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“I love myself. I hate myself.” *Richard III*, dir. Evgeny Titov

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Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus,
William Shakespeare: *Richard III*, dir. Evgeny Titov

Design: Etienne Pluss

Costumes: Esther Bialas

Sound: Moritz Wallmüller

Light: Konstantin Sonneson

Dramaturgy: Janine Ortiz

Cast

Richard: André Kaczmarczyk

Queen Elizabeth: Judith Rosmair

Queen Margaret: Friederike Wagner

Duchess of York: Manuela Alphons

Lady Anne et al.: Claudia Hübbecker

Hastings: Blanka Winkler

Rivers: Pauline Kästner

Edward IV: Jochen Moser / Hans Meyer-Rosenthal

Princess Elizabeth: Sae Hanajima

Prince Edward: Luke Dopheide

Prince Richard: Theodor Taprogge / Rafael Wohlleber

Premiere: 2 September 2023

Running time: 2 hours

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- 1 Shakespeare's *Richard III* is a history play about the rise and fall of the last Plantagenet king, the Yorkist Richard of Gloucester, the hunchbacked antihero. Shakespeare, following the Tudor historiography of his time, depicts him as an arch-villain. As the third son, Richard was never to hope for the crown. In the play, however, plotting the murder of his middle brother and his nephews and waiting for his sickly eldest brother's death, Richard, in the manner of a perfect stage-Machiavel, succeeds in gaining the crown—albeit for a short time only. Ultimately, he is defeated by

the young Tudor hero Henry, Earl of Richmond, who will ascend to the throne of England as Henry VII, grandfather to the reigning monarch alive at Shakespeare's time, Queen Elizabeth I.

- 2 The play deals with intrigues and murders, ensnaring politics, and Richard's fascinating ruthlessness. The devious protagonist involves his audience by granting them insight into his machinations while never disguising his evil intentions; for these, he is punished in the final battle at Bosworth Field.
- 3 Schauspielhaus Düsseldorf stages Thomas Brasch's translation, originally intended for five female and thirty male actors, but reduced to two men, three children, and six women. There are essential cuts to this production. Moreover, the director introduces a clear opposition between the male protagonist and the female opposition. The stage is mostly well-lit, the setting is rather clinical; the space seems to be a vast industrial or grand building with security cameras. Later scenes are moved into wider rooms, including an impressive panoptical control room—this underlines the central theme of the play: who is in control? Who is in charge? Who is in power?
- 4 The play is canonical, the eponymous role often defining the climax of an actor's career. Lead actor André Kaczmarczyk (nominated for the German Theaterpreis Faust for this role) had been directed by Kazakhstan-born Evgeny Titov before. In 2021, they collaborated on a stunning and nerve-wracking *Macbeth*, whose mind was infiltrated by spidery thoughts about power and ambition. In *Richard III*, Titov once more demonstrates how well he has permeated Shakespeare's themes and characters—and that he can reduce these to their essence. Currently, Titov is preparing a third Shakespeare, once more about the machinations of power: his *King Lear* will premiere in February 2025.
- 5 The staging is modern, and the adaptation is grotesque: Kaczmarczyk's Richard is a deformed yet agile creature. His face is distorted by a net over his head, making him physically repulsive; his feet are dressed with uneven, golden clubs. It looks challenging to walk with these feet, yet Richard seems well-practised—this detail

underlines that he can supposedly deal with the deformity. He is ugly on the outside and the inside; as the play demands, he is 'determined' to be a villain. The costume is shiny and eclectic: there is and will be more gold reflecting his pompous status later in the show. In her contribution to the programme, dramaturgue Janine Ortiz quotes the band "Deutsch-Österreichisches Feingefühl"'s 1983 song "Codo" which contains the lyric "Ich bin so hässlich. Ich bin der Hass" translating to "I am so ugly. I am hate". Indeed, Titov's and Kaczmarczyk's clear understanding of Richard shines through: he is an ambitious narcissist in disguise. He is playing with an inferiority complex, haughtily uttering "I think I might be underestimating myself and my value". His eccentricity is often contrasted with the women who are dressed either in black or white, usually recalling early modern or Victorian dresses—or of different shades of red. His ancient foe, the former and aged Queen Margaret (Friederike Wagner), for example, dressed in purple, does seem to be on par for a few glimpses: she impresses him with her haughty curses, if only for a moment.



Figure 1. Düsseldorf Schauspiel, *Richard III*, 2024.

Dir. Evgeny Titov. Richard III (André Kaczmarczyk) and Queen Margaret (Friederike Wagner).

Crédits. Thomas Rabsch ([URL](#)).

- 6 Richard is a misogynist par excellence: he plots while women are polishing his shoes. The deformed man wields power opposite supposedly "weak" women, inventively calling them moles, "Dreckfrack" [dirty suit], cucumbers, caricatures. He discards them as he pleases, as his short stint with the deceased Prince of Wales' widow, Lady Anne, demonstrates. He then moves onto more alienating territory and woos his young niece to absurdly "make amends" (IV.4.309) for the loss of her brothers, claiming superficially "Say that I did all this for love of her" (IV.4.302), which sounds even more grotesque in Brasch's translation: "An allem war nur die Liebe Schuld"—penitence is non-existent, it is 'love's fault'. As the actor of his niece is a young girl, this feels nauseating. Yet, the women will have their hour. While he abuses women, they will later collaborate against him.
- 7 The only other male actors in this production portray his sickly brother Edward IV who soon dies in a bed with a dirty, bloody cloth in a corner of the stage in a palace with ramshackle walls, and the two young nephews, soon executed after being led off with a melodic nursery rhyme "We're going to the tower now!" Their influence is inane. All other male parts are cut including that of Richard's final adversary, the Earl of Richmond and later King Henry VII. Deleting his triumph allows the performance to completely focus on the downfall of the protagonist due to his own ruthless regime.
- 8 Kaczmarczyk certainly stands out as a disgusting male persona on stage. He provokes ridicule that turns to anguish, as when he licks his desired wife, Lady Anne's spit. At the same, a lacking self-confidence and possible PTSD are apparent. These, he compensates with a hypersexuality: This Richard often plays with his large genitals, which could be interpreted as underlining hypermasculinity. He is undoubtedly toxic. An impressive and shocking scene takes place when virtually naked Richard—goblin-like—watches himself reflected in a fivefold mirror, provoking disgust, fascination, and fear.



Figure 2. Düsseldorf Schauspiel, *Richard III*, 2024.

Dir. Evgeny Titov. Richard III (André Kaczmarczyk).

Crédits. Thomas Rabsch ([URL](#)).

- 9 Richard grotesquely claims to build a “house of friendship from this pile of hate-ridden broken glass”. Funnily and fatefully enough, this will happen, but not under his command.
- 10 The performance might appear misogynistic at the beginning, but it is not. Apart from the royal women, Richard’s supporter Hastings and the role of Rivers are cast with female actors. All—adversaries at the beginning—learn to collaborate in the course of this production. They grieve together—a fact that the setting formidably underlines when coffin after coffin is brought on stage. However, they also adhere to the idea of *kalokagathia*—normative stereotypes of outer corresponding to inner beauty—and despise the physically deformed Richard. This includes his mother, the Duchess of York (Manuela Alphons), who collapses and claims her preference for death: “I to my grave” (IV.1.101). The women of York and Lancaster first call out their inimical blasphemies against each other; later they feel empathy and support each other against the tyrant. A fact that strikes here is the range of the female voices filling the stage—though only six, they become ubiquitous, their weakness and strength, their grief and anger fully apparent, at

some point, all dressed in black, mourning together. The women bond when Queen Elizabeth, then widow of the deceased king and mother to the doomed princes, confirms: "Alas, I am the mother of these griefs" (II.2.82) Friendship, or at least community, is visibly forged between them throughout the evening. Thus, the performance underlines the role of women—as compatriots, sufferers, ghosts, agents of fortune, vengeance, and justice.

- 11 Because of the cuts of the final battle, the play does not end with the blessing of the young hero, a victory, and hope for the future of a Tudor monarchy. It ends after all the women—echoing the maledictions of the ghosts from the Shakespearean text—curse and stab Richard. All remain as witnesses of his reign but with bloody hands. Revenge for Richard's murders has been fulfilled.



Figure 3. Düsseldorf Schauspiel, *Richard III*, 2024. Dir. Evgeny Titov. Richard III (André Kaczmarczyk) and Hastings (Blanka Winkler).
Crédits. Thomas Rabsch ([URL](#)).

- 12 At the end of the production, the dying king is left all alone on stage. The scene is absurdly funny, satisfactory, and yet pitiful: "Is there a murderer here", he questions. "No. Yes, I am" (V.3.196). Full

of doubt, this Richard dutifully utters the lines “I love myself” and cuts the “rather” in “I [...] hate myself.” Alone, he calls for a horse and dies.

- 13 Düsseldorf presents an exquisite adaptation of Shakespeare’s famous play: compelling, disturbing, and feminist. It leaves the audience with a bitter taste of warfare and gender awareness, portrayed via preposterous and defiant scenes.

Quelques mots à propos de :

Imke Lichterfeld

Dr. Imke Lichterfeld teaches English Literature at the University of Bonn in Germany, where she has a position as Studies Coordinator at the Department of English, American and Celtic Studies. She has contributed to publications on the English Renaissance (e.g. in *Arrêt sur Scene* or *Comparative Drama*), Modernism (*Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*), and contemporary literature (*Inklings Jahrbuch*), and she has published a monograph on early modern drama called *When the Bad Bleeds — Mantic Elements in English Renaissance Revenge Tragedy* with V&R unipress in 2010. Most recent articles include “Champ de blé aux corbeaux: The Tragedy of Macbeth (2021) by Joel Coen”, co-written with Sabina Laskowska-Hinz in *Utpictura 18* and “Contested Kingship — Controversial Coronation: York’s Paper Crown” in the volume *The Moment of Death in Early Modern Europe, c. 1450-1800* (eds. Christ/Brunner). Apart from twentieth-century literature on water, her current research predominantly focuses on contemporary practices and adaptations of early modern theatre, Shakespeare, and his contemporaries.