

Textual Editing and Diversity: Shakespeare's *Richard III* as a Case Study

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This conversation explores the big questions that are re-defining how scholars approach the editing of Shakespeare's works in our historical moment, from who gets to edit Shakespeare to how they choose to represent the Shakespearean text to their readers. Shakespeare has traditionally been edited by white, male scholars trained in prestigious academic institutions in the Anglo-world. What happens when women and BIPOC scholars, or scholars whose first language is not English, get to edit Shakespeare? And what happens when editors approach the task of re-editing Shakespeare for a more diverse readership? By using examples drawn from Shakespeare's *Richard III*, this conversation shows how differently this history play can be edited and how differently it can be made to mean for new generations of readers, students, and theatre-goers.

Keywords: *Richard III*, Editing, Textual studies, Performance, Diversity

The rise of the 'professional' editing of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century, when editors started to be commissioned among scholars employed by universities, and the systematic methods of textual analysis and editorial rationales ushered in by the New Bibliography in the twentieth century have informed our understanding of textual editing as requiring a specific set of technical skills and specialist knowledge. However, editing also (and inevitably) involves acts of interpretation: what early edition should be used as the 'base-text' for a modern edition; what features of an early edition should be valued and preserved and what features should be modernized or emended; what constitutes an 'error' or 'variation'; what words should be glossed and what sense or meaning should be foregrounded as relevant or

appropriate; what critical or artistic interventions in the history of the reception of Shakespeare should be singled out in the editorial apparatus? As an act of interpretation, editing is historically situated. In other words, editing is 'of its own time' because it belongs to the wider and ideologically informed realm of the 'history of ideas'. In this conversation, we consider the extent to which current editorial practices reflect (or perhaps resist the impact of) wider changes in the field of Shakespeare studies. We focus our conversation on recent editions of, and current thinking about, Shakespeare's *Richard III*, highlighting the need to allow diverse voices and diverse histories to emerge from our (editorial) engagement with (literary) history.

Andrea Peghinelli (AP): Establishing the text is commonly perceived as being the first task of an editor of Shakespeare, but probably this is only the beginning. Working on a new edition of a play presents many challenges and it is a complex process of decision making, always inevitably compared to, and sometimes drawing on, previous scholarly work on that play. Twenty-first century editors have resources and possibly scope for changes not available to their predecessors, especially after newly discovered facts and innovative critical perspectives have shed new light on different aspects of the 'text' as it has been transmitted by the editorial tradition. Considering, then, recent editions of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, what are their main features? What is distinctive about how they re-present the text and the history of its reception to their readers?

Sonia Massai (SM): All the so-called 'gold-standard' single-volume editions of *Richard III* currently available to theatre practitioners, researchers, and to instructors and their students are now on average fifteen to twenty years old¹. These editions offer exhaustive accounts of how Shakespeare dramatized historical source materials, while borrowing from earlier literary and dramatic accounts of the reign of *Richard III*. Compared to editions

¹ In reverse chronological order, the main recent critical editions of *Richard III* are Siemon 2009; Jowett 2000; Lull 1999 (updated in 2009).

prepared in the third and fourth quarters of the twentieth century, their introductions and notes pay more sustained attention to non-literary texts, such as libels, satires, and invectives – ‘inter-texts’ or ‘co-texts’ rather than direct sources – that made up “the discursive environment” within which the play took shape (Siemon 2009, 28-39). They also devote more space to the play in performance (Lull 2009, 41-47 were added to the original edition of 1999 to cover stage productions that had taken place over the intervening ten-year period). While scholarly and exhaustive in their analyses of all main features of the play and its reception, these editions have inevitably started to seem a little dated. Two main events have marked the reception of *Richard III* since they were published: the discovery and excavation of Richard’s remains in Leicester in 2012 and the rise of disability studies. Their editors could have predicted this turn of historical and critical events that has triggered fresh readings of Shakespeare’s fictional representation of the nature and extent of Richard’s disability, for which we now have archaeological evidence. More generally, though, these editions adopt a traditional, top-down approach to the way they present (editorial) knowledge to their readers that no longer belongs to our historical moment and to the need to decolonize and diversify the academic curriculum. Rather than directing their readers’ attention to places where the play refuses interpretative closure and encourages us to (re)discover different voices and histories, these editions confront their readers with a towering amount of knowledge that they can only benefit from as passive recipients.

AP: The relationship between Shakespeare’s play and the historical Richard III has been explored in several different ways, and it is well established that Shakespeare mainly relied on the great sixteenth-century chronicles (mostly Raphael Holinshed and Edward Hall, who, in turn, relied on Thomas More’s *History of Richard III*) as sources for this play. We also know that there was a wider range of other sources available to the playwright, other documents and different accounts not always accessible to present-day scholars – it is not possible, for instance, to trace Shakespeare’s references to an unrecorded oral tradition. You mentioned the recently discovered archaeological evidence as an element brought

forward to encourage new readings. The digging up of a royal body Shakespeare greatly contributed to shape, accordingly to his contemporaries' needs of illuminating history, could be read as an essential process of archaeology: the retrieval of lost remains to add – or re-write – missing pages to that story.

Do you think that going back to the historical context would help looking at the text – and consequently at characters – under a different light or to focus on otherwise neglected possible readings? What kind of signs were left on the dramatic text by such a treatment of history, where the exploration of the behaviour of an individual character, under given circumstances, is dangerously superimposed over the chronicling of events? Would you suggest that a new edition of Shakespeare's *Richard III* can foreground other aspects of the text or its reception to offset the conservative influence of long-established editorial and critical practice and to connect more explicitly with our own historical moment?

SM: Yes, I believe that reconsidering the range of historical accounts of the reign of *Richard III* that were available to Shakespeare and how they may have affected his re-presentation of this historical figure can help us revisit received critical and editorial approaches to this play. Each new generation of editors and readers will of course find different aspects of this rich and complex play that will seem to need further exploration. I am personally vexed at the uniformity of critical readings of (and editorial approaches to) the so-called 'wooing scene' (I.ii).

In this scene, Richard addresses a grieving Lady Anne, whose husband and father-in-law he first claims and then denies having killed. Editors tend at best to record the fact that there is no historical or fictional precedent for I.ii in the play's known sources; at worst, they identify a precedent in an earlier Latin play, Thomas Legge's *Richardus Tertius* (1579), but this claim is factually wrong². Furthermore, their readings of this scene patronize Anne as weak

² See, for example, Jowett 2000, 157-58: "Richard's seduction of Anne is not recorded in the chronicles, but is presented in *Ricardus* [sic] *Tertius*". In fact, in *Richardus Tertius*, Anne features as "Anna Regina uxor Richardi" and Richard attempts to seduce Elizabeth, eldest daughter of King Edward and Queen Elizabeth ("Filia Eduardi Major"), not Anne, in III.iv.

and morally compromised. John Jowett, for example, concludes that I.ii is a “temporary mirror” that gives “Anne [...] an illusory sexual power that disarms danger and shapes destiny”:

This is the fantasy to which she is subjected, and, hesitantly, the temptation of fantasy prevails. Anne gives in to Richard, calling him “dissembler” [...]. Her chiding is that of the resentful though forgiving lover. The word accusatorily reflects back on the self-deceit of the speaker, who both sees and disregards the insincerity. (Jowett 2000, 43)

“The episode has no visible consequence whatsoever for his ambitions to the crown. Instead it serves as a key exposition of Richard’s charismatic charm” (41). Siemon chimes in: “Anne’s laments and curses so quickly change to murmured submission that Richard’s delight at female fickleness [...] and her shame at her ‘woman’s heart’ [...] seem validated” (Siemon 2009, 19). What can a new edition of *Richard III* do to provide a different angle on this key moment in the play?

As an editor myself, currently in the process of preparing a new edition of the play for the fourth Arden Shakespeare series, I was prompted to look again at Lady Anne by my own sense of discomfort at how her character has been presented in earlier editions. It had always seemed to me that editors and critics, rather than Anne, fall for Richard and validate his rhetorical powers. Before I started working on my own edition, I had only gone as far as assuming that, as a woman and a Lancaster at the court of her triumphant enemies, Anne is not so much ‘wooded’ as ‘won’ by Richard, meaning that she has very few other options open to her to ensure her survival. But when tasked with preparing a new edition, I followed my hunch and decided to find out more about Anne to try and establish what Shakespeare’s original audience may have remembered about her and how ‘her-story’ may have affected how they responded to I.ii.

I soon realized that there is more to Anne than what editors have chosen to mention about her so far. In a nutshell, what editors generally do not tell their readers is that the historical Richard and Lady Anne had been married for nearly a decade by the time Edward IV died in 1483. Anne’s father, Richard Neville, Earl of

Warwick, had been one of the most powerful allies of Richard's father, the Duke of York, and of his children, so much so that he was dubbed 'the Kingmaker' when his unfaltering support ensured Edward IV's accession to the throne on 4 March 1461. Anne was born and had been raised as a staunch Yorkist. It was only in 1469, when Warwick got tired of the king's ingratitude and rebelled, that Anne was used as a pawn and married off to Edward of Lancaster, the son of King Henry VI and Queen Margaret. Warwick was killed at the Battle of Barnet on 14 April 1471 and Anne's husband, Prince Edward, at the Battle of Tewkesbury on 7 May 1471. Anne rejoined Edward IV's court as Richard's wife shortly thereafter. Shakespeare's original audience would have remembered that her marriage to Richard lasted for over ten years and that they had a son, who tragically died shortly after Richard's accession to the throne in 1483.

While Tudor chronicle 'his-stories' say very little about Anne, there are other, earlier accounts that document 'her-story'. Most arresting is the visual evidence of a dashing young couple in the heraldic roll compiled and beautifully illustrated by John Rous, one of the two priests of the chantry of Guy's Cliffe just outside Warwick (<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-rous-roll>). The roll includes Richard twice, first holding Warwick Castle on his left hand, with a boar at his feet, looking quite dashing in full armour³. The second drawing shows Richard with Anne next to him as his queen consort⁴. Over the page, Rous included a drawing of their

³ The text underneath this drawing reads: "Rex Richardus tercius – born in the Castel of Foderiengay a myghti prince / in his dayes special gode lord to the town & lordship of Warrewyk wher yn the castel he did gret cost off byldyng / In the which his most noble lady & wyf was born and at gret instance of her he of his bounteous grace with owt fee or fyn / graunt to the seyd borowh frely by charter / as kyng William Conquerour his noble progenitor a fore tym gret previlagis".

⁴ The inscription underneath reads: "The moost mighty prynce Rychard / by the grace of god kyng of ynglond and of fraunce and lord of Ireland / by verrey matrimony with owt dyscontynewans [discontinuance] or any defylyng yn the lawe by eyre [heir] / male lineally dyscendyng from kyng harre the second / all avarice set a syde Rewled hys subgettys In hys Realme ful commendablyly / poneschyng offenders of hys laws / specyally Extorcioners and oppressors of hys comyns and chereschyng tho[se] that were vertues [virtuous] by the

son Edward, Prince of Wales. Another early chronicler, the Burgundian Jehan de Waurin, reports that “as early as 1464 Warwick wished to marry both his daughters to the king’s brothers, one of whom, Anne’s future husband Richard [...], was his ward and apparently living in his household from 1465”⁵.

The temporal distance that separates these earlier historians from Shakespeare should not lead us to assume that their accounts of Anne’s lifelong relationship with Richard was unknown to him or his contemporaries. In his recent revisionary account of the reign of Richard III, finalized and published in the wake of the discovery of Richard’s remains in Leicester, Philip Schwyzer points out that the early 1590s occupied a “distinctive historical moment in relation to [the play’s] subject – a period after the extinction of living memory, but still within the horizon of what is variously termed ‘active’ or ‘communicative memory’, the period of 90-120 years in which memories may be transmitted over three or four generations” (Schwyzer 2013, 71). The Lady Anne we think we know via Shakespeare’s play (the weak victim of Richard’s power to deceive and seduce) may not have been the Lady Anne his original audience remembered (the rich heiress of one of the most influential families in the country, whose supporters and patrimony helped Richard establish his power base in the North of England).

By encouraging the readers of my edition to rediscover ‘her-story’, I am also hoping to invite a more open-ended reading of this scene: why would Shakespeare surprise his original audience by departing so dramatically from what they were likely to remember about Anne? Perhaps to give them (and those of us who care to find out more about her) a chance to resist Richard’s ‘charismatic charm’ and, along with it, the spin that Tudor chronicles had placed on

whyche dyscrete guydynfe [guiding] he gat gret thank of god and love of all hys subgettys / Ryche and pore / and gret lavd [loved] of the people of all othyr landys a bowt hym”.

⁵ *Recueil des Croniques et Anchiennes Istories de la Grant Bretagne*, as summed up by Michael Hicks in his entry for “Anne Neville” in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB).

earlier historical accounts?⁶ I believe that I.ii represents a crucial moment in the play, where the blatant departure from recorded and ‘communicative’ memory was meant to help the original audience and readers resist the temptation to conflate Shakespeare’s fictional Richard III, and his charisma as a character, with *Richard III*, which, as a play, and as I show elsewhere⁷, raises important questions about who is (re)telling the story, and who is (re)writing history.

AP: Whether we consider early modern England as a ‘proto-colonial’ world, or if we think instead that a colonizing imagination had not yet assumed the imperial ambitions that would subsequently connote English society, we can probably agree that there is an urgency to question and reappraise the way in which a culture is portrayed within the histories of colonialism. In the need for a present re-configuration, “a postcolonial, *proleptic* gaze on the [early modern] period via Shakespearean drama”, as Jyotsna G. Singh wrote, “is particularly potent in questioning teleological historical time” (Singh 2019, 82), and it probably allows us to adopt an anti-colonial attitude in the present and re-think the relationship with a past as a series of shifts in the evolving trajectory of Shakespearean reception.

Shakespeare’s plays are progressively used to tell stories about diverse lives and experiences. This is particularly evident in the performance history of specific plays – such as *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Tempest*, for instance – that have been appropriated by the formerly colonized, resonating, thus, with anti-colonial voices. From the mid-twentieth century on, responses to Shakespeare have been inflected by early decolonization movements, the impact of postcolonial theory and criticism, in particular by non-Western intellectuals (Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is a case in point), all of which have prompted theoretical and political reorientations. After the postcolonial turn, Shakespearean studies and productions have

⁶ Even Rous wrote a very different, scathing account of the reign of Richard after the accession of Henry VII, possibly due to his desire to please the new king or possibly because he believed the rumour according to which, after their son’s death, Richard poisoned Anne so he could remarry and secure a new heir.

⁷ Forthcoming in *Cahiers Élisabéthains*.

become more cross-cultural and cosmopolitan, originating diverse non-Western pluralized readings and revised texts in intercultural adaptations.

Unfortunately, the editions of the Shakespearean texts we have inherited are often still shaped in accordance with assumptions no longer acceptable to us, going as far as distorting elements of the plays in their early printed Quartos and Folio versions. To what extent, then, can the editing of Shakespeare, and of *Richard III*, reflect the pressing imperative to decolonize the academic curriculum and to diversify the field of Shakespeare studies? What would a diverse edition of Shakespeare, and of *Richard III*, look like?

SM: *Richard III*, as an English history play, would seem to lend itself less intuitively to re-readings that aim to decolonize the curriculum, if by “decolonizing” we mean, strictly speaking, revisionary approaches that unpack colonial and imperialist representations of ‘otherness’. However, we now tend to understand identity as intersectional, that is, as the product of multiple (as opposed to binary) determinants of subjectivity⁸. In keeping with this understanding of identity formations (and politics), we have also started to think of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ as closely interrelated to ‘gender’ and ‘sexuality’, ‘religion’ and ‘nationality’, to name just a few categories that shape our sense of self. By the same token, we now tend to think of ‘non-race’ texts as equally implicated in the construction of intersectional identities. It is, for example, worth noting that, though not a ‘race’ play like *Othello* or *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III* activates (and questions) a conventional alignment of ‘fair’ with ‘good’ and ‘foul’ with ‘evil’. In V.i, Buckingham refers to Prince Edward as the “fair son” of “holy” King Henry (V.i.4)⁹. In the next scene, Richmond refers to news of his father’s defection from Richard’s ranks as “fair

⁸ See, for example, Maalouf 2001, 159: “[We] should [...] see our identity as the sum of all [our] various affiliations, instead of as only one of them raised to the status of the most important, made into an instrument of exclusion and sometimes into a weapon of war”.

⁹ All quotations from the text of *Richard III* are from my forthcoming Arden Shakespeare Fourth Series edition.

comfort” and to Richard as the “foul swine” that “[l]ies now even in the centre of this isle” (V.ii.6, 10-11). The heart of the homeland is usurped, its “summer fields and fruitful vines” (8) are spoilt by a tyrant whose lack of ‘fairness’, literal and symbolic, marks him out as unfit to rule. The closing lines in this scene, though, ring a discordant note: an exultant Richmond, egged on by his allies, proclaims that “[k]ings it [that is, hope] makes gods, and meaner creatures kings” (24). Richmond’s hubris can be at worst off-putting when modern editors and theatre directors draw their readers’ and their audiences’ attention to it; but it would have sounded downright blasphemous to early modern spectators. Incidentally, even in Holinshed, whose chronicles for the most part toe the Tudor party line, Richmond is startingly likened to a ‘viper’, even as Richard is conventionally referred to as a ‘boar’. Even while praising Richmond, Holinshed compares the small size of his invading army to “the small viper” that is “the huge buls deadlie bane” and to “a little curre” that “dooth catch a bore boisterous and big” (Holinshed 1587, 754). My edition of *Richard III* will highlight how the play simultaneously mobilizes and critiques the ‘fair’/‘foul’ binary (and how this binary, so central to Shakespeare’s dramatic imagination, has been used to theorize the provenance of the printer’s copies from which his plays were set)¹⁰.

AP: The rise of Shakespeare from England’s national poet to global playwright has exacerbated the lack of correlation between the homogeneity of its editors and the exponential increase in the diversity of its readers worldwide. As a matter of fact, academic interest in intercultural Shakespeare has been mainly focused on the influence of rewritings – adaptations and appropriations of his plays – in the shaping of diverse audiences throughout the world. ‘Global Shakespeares’ have acquired dramatic prestige of their own; besides, the influence of other cultures shapes intellectual and aesthetic prospects and artistic visions of contemporary Shakespearean productions, festivals, and interpretations.

¹⁰ On this slippage between the use of “fair” and “foul” in Shakespearean and early modern drama and its appropriation by New Bibliographers, see Adams 2021.

Contemporary theatre historiography markedly shows how Shakespeare has been 'de-versified'; therefore, the critical feedback and the responses that diverse audiences can also bring may broaden and enrich our understanding of what constitutes an intercultural, and hence heterogenous, 'Shakespeare's global performance community'. This attitude is crucial to a consideration of Shakespeare as a contemporary writer whose work is shaped by his 'reader' – director, adapter, spectator – in their moment, and could be a step forward towards systemic change and diversification in the field of Shakespeare and early modern literary and textual studies as well. Recognizing the activities of reading, analysing, and editing as responding to and engaging with each other could help establishing a set of textual possibilities prompted by those who act upon the texts rather than the edited texts acting upon the reader.

A diversifying practice should probably discontinue the concept of the universality of Shakespeare to consider different backgrounds and identities as potential assets rather than barriers to their interpretation of his plays. One might therefore want to ask whether a diverse edition of Shakespeare, and of *Richard III*, can be produced without diversifying the group of scholars who have traditionally been tasked with the editing of Shakespeare and without eliminating remaining gatekeeping practices. Can, thus, the editing of Shakespeare be diversified by being put into conversation with neighbouring subfields, within which scholars and practitioners also work very closely with the text, including translation, dramaturgy, and (decolonial) pedagogy?

SM: Shakespeare studies often transforms itself as a discipline either in response to cultural and societal change or to inspire it. However, the specialist knowledge involved in the preparation of scholarly editions of Shakespeare continues to be produced within one of the least diversified subfields in our discipline: textual editors are still predominantly white, male, and trained at established higher education institutions in the West.

During the first one hundred years in the history of the professionalization of the scholarly editing of Shakespeare (mid-1860s to mid-1960s), less than 5% of editors were women and 0% of

editors were BIPOC scholars, or scholars from ‘white-other’ backgrounds whose first language was not English. Since the mid-1970s, the number of women editors has grown, but it still represents just over 12% of editors. Ethnically and linguistically diverse editors still represent only 2% of all editors¹¹.

I believe that my role as editor of *Richard III* for the fourth Arden Shakespeare series (and as one of the general editors of the forthcoming Cambridge Shakespeare Editions series)¹² is not only to engage with (and commission editors willing to engage with) non-English and non-Western critical and performance traditions. While of course an important development in its own right, bringing critical editions of Shakespeare in conversation with ‘global Shakespeares’ is not enough to diversify the field (and the kind of editions that scholars have traditionally produced). As well as striving to produce diverse editions, that is, editions that grant visibility to other histories and other voices, editors and general editors of Shakespeare should also act as facilitators, by extending the conversation about the ideas and practices that have shaped the edition of Shakespeare and other literary classics to include other literary scholars, translators, and theatrical practitioners, who work closely with the text in ways that are comparable to textual editing and can inspire diverse approaches to editing.

The conversation should also include non-scholarly communities who work with Shakespeare in ways that challenge its traditional alignment with a (generally white, generally Western) cultivated elite. A prime example of good practice is Shakespeare in Prison (SIP), a signature community programme run by the Detroit Public Theatre¹³. Frannie Shepherd-Bates and Matthew Van Meter, the Director and Assistant Director of SIP, are preparing the first critical edition of *Richard III* written by

¹¹ These figures are based on single-volume series starting with the first Arden Shakespeare series and excluding series that are currently under preparation.

¹² https://www.cambridge.org/core/browse-subjects/literature/announcing-cambridge-shakespeare-editions-series?utm_source=hootsuite&utm_medium=twitter&utm_campaign=JAZ_CS_E+announcement.

¹³ <https://www.detroitpublictheatre.org/shakespeareinprison>.

incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women. In their own words:

Richard III in Prison provides insight and perspective on Shakespeare's text. It builds on the rich legacy of annotated Shakespeare texts, but it also uniquely and explicitly centres the experiences and words of marginalized people without exoticizing or exploiting them. It is not 'about' prison, or the people locked up there, filtered through a narrator – it gives direct access to them, in their own words. It presents the contributors' ideas for what they are: valuable contributions to Shakespeare scholarship and an exciting way to introduce new readers to Shakespeare's work.¹⁴

The time seems right not only for *Richard III in Prison* but also for a series of 'Shakespeare in Prison' editions that will genuinely diversify our sense of what this play (and Shakespeare more generally) is and can be about.

AP: Considering that “the history of a play in the theatre can often show where the energy and shape of it lie”, as J. S. Bratton and Julie Hankey wrote in the “Series Editors' Preface” of the Cambridge Shakespeare in Production (Bratton and Hankey 1999, viii), and that a major contribution to the definitive acknowledgment of “the Shakespearean imprint” in *Titus Andronicus* – a play that had been almost forgotten – came, as Giorgio Melchiori remarked, after the admirable staging directed by Peter Brook at Stratford in 1955 (Melchiori 1994, 29), what do you think is the role of the stage history of a play in editing a Shakespearean text?

For instance, in the discussion about diversity in textual studies of *Richard III*, the issue of staging disability in early modern drama is taken by scholars as emblematic. In disability studies, as you mentioned before, Richard's character is often taken up as Shakespeare's most representative case and interpreter of physical diversity. The ambiguity about how to interpret Richard's physical form and how to dramatize his body, as a matter of fact, marks the history of the play's staging. A recent Royal Shakespeare Company production was heavily marketed as the first casting by the Royal

¹⁴ Personal communication.

Shakespeare Company of a disabled actor in the leading role. The frequency of disabled actors earning major roles appears to be growing in British theatre; however, do you think the literalism affecting casting in this particular case, instead of serving to “enhance the performance and impact of the production”, as director Gregory Doran stated (quoted in Marshall 2022), inevitably shifted the focus of the story of Richard being mainly about his disability?

SM: I would agree that key productions of Shakespeare (or any other ancient, early modern or modern classic) can radically change the way we think about it, the range of interpretations it can elicit, and their relevance in a specific place or moment in time. Gregory Doran’s RSC production of *Richard III* undoubtedly marks an important milestone in the history of the company. And it is quite fitting that *Richard III* should function as a vehicle for the establishment of fairer working conditions for actors affected by physical or mental disabilities within the theatre industry: after all, *Richard III* is the first play in the English canon to have placed disability centre-stage. There is however a risk in overdetermining Richard’s disability, especially after the discovery of Richard’s remains in 2012 has helped experts establish that he was affected by scoliosis, a condition that affects the alignment of the shoulders (and that could have been hidden by clothing and armour), and not kyphosis, a condition that affects the shape of the back (and would have been harder to hide). ‘Literalism’ is another risk that comes with casting an actor affected by a physical disability to play Richard, since Richard’s disability, especially when compared to how it was represented in earlier dramatic and non-dramatic sources and analogues, becomes less stigmatic and more symbolic (see Wilson 2022) and is in many ways *enabling* rather than *disabling* (see, for example, Love 2019; Williams 2021).

Diverse casting makes more sense when it encourages audiences to think less literally about physical or mental disability. Ivo van Hove’s *Kings of War*, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s first tetralogy (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*), is a good example of a production that encouraged this approach to understanding ableism and disability in less literal (and

oppositional) terms. In this production, Hans Kesting's Richard III wore suits that were visibly too tight for him, thus suggesting that his alienation from the rest of the York court stemmed from personal and social maladjustment rather than from a congenital physical disability. He also delivered all his monologues (except the last) to a large mirror. No other character took the slightest interest in the mirror; Richard, by stark contrast, self-fashioned himself, time and time again, before it, showing how dis/abled identities are fluid constructions that respond to cultural and societal pressures and pre-/mis-conceptions about what constitutes dis/ability¹⁵.

In other recent productions, other types of 'literalism' have proved thought-provoking and popular, but also overdetermining. In Thomas Ostermeier's production (2015), for example, Lars Eidinger's Richard, whose athletic body, once he took off a prosthetic hunched back in I.ii, displayed no other visible markers of disability, nevertheless burst on to the stage fully formed as a confident, malevolent deceiver. Eidinger's Richard seduced the audience even before he successfully wooed Lady Anne. In Doran's production, Arthur Hughes's Richard has been praised for "go[ing] some way to correcting the false equivalence" of deformity and malignancy (Akbar 2022). Similarly to Eidinger's Richard, though, Hughes's Richard is a "handsome, swaggering sociopath" (Akbar 2022) – and not a character whose deformity attests to the inevitability of warped and compromised moral bearings. At least in this respect, Hughes's Richard aligns with other Richards, played with extraordinary panache by the best actors in their generation (from David Garrick to Ian McKellen), who glamorize this equivalence without questioning it.

Conclusion: Year of Richard III

When we first planned this conversation, we did not know that three major productions of *Richard III* would revive public attention in this English history play in 2022. Opening almost simultaneously in Canada, the USA, and the UK, three productions of *Richard III* at the Stratford Festival in Canada, the Free Shakespeare in the Park

¹⁵ For more details about this production, see Massai 2018.

in New York, and at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon adopted radically different approaches to casting and characterization. At the Stratford Festival, Colm Feore, who is not disabled, was coached by a disability consultant to impersonate a character affected by scoliosis (rather than stigmatized by a hunched back). In this production, Richard was less affected by “a medical disability than a social and cultural one”¹⁶. In New York, Danai Gurira, a black actor who is not disabled, played Richard as “an action hero”:

Looking like a supervillain in black knee-high boots and stretch denim trousers, with her hair shaved into heraldic patterns, she is unflaggingly energetic, vocally thrilling and, as events become more hectic, more and more convincing. (Green 2022)

In this production, where Lady Anne is played by Ali Stroker, who uses a wheelchair, the bodies of the actors actively encouraged the audience to think critically about what constitutes a disability (or social disadvantage). Likewise, director O’Hara’s idea to express Richard’s diversity by casting a black woman to play this role prompted the same audience to explore his ‘toxic masculinity’ from a fresh angle, thus making his misogyny seem grotesque. As mentioned above, Hughes, who is affected by radial dysplasia, tapped on his own experience of disability to infuse his Richard with the power of lived experience.

All these productions were praised and critiqued to a similar extent, since their individual approach necessarily excluded other possible approaches to understanding Richard and the fictive world of the play in ways that resonate in our time. Classics are often radically altered in performance in order to ask new questions that can overturn traditional assumptions, but innovation can produce contrasting effects – greater freedom in casting can lead to overdetermining literalism – which neutralize its potential benefits.

We hope that this conversation will encourage editors of Shakespeare (and other literary classics) to prepare editions that

¹⁶ Ann Swerdfager, spokesperson for the Stratford Festival, quoted in Tracy 2022.

similarly are of (and speak to) our historical moment. Like these productions, editions that foreground the questions and approaches that matter to us will seem more partisan and perhaps less scholarly to those who believe that editing is purely a technical task. As we suggest here, while requiring specialist knowledge of textual production in Shakespeare's time, editing his works is also an act of critical interpretation. It therefore seems important that, at a time when our field, like many other academic fields and sectors of society, is trying to strive for higher standards of equality and inclusion, editors should acknowledge their own historical and ideological situatedness and model their practice to reflect the critical, open-ended nature of the knowledge-making process that goes into producing a scholarly edition of Shakespeare (or any other literary classic). Even more crucially, we hope that this conversation will encourage literary scholars, translators, and theatre practitioners, as well as communities like SIP, to take ownership of the editing of Shakespeare as a powerful strategy to mobilize his works to talk to (and for) them.

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