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RICHARD III AND A COMEDIAN'S EYE

By

William S. Salmons

B.A., Shenandoah College and Conservatory of Music

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Performance

Department of Theatre Arts

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2012

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B.A., Shenandoah College and Conservatory of Music, 1993

A Thesis Approved on

April 8, 2012

By the following Thesis Committee:

Dr. Amy Steiger

Dr. Rinda Frye

Dr. Julia Dietrich

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents

Mr. Leroy Salmons

and

Mrs. Dorothy Fay Salmons

for their support of all my crazy endeavors!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Amy Steiger for her patience and helpful hand in the writing and forming of this thesis. Your knowledge has made me a better writer and person. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Dr. Julia Dietrich and Dr. Rinda Frye for their support and comments in my growth as an actor and a student. Many thanks to Professor James Tompkins for keeping me grounded, but pushing my boundaries. Lastly I would like to give thanks to my Graduate class for their support and work through the last three years.

ABSTRACT
RICHARD III AND A COMEDIANS EYE

William S. Salmons

April 9, 2012

This thesis is a culmination of process and real life experiences I used as an actor to reach the goal of performing the role of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Not only do I discuss the process I used, but I discuss the choices I made in pursuing this role through research, mentorship, and professionalism. Mostly I discuss why I was perfect for this particular role performed at the University of Louisville.

This thesis is divided into four parts covering background, college, professional work, graduate work and finally performance of *Richard III*. Part One gives a historical background on my life from high school to my acceptance here at the University of Louisville. Broken into smaller sub-chapters I discuss mentorship, professionalism, research and technique, all of which I use in my daily work as an actor. Part Two explores the use of process here at the University of Louisville and how I used it to my advantage in *Richard III*. I focus on the processes specifically used in the rehearsal of *Richard III* including the voice, acting and movement work that helped me shape my character of Richard.

Finally Parts Three and Four cover my performance and conclusion of why I was perfect for this role. In Part Three, I delve deeper into choices I made by the use of technique and research, and how the particular process Dr. Rinda Frye uses in her rehearsals formed a coherent and comedic Richard like none other any has seen before.

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INTRODUCTION

Richard III is one of Shakespeare's most profound villain/clowns, and is also one of the hardest characters to perform. Not only does the actor have to deal with the length of time on stage, he must also hold a physical deformity for the two and a half plus hours on stage, all the while saving enough energy for a large stage battle where Richard is finally slain in the end. Many famous and infamous actors have tackled the role of Richard III- the likes of F. Murray Abraham, John Barrymore, Laurence Olivier, Ian McKellen, Al Pacino, Antony Sher and most recently Kevin Spacey. In 1862 John Wilkes Booth took on the role of Richard III which led to his Chicago, New York, and Boston debuts (Kimmel, 166-167).

Many scholars and actors have their own ideas of how Richard should be played, as do many audience members who choose to see the play. There are certain points you have to hit and speeches that just cannot be cut. Most contemporary directors make cuts because audiences of today do not want to sit in the theatre for more than three hours.

But when one hears that a performance group is going to take a comedic stab at *Richard III*, one may balk at the idea. I was one of those people. When I was first told I was going to be taking on the role of Richard, I cried, and then

laughed, cried some more and finally acceptance rolled over me. Then I was told the director was going to look at him with a comedic approach. I cried again. I was scared to death!

I was scared because as an actor I have had many issues in the past that had gotten in the way of my acting, like the fear of performing the language of Shakespeare and memorizing such a large show. On top of that, some teachers have even commented that my many years in children's theatre ruined my instincts and brought out my tendency to play qualities. (This means in their eyes I was playing "to be funny" or "look, I have a strange walk"). With only six weeks of rehearsals, both fears of memorization and tackling the language were exasperated. Doubts of taking a stab at such a large role, and one that is primarily played dramatically were ever present.

What makes me qualified to play such a daunting, popular role, and how did my education, background and process get me through the immense memorization, rehearsals, and performances? Does a person with very little background in Shakespeare have the tools to bring to life a character as rich and deep as Richard? Does an actor who is primarily a comedic children's theatre actor have the right training to perform *Richard III*?

Throughout this thesis I will share with you my thoughts on tackling this role and how my training to date gave me the skills— acting, my professionalism, my history with strong mentors, and especially my love of research (because this role requires a certain curiosity about history) — that made me the perfect person for The University of Louisville's production of *Richard III*. I will argue that based

on my experience of playing Richard in a production at the University of Louisville in 2011, it is possible to attack this role using comedic skills while having little experience with Shakespeare, provided the actor understands the character, the language, and has a director who can guide as well as nourish him.

I came out as a better actor, teacher, and mentor for tackling this iconic role, and the University of Louisville, Shenandoah University, Columbus Children's Theatre and even Pinelands Regional High school guided me to where I am today. I am Will Salmons, actor, teacher, mentor, student, and *RICHARD III*.

PART I
HISTORY AND BACK STORY

High School

Believe it or not, it all started as a dare. Well, it started years before that, but my true theatre career didn't take off until I was dared to audition for my high school's version of *Dracula*. I was in the seventh grade living in Tuckerton, New Jersey going to Pinelands Regional High School, during which time my school went from grades seven to twelve. The middle school and high school were melded together into one large building where many classes like music, gym, lunches, and shop were mixed with upper and lower classmen. The school is also located in the Pine Barrens of New Jersey. The population is primarily white, lower-middle to lower class. We are not considered "white trash" or "red necks," we are called "Pineys," and the arts are considered something that "those funny people do."

The area can be quite beautiful, but the arts are just not prevalent or a priority. If it did not have anything to do with hunting, fishing, or seafood it wasn't considered natural. The only place to view art or even theatre was to travel seventy five miles west to Philadelphia or one hundred miles northeast to New

York City. Although Atlantic City was thirty miles south it was hardly a Mecca for the arts. Eventually I found we had to make our own theatre, and I attached myself to those that enjoyed it or taught it, planting the seed in me to mentor those that were interested in it along with me.

Mentorship

Being a mentor comes easily to me and as you can see, it started early. Having a strong director and mentor has always been important to me as many of my past directors and teachers have mentored me in their process, whether it be in professionalism, life skills or acting techniques. Their love and passion for the theatre have made me want to become an actor and teacher.

Because of this instilled mentorship, to this day I often enjoy mentoring those interested in theatre, through teaching, coaching, taking headshots, and even helping students find the best school or theatre to audition for. I'm one who likes to give back. Dr. Rinda Frye, our director for *Richard III*, has often said how well I relate to the undergraduates and how I can get them focused and excited for a rehearsal either through a warm up, theatre game, or just being a friend. Mentoring comes easy to me and as you can see, it started when I was young.

Early in my life because of teachers, I had been exposed to live theatre and dabbled in it a bit, but it wasn't until the "Pinelands Experience," that I realized how important theatre and acting would be in my growth as an actor, mentor, and eventually teacher. The "Experience" is a horrible coming of age

camping trip the seventh graders were forced to go on in late October to meet new people and make the transition to middle school easier. The five days were tortuous, wet, and freezing. We didn't see the sun the whole time we were there. (Now I know how Richard felt on the battle fields of Bosworth Field.)

At the culmination of the weekend all the groups were asked to perform a sketch they had worked on throughout the week. My group was filled with boys who were not remotely interested in performing or acting. To them it was "gay", "stupid", and "not very fun." Somehow by the time we had to perform I had written a piece based on a local ghost story and I talked my group into performing it. We scared everyone! No one even noticed that one of our cast members was missing and when he jumped into the crowd from the woods, screaming and yelling and covered in ketchup (yes, ketchup), we brought the crowd to its feet. We had caused pandemonium and mass chaos, guys yelled, girls cried and we laughed for hours! We even won best ensemble sketch for the evening and were rewarded with hot showers the next morning.

Eventually, my group admitted to having fun and thanked me for writing and leading the group to a successful outcome. This was my first foray into writing, directing, and mentoring, but it wouldn't be the last.

After I won the sketch of the year award, a teacher I had never met at this point told me I should audition for the high school play. They were doing *Dracula*. I didn't think about it again until the day of the auditions in early November. My best friend Kenny and I had gotten an after school general detention for roughhousing before class. I was really scared it was going to affect my

“permanent record” because at this point in my life I was the straight arrow and didn’t often make waves.

Kenny and I entered the room for our detention and I found the mysterious teacher from the camping trip behind the desk. It was a light day; Kenny and I were the only ones due for detention. We took our seats and started to do out homework. About 3:00 the teacher came to me and asked how I had gotten into trouble, and why I wasn’t at the *Dracula* auditions. I told him I had forgotten about the auditions and that Kenny and I were rough housing before home room and we knocked Mr. Peter’s coffee out of his hand.

The next thing that happened shaped my life to come. He dared me to leave detention and go down to the theatre to audition for the play. I asked him why and he said “your talents are being wasted in this detention” and “you should do something worthwhile.” He told me if I was to be cast in the show I wouldn’t have to make up my detention. If I was not cast I had to come back another time and finish my detention. This teacher was not one of my regular teachers, but he had my back. I still wonder to this day what the outcome would have been had he not pushed me to go.

Needless to say I was cast in the show. The character of Renfield was mine and the acting bug bit me. To this day Renfield will always hold a special place in my heart. It was my first real role and what a challenging role it was. During my six years at Pinelands I learned a lot from the upper classmen and many times they took me under their wings when I had questions or even difficulties with the shows or even the school bullies.

My high school years were fun and challenging. Because we were relatively close to New York and my teachers had a love for Broadway, I saw my first Broadway musical in seventh grade. The entire cast of *Dracula* went to see the original 1980 production of *Evita*. Unfortunately we went to a matinee and missed Mandy Patinkin and Patti LuPone. However we did see John Goodman and Rene Auberjonois in *Big River* a few years later. I even met Adolph Green at the opening of *Singing in the Rain* when my mentor, teacher and now close friend Kathy Siegfried pointed him out and dared me to go talk to him. Even at an early age when I was confronted by a challenge I embraced it. Although it may have frightened me a little, like performing a role like Richard, I never backed down, especially with a strong mentor, or director guiding me.

Research

Renfield is a dark comedic role. In our version he often wandered around the stage looking for flies and catching spiders, which he then ate in front of people when he found them. He and Richard are similar in many ways. He is a complicated character. He is not just a lunatic that runs around doing the bidding of one man, but he has his wants and needs for himself. For my research, I spent many nights with my mom on the weekends where she worked with the mentally and physically challenged. I watched the way they walked and how they ate. Renfield did not have a noticeable walk like Richard, but crawled a lot and was often found lurking in corners throughout the play. Starting with a character like

Renfield was my first step in working on a comedic character. Renfield, like Richard, is a dark foreboding man, but both men have many comic moments. Two moments in particular are when Renfield catches flies and eats them, and in our version of Richard, he tosses the head of Hastings back and forth to Buckingham before sending him off to visit the Mayor. If not directed properly these both can be over the top and not very funny. Without research and further study of the characters the choices made would not have worked to my benefit.

Since performing in *Dracula* I have been hooked on acting. The more I worked with the drama club in high school the more I knew I was going to be an actor. I came out of my shell; this was when I found I loved to do research. Besides going to work with my mother I must have watched every *Dracula* movie and play ever filmed so i could get an idea of what the role of Renfield was like and what options there were for me. Even though many of the films I watched cut out the character of Renfield, I was able to get a grasp of the time period and the feel of the play. To this day I still research every role I play. From Sam Byck in *Assassins*, to Michael in *The Lisbon Traviata*, and from David in *Twilight of the Golds*, to Richard in *Richard III*.

Research for me consists of reading variations of the play if there are any, historical facts of the character, like Richard and Sam Byck who were both real men and well known historically. Sometimes it was to research the time period, or for *Twilight of the Golds*, I watched the entire *Ring Cycle* by Wagner. The lead character David was a New York set designer and his goal was to design the set for every show in the *Ring Cycle* and he often refers to many sections or arias of

each opera to make a point. The director of this play allowed me to design the music segments, and cues since I was the most familiar with the *Cycle* and I would be referring to the music during the play.

Acting Technique

When looking back at my high school training I can't definitively say we were taught a specific acting theory. We were taught to be truthful to the character and always think about what was really going on in his or her head. This was the first time I heard the term subtext and inner monologue. Mrs. Siegfried and Mr. Henry Kiernan were two of the best high school drama teachers in the area. We knew this because when we went out for local competitions and adjudications we often came home with "best director" and "best ensemble" awards proving their worth. Both have a Masters in Acting and English. Mrs. Siegfried was the first to introduce me to Shakespeare and his work. It was also because of her I had my first fright with Shakespeare. It was also because of this one situation I was frightened of the language and how it made me work harder in my memorization and focus.

I was now in the ninth grade and our mainstage performance at school was *Two Gentleman of Verona*. I was cast as Speed, Valentine's servant. Our acting class was studying the same play and we had to choose a scene to design, direct and act in. Since the guy playing Launce in the show was in the same class, we were given permission to do one of our scenes so we did not

have to learn something different, and it would at least benefit the show. At least that is what was supposed to happen. Doug, my friend playing Launce, had the idea to update the play and I put our scene on skateboards. It went very well and Mrs. Siegfried loved the idea so much we incorporated it into the play. So Launce was often pulled in on the skateboard by his dog, Crab. The problem was we had done that scene so many times in class we often skipped it in rehearsals and Doug and I became quite complacent. Opening night we were sitting back stage fooling around and we heard our entrance cue. We rush about grabbing our skateboards and head out on the apron of the stage to do our cross over scene. I have the first line:

Speed: Launce! by mine honesty, welcome to Milan!

Launce: Forswear not thyself, sweet youth, for I am not welcome. I reckon this always, that a man is never undone till he be hanged, nor never welcome to a place till some certain shot be paid and the hostess say 'Welcome!'

Speed: AHHHHHHH (I go blank! In front of almost five hundred people! at least thirty seconds must go by)

Launce: (improvising) I doth not know what thou sayst....

Speed: AHHHHHHH

Launce: (taking my last line of the scene) Wilt thou go to the ale house with me?

Speed: (running off, beginning to cry) AT THY SERVICE!

(*l.iv.*)

Not only did we skip the entire scene, but in front of everyone, the curtain opens to reveal Proteus changing his pants. I was never so mortified and upset with myself. This laid the seed for a few things. One, I never go anywhere without my

script. Two, I don't fool around backstage any more, but the third thing haunts me the most, the fear it will happen again.

Because of this incident I was afraid of the language and did not have a chance to tackle another Shakespeare play until 1990 when I auditioned for *As You Like It* at Stockton State College and was cast as Oliver Martext and Hymen. This time I made it through every performance, but my fear of the language was ever present.

Because of my fear of the language and what had happened I learned early the language is tough and that I need to spend more time with the script, regardless of what play it is. Even though I am older and my memory is going, my grasp of the text and language is stronger because I have been shown how to get the words into my body and not just my head. Dr. Frye, my voice teacher and director of *Richard III*, instills this in us as part of our voice class and it is one thing I have truly taken to heart.

Professionalism

Plans of going to college and getting a degree in theatre had been in my sights since my sophomore year. However, my senior year started with bad news. Kathy Siegfried was leaving her teaching position and moving to Trenton, New Jersey over an hour away. Henry Kiernan had been gone a year already, going to our rival high school, Southern Regional, to become a supervisor of the English Department. I was going to have a new drama teacher. At first it wasn't

that big of a deal until I realized Mrs. Siegfried would not have time to get together for our college coaching sessions. Even though I was known around the area as a decent actor and I often received work at professional companies like South Jersey Repertory and Surflight Theatre, I didn't have the connections at the time to help me prepare for such a large audition.

I felt like I had been kicked in the gut, all this work ahead of me and now I had to go it alone. To add insult to injury the new teacher only lasted till November. He was accused of sexual harassment and sex with an underage student. Again, I was left standing alone in the dark, but deep down I was given the skills to go it alone.

Just a few months later, after my senior performance of Jonathan in *Arsenic and Old Lace* was postponed due to the firing of our director/teacher, I had my first college audition at Rutgers University. My nerves got to me and my pieces were not very strong. I believe I didn't get in because I knew nothing about Sanford Meisner, who just six years later I would work with at a weekend workshop at Northern Illinois. When they questioned me about his work and theories I had no clue and felt unprepared. When we were introduced to his "door work" and "repetition", I had no idea what to do and in all probability looked scared and confused. Here I learned that not only is research good for plays, but also good when searching for a job and or school. Do your homework; know what you are walking into before you go. As I get ready to graduate from Louisville, I study all the theatres I am interested in before even calling for an interview or audition.

Eventually my acceptances came in from Boston University and Shenandoah College and Conservatory in Winchester, VA. I decided to turn Boston down because they accepted me without an audition. Although I had always wanted to live there, I was told the theatre program was not as strong as Rutgers and Shenandoah. So off I went to Winchester, Virginia to start my college career.

College

Shenandoah College and Conservatory of Music, now Shenandoah University is a conservatory based school in Winchester, Virginia. During my time there the focus was largely on musicals and children's theatre. You had the choice of a BFA in music theatre or BA in acting, and considering that I was not a strong singer I decided to go with the BA in Acting. The primary differences between the two degrees are that the BAs choose a minor, whereas the BFAs are forced to have piano as a minor.

Due to my fondness for researching a role, mentally, physically, and sociologically I almost chose psychology for my minor. I thought this would give me a great background for any character research needed later on in my career, but I soon found I couldn't pass the tests, although the teacher loved my papers and experiments. After a short time I chose lighting design as my minor because I felt whatever I did in life it would always be in the theatre, and to this day I still often get work from it! Plus, as an actor, I know how to find my light!

Mentoring

The core acting classes were the same for either degree: acting, scene study, improvisation, and history of theatre. Even the technical classes were the same for everyone. The acting method used at Shenandoah was a mishmash of different things, but what I got out of the program was Stanislavski- based more than anything. The school did not teach us one, particular thing. I felt it was truly performance based.

Shenandoah had two acting teachers, Mr. and Mrs. Herman. He directed the musicals, taught most of the acting classes and directed the one and only play a year, while she covered all of the children's plays, ran the touring company, taught Acting I and the improvisation class. Mrs. Herman became my new mentor during the entire time I spent at Shenandoah. She was the first teacher I had that did not mince words. She was soft in the way she gave a note, but the respect she commanded was unbelievable. You couldn't help but to listen and wait with baited breath to see what she was going to say next. Because I was younger then, I had a problem of rushing through my moments and not connecting my thoughts. She taught me that, "Plays are silences surrounded by words, find your moment and don't move on till your next thought comes in." This is very similar to what we learn in our voice class here at the University of Louisville. A few times I had to remind myself of this when Dr. Frye would note I was rushing through my lines during *Richard III* rehearsals.

Professionalism

One thing that really excited me about going to Shenandoah were the two separate touring companies we had on campus. The BFA Music Theatre students had Music Theatre Ensemble where they learned a musical revue that would tour to surrounding high schools in the area. They tended only to perform about four to six times a semester. This is sad considering all the work that went into a forty-five minute musical revue with a cast of around fifteen. The BA acting students were cast in their own touring children's piece and this group was called the Shenandoah Showmakers. They performed every Tuesday and Thursday for an entire semester traveling the entire state of Virginia. I was gifted with performing with this group for three years. It is normally a one time gig, but Mrs. Herman liked my acting and work ethic and each year asked me to return to lead the group, play stage manager and act. This was perfect training for the job I would land in Ohio just four years later.

Besides the training for the children's theatre, what I gained from this school was more of a professional attitude than acting skills. I know I learned a great deal about acting, but I know how to sell myself as an actor and how to act professionally in a show. These attributes I found are paramount for a director to want to work with you. We ran rehearsals as if we were Equity actors, and they treated us as if we were in a professional company. Here is where I was instilled with my professional attitude. I was taught that it is all right to ask questions, but

one must say “thank you” and “got it” during notes. This was not a time to argue with the director or complain about something that happened in rehearsal. To this day I carry myself in this way and am often get shocked when a student back talks to the faculty or director. I noticed when a lead performer acts with respect towards the stage manager, director, and cast members those in the room will soon follow suit. When I have the chance to be the leader of these simple qualities, like I did during *Richard*, I take it to heart.

By the time I graduated from Shenandoah I was well known for my children’s theatre work and I had won a prestigious summer job with Totem Pole Playhouse as an intern/actor. That summer I was to perform with my teacher Mrs. Herman and Jean Stapleton in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, along with Curtis Armstrong playing Dr. Einstein. Unfortunately for us Mrs. Stapleton took a TV film job in California and was not able to join us that summer.

What I learned that summer was how to memorize a script quickly and correctly. The leads had been given their scripts months in advance as I had been for *Richard*, but many of the interns were not notified of what roles we were playing until the first day of rehearsal. This company worked in two week runs: You would rehearse during the day while performing at night, and being an intern you also helped build the set and hang lights. This again is an invaluable learning experience to see what really happens to get a play on its feet in a quick, but professional setting.

Graduate Work, Take One

During my last semester at Shenandoah and my summer in Pennsylvania at Totem Pole Playhouse I worked on getting into Graduate school. I auditioned for Purdue University, Northern Illinois, Western Illinois, The Ohio State University, Southern Methodist University, Penn State University, University of Cincinnati, and the University of Virginia. After much deliberation and consideration I decided on Northern Illinois for my graduate studies. This was one of the more difficult decisions I had ever made and for a long time it was one I often wish I could have changed. As I get older and look back on my choices, I see that each one has guided me to where I am today and helped me to perform *Richard III* with success. My schooling at Northern Illinois may not have been a success, but I was able to glean a few techniques out of the experience, like Meisner's repetition, and the Alexander floor work. Some of these I still use today in my work.

Acting Techniques

Northern Illinois is a Meisner-based acting school, and this time I knew what I was getting into. Gene Terruso is a certified Meisner teacher and was a close friend of Mr. Sanford Meisner. Mr. Terruso spent many years working side by side with Meisner so his work comes as a first source. The Meisner Technique is a hard one to grasp. The technique has many different acting exercises that

the students work on before even picking up a script. Basically these exercises develop actions, objectives, obstacles, subtext, and purpose, so the actor can forget about himself and live truthfully in the moment. Many of these things are also taught here at the University of Louisville, but through a different technique.

Even though this was a very dark time in my life, having no money and being so far from home, I was able to take a few things away with me. I found I was quite fond of the Alexander work and what little work we did with styles. The truthfulness of how someone talks to you in our Meisner work, and how it makes you react to that situation, are still ingrained in my acting today. One day a fellow student turned to Mr. Terruso and asked, "What if my partner gives me nothing? How do I work with that?" Mr. Terruso sat his coffee down, took off his glasses and said "How does it make you feel that they give you nothing?" She said "It pisses me off!" "There", he said "they gave you something; you will only get nothing from them when they are dead and that should still affect you. Class dismissed!" After a year in Illinois I decided I was neither ready nor right for this particular program, or the area I lived in, or for graduate work in general, so I left for Columbus, Ohio to find work.

Columbus, Ohio and the Children's Theatre

After only a few months of living in Columbus I was hired by Camp Cedar, a residential summer camp for boys located in Casco, Maine where I taught drama and the summer musical. This was the first time I could really give back

and share my skills with those interested in the arts. The summer was fun and I learned a lot about myself. Patience, control, and a certain level-headedness were needed to stay sane. All of these boys were from very affluent families and often challenged me and my position. Looking back now, it was very much like Richard being questioned if he could or should rule, minus the beheadings and murders- (although the thought crossed many a counselor's mind). Overall it was a great job and because of it I was hired by Columbus Children's Theatre to teach some of their after school classes when I returned to Ohio.

For a couple years it was hard to make ends meet and there weren't a lot of jobs in the area, especially ones that paid. The Children's Theatre was good, but not very sustainable. For the first few years in Columbus I was performing in their mainstage shows and hoping for an opening in their professional touring company. Finally after three years there was a changeover in the touring cast and I was given the role of Road Manager and Actor. Now I was acting full time and getting paid for it. In 1997 I was making Twenty-five dollars a performance and we were doing one to two shows a day. I thought I had finally made it!

By the time I left the Children's Theatre in 2009 I had used my skills as a self-promoter to get the touring company of actors full benefits and forty dollars a show, performing two to four times a day. I went from a part-time employee to a full time salaried member of the company. This was one of my biggest accomplishments to date. Not only was I acting in the touring company, I was also promoted to booking manager. Very much like Richard rising in the ranks, I was on my way up. (But again without the murders and beheadings!)

Mentorship

During my years in Columbus, I was offered several directing jobs; most were at the Children's Theatre, but a few were for other local theatres. I believe it was because of the commitment I showed and my desire to make the companies I work with stronger and better.

While at the Children's Theatre I mentored many students who I taught in classes and directed in shows. Four of those students are now working professionally in Los Angeles for Disney and the USA network, one is currently on tour with *Mary Poppins*, and another just opened *Newsies* on Broadway.

It was a very difficult decision to leave Ohio, but I had hit the ceiling there and I wasn't going to be able to grow much more as an actor. The work there was becoming dull and not so challenging. If I had stuck around for a thirteenth year I would have performed *Jack and the Beanstalk* for a fourth time and *Sleeping Beauty* for a third time. This just gives you an idea of how stale I was feeling, even though every day I stepped on stage I loved it. Let's not forget about whenever we pulled up at a school and the kids would recognize me from previous years. I felt like royalty and was treated like a rock star! I was influencing children I didn't know about theatre and the arts.

PART II

THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

In 2009 I found my new home for the next three years, the University of Louisville in Louisville, KY. I chose this school after a long and exhaustive search for a graduate school that would fit my wants and needs. What I was looking for was faculty that had decent credentials, functional theatrical spaces, and a safe area in which the school was located with possible connections to professional theatres, none of which I found here in Louisville. I tease; actually many of my needs were met here.

Mentoring

During my first visit and audition I felt very comfortable here, the faculty was friendly and I knew there was a mutual interest in working together. I even spent the afternoon driving around town with Dr. Frye where she showed me the sights and we continued to talk about the program. I was sold. I decided to go to the University of Louisville. My next life chapter was about to begin.

The department here is small and many of the faculty members are dually trained in disciplines. Professor Jim Tompkins is trained in movement and acting

while Dr. Rinda Frye is trained in voice and acting. Most of my time here at the University is spent with Professor Tompkins and Dr. Frye. They were to become “my parents” if you will. They are both very talented professional working artists and teachers. They are wonderful to work with, but their styles are very different in many ways. They both know how to guide us to what they need us to learn and they do it with a firm loving hand, although sometimes more firm than loving. I consider both of these people mentors as much as I consider them my teachers. During scenes in class and during rehearsals, moments of their teaching will pop into my head and keep me focused on the task at hand. I often hear Dr. Frye saying, “Will, stay on your breath.” While Professor Tompkins is saying, “clunk, it just died, do you feel that out here?” Both have extensive backgrounds in training and both have helped me to mount my portrayal of Richard.

ACTING TECHNIQUES

Movement

I have to admit I think my movement class here was the most challenging class I have ever taken, the physicality of the work and the stamina needed had been lost sitting in a van traveling Ohio eating fast food. Our first year was committed to building our core and sense of body through pantomime, acrobatics, yoga, and group exercises. The group exercises consisted of a

theme, like “circles and curves”, “the wakeup”, and everyone’s favorite, “Pinokapop.” Within these exercises we were to work together to build a cohesive piece based on the theme. One of my more successful pieces was circles and curves. Three of us were pretty much cars connected on a track like a roller coaster as we spun about the room in a frenzied manor.

Through the pantomime we found the control we needed to do the simplest things as chopping wood, jumping a fence, and lifting weights. These are also very good exercises to learn as an actor, because I have found many times to use some of these in my work. During my performance in *How Orasanmi Chose His Head*, I was able to use the wall climb, and chopping wood. This show and *Richard III* were very physical, and my movement class did wonders to get me through it physically and safely.

Year two was probably my most favorite of the two years of movement. We had moved on to mask work and we learned how to build stories using the mask. First semester was neutral mask. Here we learned the basics of moving the body while wearing a mask, the concentration needed and basic story telling through the use of movement without sound. Second semester we were introduced to the masks of *Commedia Del Arte* and character masks. We were given new parameters and were often allowed to speak with the mask. The culmination of our character masks was a group performance at the Speed Art Museum where we interacted with the patrons and the surrounding art installations. Having a good sense of one’s body and certain comfortability was

needed on this day as we performed in our all white, full bodied leotards with enormous, over sized masks.

Many of us came away with a number of things in this class, the comfort level gained with our bodies, strength conditioning and stamina, along with being able to work well in an ungoverned group. I give credit to my professionalism as I was able to guide as well as extinguish fires among our groups when arguments would erupt about the piece and how we wanted to present it.

The conditioning and stamina work was a major help with my work in *Richard III*. Although back problems have plagued me for many years, having this training helped to alleviate and assist me to choose the correct way to hold my disability as Richard and the proper way to warm up and stay ahead of any pain and discomfort. As Antony Sher says in his book *Year of the King: An Actors Diary and Sketchbook* "Richard is notorious for crippling actors. They spend years afterwards on osteopaths' couches" (Sher, pg 98). Trust me; I know what he means now!

Voice

Our two years of voice consisted much of Kristin Linklater's voice work. Using her book *Freeing the Natural Voice*, we learned how to connect language to breath and voice.

This approach to voice is designed to liberate the natural voice and thereby develop a vocal technique that serves the freedom of

human expression. The basic assumption of the work is that everyone possesses a voice capable of expressing, through a two-to four -octave natural pitch range, whatever gamut of emotion, complexity of mood, and subtlety of thought he or she experiences...Hence, the emphasis here is on the removal of the blocks that inhibit the human instrument as distinct from, but not excluding, the development of a skillful musical instrument. (Linklater, pg 7)

This work is to build the voice naturally, not to build the “voice beautiful” as some voice classes teach. This quote is the model of her work and what she wants the student to learn and come away with. There were many exercises we used to reach this goal of having a “free voice.” From learning her progression for the voice warm up to Alexander work, we are given the tools to open our voices and bodies to the work. What was also beneficial in the voice class was Dr. Frye had all of us lead the warm up not only for a purely educational reason, but it gets the progression in your body when you focus on having to share it with a group. During our rehearsals of *Measure for Measure* and *Richard III* the graduate students took turns each night leading the cast members in this warm up which was beneficial for many reasons. We brought the group dynamic together because they were being led by a cast member and we got to solidify the progression in our bodies.

Second year of voice is a continuation of the progression and instilling the work of Linklater and Alexander. The additions of dialects are now a part of our daily work. The dialects are great for me as an actor, but were not all that useful for my work in *Richard III*.

Research

Another really useful class I had here at the University of Louisville that helped me in my preparation for *Richard III* was an English class on Shakespeare taught by Dr. Julia Dietrich. I had never had an actual class on Shakespeare and this one had us reading ten of his plays, a couple medieval plays and scholarly pieces from *Shakespeare Quarterly*. It was by far one of my more difficult classes in the fact that the reading was extensive, along with the late hours of rehearsals, but it was by far one of the more rewarding classes as it introduced me to many of his pieces including *Measure for Measure* which the University of Louisville would perform the following year. This class also gave me a leg up on being introduced to *Shakespeare Quarterly* where I found some great articles on and about *Richard III*, like *A Monster Great Deformed*, and *Replicating Richard*.

Dr. Dietrich's Shakespeare class opened up many ways of looking at and studying Shakespeare for me. Here is just a taste of what was expected to pass her course successfully. She wanted us to identify imagery, themes, patterns, and structure in Shakespeare's plays. She had us discuss through writing and class participation the ways in which the plays have shaped the cultures in which they have been performed. Not only did we study his work, she had us summarize and evaluate recent critical articles in *Shakespeare Quarterly*. For our final we had to research a Shakespearean production and write a well-reasoned argument interpreting the evidence uncovered by research.

My paper was based on Laurence Olivier and Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet*. In it I compared the script cuttings and the overall look of the two films. Olivier was famous for cutting his scripts and, like *Richard III*, his *Hamlet* was no different. In his version of *Hamlet* he completely cut out the sub story of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Many scholars were up in arms about this, but the story worked and it was in my opinion a little easier to follow. As for Branagh, he did a full uncut version, with short flashbacks filling in any questions often left open for the theatre patron. For example, one question many people ask about Hamlet and Ophelia is, "Are Hamlet and Ophelia intimate sexually?" Branagh answered this in a down and dirty sexual flashback. Coming in at nearly four and a half hours, it is a large spectacle. I was only able to make it through the whole piece because of the cinematography and the beauty of the sets and costumes. Having done this paper gave me new resources like *Shakespeare Quarterly* to begin my work on *Richard III*.

Coming out of this class gave me a deeper appreciation of Shakespeare and his characters through open discussion and research. Using the text we would scan for upper class or lower class clues, like speaking in verse or prose, which helps for character work as an actor. The use of patterns was also introduced to me in this class. This was a basic concept that completely slipped my mind, but as I found later during my work of *Richard III* many patterns emerged. Patterns like scripture usage, the supernatural and the use of the "boar." Looking at what characters say about each other in the play is just as important as what your character says and does. Here too I found more patterns

in *Richard III*. Here are some of the names Richard is called, some by his own mother, “bottled spider”, “bunched back toad”, “abortive, rooting hog”, and just simple “villain.” These are just a few of the techniques learned in Dr. Dietrich’s class that I used in my work with *Richard III*.

I only wished we could have read *Richard III*, which would have given me an even better connection with the character. Having studied *Measure for Measure* in her class gave me a better understanding of the play before we started rehearsing it. It also has proved to be an advantage for my directing work, as I have currently been hired to direct *Measure for Measure* for Kentucky Shakespeare’s High School Group, “The Globe Players.” All of the classes we were provided are beneficial to our acting, but I chose to point out these three specifically because they gave me a direct relationship to *Richard III*.

PART III
RICHARD III

Every day actors make choices that can develop, build, or change their careers. They can choose what play to audition for, what company to audition for, maybe even what city to live in to launch their careers. Some actors have been known to follow directors to build on a work ethic that goes deeper than many people can imagine. The actor/director combination is strong, but we can't always choose it; sometimes it is accidentally found and can build or crush the work of the actor.

Once the actor has been cast in the production the text comes into the picture. How do the actor and director work together to learn and build the production so it will be understood and fulfilled to the standards of the director? Does the actor always understand the eye of the director? What happens when the process of the actor interferes with the process of the director? Does the show suffer? Can it make the production stronger because the company works harder to strive for excellence? Many of these questions come in to play when actors and directors are new to each other. There is always a moment of "Is this person crazy? They want me to do what?" This was my initial reaction when Dr.

Frye told me we were to look at Richard with a comedic side, but inevitably there is the “ah hah” moment and this allows things to spring forward. Or at least we hope most productions have this moment!

Mentoring and Directing Process

When I started at the University of Louisville in 2009 I had only performed two Shakespeare plays. One I mentioned earlier was in 1985, when I played Speed in *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, and in 1992 I played Hymen and Oliver Martext in *As You Like It* for Stockton State College in New Jersey. I was pretty much a virgin to Shakespeare and then I met Dr. Frye. For the next three years I performed every Shakespeare play she directed. I think I knew from my first performance of Jaques in *As You Like It*, my thesis was going to be Shakespeare. How did I know this? I want to say it was the way I worked with Dr. Frye. Right from the beginning I had a comfort level with her. I felt free enough to experiment and to try things out of my comfort zone.

My very first role I performed at The University of Louisville was Jaques in *As You Like It*. This was an overwhelming role for someone not well versed in Shakespeare and afterwards many friends and some of the university faculty told me I had a good grasp of the language. This was hard for me to believe since I was new to Shakespeare and the language always scared me. But a short three years later I landed the role of *Richard III*, one of the largest roles next to *Hamlet*.

Acting Technique

Dr. Frye has a different approach to working Shakespeare and it comes from her training with Kristin Linklater and working with Shakespeare and Company in Lennox, Massachusetts. The process is called “Dropping in and Feeding.” Basically you are always “fed” your lines by a reader, usually another actor in the show. This is a responsibility taken on by everyone in the cast, and builds a strong, dynamic trust between everyone. Not only does a trust develop between the cast members while doing this process, it is another way of learning the lines, characterization and the story itself.

The director always begins by dropping in the show or as much of the show as possible. Before you even stand on your feet you sit around in a large circle and “drop in” as much of the play as you can. In my case, for *Richard III*, I sat alone, surrounded by my fellow actors with Dr. Frye sitting behind me asking me questions about the opening monologue and how I felt as she “fed” me the monologue. All I do as the actor is to repeat the physical lines of the play while mentally rolling the questions asked around in my head. It goes a little like this:

Rinda: “Now is the winter of our discontent”

Me: “Now is the winter of our discontent”

Rinda: Why is “now” the first line?

“Now is the winter of our discontent”

Me: “Now is the winter of our discontent”

Rinda: What are you discontent about?

“Now is the winter of our discontent”

Me: “Now is the winter of our discontent”

Rinda: How do you feel about winter?
"Now is the winter of our discontent"
Me: "Now is the winter of our discontent"

This goes on for as long as the person dropping in feels you have experimented enough with the line or word being dropped in. The job of the person dropping in is not to give you line readings, but to ask questions to give you more options to think about. Here is where "table work" or a tabled reading of the show many companies work with comes into play, but I don't think sitting around a table just reading and talking about the play will get you as deep into the character as the dropping in process does. This is done for every character until you finish the play or time dictates to move on to the "feeding."

"Feeding" is when we move to our feet and do what is called "impulse blocking." At this point you move when and where you feel you should be, all the while having another actor "feeding" you the lines. At first it takes a lot of focus to get through a scene because each actor has a feeder standing directly behind them feeding them their lines while following them on stage. I'll be truthful and say when I first tried this process I thought Dr. Frye was crazy. Then I had my "ah hah" moment, which came during *As You Like It*, and was able to adjust to this new process of learning a script.

This turning point or "ah hah" in understanding and dealing with Shakespeare came on the first day I was on my feet in rehearsals playing Jaques in *As You Like It*. I was not all that familiar with my lines and the process of dropping in. Basically I was floundering with the lines and felt so self-conscious I

did not understand, or really “hear”, the lines being fed to me by my line partner. I was shutting down; I wasn’t allowing the lines to flow into or through me. After I went through the scene numerous times and progressively got worse, I was sitting in the hallway beating myself up when Dr. Frye came by and told me not to worry about it. She told me it happens to many people new to dropping in and then we realized that particular monologue had been skipped and was never dropped in. This is when I realized how important it was to drop in your piece before you are on your feet being fed by your line partner. I also found that Dr. Frye is a director that takes account for all that happens. She apologized for skipping that portion and took some of the responsibility for my disastrous rehearsal. That day I knew I wanted to work with her again.

Within the next three years working with Dr. Frye in class and on shows we built a strong connection and I knew she had gained a trust that I could do a role like Richard. But I was not sure I had the trust in myself to pull it off. The largest thing in my way was the text itself. Everyone knows Shakespeare is a specialized verbal gymnasium of ifs, thous, thys and thines. Those weren’t necessarily the problem for me; it was the grunt work of the memorization that got in the way. Richard himself has over two thousand lines before cutting (or so it feels like it), so maybe a thousand five hundred after cuts would need to be committed to memory, and not just to memory but to heart and into your body.

Rinda was always behind me giving me positive feedback, as well as a few of my fellow graduate students who were always encouraging and helping me to stay positive. They told me to work hard and look forward to the fun of the

performance. Every time I thought of performing this role I felt nauseated and sick. Me? Playing *Richard III*?

Language and Text

How does one begin to memorize a show like *Richard III*? I knew in March of 2011 that I was cast in the show. Although I did not have the cuts for our production which would open on October 9th of that same year, I began memorizing in May and spent an entire summer at my parents' house in New Jersey doing just that so I did not have any distractions.

I have a unique way of learning the lines for a show. As I mentioned earlier I have always had difficulty learning and memorizing lines so I found a way to help me do it verbatim. Sometimes I spend time writing out the full lines for each character I may be working on, but since *Richard* was so large I had to forgo that and go to the next step. Basically I write out each line of Shakespeare just using the first letter of each word. It looks something like this:

N I t w o o d
M g s b t s o y
A t c t l u o h
I t d b o t o b

I do this so I can scan the lines as I memorize, but I am not cheating by looking at the whole word or line. Some people choose to read the script over and over and some people like to put their lines on tape to listen to them whenever they

have time. I have even heard some people like to hang upside down while reading their lines; it has something to do with the blood rushing to their head that helps the lines stick. I have tried many of these options and I found writing out the lines is the best one for me. The text I wrote above is as follows.

Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this son of York
And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house
In the deep bosom of the ocean buried (I.i)

This way of working has really been a boon to my work, and those that have worked with me know my difficulties of memorization. Is it my age? Is it the text? Is it nerves? One may never know this answer.

When the cuts finally came to me in August, it was like relearning them all over again. I had gotten as far as Act III by the time I returned to Louisville in mid July, but I had to go back and start all over again. It was very frustrating, but if I had not started when I had I would not have gotten it all done. In the end, I had one full week before technical rehearsals where I did not need to call for a line and was fully committed to the script.

How does having your lines memorized prior to entering the first rehearsal help in the process? Well that brings us back the process of dropping in and feeding that Dr. Frye applies to her actors. Having done this process before and found how disastrous it could be without prior studying, I came to the first rehearsal of *Richard III* well versed in the opening monologue and Acts I, II, and

III. This gave me the ability to react to the questions more than having to remember the full line of text I needed to repeat. This is where I should have started with Jaques's monologue mentioned earlier. This frees you to fully react to your acting partner and to answer truthfully.

That first day with Dr. Frye sitting behind me and the entire cast sitting around me was overwhelming and exciting. Then we started the dropping in. It was a fulfilling time and I discovered many things about myself and Richard. There was one point where Dr. Frye was talking about my deformity and my childhood, and I happened to look up at Hannah, the lovely, sweet girl who would be playing my wretched mother and I saw she had a tear falling from her eye. Dr. Frye was asking "did children make fun of you as a child", "did your mother treat you badly", "was she horrible to you?" This entire time I was repeating "Deform'd, unfinish'd, sent before my time..." Having all the eyes on me and my mother crying in front of me opened something inside me I can't explain and I broke. The tears flowed forth and a real moment was discovered. This is the embodiment of dropping in. This may not have been a comedic moment, but it was a moment none the less found by the use of dropping in, not by door work, or sitting at a table discussing the play.

One other important gain of this process is the actor can use both his hands from day one. They can hold another character, carry a prop, and simply be free to move around as they feel without the hindrance of a script in hand. This is a large benefit to an actor especially when so many of the scenes in *Richard III* are physical and you need both hands.

Does this process have any drawbacks? I did miss not having a true read through of the play. I can see how this is a great learning tool, but after talking with many of the other actors in the play they said they never read the play and couldn't say what was happening except for the scenes they were in. I think this is a problem. Since we are working with many non-professional actors I think we need to read the play together or they won't do it. To me, this would only add one extra day to the rehearsal process and since many people are not in the room during the dropping in, as it is an option to watch if you are not in the scene, I noticed many actors leaving to do other things than to stay and watch. Thus I believe a reading of the play is essential. In defense of Dr. Frye I did bring this up to her sometime in January after the show had closed and she commented she has done read throughs in the past and would have liked to have done one for Richard, but the time was so short we needed to spend it on other things.

If I should ever perform *Richard III* again many of these previous processes would still be in the back of my mind but I doubt I will find many groups doing the "dropping in" unless I luckily find myself working for Shakespeare and Company. Would I change the way I learned and worked on Richard? I would have to say no. I sometimes enjoy the process of dropping in. There are many things you may miss by carrying a script. You lose the connection between you and your partner and the trust built during the dropping in. Also building a trust between you and your feeder is just as important as working with your scene partner. How else could you build a connection and cast bonding but by literally learning the show together like this?

I think a read through of a script is always necessary and that will be in my process. Dropping in large sections of plays and monologues will also be in my process. Doing this I can ask as many questions as possible and open many more doors for my character rather than just walking around reading from the script, not looking at my partner. This process is also a better way for me to memorize and to be ready for rehearsals than waiting for the first rehearsal to walk around with a script.

As an actor I don't think this process works for everyone. After talking to many cast members I say this because they are not open to the experience. At first I was resistant to it too, but I eventually learned its benefits over other processes. For me, it is by far the best option. From memorization to the understanding of the text, I think and feel the dropping in brought me to a deeper level of understanding than I would have gotten solely from the Stanislavski and Meisner methods. Now there are times where my personal adventures and difficulties would benefit a role, but being so different from Richard one needs to find ways to understand and imbue him with traits that can be believable and truthful, and I think I was able to find that in the dropping in where I may not have discovered them with another processes.

Research

Before I could even stand on stage I needed to know more about who the real Richard was. By reading history books and watching documentaries I got a basic vision of the true Richard. When I was ready to start building my idea of who Richard was, I began with a character analysis. If I was having a particular problem with a scene I would do a scene breakdown for each case. Things I would ask were...Who was I talking to? What do I want from them? How will they block what I need and what do I need to do to get them out of my way? Not only does research on a character help, but what does the cutting of the script say to the audience about the characters and what does it mean to the actor?

The first thing I learned was that Richard was not deformed as Shakespeare writes him (Monarchy, DVD); he was quite strong and nimble! There are rumors he was born early and frail, but nothing can be truly substantiated. However, his final years prove he was the physically powerful murderer/ruler. By the time he was eighteen, his father was dead, killed by Margaret; his Brother Edward is King, his Brother Clarence is locked in the tower and he is known as an effective hatchet man.

The most difficult aspect of building *Richard* was tying the historical, "hatchet man", to Shakespeare's witty, and conniving, *Richard*. I had to look at what was useful to me as the actor. Since we were leaning towards a more playful comedic *Richard*, I had to let a lot of the historical past go. It gave me great insight to the time and place, but according to some accounts Clarence

was more the aggressor to the throne than Richard. Shakespeare combines a lot of Clarence's deeds, like trying to kill Edward, and the nephews and incorporates them into what we know of Richard today (Monarchy, DVD).

The following is a piece of my character analysis used for the Anne and Richard scene. As an actor portraying a historical character there comes a time where history stops and invention takes over. To give myself a full rounded character I had to make things up that I as Richard would have done. This includes finding where in his fictional life the comedy we use in the play would enter his life and be useful in the play. Many don't often go this far into a characters development; this is why I believe I was the correct choice for this role. I can't perform a role whether in class or a show without extensive research.

Richard, Duke of Gloucester: (1452-1485) was born on October 2, 1452 at Fotheringay Castle in Northamptonshire. My father was Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York and mother was Cecily Neville. I was the youngest of four brothers but am now third in line for the crown. My oldest brother, Rutland was murdered during a battle with Queen Margaret, widow of King Henry VI. Currently my elder brother Edward is king. Being sickly he will be passing the crown to our middle brother George, Duke of Clarence. I have intercepted letters and told stories of Clarence's plot to try and gain the throne from my brother. When Edward hears these stories he will no doubt have Clarence beheaded. Having Anne as my wife will surely make it easier to gain the crown after Clarence is gone and Edward passes.

I have been a loyal and hard working brother. Although my life was rough since birth, I have striven for excellence and deserve the crown. I am one who does not stop at anything. At the age of eighteen I was already known as the "hatchet man." Everything I have been asked to do, including the murders of those that fought against us, I have done and done it without question. I deserve the crown.

My life was short but it was not meaningless. I was only thirty one when killed at Bosworth Field after winning the crown and reigning for two

years. During my short life, I took many lives and manipulated many people. This included my nephews, whom I had murdered in the tower, the niece I tried to marry to keep the state from falling, and both of my brothers whom I brought down by slander and murder. I did all of this for the crown!

I was raised Catholic, but do not necessarily follow their beliefs or follow the church unless I can use it for my will, but I can and will use the bible in many ways to fight for what I want and need. For pleasure I enjoy jousting and working on my skills of war. I practice regularly in rapier and dagger, broad sword and shield. I often use my disability as an advantage hiding daggers in my brace to surprise the enemy. I do not drink to excess as it affects your ability to think and fight, but I am of the mind to get my opponent drunk to win.

During a difficult birth I was born with a palsied left side. There is a large mass/growth on my left shoulder blade, which forces me to walk hunched over. The left leg has a small twist in the thigh bone pronouncing a limp when I walk. Many treatments were tried but to no avail. The worst was when I was a young child the entire leg was braced with heavy awkward poles and straps, but this hindered everything I did including walking and riding a horse. Eventually I made my own brace focusing on the thigh area. It was not a cure but it helped the leg from turning inward which forced me to lean forward causing me to trip and fall. I don't fall much anymore, but if I get excited and lose concentration I will stumble now and again.

As a child I loved to read and considered myself quite witty. Often when being picked on I would have to use my smarts and wits to win these battles, and as I got older I was able to sharpen my tongue. I became a force to be reckoned with. I considered myself a great debater, but not everyone felt the same way. Using a joke in a very inopportune time is very pleasurable for me; it knocks my foe off kilter. As I often do when dealing with the ex-Queen Margaret. This woman is just downright crazy and I find it entertaining to play with her and get her excited. I enjoy pushing her buttons, knowing full well she can't control herself and will eventually do herself harm.

In the current scene I am going to attempt to woo, Lady Anne. She is in the process of burying her father in law. Just recently she buried her husband Edward, both of whom I have killed in battle. I have eyed Anne from a far for many years and with her hand of marriage I will be another step closer to the winning of the crown.

It is mid afternoon in the town square; the weather is a mild autumn. Anne is following the casket of her father in law king Henry VI. There

are only two pall bearers in this sad, bleak procession. When first approaching Anne I must be careful not to tip my hand at what I am trying to do, so first I play a little cat and mouse to throw her off guard. You can tell she is startled to see me and does not quite know what to do with me. My language is short and brief and to the point at first, but soon I realize there are real feelings here. She is quite a beautiful and stunning woman. When she is lamenting over the corpse I strike. What does she think of me? I know she is angry for her loss, but I did it for my betterment. She spits at me. Why? She can't hold that against me. It is done all the time, besides she can be mine now!

I admit to loving her and how much I want to be with her. She is wavering, caught off guard again. This is working, I'm going to win her, but she continues to pull away. I can tell she likes me, she does not run or leave and stops pulling away. This is it! I kiss her! She does not spit at me again. If she hates me so much she has to kill me or live with me, I know she won't be able to kill me so I thrust the knife into her hands and admit to all of the murders. I beg her to kill me or to love me. She is speechless; she doesn't know what to do. She's crying. She pauses. She can't do it. She's crying. She is crying tears for me. I've done it. She has relented. She will be mine, but not for long!

As you can see, where there is no history about Richard's background or where Shakespeare goes so far left of center in his characterization, I as the actor had to have answers for every question posed in the script. I made the decision Richard has always had his eye on Anne. By truly admitting his love to her the scene is stronger and less of a "play" for the crown, although he is using her and doesn't keep her, there is true emotion here. The audience is even drawn in here and can feel Richard may not be all that bad.

Cutting

A small cut in the scene informs the audience of one thing, while another cut tells something different. For example, I want to compare the choices Dr. Frye made in cutting and the choices I made as an actor while performing the wooing scene in *Richard III*. These will be compared to the same scene performed by Laurence Olivier in his 1955 film version of the play. I choose to compare these two performances because I feel they tell two different stories while using the same script.

The first thing that cannot be overlooked is the cutting of the script. I realize the choice of cutting is not always the actor's, but since Olivier directed, produced, wrote and starred in his version it says a lot about what is said and seen.

In the Olivier version he cuts the scene in half, adds a time change, and drops another scene in between these two wooing scenes. Part one of the wooing scene is extremely short. His Richard confronts the pallbearers, Anne questions his existence, and he answers with her father in law "is better off in heaven" and saying her life would be better off with him in "her bed chamber." She spits on him before walking off with the corpse (which does not happen in Shakespeare's script, Richard takes it with him) while he laments on not keeping her long but he will have her. It is not clear on how much time has passed, but it seems to be at least a day or two has transpired between scenes. The second part starts with Richard finding Anne praying in the court yard over her husband's

grave. Again, this does not happen in the actual play. The script only refers to the death of her husband. The first line he says to her is “Gentle Lady Anne is not the causer of the untimely death of your brave prince as blameful as the executioner?” This is a modified line referring to her husband opposed to all of the Plantagenets killed by Richard. The scene then runs to the end with a few cuts here and there but nothing that really affects the outcome more than the choice of breaking the scene in two and putting time between them.

What does this say? As an actor I find this a cheat. Many scholars talk about how difficult the wooing scene is and how hard it is for the actor to make the change in Anne believable. Yes, if I cut out all of the horrible, mean, difficult lines I could make Richard the charmer that Olivier did. Freud even comments on this section of the play; “Richard does not say everything; it merely gives a hint, and leaves us to fill up the indications.” (Levine, pg 237) I believe Olivier chooses to make it easy on himself.

I feel he bastardized the play, and if I gave Anne “time to cool down” and come at her with a different tactic my performance would look easy and appealing. We cut the script for time purposes not for ease of acting. When does the cutting and rearranging of scenes no longer become Shakespeare’s voice but the director’s or actor’s? To me, it looks like Olivier doesn’t feel comfortable with Shakespeare’s story so he cuts and chops it to fit “his view” of Richard. He even has Anne walk off with the corpse, when in actuality Shakespeare has Richard take it to another cemetery unworthy of the corpse. I believe this version shows a

charming, calculating Richard, but not the powerful, forceful, disturbing one that is written for in the script.

So how did I perform the same scene to accomplishment? Our scene between Richard and Anne was primarily uncut. The only lines we cut were ones that referred to things cut from other parts of the play, like the short section where Richard confronts the pallbearers and since they are not carrying halberds, those lines sounded out of context. Richard tends to repeat himself, and some of those lines were cut for brevity. So overall, our scene plays continuously till the end of the scene, keeping most to all of Shakespeare's words intact.

My choices were made from the heart. I played Richard as if he truly liked Anne, that he truly loved and wanted her. Yes, he was awkward, but he was still charming, and kind of funny. In my choices Anne was a close friend when they were younger as is found in the true history of Richard. Tactics I used in wooing her were humor, tactile contact and truthfulness. I can't count how many time I touched or caressed Anne in our scene. Olivier touches her only twice and he does not choose to kiss her as I do on "lips are made for kissing lady..."

Many actors choose to play Richard with a "wink" as if he is saying "watch how she is falling for me." like Ian McKellen in his very abbreviated wooing scene shot for his 1998 film version. These actors chose not to fall in love with her or to allow her to love him. In these choices it isn't as fun to hear the audience's reaction when they feel like they were tricked as was heard often at the end of our scene. I on the other hand chose along with the director to find the humor

and humanity of the character. He was someone's son, brother, uncle. He was a child at one time in his life. My characterization was about his humanity not his murderous dark side. That is something that came forth because of what he wanted, not who he was.

The next part of *Richard III* Dr. Frye and I talked about was where the comedy would prevail over the heavy drama. Some scenes were easy to find the comedy in and some not so easy, but because of my training and openness to a director it was fun finding and exploring the script in this fashion. As we started our rehearsals the first thing we found was that comedy was prevalent in the first few acts, but once Richard becomes King and things begin to go wrong the comedy slips away along with Richard's grasp on reality.

The opening monologue was a challenge in finding the comedy. As I studied other versions and listened to their interpretations, many went along the way of anger and disgust. Olivier added so many lines from *Henry VI Part III* it didn't even resemble the opening that Shakespeare wrote. McKellen spends so much time in a bathroom doing his speech I found it strange to follow.

I used timing, wit and some physical gestures to help the comedy come forward. I wouldn't say I forced it, but found different ways of pronouncing the joke. For example in the opening monologue when talking about "and descant on my own deformity" I was able to take a moment and ogle myself in the shadow of the spot light. Posing and enjoying my shadow here allowed the audience to enjoy it too. This continued with me pulling the audience in with me as I told them in an excited manner what I planned to do throughout the play. Pushing the

audience away or performing Richard as a mean, disgruntled person would turn off the audience. Why would they continue to follow along or even stay? The audience has to like Richard in some way, so why not try comedy and make them laugh? Although when they laugh they realize it is not exactly the right thing to be doing. You could hear them comment when I said “For then I’ll marry Warwick’s youngest daughter. What though I killed her husband and her father.” They knew it was wrong but couldn’t help but laugh. This was important for me playing Richard to keep them interested and on my side.

The wooing scene of Lady Anne early in the play was one of the more difficult scenes in which to find the comedy. Dr. Frye and I decided the comedy didn’t have to be overwhelming, but I needed to make the choice of really liking Anne. The biggest laugh in the scene would come on Richard’s line “Nay, he is dead”, referring to Anne’s comment that her husband was still alive. Even though he is goading her at this moment he is still likeable and a bit charming. His wit catches the audience off guard letting them laugh at a somewhat serious moment. He is very much a spider luring in the fly.

When actors chose to play this scene as a wink to the audience, saying “hey watch what I am going to do” this does not propel the scene or invite the audience into the world of these two characters. Dr. Frye and I both believed there has to be real emotion and connection between these two so when Richard laughs about having wooed her and won, the audience is really caught off guard for falling for it.

Two of my favorite comedic scenes in Richard are both in Act III. They are Scenes V and VII. In Scene V we see Richard as an actor as well as comedian. Richard has just had Hastings killed and is trying to get the vote from the Mayor of London. When the head of Hastings is “thrown in” I cradle it and hold it like it was my own child and then proceed to toss it around like a softball when the mayor is gone. Again by the surprise of character change of “loving friend” to “evil monarch” the audience is caught off guard and are heard laughing as we toss the head around. As one reviewer comments, this is exactly what we were going for.

As the violence escalates, so does the humor, Lord Hastings is beheaded, Richard and Buckingham celebrate with a game of catch, using a bloody bag. Guess what’s in the bag?! (Sawyer-Dailey, review)

This scene was great fun to work on. We discussed that it had to be believable or it would become a horrible joke gone bad. Dr. Frye felt having the head in this scene was important to show the different faces of Richard. For a while I was afraid it wouldn’t work. So many issues arose in rehearsal. For the head, we used a cantaloupe. This made a nice hollow “thud” when it hit the ground. It was also perfect for the weight of a head. However, as you often learn in rehearsals, things go horribly wrong. Early on when we first used the head it was placed in a burlap bag, but after a few tosses and misses it cracked open and began to run through the bag. Just imagine the juices flying around the stage as I tossed the head to Buckingham while trying to deliver the lines without

laughing or commenting on the mess the head was making. At one point while giving the line “infer the bastardy of Edward’s Children” I raised the dripping head to my mouth and drank the flowing juices, to the cast’s and crew’s disbelief. I knew I would never be able to do this in the performance, but I wanted to experiment and feel what would happen if people saw Richard do this. From then on, the cantaloupe was triple bagged in plastic for safety! Dr. Frye even mentioned why she let the scene continue out: it was to allow us a chance to deal with a bad situation on stage if something were to go wrong, and being professional we all did well in covering and dealing with the mess.

In Scene VII, Richard is just getting into full comedic swing before he comes crashing down. He is introduced reading from the bible and flogging himself. Buckingham knew when I was going to flog myself, but there were a few times I found something new and would flog myself improvisationally, making the moments a little more spontaneous and fun. When I fainted on the line “oh don’t swear cousin of Buckingham” I would usually get a few chuckles because the audience was in on the joke of the flogging and fainting. One night there was a little boy to my right hand side who said out loud. “Mommy, why is that strange man hitting himself?” It took everything I had not to answer him or to laugh.

PART IV

Conclusion

There are many comic moments in *Richard III* and I believe Dr. Frye, myself and the rest of the cast were able to find them and play them with ease and believability. Would I choose to use these techniques again if I were to play or direct Richard? I would say yes. Even though he is a despicable character he is still smart, charming and funny.

Does a novice, children's theatre actor have the skills to pull off *Richard III*? Yes. That actor, me, was given the right skills, direction and tools to bring Richard to life. Is it the quintessential Richard everyone talks about or thinks should be performed on stage? No, but it was a successful, entertaining Richard you don't often see or hear about. I leave you with a review that speaks for itself!

...and certainly Will Salmon's solid Richard III, who kept us amused and repulsed. He had a great mixture of evil, humor (yes, a good director and a good actor finds humor in all plays) and artistry in his crimes.

(Sawyer-Dailey, review)

How does this make me a better actor? As someone who was always nervous or a little frightened of the language, this role gave me the strength I needed to perform Shakespeare and other roles like it. I am stronger in my

choices I make with characters and the self confidence needed to attack a role like this. The level of confidence I have now for Shakespeare is twice as strong as it was before if not more. I even have the confidence now to direct his work, as I have been hired to direct *Measure for Measure* with the Kentucky Shakespeare Festival this summer. This work was truly invaluable and even with the ups and downs I would do it again in a heartbeat.

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Independent Study in Voice and Diction- Dr. Rinda Frye
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- Meisner Technique Master Class with Mr. Sanford Meisner and Kathryn Gately-Poole,
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