

## **Introduction**

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

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

resources for teaching, the podcast exemplifies a particularly generous kind of space-sharing. Such space-sharing initiatives online have facilitated conversations about diversity, disability, inclusion, and the questioning of cultural prejudices – subjects also addressed in this special issue.

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

these two plays may also offer the possibility to ask questions about otherness and encourage conversations about inclusivity.

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

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

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

The question of who is entitled to represent history – and how – has become pertinent in the current political climate in which we have seen the formation of global movements such as Black Lives Matter or #MeToo. The 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe was a timely expression of how Shakespeare – and history – can be made to feel more inclusive and relates to ongoing critical discussions, but we are also reminded that some of these discussions build on previous and ongoing scholarly efforts. As Farah Karim-Cooper and Eoin Price argue in their introduction to a recent special issue of the journal *Shakespeare*, the word 'timely' in relation to Shakespeare and the subject of race is in fact potentially problematic, both because it risks occluding a longstanding tradition of existing scholarship and because it forecloses future study by over-emphasising the present (2021, 1-2). As Karim-Cooper and Price note, Kim F. Hall's path-breaking study of racial epistemologies in Shakespeare and early modern English culture, *Things of Darkness: Economies*

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

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

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

But a conversation about Shakespeare and diversity naturally extends beyond a British and Anglophone context. One of the aims of this special issue was to find different geographical and cultural cases so that knowledge and inspiration might also be gained from a comparative perspective. One of these cases was a production of *Richard III* at Kronborg Castle in Elsinore, Denmark in 2019, which

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is followed by an analysis of contemporary theatre productions of *Richard III* in Australia by Caitlin Mary West. Focusing on the concept of implied stage directions, West argues that productions of *Richard III* can find successful ways to resist the play's implied connection between Richard's disability and his behaviour, as exemplified by productions by Siren Theatre Co. and The Sydney Theatre Company, both in 2009. The early modern understanding of physical disability as a manifestation of moral deviance continues to present a challenge to contemporary theatre practitioners who wish to engage with *Richard III*. West's analysis demonstrates both the potentially problematic consequences for productions that follow textual signifiers uncritically, and the ways in which productions might resist the text in a productive manner so that "the friction between the written and performance texts is not smoothed over or done away with. Rather, it is brought out into the open, the meaning suggested by the text is challenged, and a new interpretation is offered". Her analysis is situated within the



context of Australian theatre and offers insights into local cultural politics but the discussion has “broader implications for performing Shakespeare in the twenty-first century” and offers opportunity for comparative exchange with other geographical and cultural locations.

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

Each of the contributors to this special issue thus offers a set of local perspectives on what will surely be an increasingly global and cross-cultural conversation about Shakespearean inclusivity. Pre-lockdown live productions such as the 2019 *Richard II* at Shakespeare’s Globe contributed to an impetus that led to similarly collaborative and diverse Shakespeare productions online, such as Robert Myles’ [\*The Show Must Go Online Project\*](#), with the added advantage of the ability

immediately to include and reach actors and audiences on a global scale. As scholars and teachers, performers and audiences begin to return to physical spaces in many locations – although not everywhere – some of the experiences and discoveries that were shared in virtual spaces during the pandemic will hopefully still be with us.

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