began to relax more and trust that
as long as I was connected to the character, world, and circumstances or working to be, then I was doing my job whether I cried or not. I felt so much more relaxed and open when I let go of my expectations for the runs and just allowed myself to be in the moment. I left *Good for Otto* so much stronger than when I entered embracing a deeper understanding of attacking my lines, not getting in my own way, and allowing each performance to be what it wants to be.

*Richard III* marked my biggest undertaking as an actor. It is the iconic lead role in Shakespeare’s second-longest play. Luckily, I began work on the role during the summer of 2022 in hopes that I would be cast as Richard and be ahead of the game. Beginning the same way I begin all my projects, I broke down the character and script and followed by writing the character’s autobiography. 

*Richard III*, one of Shakespeare’s history plays, posed its own unique challenges from the very beginning, as it is based on real events and people in English history. In general, I know little about English royalty and haven’t had much of an interest in it. Therefore, I began my studying of the characters involved in the crudest of terms, seeking to know who supported Richard’s ascent to the throne throughout the play and who opposed him. This created a more straightforward way of categorizing a long list of English royalty into a tangible framework for storytelling. I also began to memorize Richard’s lines, as learning lines has proved a difficult task for me at times, knowing that if I were to be cast as Richard, I would need to be ahead of the game to not find myself “under water.”
I also understood that the role of Richard was not mine to have and that I might not be cast as Richard or in the production at all. I understood this and knew that working on Richard would be a great exercise in my dog days of summer if nothing else.

After I was cast as Richard and we had the first read-through, it was clear to me that I had a mountain of work ahead of me, as *Richard III* is not one of Shakespeare’s most accessible plays. Instead, it is a political thriller with lots of Machiavellian alliances and a royal English backdrop that modern audiences do not know. I knew I needed to clarify the point of each scene, understand how it led into the next one, and internalize how Richard feels about every other character throughout the play. Luckily, we had a longer rehearsal process, and I felt this knowledge would become increasingly clear as we worked on it.

I continued to attack my lines right away. No matter what acting challenges lay ahead for me, none of them mattered until I was off-book. As I dedicated more time than ever before to mastering lines, it became common for me to dedicate all day Friday and all day Sunday to memorizing lines. Apart from this, I squeezed out as much time as I could by saving work till later in the semester, skipping lunch, and staying in the building past midnight. Within this process, I had to let go even more of Meisner’s way of learning lines. Once I did this, it created such freedom in learning lines, and I hit my goal of being off-book by October 1st. After finally getting off-book, I felt much more of the pressure of
carrying the show. Now that I had all these words in my head, I comprehended the demand of capturing the precision of Shakespeare’s language while living out Richard’s journey. Luckily, this demand of getting all the lines right faded with running the show over and over.

After understanding that I could make it through the show, the acting challenges rushed in. Trying to balance Richard’s physicality, brutality, and manipulative ways, and finding moments of tenderness proved a Herculean task. Hamilton decided to rework the “Lady Anne wooing scene” and the final scene between Richard and Elizabeth late in the process. Although my castmates and I had a strong understanding of these scenes, they simply were not connecting as we got closer to opening. For the Lady Anne scene, I told Hamilton I had the idea of Richard threatening physical violence against Anne throughout the scene, which made sense as to why Anne would agree to marry Richard by the end of the scene. This man has destroyed her world, and his continued brutality and insistence wear her down until she complies. Once we made this adjustment, the scene really began to work. We made a similar adjustment to the final scene between Richard and Elizabeth. Even though Richard killed Elizabeth’s children, she eventually gives in to his requests to woo her daughter for him. We decided this was again a chance for physical violence to prove the primary tactic for Richard to win his objective. These scenes along with Richard’s actions
throughout the second act of our production cemented his brutality as a defining tactic of how Richard achieves his goals in the world.

After cementing Richard’s throughline of brutality in the course of the show, I found it hard to find more of the tenderness in Richard. From the beginning, this proved a hard task, since Richard acts so single-mindedly throughout the play to attain and preserve his power. I discovered this conflicted side throughout the play with a few realizations I had: Richard does not know exactly how he will execute his plan or if he will succeed. I realized that I had been playing it as if Richard were sure of his success, which was such an incredible way to rob myself of a great opportunity. Although Richard is confident, he does not know the future. Once I conceived this point and injected this important obstacle back into my performance, the show came alive for me again. Once I brought the uncertainty of Richard’s success back into my performance, the stakes rose to the reality of what they are. If Richard is caught at any point, he will be executed and more than likely tortured.

I also even identified moments for Richard’s softness: Richard felt real love for his mother, deceased brother, and Lord Hastings, and had to disregard these emotions to become King and protect his throne. Richard finally comes to understand his absolute isolation in the dream soliloquy and recognizes that he cannot feel pity for himself and the costs of pushing everyone away to become King and maintain his power. This knowledge allowed me to find moments of
hope, connection, and vulnerability in Richard’s arc throughout the play. This
three-dimensionality made all the difference for me and brought my performance
to the heights I hoped it would. I left Richard III with such growth in memorizing
lines, finding nuance, consistently seeking new approaches to keep the play alive,
and with a greater appreciation of how all these things will serve me in the future.

This experience has been a self-reflective introspection tracking my artistic journey. As I mentioned previously, I have been acting since I was fifteen years old. After nearly doing this for twenty years, it feels somewhat arduous to track my progress, what I have learned, and how I have grown. More than anything I can say, I just am an actor in my blood and so much of my progress in the work has mirrored my growth as a person. Of this I am sure: my graduation from Minnesota State Mankato does not mark an end to my theatrical career but rather a new beginning, one that will last with some luck for the rest of my life and one upon which I will build on the lessons I have learned here. My goal is to continue to grow as an actor and put forth the lessons I’ve learned into the next project.
APPENDIX A

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

How long have I been planning to take over as King? A long time, since childhood wanted to be in power
-Must have been soon after Edward IV was crowned. (This sparked everything forward.)
-What did I do to get to this point? (Lie, cheated, stole, everything I needed to do.)
-I think I hate how I am and my body and feel as if I was born in the wrong body?
-What’s the atmosphere in the court now? Suspicious and uneasy because of infighting and issues with Clarence.
-I won’t kill myself. I take it out on everything/one else.
-What’s my history w/ Clarence? Felt underappreciated, placated when I needed to.
-What’s my history w/Edward? Felt underappreciated, placated when I needed to.
-“And says a wizard told him that by “G”-How? This is true, but I utilized this to be Clarence.
-Blaming things on Elizabeth. Sowing the seeds of doubt.
-History/Dynamic w/Elizabeth-Have never liked or gotten along with Elizabeth. I think she saw me for my ambition and acted against me from the very beginning. At odds from the very beginning. But putting a nice face on things when necessary to make my plans go forward.
-Telling Clarence Elizabeth is out for us.
-Telling Clarence if we stay good w/Ed then we should be okay.
-Building up plausible deniability from the very beginning.
-I know how to use people’s words against them.
-I think I always had plans for higher ambitions, but they fell much more into my lap once my brother was crowned King.
-“The King is sickly, weak, and melancholy, And his physicians fear him mightily.” From what is he sick? Bad diet and indulging as King probably drinking and bad diet. And stress from the infighting in the court.
-How long ago did I kill Henry VI? How did it happen? Did I make a point to kill him? Details? Stabbed King Henry VI in Tower of London. My brother had captured him, and I stabbed him after my brother usurped the throne to become King and decimate rivals.
-I also, killed Edward Anne’s husband as well? How/where? Details? Killed Edward, Anne’s Husband at the battle of Tewkesbury, where my family won the civil war. Killed him in battle. I’m scrappy in a fight and got the best of him while partially distracted. I think I might have had my men hold him and I killed him.
-Moment before entrance in Act I, scene ii, also what is my plan? How will I execute it? I think this thing takes a lot of assuredness in oneself. My words and ways of dealing with people are my best quality. I know this will be a tough one, but I know she is weak and vulnerable in this new regime and will falter once she sees what I see.
-Sounds like viciousness (physical) when provoked. Perhaps I’m good with a sword or know my power. I know my power and am opportunistic.
-Killed Henry VI then put the blade against chest of Queen Margaret? Why didn’t I kill queen Margaret? How did the interaction with Queen Margaret happen? Left and found Queen Margaret after I killed Henry VI. I thought this would be a way to sure up power even more. Buckingham(?) stopped me and my head prevailed knowing that killing her would ultimately be looked upon unfavorably. That’s why I kept her alive.
-What are my tactics/actions? Manipulate, outsmart, build alliances, lie, cheat.
-I tell Lady Anne that I killed them because I was obsessed with her beauty.
-I tell Lady Anne that she could be better off with me.
-When I offer to kill myself for Lady Anne, how do I know this will work? She does not have the stomach for this, and this could be used against her.
-I stabbed Edward three months before Act I, scene ii “in my angry mood” at Tewkesbury.
-I killed Henry in the Tower of London and Edward at Tewkesbury.
-Why do I do what I do in Act I, scene iii? To sew discord and appear loyal to the king? Cause Elizabeth’s squad will be main rivals when Edward is dead.
-Edward that I killed was son to Henry VI, king of England and husband to Lady Anne.
-I told Derby, Hastings, Buckingham the queen is against Clarence. How? She thinks he will not
-Maybe my men wounded Edward and then I came in and killed him.
-I seem holy to them(Derby, Hastings, Buckingham) when telling we will not attack Rivers, Dorset, and Grey. I can manipulate anyone.
-I tell murderers to go kill Clarence.
-Did I influence fortune teller who said G? How? How long have I been thinking/plotting this?
-Act I, scene iv, “You are deceived. Your bother Gloucester hates you.” Clarence thinks I love him. I used the relationship for what I needed it to be.
-Act II, scene i starts with Edward IV coming from uniting the two rival groups.
-Richard’s religion-Does not think about it? Or Christian? I think does not think about it. I think it’s more that God looks upon me as a special person that will wave my sins for my achievements because of the hell people have put me through, (Maybe because of disability).
-Moment before entrance in Act II, scene i?
-I blame Clarence’s death on the Queen’s men.
-I told Clarence’s kids the queen imprisoned and killed Clarence. Because she hates him.
-King is dead on page 107.
-I fight to be a part of the welcome party for the princes.
-Do we need approval of the queen to go?
-How my mom talks about me, “He was the wretched’st thing when he was young, So long a growing and so leisurely.” How my mother talks about me? What was growing up like? My mom was awful to me. And mistreated me
-Act II, scene iv, I have had Queen’s men sent to prison. How? For unknown reasons. Using political sway with ruling class.
-Act III, scene I, telling the prince that he cannot trust those uncles.
-Telling the princes they will stay at the tower-what is the tower exactly?
-Act III, scene i- York ask for my dagger after playing a battle of wits-Why? What do I see? Why do I trust this?
-York seems to be messing with me calling me little Act III, scene i.
-Have I decided to kill them yet- I think so.
-Buckingham agrees that York is making fun of me.
-Act III, scene i-Catesby tells me that Hastings won’t join my side.
-I set up a test for Hastings.
-Plan to kill Hastings if he will not join me. And plan to give Buckingham a title, The Earldom of Hereford.
-Act III, scene iii- killing the Queensman
-Act III, scene iv- why do I ask for strawberries? Show of power? Luxury?
-My arm is deformed? How? From birth? What is the disability?
-Act III, scene iv- Hastings trusts my face.
-Act III, scene v- Buckingham and I tell the mayor that we killed Hastings because he rebelled against us? We need to get the mayor to believe because he controls the beliefs of the people of London. Cannot have them rebelling. Buckingham goes to the people to convince them I’m the rightful heir to the throne. This ultimately does not work, and I need to get the people of London on my side through a display of piety.
-All the women in Act IV, scene i hate me.
-Act IV, scene ii- I am king now. What was the coronation like? What can I do now as King that I wanted to do before? I think my power is absolute, but I must preserve power and ensure I remain King.
-I plan to kill Anne and marry Clarence’s daughter to fortify my power.
-Act IV, scene ii- “Because a bard of Ireland told me once I should not live long after I saw Richmond” What are the details of this? Clearly, it sounds like I take it seriously. Told me to kill him if I got the chance. What do I think is going to happen? I could die.
-I decide not to give Buckingham the Earldom I promised him.
-Act IV, scene iii- why do I want to know the details of Tyrrell killing the princes. Because they are my enemies and wanted me dead, and I will take joy in hearing how I got them first. I’m against anyone who’s against me or stands in my way.
-Act IV, scene iii- Richmond is in the field with the Welsh.
-Why ask Queen Elizabeth for Clarence’s daughter? To ensure power. Fortify the crown.
-Act IV, scene iv- mother cursing me…what do I think of my mother? Where is my Dad?
-I deny that I killed the princes to get Clarence’s daughter and protect the crown.
-Do I win over Queen Elizabeth in Act IV, scene iv.
-I will wear armor onto the field of battle.
-How did I kill Henry the VI?
-Richmond was never trained in combat. I’m guessing I was somewhat but didn’t learn greatly because of my disability.

Richard has the center of a heavy jagged stone in the middle of his solar plexus, and it sits there heavy.

My Upbringing
I was born on October 2, 1452, to my mother the Duchess of York (Cecily Neville) and my father Richard (3rd Duke of York) (not particularly close to him, he died in battle when I was young). I have two brothers Edward and Clarence. I am the youngest. Both of my brothers were strong and sturdy from a young age, however, I was born with deformities. From the very beginning, my family treated me like a freak with deformities that they said marked my inner character. I was shunned and picked on and emotionally abused because I was born differently. From that instance and being reinforced by my parents and brothers, I have hated my body and felt like I was born in the wrong body. However, my mind and spirit were always strong. I felt like I could stay two steps ahead and get in the good graces of people. I have never let go of this feeling of feeling lesser than and wanting to gain power. I am underappreciated and will have my day.

War of Roses
The War of Roses was going on since my early childhood. The Lancasters claimed the throne and so did my family. And the following many years England was engrossed in a civil war. I learned how to fight and fought in battle like the rest of my brothers. I was ok with a sword considering my disability but relish fighting and destroying my enemies. I particularly understood politics and alliance forming. I soaked up these things like a sponge and excelled in them. We captured Henry VI towards the end of the War of Roses. And I killed Edward his son at Tewkesbury thus ending the War and allowing my brother Edward IV to ascend to the crown. After this I went to the Tower and notified Henry VI what had happened and killed him. I almost killed his wife but thought better of it and pulled back. That has brought me to now where I am in the best place I have ever been in my life.
My Plan

My plan is simple to become King and muster all the power that I can. I knew this was my ambition especially coming from a royal family from an early age. During the war of roses, my ideas really kicked into high gear. And once the War of Roses ended and my brother became King, I felt like the dominoes fell into place that things would work.
APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION PHOTOS

Grey Robertson as Richard III
Grey Robertson as Richard III
Grey Robertson as Richard III
APPENDIX C

PROGRAM

Theatre & Dance
Richard III
By William Shakespeare

Andreas Theatre

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MANKATO
DIRECTOR’S NOTE

Richard’s fragile ego, adored for truth, and lust for power resonate with us deeply in this midsummer election year. He is so focused on his own self-gain that he is willing to sacrifice the good of his country in order to serve himself. He constructs outrageous lies about his critics, uses the power of his office to intimidate and threaten any who disagree with him, believes he is entitled to take from his nation anything that strikes his fancy, and demonstrates no interest in the health and safety of his people. These are dangerous and terrifying things to see in a leader. And while Henry VII and the Tudor dynasty was no utopia, perhaps anything would be better than a nation led by a man like Richard.

– Dr. Heather Elise Hamilton

Dr. Hamilton has compiled an extensive dramaturgical document containing historical content, a summary of scenes, and detailed descriptions of the historical figures depicted in this script. To view the document in its entirety, open the camera on your smart phone, and hover it over the QR code, then click on the link that appears.

DISABILITY STATEMENT

The play Richard III, and particularly the title character of Richard, Duke of Gloucester as written by William Shakespeare, presents some difficulties to contemporary audiences for its portrait of physical disability as monstrous and wicked. It is considered one of Shakespeare’s “History” plays and, although accurate in depicting Richard with a disability, the extent and manipulation of that depiction is as flawed as the written history (as Thomas Moro Works) on which he bases the play. It has long been the theatrical practice to represent Richard’s physical nature through exaggerated, caricatured gestures suggesting a “hunchback,” a pronounced limp, and a withered arm. Do you remember the politician who sought, by wildly waving his arms, to recreate an award-winning journalist with a physical disability? More’s history of Richard serves much the same purpose in an attempt to support the Tudor monarchy. It is no less a character assassination by body-shaming.

My primary role in this production was to design the scenery – so why am I writing this statement? To begin the process of meeting with the production team last spring, the director initially wanted to completely negate any actor representation of disability for fear of insensitive and hurtful actor “mugging” which might have the unintended effect of promoting intolerance. So, it might seem ironic that I, a member of that team with a visible, congenital, physical disability, would be the one to question that approach, quite vehemently in fact. Disability (although not a term he would have used) was at the core of Richard’s identity. His first introduction of himself repeatedly and blantly identifies what he perceives to be failures of “body,” which he even uses later to justify his villainy! Listen for some of what he says in the prologue alone: “malady stumpy... curtale of fair proportion... chiselled of feature by dissembling nature... "Deformed, unfinish'd... scarce half made up..."; so lamby and unshapely, dogs bark at me.” It was only recently discovered that the real Richard had scoliosis, or a curvature of the spine. My disability is nothing like Richard’s, except in the fact that it is a disability, and in keeping with his words; I was born missing “half” my leg which requires the use of an artificial limb and causes a visible limp. Consequently, the director asked me to serve as a consultant regarding disability and how we might stage the performance in a sensitive and affirming way, while still maintaining the essence and context of Shakespeare’s work.

What did all that mean for the production? Did I recommend a way to walk or talk? Did I suggest socially acceptable gestures that might indicate disability? No. I served as a resource to the cast as a person with a disability; with my own perceptions of self, in a body that is different than the norm, as well as the perceptions of others communicated to me throughout my life experience. Rather than coach, I questioned. I sought to have the actors explore their own perceptions of physical differences and how it is manifested in our behavior and treatment of others. You may or may not notice visible differences in this production, but be assured every performer is thinking about how the historical Richard, and the character created by Shakespeare was uniquely transformed by his physical body.

– John David Paul

Bethany Theatre Department
2022-2023 Season
Pinocho: November 11-13, 18, 19
Once Upon a Mattress: February 3-5, 10, 11
A Game of Love and Chance: April 14-16, 21, 22

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CAST LIST

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY, MANKATO
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE
– PRESENTS –

Richard III

By William Shakespeare

October 20-23 & 26-30, 2022

CAST OF CHARACTERS

King Edward IV; Tymel; Soldier..............................Tyler Horn
Murderer 2; Ratcliff............................................RJ Magee
Murderer 1; King Henry VI....................................Ryan Shurgis
Queen Elizabeth; Prince Edward's Ghost; Soldier..........Parker Adams
King Richard III (Duke of Gloucester)......................Grey Robertson
Lady Anne Neville; Soldier....................................Bex Williams
George of Clarence; Soldier..................................William Hoehzle
Cecily, Duchess of York; Henry VII of Richmond........Cadence Smith
Queen Margaret; Bishop of Ely; Soldier...................Finnola Coughlin
Lord Buckingham .............................................William Hallock
Lord Hastings; Soldier......................................Casey King
Lord Stanley of Derby.......................................Andy Johnson
Lord Rivers; Soldier..........................................Brittany O'Keefe
Lord Grey; Soldier............................................Odessa Stade
Lord Borough; Soldier.......................................Danny McDonnell
Gatesby; Soldier..............................................Abigail Dittemer
Young Lord Edward Y; Page.................................Eleanor Shurgis
Young Duke of York............................................Robyn R. Honeman

SETTING

the late fifteenth century
at the end of the War of the Roses
Works Cited


https://www.npr.org/2022/01/05/1069977469/a-timeline-of-how-the-jan-6-attack-unfolded-including-who-said-what-and-when.


