

DOMMAR[®]

Study Guide for

RICHARD II

by William Shakespeare

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Contents

Section 1	Cast and Creative Team
Section 2	An introduction to William Shakespeare and his work Biography RICHARD II
Section 3	Inside the rehearsal room Rehearsal notes Extracts from Assistant Director Simon Evans' rehearsal diary An interview with director, Michael Grandage An interview with Eddie Redmayne, playing Richard
Section 4	RICHARD II in performance Practical exercises based on an extract from the play Questions on the production and further practical work
Section 5	Reading and research Bibliography Endnotes

Cast and Creative Team

Cast (in order of speaking)



Eddie Redmayne
King Richard II



Michael Hadley
John of Gaunt,
Duke of
Lancaster, King
Richard's uncle
/ **Gardener /**
Keeper



Phillip Joseph
Welsh Captain /
Bishop of Carlisle



Andrew Buchan
Henry
Bolingbroke,
Duke of Hereford,
John of Gaunt's
son



Ben Turner
Thomas
Mowbray, Duke of
Norfolk / Earl of
Salisbury



Sian Thomas
Duchess of
Gloucester,
widow of Thomas
Woodstock, Duke
of Gloucester, King
Richard's uncle /
Duchess of York



**Ashley
Zhangazha**
Duke of Aumerle
the Duke of York's
son



Michael Marcus
Bushy, follower
of King Richard
/ **Abbot of**
Westminster



Daniel Easton

Bagot, follower of King Richard



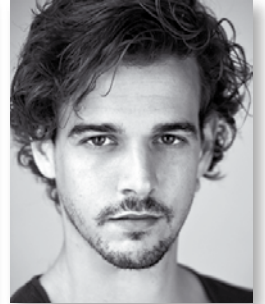
Stefano Braschi

Green, follower of King Richard / **Sir Stephen Scroop / Gardener's Man**



Harry Atwell

Sir Piers of Exton



Joseph Timms

Harry Percy, the Earl of Northumberland's son



Sean Jackson

Lord Fitzwater



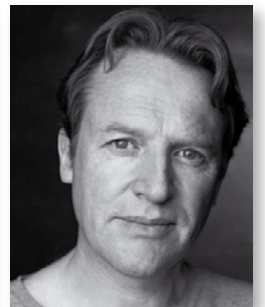
Ron Cook

Duke of York, King Richard's uncle



Pippa Bennett-Warner

Queen Isabel, King Richard's wife



Daniel Flynn

Earl of Northumberland, of Bolingbroke's party

Creative Team

Michael Grandage, Director

This is Michael's final production as Artistic Director of the Donmar Warehouse.

For the Donmar: *Luise Miller, King Lear* – Critics' Circle Award for Best Director (also UK tour/New York), *Red* (also New York – Tony Award), *Hamlet* (also Elsinore/New York), *Madame de Sade, Twelfth Night, Ivanov* – Critics' Circle Award for Best Director (shared with *The Chalk Garden*) and Evening Standard Award for Best Director (shared with *The Chalk Garden* and *Othello*), *The Chalk Garden, Othello, John Gabriel Borkman, Don Juan in Soho, Frost/Nixon* (also Gielgud/New York/US tour), *Guys and Dolls* (a Donmar production at the Piccadilly – Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production), *The Cut* (also UK tour), *The Wild Duck* – Critics' Circle Award for Best Director, *Grand Hotel* – Olivier Award for Outstanding Musical Production and Evening Standard Award for Best Director, Pirandello's *Henry IV* (also UK tour), *After Miss Julie, Caligula* – Olivier Award for Best Director, *The Vortex, Privates on Parade, Merrily We Roll Along* – Olivier Award for Best Musical and Critics' Circle for Best Director, *Passion Play* – Critics' Circle & Evening Standard Awards for Best Director, *Good*.

As Artistic Director of Sheffield Theatres (1999-2005): includes *Don Carlos* – Evening Standard Award and TMA Award for Best Director and German British Forum Award (also Gielgud), *Suddenly Last Summer* (also Albery), *As You Like It* – Critics' Circle and Evening Standard Awards for Best Director and South Bank Show Award for Theatre (also Lyric Hammersmith), *The Tempest* (also Old Vic), *Richard III, Edward II*.

Other theatre: includes *Danton's Death* (NT), *Evita* (Adelphi), *The Doctor's Dilemma, The Jew of Malta* (Almeida/tour).

Opera: *Don Giovanni* (New York), *Billy Budd* (Glyndebourne), *Madame Butterfly* (Houston).

He has been given Honorary Doctorates from Sheffield Hallam University and Sheffield University where he was also a visiting professor. He is currently a visiting professor at University College Falmouth and President of Central School of Speech and Drama. Michael was appointed CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2011.

Richard Kent, Designer

For the Donmar: as Associate to Christopher Oram includes *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, King Lear* (also New York), *Passion, Red* (also New York), *A Streetcar Named Desire, Ivanov, Twelfth Night, Madame de Sade, Hamlet*.

Theatre: includes *Mixed Marriage* (Finborough), *Rose* (Pleasance, London/ Forth, Edinburgh), *Decline and Fall* (Old Red Lion), *The Stronger and Pariah* (Arcola), *Gin and Tonic and Passing Trains* (Tramway, Glasgow).

Opera: as Associate to Christopher Oram includes *Don Giovanni* (New York), *Madame Butterfly* (Houston), *Billy Budd* (Glyndebourne).

David Plater, Lighting Designer

Trained: Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

For the Donmar: concert performances of *Company* and *Merrily We Roll Along* (Queen's), *Josephine Hart Poetry Week*, *Four Quartets*, *Frame 312*, *Three Days of Rain*, *Morphic Resonance*, *Splash Hatch*, *Summer Begins*, *Badfinger*.

Theatre: includes *Mixed Marriage*, *The Beaver Coat* (Finborough), *Black Ballet* (Linbury, ROH 2001-11), *Michael Ball* (Haymarket), *Loyal Women* (Royal Court), *Dave Strassman Show* (Apollo), *Dark Tales* (Arts), *Company*, *Animal Farm* (Derby Playhouse), *The Arab-Israeli Cookbook* (Tricycle/Gate), *Stacy, Fanny and Faggot* (Trafalgar Studios), *My Night With Reg*, *Dancing at Lughnasa* (New Vic, Newcastle-under-Lyme), *When We Are Married*, *A Passionate Woman* (York Theatre Royal), *Moment of Weakness* (Belgrade Coventry), *Amy's View* (Yvonne Arnaud, Guildford), *What You Get and What You Expect* (Lyric Hammersmith), *What Now Little Man* (Greenwich), *Oliver!* (NYMT), *Love on the Dole* (Oldham Coliseum), *The Double Bass*, *Blackbird*, *Mongoose*, *Trips Cinch*, *Eskimo Sisters*, *A Thousand Yards* (Southwark Playhouse), *References to Salvador Dali*, *The Pariah*, *The Stronger* (Arcola).

Adam Cork, Composer & Sound Designer

For the Donmar: *Anna Christie*, *Luise Miller*, *King Lear* (also UK tour/New York – Olivier Award), *Red* (also New York – Tony Award), *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Hamlet* (also New York), *Madame de Sade*, *Ivanov*, *Creditors*, *The Chalk Garden*, *Othello*, *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Don Juan in Soho*, *Frost/Nixon* (also Gielgud/New York/US tour), *The Cut*, *The Wild Duck*, *Henry IV*, *Caligula*.

Theatre: includes scores and sound designs for *London Road* (NT), *Enron* (Headlong/Chichester/Royal Court/New York), *Decade* (Headlong), *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Phèdre*, *Time and the Conways*, *Danton's Death* (NT), *A View from the Bridge*, *No Man's Land* (Duke of York's), *Macbeth* (Chichester/New York), *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, *Don Carlos* (Gielgud), *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*, *Speaking Like Magpies* (RSC), *The Glass Menagerie* (Apollo), *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, *The Late Henry Moss* (Almeida), *Suddenly Last Summer* (Albery).

Film: includes scores for *Macbeth*, *Bust*, *Tripletake*. Television: includes *Frances Tuesday*, *Re-ignited*, *Imprints*.

Radio: includes *The Chalk Garden*, *Losing Rosalind*, *The Luneberg Variation*, *The Colonel-Bird*, *Don Carlos*, *Othello*, *On the Ceiling*.

An introduction to William Shakespeare and his work

Biography

'The name and reputation of William Shakespeare towers over much of Western culture like a colossus,' writes academic and theatre practitioner Peter Reynolds in the introduction to his book *Shakespeare: Text into Performance*. His plays are performed more often than any other writer, living or dead, and there is a vast and ever-expanding Shakespeare industry. 'People almost everywhere, in a huge variety of cultures, are influenced by the name of a long-dead poet and playwright, despite the fact that the majority of them will never have seen, and certainly never have read, a Shakespeare play.'¹

Despite the considerable, often daunting, reputation of this 'cultural monolith' very little is known about Shakespeare and his life. Official documents and occasional references to him by contemporary writers provide us with an overview of his public life, but his private life remains largely unknown.

Shakespeare was born into a respectable family, the third of eight children, in the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire in 1564. Records show that he was baptised in Holy Trinity Church on 26th April and buried in the same place fifty-two years later on 25th April, 1616. William's father, John, was a prosperous businessman, a glover and leather merchant who held several public offices. Given his father's position, it is likely that William was educated at the local grammar school, where he would have studied Latin, history, logic and rhetoric. He did not, however, progress to university, perhaps as a result of his father's dwindling fortunes from 1578 onwards, and was thus deprived of the benefits many of his contemporary writers enjoyed.





In November 1582, at the age of 18, Shakespeare married 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. They had three children together: Susanna, born shortly after their marriage in 1583, and twins Judith and Hamnet in 1585. It is uncertain how William supported his family during this period and the next several years, until 1592, have been the subject of much speculation. He may have worked for his father or, as many academics have suggested, he may have been a teacher. Whatever his occupation we may conjecture that it was around this time, 1586 or 1587, he moved from Stratford to London.

Again we cannot be certain when, or indeed why, Shakespeare left Stratford. It may have coincided with the visit to the town in 1585 of a company of London-based actors. We do know, however, that William was living in London in 1592, by which time he was established as both a writer and actor. In a pamphlet published that year, *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit*, the lesser-known dramatist Robert Greene criticised the 'upstart crow'² William, essentially an uneducated writer, for usurping the place which, according to him, rightly belonged to university graduates. That Shakespeare warranted such attention, provoking open hostility from a rival, suggests he must, by 1592, have been living long enough in London to have made a name for himself as a writer. Even at this early stage in his career, his plays had clearly achieved a level of notoriety and some degree of success.

Over the next twenty years Shakespeare continued to live in London, regularly visiting his wife and family in Stratford. He continued to act but was known principally as a dramatist. In 1593 a plague broke out in London and all the theatres were closed. In addition to writing two long poems, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare appears to have used the time to strengthen his relationship with a theatre company called, under Queen Elizabeth I's reign (1558-1603), the Lord Chamberlain's Company and then, after King James I's accession (1603), the King's Men. This association was long and successful, continuing until William's retirement from the theatre in 1611.

1596 brought both personal tragedy and newfound success. In the year Shakespeare was granted a coat of arms by the College of Heralds, thereby guaranteeing his status as a 'gentleman', his son Hamnet died. The following year, in 1597, William bought New Place, one of the largest houses in Stratford, and two years later he acquired shares in the Globe Theatre. In 1609, the year he published a collection of sonnets, William also became part-owner of the newly built Blackfriars Theatre.

Although he retired to Stratford two years later, Shakespeare maintained many of his business links with London until his death in 1616 at the age of 52.

Shakespeare's Plays

Shakespeare's career as a writer spanned approximately twenty years, from 1591 until 1611. He is believed to have written thirty-seven plays during this period and may have collaborated on several more. It's difficult to accurately date the writing of individual plays, but some idea can be gained from records of performances and editions published before and shortly after Shakespeare's death.

The work was often not wholly 'original', Shakespeare drawing upon stories from history or contemporary literature. These stories were, however, transformed by him into well-crafted plays, characterised by his own unique dramatic voice. They can essentially be divided into two main categories: comedies and tragedies, the latter concluding with the death of the central character.

Although dating the plays' original composition is a matter of debate, a broad outline of Shakespeare's dramatic career has been established. He began in the early 1590s by rewriting earlier plays or working with plots taken from the Classics. He focused on comedies (e.g. *The Comedy of Errors*, 1590-1594, derived from the Latin playwright, Plautus) and stories recounting English history (e.g. the three-part *Henry VI*, 1589-1592), although he also attempted revenge tragedy (e.g. *Titus Andronicus*, 1592-1593, indebted to two Roman writers, Ovid and Seneca).

It was during this period that Shakespeare honed his craft, writing the celebrated comedies *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1594-1595) and *As You Like It* (1599-1600), and the history plays *Henry IV* (1596-1598) and *Henry V* (1598-1599).

The new century heralded a further development in Shakespeare's writing. Plays such as *Troilus and Cressida* (1601-1602) and *Measure for Measure* (1603-1604) are poised between comedy and tragedy, their ambivalent tone prompting complex responses, causing them, sometimes, to be referred to as 'problem plays'. It is tragedy, however, which comes to dominate Shakespeare's mature work, such masterpieces as *Hamlet* (1600-1601), *Othello* (1602-1604), *King Lear* (1605-1606), *Macbeth* (1605-1606) and *Anthony and Cleopatra* (1606).

The latter years of Shakespeare's dramatic career marked a significant departure from his earlier work. Such plays as *Pericles* (1608), *Cymbeline* (1609-1611), *The Winter's Tale* (1610-1611) and *The Tempest* (1610-1611), often called the 'romances', possess qualities of both masque and pageant. They reprise many of the scenarios and themes of the earlier plays but relocated to distant, often fantastical lands, incorporating elements of music, dance, mime and tableaux. Situations which previously in the tragedies led to disaster are here resolved. Restoration and reconciliation are the overriding themes.

RICHARD II

The scholarly consensus is that *Richard II* was written and first performed sometime between 1595 and 1596. It was originally published in 1597. The play is the first in a group of four that span the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV – in two parts – and Henry V. These are now referred to as Shakespeare's second historical 'tetralogy' (from the Ancient Greek word for four), the author having written four earlier history plays – the three parts of *Henry VI* (c. 1589-1592) and *Richard III* (c. 1591 – 1593).

Many academics believe *Richard II* marks a departure for Shakespeare, both in terms of his artistry and aesthetic. 'The story that he chose was one that may well have seemed to have contemporary relevance,' writes Stanley Wells, reflecting on the parallels between King Richard II (1377-1399) and Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) in his introduction to the Penguin edition of the play. 'Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne since 1558, and had never married. The question of the succession was a major political issue.'³ Charles R. Forker returns to this point in the later Arden edition: 'Both monarchs, after all, were childless. The Queen tried to discourage speculation and debate on the matter just as Richard had done two centuries earlier; but popular uncertainty about who would succeed was thought to weaken the stability of both reigns.'⁴



Elizabeth herself was aware of, and sensitive to, the comparisons between herself and Richard. In a well-documented conversation with the Keeper of the Records of the Tower of London, William Lambarde, in August 1601, she commented, 'I am Richard II, know ye not that?' Like Richard, Elizabeth was criticised for being overly susceptible to flattery and influence by favourites. Many opponents of Elizabeth's fiscal policies complained about her ministers.

Despite the 'contemporary relevance' alluded to by Stanley Wells, what Forker refers to as the play's 'timely political resonances', the Penguin editor counsels the modern reader against inferring too much: 'Nothing in Shakespeare's play suggests that he was specially interested in the topical parallels, or that he wrote with any immediate political intent... The play raises many general issues, both political and personal. But Shakespeare does not specifically relate them to the situation at the time he was writing. Nor does he twist the facts so as to force his audience into an awareness of relationships with contemporary politics.'⁵

The nineteenth-century author Oscar Wilde made the fanciful suggestion that Shakespeare may have been inspired to write *Richard II* having seen the King's tomb in Westminster Abbey. Shakespeare certainly drew on many influences to stimulate his imagination, but his main source remained the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed's extensive *Chronicles*; a compilation based upon the accounts of earlier historians that was for Shakespeare the most up-to-date reference book, to which he returned many times throughout his career. As with all great artists who 'borrow' from others' work, Shakespeare's genius was to make the material uniquely his. 'In dramatizing the reign of Richard II he followed Holinshed fairly closely,' explains Wells, 'but even so he chose to use only the final pages of Holinshed's long account of the reign, and with that he took liberties.'⁶

Of the many interrelated themes Shakespeare explores in *Richard II*, the examination of 'The Divine Right of Kings' is central. A religious and political doctrine, it asserts that a monarch is bound by no earthly authority, deriving his/her right to rule directly from God. S/he is effectively God's Deputy on Earth. '[Shakespeare] was interested in the political aspects of Richard's reign and their bearing on the general topic of the position of the monarch in relation to God and to his people,' says Wells.⁷ According to Forker, this results in the play inviting its audience to witness 'the dethronement of an unsuitable anointed monarch [Richard] by an illegitimate but more able one [Bolingbroke]' and to consider 'the disquieting possibility that the institution of hereditary monarchy may itself be unviable'.⁸

'That's something we've been very clear about in rehearsal,' says Russell Jackson, Text Consultant to the Donmar Warehouse's 2011 production. 'We constantly remind ourselves of the idea that the King has been appointed by God. This was something that monarchs, for obvious reasons, have been very keen on, especially James I, Elizabeth's successor.'⁹ This was a particularly pertinent issue for James (1603-1625), as Wells explains: 'Elizabeth had done much to unify England and increase the country's prosperity. It was important that the next monarch should not throw away what she had won. A weak ruler would have been a national disaster, and there were those who felt that her successor should be chosen and appointed for his merits rather than on hereditary principle.'¹⁰ 'A king who's been replaced by somebody who, on the face of it, is better at the job is a dangerous idea,' comments Russell. 'This was something Elizabeth was very concerned about.'

In the play, Richard – the last King of England to rule by direct and undisputed succession from William the Conqueror (1066-1087) – believes his position inviolable; Russell refers to 'his sense of himself as an icon'. Despite warnings to the contrary, Richard remains confident in the apparent security of his hereditary kingship. Returning to England from fighting rebels in Ireland, he learns of the rebellion at home and, according to Wells, 'utters his strongest affirmation of the power of his public office, of the idea of kingship.'

Not all the water in the rough rude sea

Can wash the balm off from an anointed king.

The breath of worldly men cannot depose

The deputy elected by the Lord.

Scene Nine (Act Three, Scene Two)



Richard is soon to learn, however, that 'the façade of kingship may offer inadequate shelter to the human being who dwells behind it.'¹¹ His journey throughout the remainder of the play sees him progress through the various stages of grief; grief for his lost title, and with it his identity. He moves from denial to anger to bargaining and, finally, acceptance. As he later counsels his wife, Isabel:

*'Learn, good soul,
To think our former state a happy dream,
From which awaked the truth of what we are.'*

Scene Thirteen (Act Five, Scene One)

By the end of the play, alone in his cell, King Richard has been replaced by a mortal man.

'The play is among Shakespeare's first to utilize patterns of imagery and thematic repetition for dramatic and structural purposes,' asserts Forker.¹² Both he and Wells focus on the role of England – the land – in their discussion of *Richard II*, Wells stating that 'England is herself one of the *dramatis personae*'.¹³ The country takes centre stage in Scene Five (Act Two, Scene One), in a speech spoken by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, containing some of Shakespeare's most memorable and oft-quoted lines: 'This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England'.

At various points the country is compared to a garden, most notably in Scene Eleven (Act Three, Scene Four) – 'The Garden Scene' – in which the Gardener likens the land to an ill-tended garden, accusing Richard of failing to govern his country as conscientiously as he tends his garden. 'The garden scene... focuses the symbolism of England's earth into a national emblem,' suggests Forker. Many characters, including Richard, Bolingbroke and Gaunt, 'are all portrayed as feeling a strong emotional bond with England, the country of their spiritual as well as their national identity.'¹⁴ According to Wells, Richard almost regards it as 'a sentient being, capable of taking his part against his enemies':

*This earth shall have a feeling, and these stones
Prove armed soldiers ere her native king
Shall falter under foul rebellion's arms.*

Scene Nine (Act Three, Scene Two)

There are numerous references to England as 'a living being, or as something of natural purity which is in danger of being stained, most horribly by the blood of those who have been brought up in it.'¹⁵ Once again we return to the central theme of the play. 'The motif of blood... signifies more than warfare and murder,' Forker reminds us. 'Shakespeare makes it also symbolize heredity, family pride, kinship and royal legitimacy.'¹⁶

No discussion of *Richard II* – its themes, images and symbols – would be complete without reference to the play's language; 'the most purely lyrical of Shakespeare's histories – perhaps of all his plays,' suggests Wells.¹⁷ Forker highlights the play's many allusions to language itself, terms such as 'mouth',

'tongue', 'breath', 'word' and 'speech'. 'The fact that Richard talks so eloquently about himself has caused him frequently to be spoken of as a poet,' says Wells. He suggests instead it is more accurate to describe him as 'poetic in temperament... a man of strong imagination... who is intensely conscious of the power of words, and of his own dependence on them'.¹⁸

Forker draws a distinction between Richard the orator and Bolingbroke the soldier; between the former's 'fanciful and impassioned flights of speech' and the latter's 'more realistic and utilitarian concept of language'. In their contrasting attitudes towards language, he sees 'the competing value-systems of the play': 'Richard's essentially feudal world, a world of oaths and codes of honour, of titles and of fixed identities, of ritual solemnity and ceremonial beauty, puts heavy stress on the seriousness and potency of words. Bolingbroke, who challenges and overturns that world, brings to bear a more modern, relativistic, sceptical and less comely understanding of how meaning is generated.'¹⁹



Inside the rehearsal room

Rehearsal notes

Monday 24th October, 2011. It's a significant date for the Donmar Warehouse. Today marks the beginning of rehearsals for Michael Grandage's final production as Artistic Director – *Richard II*.

As is customary, cast, Creative Team and office staff assemble in the rehearsal room at the start of the day for the traditional 'Meet and Greet', an opportunity for everyone to meet all the other members of the team. Together they are responsible for every element of production, from make-up to marketing. Thirty-plus people line the walls of the light-filled room in the Jerwood Space, the scene of so many of Michael's rehearsals in recent years. Looking around there are familiar faces from his nine-year tenure and newer colleagues too.





That's because *Richard II* is, according to Michael, 'A young man's play, and I wanted to go out looking to the future.' Hence the designer is Richard Kent, assistant to long-term Donmar collaborator and designer Christopher Oram, and the lighting designer is David Plater, the Donmar's resident lighting technician.

Introducing the play, Michael explains that he first encountered it at the age of 17 when he was in a production. 'I can't remember if I was Bushy, Bagot or Green!' he quips, but does recall standing behind the king's throne thinking he should be in it – i.e. playing Richard. Though not one of Shakespeare's best-known plays, *Richard II* has proved enduringly popular. Many people have told Michael it's their favourite. 'We have to ask why that is.'

Before the majority of people leave, allowing the cast and Creative Team to begin their work in earnest, Michael and Richard unveil the model box and briefly outline the design concept, in particular its stimuli. They visited a lot of art galleries as part of their preparatory work and were captivated by medieval art. If possible, Michael would like to reference and even re-create on stage some of the paintings they saw, in terms of depicting the social structure and hierarchy of Richard's court.

At this point the office staff depart. The rehearsal room is a private and intimate space, particularly during the first week of rehearsals when people are trying out different ideas, reserving the right to succeed and fail in equal measure. Only the cast and Creative Team remain, including Resident Assistant Director Simon Evans, Deputy Stage Manager Mary O'Hanlon and Text Consultant, Russell Jackson.

The sixteen actors pull up chairs in front of the model box and Michael says he'd like to start with a short session talking about the play as he prefers to begin discussions with the text. 'One defines a rehearsal process over years,' he explains, 'particularly with Shakespeare.' He tends not to do readthroughs, describing them as 'an uneven playing field' and suggests they're only of worth to a writer of a new play. On the text, Michael explains that he makes cuts with long-term collaborator David Hunt, 'filleting out' any repetitions in the play. He is careful not to alter the structure of the piece. With regard to the actors' own process, creating biographies or 'back stories' for their characters, Michael's view is simple and pragmatic: 'Use what's helpful.'

They'll always start by reading through the scene once, then going back and translating it, i.e. from 'Shakespearean' into modern English. 'We'll do the chat from the point of view of standing up with the text,' says Michael. 'It's about defining a path, even if the way's not clear, even if it's just what the problems are.' He stresses the importance of not missing any of the words and images within the text. 'We need to make sure we speak the play really finely. If my job is nothing else in the world it's to represent the two hundred and fifty people in the audience.' Michael then returns to his earlier question about *Richard II*: 'Why is it so many people's favourite play?' Providing an overview, he explains that Shakespeare wrote it contemporaneously with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, suggesting that he'd returned to the history plays in the context of his development as a writer. He considers some of the fundamentals of the piece. 'The main character in the narrative – God – isn't in the play. The relationship to God between the first audience of *Richard II* and now is very different. How do we want our 2011/2012 audience to respond to these people?'

The set and costumes are discussed in more detail. In terms of the setting, the date is approximately 1397. Richard shows a collection of prints from his and Michael's research, paintings on display in the National Gallery. Michael reflects on the fact that King Richard II was the first monarch to commission a portrait of himself, which hangs in Westminster Abbey. As a result he has historically, and unfairly suggests Michael, been accused of vanity.

As he discusses the set, Michael refers to the model box. He encourages the actors to play the whole space, using the upstage area behind the columns and the balcony above. In terms of the look, Michael favours 'a monochrome palette', adding, 'white against gold is very effective.' It is made clear, however, that it will be a burnished gold as opposed to a shiny one. The costumes have been re-interpreted to 'butch them up'. For example, the men will wear fitted trousers not tights. Michael has banned anything twee, which he jokingly refers to as 'nonny'.

The preliminary discussion over, Michael turns his attention to the first scene. Michael wants to start by clarifying with the cast the complex relationships between the characters, identifying who's related to who. 'Do you know, historically, how you're all related to one another?' He's particularly keen to establish 'blood connections'. The question, 'Who's next in line to the heirless Richard?' is asked. Through discussion the cast and Creative Team piece together their shared knowledge of the supposed historical facts: Richard and his cousin, the ambitious Henry Bolingbroke, were knighted together suggests Ron Cook, who plays the Duke of York; Bolingbroke is a closer cousin to Richard than Bolingbroke's sworn enemy, Thomas Mowbray.

The tensions between the characters are also considered. Richard has advanced individuals who aren't of noble blood, thereby annoying the established aristocracy.

Bagot, Bushy and Green have all been given knighthoods and are not, as some believe, politicians. Michael senses 'a warm, patriotic glow attached to Gaunt (Duke of Lancaster) and his speech' in this scene. But there's also, suggests Michael Hadley who plays Gaunt, 'an undercurrent of Richard wanting to take over Gaunt's lands'.

'Underneath this whole scene is the death of the Duke of Gloucester, Lancaster and York's missing brother,' says Russell. Bolingbroke accuses Mowbray of killing Gloucester but many suspect Richard himself was complicit in the murder, along with his advisors Bagot, Bushy and Green. In effect Bolingbroke is indirectly challenging the king by accusing Mowbray and the majority of Richard's court realise this. Always focusing on the storytelling, Michael considers the contrary position: 'What's to be gained dramatically if the characters don't know what's going on?'

Mowbray is a potential threat to Richard as he could expose his involvement in Gloucester's murder, which is why he ultimately banishes Mowbray for life. 'A trial by combat could go the wrong way,' explains Russell. Meaning had Richard allowed Bolingbroke and Mowbray to fight a duel to the death, Mowbray might have survived and still posed a threat. 'Heaven shows its hand through mortal combat,' adds Russell. If Bolingbroke had fought and killed Mowbray it would have been interpreted as divine justice, thereby proving Mowbray's guilt – and by association, Richard's.





'It's easy to forget the tension that needs to be in this scene,' says Michael. 'These are huge moments – Bolingbroke and Mowbray throwing down their gages, accusing one another of being traitors.' It's suggested that questions have already been raised about Bolingbroke's loyalty to the king. Michael asks what 'place' is he in? 'Where is Bolingbroke tonally?' Adding, 'There's another colour in this room.'

In translating the text, Michael considers if Shakespeare is doing something with the language. Possibly being ironic? He notes that, 'Already on the first page there's a direct appeal to heaven' – Bolingbroke's 'Heaven be the record to my speech!' Russell adds, 'If anybody invokes God it's very important. You're putting your soul in danger of mortal terror.' These characters have a very different set of beliefs to us. 'You're in a world where everybody believes in the Divine Right of Kings,' says Phillip Joseph, playing, among others, the Bishop of Carlisle. 'Everybody without exception,' agrees Michael, 'including the audience.'

This 'table work', sitting together discussing the text, is kept to a minimum in Michael's rehearsals but it's vitally important that details are clarified. For example, in his opening speech Richard refers to Bolingbroke's 'late appeal' against Mowbray. Having collated the notes from other editions of the play, Michael informs the actors that this alludes to a confrontation between the two men at Shrewsbury six weeks ago. Simon adds that Mowbray has been detained in prison ever since.

When he calls Bolingbroke, 'A recreant and most degenerate traitor', Michael notes that this is the first time the king's cousin has been so accused – 'We should make sure it lands.' He finds Richard's response – 'Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be ruled by me...' – interesting: 'Tonally it's not very commanding.' He considers Richard's line, 'Lions make leopards tame' – the lion and leopard being the king's and Mowbray's respective emblems. 'It's interesting for me to note this moment,' says Michael. 'The heat is off Bolingbroke.' Mowbray's response, 'Yea, but not change his spots...' is, according to Michael, his 'first speech from the heart'.

Having read through the scene, he asks: 'Have we just witnessed the first scene in which the king has revealed a weakness, an inability to control the situation?' It's commented that the play's original audience would have been astounded to observe so ineffective a king. 'I'm pausing to say that's of bigger significance than we first think,' says Michael. 'You, the silent observers, need to help the audience understand that.'

Reflecting on the tensions within Richard's divided court, he praises Shakespeare. 'He's a great writer. In one little scene he's established the fault line that will run throughout the rest of British history.'

After a short break, Michael works with the actors, starting to put the first scene on its feet. 'We're going to play it in a royal room.' Richard's throne is accordingly placed in the centre of the space. 'You've got as many ways to use this as you can think of,' Michael tells Eddie. He positions the characters around Richard according to rank and status. At this stage nothing is set and everything has yet to be decided, such as where the characters enter from. Lancaster's first entrance, it's suggested, should be from the downstage right vom. Michael discusses Lancaster's blocking with reference to the model box.

Questions asked include: Who does Richard instruct to call forth Bolingbroke and Mowbray? Who comes on with who? The possibility of Bolingbroke being led on by Lancaster is explored. There's a brief discussion between Michael and composer Adam Cork about the music at the top of the play. He asks the actors to come on again to give Adam a 'rough timing'.

Working through the scene, Michael comments on the challenge from Bolingbroke to Mowbray, 'I think it's helpful if the gage is thrown down in front of Richard.' As a result, he can't ignore it. Eddie refers to Richard's line, 'Now by my sceptre's awe I make a vow', and asks whether the sceptre – a ceremonial staff held by a monarch as a symbol of authority – is real or metaphorical? 'At the moment it's metaphorical,' Michael responds, 'but it might not be.'

He considers all of the action on stage: 'I'd quite like to look at the convention of bowing in this production.' And helps clarify the storytelling by adjusting the actors' positioning, with comments such as, 'So that would just help if you come downstage there...' Toward the end of the scene there's a stage direction, an editor's addition, indicating that Lancaster leaves first. Michael prefers to keep him on while the other characters exit, Lancaster watching them go. Again, this tells a different story.

When I return to rehearsals three days later, Scene Thirteen (Act Five, Scene One) – a short scene mainly between Richard and his wife, Isabel – is being rehearsed. 'This is only the second scene in which we see the private Richard,' observes Michael. The king's sexuality is briefly discussed, specifically the suggestion made by previous practitioners that Richard might have been gay. Michael thinks this odd. 'When did directors decide it was a good idea to introduce a homosexual element when the writer's written a perfectly loving marriage?'

Practical questions are asked of the scene: Where are we? In a London street, it's suggested. Michael admits the setting is a little confusing: 'I'm not sure where to place this scene.' Where have the characters come from? 'What are you doing in this scene?' Michael asks Pippa Bennett-Warner, playing Isabel. Is she unaccompanied? 'What's happened to your authority? You're just a French girl now.'



Eddie focuses on their relationship: 'When did we last see one another? Does Richard expect to see Isabel here?' More practically, Pippa asks Eddie, 'When do you see her?' Michael reflects on the fact that Richard is passing through the scene, literally walking across the stage: 'We have to contrive a reason for you to stop.' He looks at Isabel's lines. 'Use "Ah, thou the model where old Troy did stand!" to get Richard's attention.' Working through the scene, the changing emotions, Michael comments to Pippa, 'And then what you need to do is alter something with your dynamic.' Always focused on the audience's perspective, he occasionally says to actors, 'For all the house to see you, we need you to be here...' indicating a position on stage.

The Earl of Northumberland's entrance and exit is considered. Which way does he come on from and go to? Through discussion it's agreed he's come from Bolingbroke in Westminster with orders to escort Richard to Pomfret in the north of England. To make sense in Richard's change of direction he can't keep going the way he was.

Having worked through the scene Michael talks about comprehending the speed of thought and speech within the characters' dialogue. 'It's a little like playing Noel Coward. It requires speed, lightness and precision of speech.' He assures the actors they'll return to the scene again. 'That was not the rehearsal, that was a sketch. We'll colour it next time.'

Due to the unavailability of Sian Thomas, playing the Duchess of York – she’s currently appearing in another production and has a matinee that afternoon – Scene Fourteen (Act Five, Scene Two) is discussed instead. Michael asks Ron Cook, playing the Duke of York, and Ashley Zhangazha, playing his son, the Duke of Aumerle, to explain to the other actors what has happened previously. He notes that the two actors will need to create a back story for their characters. ‘Their relationship comes late in the play, which is always difficult for an audience.’

Andrew Buchan, playing Bolingbroke, observes that, ‘York has always campaigned for honesty.’ Michael concurs. ‘I’ve thought of this more as the week’s gone on,’ he comments, ‘how right and proper York is.’ Despite his belief in what’s good and just, it’s noted that York is ultimately a poor leader.



Working chronologically, Scene Fifteen (Act Five, Scene Three) is rehearsed next. This is the first scene in which Bolingbroke appears as king – King Henry IV. His transformation needs to be marked by his costume. There's a suggestion that Bolingbroke might look like Richard in the first scene of the play. 'Where is this scene taking place?' asks Michael. 'Have any of you any idea where you are?' Backstage at Westminster is proposed, Russell suggesting Bolingbroke enter taking off his robes, or simply removing the crown. Michael ponders this. 'I just wonder if the audience need to enjoy seeing Bolingbroke as king before he disrobes?' Michael also considers how Bolingbroke might use the throne.

The question is asked, why does Bolingbroke pardon Aumerle so quickly? This leads to a lengthy discussion about the new king's motivation. The scene starts with Shakespeare underlining the fact that Bolingbroke is a father, the king's opening line is, 'Can no man tell me of my unthrifty son?' For Bolingbroke, Aumerle's treachery is overshadowed by his father's loyalty. More pragmatically, he needs York as an ally.

They move on to Scene Sixteen (Act Five, Scene Four). 'A brief but shocking scene,' says Michael, in which two of Bolingbroke's followers, Sir Piers of Exton and the Earl of Northumberland, plot Richard's murder, apparently with the king's tacit approval. 'It should definitely come as a shock that Bolingbroke is commissioning secret murders.'

The scene is first read for meaning then put on its feet. 'It's in a very, very small place this,' observes Michael. 'This isn't a play with a lot of whispering, it's not like *Richard III*. Let's see what it looks like with both of you either side of a pillar.' Harry Atwell, playing Exton, asks if he should do a 'false exit' on his line, 'I will go'? Meaning he goes to leave, then stops and turns back to deliver his last line, 'I am the King's friend, and will rid his foe.' Exploring all the possibilities, Michael suggests he tries it. Afterwards he comments, 'I'm not sure if that works with the clandestine feel of the scene.'

I next visit rehearsals the following week – day three of week two. Work begins by revisiting Scene Ten (Act Three, Scene Three). Michael turns to Andrew Buchan and Daniel Flynn, playing Bolingbroke and Northumberland respectively, and asks them to recap – 'Can you show me what you did.' A 'thank you' from Michael indicates they're ready to start and quietens the room. At the top of the scene Bolingbroke, recently returned to England from exile, is making further advances inland accompanied by Northumberland. 'Is this fifth gear now?' asks Andrew. 'We've already landed on the coast.'

Michael considers Bolingbroke's opening lines: 'So that by this intelligence we learn / The Welshmen are dispersed, and Salisbury / Is gone to meet the King, who lately landed / With some few private friends upon this coast.' 'Can you play, "Is that right?" under it,' he asks Andrew. 'That way you're not just a man coming on giving information, you're taking part in a collaborative meeting.'

Michael occasionally stops the action to clarify meaning, focusing in this instance on one of Northumberland's lines, 'The news is very fair and good, my lord.' How good? 'My point is you two are working very closely together here,' says Michael. 'My worry is the coincidence factor – everyone turning up at once.' By which he means Bolingbroke's allies amassing. 'We're motoring now in terms of the action of the play,' Michael reflects. 'You say fifth gear, I think fourth. Fifth is the Deposition Scene.'



He turns his attention to York's reprimand: 'It would beseem the Lord Northumberland / To say "King Richard".' 'Let's just play that a little more, York putting a spanner in the works,' says Michael to Ron. He agrees: 'There's a choice to be made in the level of it. Indirectly chastising Bolingbroke or attacking him – "Don't you dare!".' As usual, York is in the role of referee.

'Harry coming in must therefore be a relief,' says Michael. 'So let's quickly analyse what you're doing here,' he says to Joseph Timms, playing Harry Percy, son of Northumberland. 'We need you to come on stage knowing that you're going to give information about what's going on here. We need something to propel you on. At the moment you're coming on quite cleanly. Remember this is an age of no mobile phones. What's just happened up there?' he asks, referring to Richard and his few remaining allies, whether they intend to surrender. 'It lacks clarity right now.'

Simon suggests Harry come on with the others downstage left at the top of the scene and immediately exit into the castle upstage right to get the necessary information before coming back on. They try it and though Michael ultimately decides to cut the coming on and going off again, he thinks it a worthwhile exercise in clarifying the storytelling. 'That was good,' Michael says to Joseph. 'It gave you a journey to go on.'

Michael keeps a watchful eye on the positioning of the actors on stage, especially important in these larger group scenes: 'We're all bunching up here. Keep on the diagonal.' Occasionally he focuses on individuals: 'You've put yourself in a bad position there... I would stay. You're taking away your own focus by moving.' Mostly Michael sits with his script placed on a music stand in front of him, other times he moves about the space, watching from different vantage points.

Next is Richard's entrance on the balcony above while the action unfolds in the courtyard below. He is accompanied by Aumerle, the Bishop of Carlisle and several other loyal followers. 'Have we come on miles too early?' Eddie asks Michael. 'Can we get a cue?' Michael considers the nature of Richard's entrance. 'I think



we're making the mistake of thinking this is like the beginning of scenes one and three. It's not processional.' He goes back to the text. 'Can you find a way, Eddie, to come on during Ron's speech? Make sure up there is not a part of down here.' Richard's followers are instructed not to look down until he does. 'Just before Ron's line, "Yet looks he like a king", you could start your journey to the centre, Eddie.' Although the entrance isn't processional, Michael notes the dignitaries that accompany Richard: 'The king's decided to come on with full pomp. He's laying it on with a trowel.'

In addition to watching everything carefully, he also listens intently. 'Keep that alive, Ron – "Alack, alack for woe / That any harm should stain so fair a show!" – it has a tendency to die otherwise.' At present Michael is experimenting with either Bolingbroke or Northumberland speaking the passage, 'See, see, King Richard doth himself appear.' Daniel does it today and afterwards Michael asks him, 'How did that feel? Better or not so good?' He decides to continue to 'play with both versions' for another week. Looking again at the scene, Michael addresses Daniel: 'May I ask a question? Are you, Northumberland, not ashamed to refuse to kneel before the king?' He turns to Eddie: 'Maybe you could turn it up a bit on that line, "We are amazed; and thus long have we stood / To watch the fearful bending of thy knee".'

After running a section Michael will comment, 'That's pretty good, but just a few things...' and then give some notes. Afterwards he'll ask the actors, 'Shall I go on now, or do we want to consolidate all of that?'

They move on. 'The whole structure of this scene is you being forced to come down,' Michael says to Eddie. 'Although we know Bolingbroke and his followers are in a strong position, at this point in the story, with Richard raised aloft, they don't seem it.' He focuses on the scene in the courtyard, below the balcony. 'Make the action down here stiller, less animated, but tell us something about what you're thinking.' Andrew asks Michael if Bolingbroke, concealing himself beneath the platform, can hear any of what Richard is saying? 'They can't properly,' says Michael, 'but I like you playing trying to listen.'

Michael will often refer to the various 'colours' within the text. After Eddie delivers several of Richard's speeches, he comments, 'Very good in terms of turning the tone from regal to submissive. You coloured it correctly. I loved the level of, "What must the King do now?" You found an extraordinary humanness and vulnerability, but then it became something angrier.' Michael continues to encourage Eddie to pace himself: 'Give yourself some time and air around that.'

When Northumberland invites Richard to come down to talk with Bolingbroke, Michael describes it as 'the greatest indignation yet... You've never been asked to come down in your life.' He warns Daniel against emphasising the 'down' in his line too much – 'Let Richard pick up on it.'

Reaching the end of the scene, Michael says to Eddie, 'I'd love that last line to go to Bolingbroke a bit more – "Set on towards London, cousin – is it so?" You might as well say Tower.' Drawing the rehearsal to a close, he comments, 'Lots of good stuff there and lots we still need to rehearse.'

After a short break rehearsals continue halfway through Scene Twelve (Act Four, Scene One), in which Richard relinquishes his crown, and therefore the monarchy, to Bolingbroke. There's some discussion about which actors are needed to rehearse this scene. Michael prefers to work with Eddie, Andrew and Ron first and add in the others later. 'As it's only the four of us,' says Michael, 'I'm going to pick you up on words.'

The first thing to be established is who had the crown? 'Did you bring on the crown and sceptre last time?' Michael asks Ron. He suggests Ron keeps hold of these. He wants Richard and York to enter above. 'It's so unconventional for such a famous speech – "Alack, why am I sent for to a king..." – to be delivered coming down a flight of stairs. I love it!' The issue of whether Richard and York can be heard approaching, talking to one another, is raised. Michael is unequivocal: 'Off-stage dialogue equals crap. You can never hear anything.'

Running through the scene Michael focuses on the text as promised. 'You must say "seize" in "Here, cousin – *seize* the crown." You don't say "take",' he says to Eddie. Richard's image of the 'golden crown like a deep well' is significant – 'Take your time over that.' Eddie and Andrew stand either side of the crown holding onto it. 'That's a great picture, arms outstretched on the crown,' says Michael. 'It's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* – which mother will get the child?' Eddie raises a technical issue, asking stage management to ensure the crown's edges aren't sharp.

Michael constantly asks the actors for clarity, 'Meaning what...?' He works for some time with Eddie on Richard's long speech in which he, with real pain and agony, reluctantly hands over his crown: 'Ay, no. No, ay; for I must nothing be. / Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.'

'I would love to hear each "no". I want them to bang out,' says Michael to Eddie. 'Shakespeare's written this for a reason. Each one has an intention.' Eddie understands: 'It's not two "nos". It's "no no" – i.e. you can't say no.' Listening to the line again, Michael comments, 'That first "no" we're not hearing. You put it all into the second. Throwing away one of those "nos" in an internal way is too much at this point in the play.'

The question is asked, when does Bolingbroke take the crown? 'Once Richard says "Ay", Bolingbroke needs to be taking the crown away,' Michael tells Andrew. 'If you still hold it there I'm waiting for Richard to do something.' Again, he considers the audience. 'Remember all the people who don't know *Richard*

//. They'll be thinking, "Here's the moment when the crown gets handed over." What's extraordinary is there's so many key moments in the play for those in the audience who don't know it.'

Michael prefers, in the first instance, to trust the actors' instincts in finding staging solutions, such as Bolingbroke taking the crown. 'Before we play my logic, let's play yours.' If he's not sure about something they try he'll simply say, 'Ish...' Or of two possible choices, 'Let's play with both and see.' Michael's always concerned that nothing of significance be 'underplayed'. He warns the actors against 'undervaluing' their lines, such as York's gentle reminder to Richard: 'To do that office of thine own good will / Which tired majesty did make thee offer...' Equally important is the way in which characters receive information. 'Can you at all points listen to what the Duke of York is saying and take it in,' Michael asks Eddie.

He focuses on Richard's, 'Now mark me how I will undo myself', observing that it's his choice to do this to himself – 'Only Richard can do that.' He encourages Eddie to make his long list – 'My manors, rents, revenues, I forgo. / My acts, decrees, and statutes I deny' – like a shopping list. 'Shove it at Bolingbroke.' Michael observes a technical point, that when Eddie truly knows his lines, not just having learnt them, he'll be able to rattle off the list. Meanwhile, says Michael, Bolingbroke's intelligence would know, and we'd see it, to let Richard get this out of his system.



Before the rest of the cast rejoins, Eddie wants to run through Richard's 'looking-glass' speech. Working through his monologues, beginning, 'Must I do so? And must I ravel out / My weaved-up follies?', Eddie pauses: 'This makes so much more sense now. The last bit I did in such a rush.' He and Michael discuss staging. 'Is this alright, this position?' Referring to the speech above, Michael says, 'You shouldn't do anything like that down in that corner. You should occupy the centre.'

On a technical detail he tells Eddie to throw the mirror down after, 'How soon my sorrow hath destroyed my face' – 'Bang! Otherwise we don't hear "face".' He turns to Andrew: 'Can you step in at that point – "The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face" – so once more it's about bringing the two of you together.' Should Bolingbroke pick up the broken glass? It would bring him downstage. The actors joke about breaking a mirror every performance, resulting in a 1,000 years bad luck.

The other actors join Eddie, Andrew and Ron in the rehearsal room and Michael goes back to the start of Scene Twelve and runs it through. The question is asked, at the top of the scene is it a ceremonial entrance? 'No,' says Michael. Afterwards, he gives some general notes. 'The room didn't build in tension, it kind of plateaued out. The space was without danger and threat. That's because, technically, it's a lot about pace and picking up cues and we're still finishing the learning stages. It's also about reactions and individual needs in the room.'

He refers to the challenges and counter-challenges the rival factions make to one another. 'Each of the gage throws is a "topper" – it tops the last one.' Michael doesn't want to lose the 'anarchy' in the room, but equally doesn't want it to descend into a 'crucible of hate'. He wants to 'turn up the tension' and when the actors run the scene again he gestures, like a conductor, for them to up the level. He also gives a note to stage management to ensure the gages are heavy so that when they're thrown down they don't bounce.

Focusing on individual performances, Michael gives specific notes. He praises Daniel Easton on Bagot's speech: 'That was really good. You took the room.' He stresses the need for pace before the Bishop of Carlisle's violent reaction to Bolingbroke's pronouncement that he'll 'ascend the regal throne'. 'In order to kick that in and help Carlisle, it needs to be rattling along. It's hard to get to "Marry, God forbid!" out of a pause.' Michael refers to Carlisle's line, 'I speak to subjects and a subject speaks, / Stirred up by God thus boldly for his king' – 'Only you can do that in the room.'

Moving on to Richard's entrance, Michael wants to clarify details. 'Can I just be clear, we decided we weren't going to go down on our knees? Weirdly it's not right that you go down for him in this bit of the narrative, but instinctively you want to and that tells its own story.' At the end of the scene he picks up on Bolingbroke's use of the word 'convey' – 'Go some of you, convey him [Richard] to the Tower.' 'He's slipped up there,' says Michael. 'It's the wrong word for Bolingbroke to use.'

He finishes the rehearsal by looking at Richard and Bolingbroke's exit and the last part of the scene between the Abbot of Westminster, Carlisle and Aumerle. 'That's in pretty good shape,' says Michael in conclusion. 'Very good shape.'

I return to the rehearsal room the following week – week three, day two. The cast are working on Scene Fifteen (Act Five, Scene Three). 'We got a good energy coming out of the previous scene which should help project you into this scene,' says Michael. He considers its context, with reference to Bolingbroke. 'Can I ask

a more practical question? Has he been crowned? When? It's a weird little Racine moment. It all happens off-stage. The second biggest event of the play takes place off-stage.'

He reflects on this. 'I think I'm asking should I put a load of other lords in this scene and who should they be?' There follows some discussion about who should be present. 'I think I'll add Northumberland and Exton,' says Michael. 'Do it and let me imagine they're there and I'll see if it works.' Afterwards he turns to Mary O'Hanlon, the DSM, and says with a smile, 'Go and find out who's in the green room and bring me some lords!' By bringing on more lords at the top of the scene, Michael believes it makes more sense of Bolingbroke's entrance as King Henry IV.

Working through the scene, he stops to consider Aumerle's entrance – 'Where is the King?' 'Now that's always problematic, isn't it? Because you can see him.' There's talk about 'vom acting' or 'noises off'. Michael warns against playing too much in the wings: 'There's off-stage and there's off-stage. Be there and on.' Similarly he focuses on the Duchess of York's arrival. 'Your entrance needs to be much more linked to your exit in the last scene,' Michael says to Sian Thomas, 'that desperation.' He questions her line, 'What ho, my liege, for God's sake let me in!' 'Is someone not letting you in?' Michael asks Andrew to 'turn it up' when telling his aunt to stand. He notes that Henry's 'first act of kingship' is to pardon Aumerle.

Before running the scene again, Michael seeks to clarify the meaning of individual lines. 'Can I just go back on a couple of things...' He adds in some detail for the actors: 'Andrew, for what it's worth, your son didn't turn up for your coronation. I like this little bit of history because it's helpful. It might be an interesting colour to add. Enter with some annoyance, it'll give you a little bit of energy back.' He focuses on Bolingbroke's position at the top of the scene: 'You're king now, you can do all of that up here.'

It's suggested that some of Henry's followers be armed. 'That would help tell the story better,' comments Michael. He's relentless in his pursuit of clarity. 'So what am I missing here? There are some lines that are still a little fuzzy, but we'll sort those and then the scene will fly.' He pauses, thinking. 'I'll tell you what it is – it all happens a little bit too easily, Bolingbroke granting Aumerle conference alone. So that's one thing we can clean up.'

The actors ask if they can run the scene slightly slower to hit all the beats. Michael agrees: 'We're doing it at show speed when we haven't got all the words.' Afterwards he commends the actors: 'Everything was laid out, was slightly more emphatic. Good, hold onto that.' Looking ahead there's a discussion about the transition from Scene Fifteen to Sixteen. Michael wants to avoid a 'lights down/ lights up' moment. 'The problem is they're two slightly unrelated things, Exton suddenly deciding to kill Richard.' Can Northumberland make the transition work?

There follows a more intimate rehearsal with just Eddie and Michael, looking at Scene Seventeen (Act Five, Scene Five), beginning with Richard's soliloquy, 'I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world.' Michael and Eddie walk around the space talking quietly. Eddie would like to emerge out of the shadows at the top of the scene. Michael says it's possible to get him on during the lighting change that marks Northumberland and Exton's exit.

Focusing on Richard's speech, Michael comments, 'It's not like normal address. In having you talk to the audience, or the music, it destroys the isolation. If you do it for us instead of for yourself we're in the room with you, rather than you being

alone. Leaving us for as long as you dare and then eventually coming to us feels like a better journey.' As ever, he stresses the importance of diction and sounding the end of words. 'Sometimes the idea of how you're doing it becomes bigger than the words,' warns Michael. 'The ideas need to be with the words.' Eddie runs the speech again and afterwards Michael comments, 'There were so many colours in it, it seemed faster.'



Extracts from Assistant Director Simon Evan's Rehearsal Diary

Week One

As RICHARD II approaches opening night I'm sure plenty of ink will be spent discussing Michael Grandage's legacy. After all, it's his last production at the Donmar Warehouse under his own Artistic Directorship and a story of the passing over of power from one monarch to the next. But at this early stage it occurs to me there's nothing more significant to say on that topic other than a description of the atmosphere in the rehearsal room on the first day of this our first week of rehearsals.

On Monday morning Jerwood Space Four was filled with a company which, while sprinkled with new faces, consisted substantially of some of Michael's oldest cohorts. Michael Hadley, who first acted with Michael on *The Vortex* (Michael's first show at the Donmar), stood chatting with Ron Cook, Stefano Braschi and Ashley Zhangazha about *King Lear*, while Pippa Bennett-Warner and Eddie Redmayne discussed their own separate 'Donmar New York' experiences. David Plater, who's been Chief Electrician at the Donmar since the time of Richard II himself, explained his lighting design concept for the show to Richard Kent (Christopher Oram's sometime associate and now RICHARD II designer) while Adam Cork (with arm in a sling) chatted with Katy Bryant (regular Company Stage Manager) about how his bike had thrown him over the handlebars.

It seemed that anyone who'd ever worked for the Donmar – office or theatre, past, present and future – turned up for Michael's welcoming words so 'standing-room only' doesn't quite do justice to the mass of people and, although I couldn't see them, I'm confident that there were bouncers on the door turning people away when it came to the model box showing.

In practical terms we adhered to the tried-and-tested process, spending the first week making a first broad-stroke pass through the play a scene at a time. Each scene was read in the original and then re-read with the actors attempting to translate or paraphrase Shakespeare's iambic pentameter into modern vernacular to ensure we all understood its meaning.

We were gratefully aided in this by Michael's Shakespeare authority Russell Jackson, who was on hand to unpick some of the more convoluted rhetorical exchanges. Michael's view is that questions are better answered on the feet, in the world of the play, than around a table. So the next step involved putting it on it's feet and giving it the most rudimentary staging pattern. This was partly for the actors to understand how the scene may look, but also for Michael to start to understand how the scene might work and give him food for thought before the next pass in week two.

The finished product will no doubt be extraordinary but, at this early stage, it's the feeling of community which is so palpable. After all, it's a group of old friends who've come together again to do what they do best and, although we had to talk Michael down from leading rehearsals from King Richard's throne, I think he's enjoying it too.

Week Two

This has been a deeply satisfying week to observe as, before passing through the play more rapidly in the weeks ahead, tweaking and finessing in those ways I've described ad nauseam already, I've been able to watch Michael Grandage and the company of RICHARD II roll their sleeves up and tackle that foundation of theatre making – blocking.

This is worthy of mention for two reasons. The first is that we'd not really worried about staging too much last week as we'd spent it in the slightly claustrophobic Space Four. From this week on, however, and for the remainder of our rehearsal time, the Jerwood team has promoted us to the enormous Space Seven. It's the size of room where, if Michael points at an actor and gives a note, the image of him gesturing reaches the actor a clean two seconds before the sound catches up. This space has enabled the wonderful Donmar Production Management Team to erect a stand-in balcony – a pivotal element in Richard Kent's two-tiered set – and allowed us to stage the show accurately.



The second reason it's worthy of note is the sheer volume of bodies which need, prior to detailed character work, simply to be arranged on stage. In the pecking order of cast sizes of my year, RICHARD II towers over the rest by some considerable margin. With a company of sixteen it's a good six actors richer than it's next rival, *Luise Miller*, and has the added bonus of big crowd scenes, requiring many of those bodies on stage at the same time!

It has been in these scenes that you really see Michael's affinity with the Donmar stage, and perhaps another reason he was keen to cast the play with actors also familiar with the space. He places actors on strong diagonals, offers simple direction which can move them into the voms or upstage, and helps them begin early on to give the space to a specific actor in preparation for an upcoming speech – 'This sceptered isle...' – as fluently as he would note them on the finer specifics of a line of iambic pentameter. It's this ease with both play and playing space which has allowed directors at the Donmar to stage a kind of epic classical work usually kept for the Olivier and it's deeply enjoyable to watch because, whatever level of director you are, you can associate with the frustration of, 'Where the blazes am I going to put everyone?!'

Not that we've abandoned our detailed text work either. Michael's had one-on-one sessions with most of the company on their own specific speeches and, in moving through the play a second time chronologically, we've also been able to take a breath and enjoy unpicking those scenes with a slightly smaller quotient of actors on stage.

Week Three

There was a point, at the beginning of our third week of rehearsals, when one of the company – naming no names – delivered the word 'heart' as the end of a line of iambic pentameter. The issue was, however, that the word he/she actually delivered was more akin to a 'harr' sound. The lack of a hard consonant at the end of the line was conspicuous, but not nearly as conspicuous as Michael Grandage, who instantly finished the line for him/her, throwing an audible 't' sound at them from his seat at the front of the rehearsal room.

This was Week Three, and the 'correct' articulation of Shakespeare's language was to be Michael's prominent pursuit. Last week we focused on staging and storytelling, enjoying the arrangements of bodies in space and the clear delivery of Shakespeare's narrative. This week, as we passed through the play a further two times, we have been exploring the language in the most minute detail, not just to unlock it's meaning, but to unlock its very structure.

Through scene work and one-on-one sessions I've seen Michael guide cast member after cast member through his approach to Shakespearean verse; at once faithful to the text's legacy but also hugely modern and accessible. In more than one oratorical moment he rose from his chair and addressed the room, with the kind of passion that only comes from total love of the subject material, debunking what might be considered the more measured and metrical delivery of days-gone-by in favour of a more smooth and honest delivery of Shakespeare's poetry. 'Don't be a slave to it,' he urged, 'just own it.'

Not that Michael isn't faithful to Shakespeare's words and construction. The 't' sound he spat out into the room was joined by many other letters as the week progressed, actors were corrected over errors as minor as saying 'shall' rather

than 'will' in a scene and his pencil constantly hovered over the script ready to underline a word or phrase which was swallowed or thrown away. His notes on the structure of the verse – so often a point of contention in actors, directors and audiences – were not in any way against the flow or construction of the line, rather an impassioned reminder to actors that Shakespeare, more than any writer since, captured the rhythm of natural speech and is at it's best when delivered as such.

The effect was truly remarkable as words, lines and speeches took on another level of humanity. It felt, for the first time, as though a measured, overly rhythmical delivery had held us, as temporary audience, at arm's length, as though we were admiring a museum reconstruction and now suddenly we'd been pulled into the story, watching fully-fleshed characters talk rather than declaim. The language and delivery is still heightened, obviously, as all theatrical speech is, but also, now, fundamentally honest to the real people and real emotions which, whether we're presenting Kings or Gardeners, is surely our responsibility to presen... 't'.



Week Four

In his closing words to the company at the end of our third week of rehearsals, Michael prepared them for Week Four by urging them to think of it as 'luxury week'. This doesn't mean my report chronicles a week of massages, three-course lunches and pedicures, rather that, brought up on a diet of four-week rehearsal periods, Michael thinks of the additional five days which the Donmar's five-week period allows as a treat. It's one last chance to ensure that the choices we've made in staging, delivery and storytelling are the correct ones. We were already strong enough to go into the theatre, he said, but that didn't mean we shouldn't treat these final few days, before we 'lock the show down' and begin runs in the Jerwood in week five, as a further chance to question everything one last time. 'The show is in great shape,' he promised, 'but let's just make sure that it can't be even better still.'

So it was that we passed through the show twice more in week four, though truth be told, and despite the call to spontaneity, there were no radical departures from the work of weeks one to three. We haven't re-located the story to the confines of a mental asylum, nor have we followed Deborah Warner's 1995 concept and given Pippa Bennet-Warner the role of Richard II, or John Barton's 1973 idea with Andrew Buchan and Eddie Redmayne switching their respective Bolingbroke/Richard roles on alternate nights.

In reality the changes, when instituted, were fairly minor – which is reassuring for the producers but makes for a marginally less interesting report – but significant. We questioned and qualified which scenes people should be armed in, and re-staged Bolingbroke's approach to Richard's castle. We introduced a more violent separation of Richard and Isabel in their farewell scene and gave Pippa Bennet-Warner another character to address as she waits for Richard, avoiding a (less-focused) soliloquy.

These and a hundred other little tweaks and alterations are enriching the production and it's worth remembering that the detail we now expect from Donmar shows is not simply a result of repetition, but a freedom and willingness to jettison established and rehearsed work in pursuit of something which might be just a little better, or clearer, or – thank goodness – more interesting.



An interview with director, Michael Grandage

The last time I interviewed you was during rehearsals for John Gabriel Borkman four years ago. We talked at some length about what it is to be an Artistic Director and you referred to going on a journey with a group of collaborators and an audience. I don't know whether you had a map when you set out, but I'm wondering where you think the journey has taken you as you near the end of your time at the Donmar Warehouse?

There's a journey that you aspire to at a time like that and then there's the actual journey when you come out the other end. And as we emerge now out the other end, I'm quite excited and satisfied that connecting with a group of key collaborators to build a house style is a journey we've achieved. The house style has come out of that journey so strongly that other people you invite to create work in the space do so within its framework.

By 'house style' I mean the way we present things in design terms. The way we cast things, the way we present all the other elements of a production put together, including the way we actually produce the work. All of that adds up to the way an audience then receives it. Each of those elements needs to connect to each of the elements in every production, so that sitting back from it, usually when the productions are over, you see something that emerges called a house style.

So in terms of that part of the process I feel very happy that in a 'blindfold test' where somebody's brought into an auditorium blindfolded, has it removed and then asked, 'What do you think you're looking at?' I'd like to think they'd say, 'This is a Donmar production.' And I think it would be instantly recognisable because of the high level of production values that we place on all our productions. The nature of the look of a production, even though you can have two plays from different worlds, different times, to completely different physical sets, somewhere there is a unifying part of the presentation that makes you recognise the high level of achievement that comes from a Donmar production.

Attracting new audiences has certainly happened because, as we sit here now, what's happened in my entire tenure of nine and a half years is that we've built audiences. When we took over the Donmar we weren't playing regularly to full houses and we are now at the end of that time. And that means we can even sustain the idea of something not working and people will come back to book because you've created a quality-control where they'll always get something worth booking for.

We've achieved a hundred percent audience figures in the last five years. The make-up of that audience is a more interesting question, because we still have no real data available to us about understanding exactly who those people are. But I think by shifting some of the programming in different directions, most notably I suppose Spelling Bee, which was at the beginning of 2011, we targeted a completely different audience. Where did they come from? How did they even know to come? You have your core group of supporters, and then a group equally as big around the supporters who move from production to production. That means we've got a bigger audience base than we probably thought.

When I'm in the auditorium I realise now there is an upstairs and a downstairs syndrome. They're a lot of younger people sitting upstairs, partly because those seats are cheaper, and we're now offering greater access by having more cheap



seats. We've changed our pricing structure in the last two years meaning we've got more ten-pound seats than we had before. Those ten-pound seats rather satisfyingly are now being taken up by younger people. So we've got a bigger younger audience than we had when we last spoke, which I think is wonderful because it's a nice thing to be able to pass on to Josie Rourke, who comes in as the new Artistic Director.

I think that's something her generation and outlook can build on, encouraging more young people to come to the Donmar. But remember everything always has to be in context. We only have two hundred and fifty seats. Who can they go to on any one evening? The good news is that they are all going. It would be far worse for me to be sitting here with you and discussing the problem that we still can't sell out.

Why did you choose a Shakespeare play for your last production? And why, specifically, Richard II?

Richard II because it's a young man's play. I wanted very deliberately to end a regime not with an old man's play, like King Lear, but with a young man's play. And I've extended that way beyond just having a young king, and a group of young people around the king, but also the design team. I've deliberately focused on the next generation.

The costumes and the set are by Richard Kent, who has been Christopher Oram's associate now for many years. This offers him an opportunity just at the end of my time, in the same way as at the beginning of my time I brought in two or three new people who'd not really done much in London before - one was Christopher Oram, one was Neil Austin and the other was Adam Cork. Now we've become the older generation, and, as I leave, I want to come full circle and bring in the next generation. It was a very deliberate choice to go out looking to the future, rather than going out looking behind me.

You mentioned in the 'Meet and Greet' that you were in a production of Richard II when you were 17 and I'm wondering if the play holds a special significance for you?

It does. I was in it at the National Youth Theatre, interestingly enough with Douglas Hodge who played Bolingbroke. We were both 17 and went round Europe with it. It was a very important moment because it was my introduction to Shakespeare in performance and it's stayed with me. As a result I've been a Richard II collector ever since. I saw a production with Alan Howard as Richard at Stratford many times in the early 1980s. And subsequently any other production that's come along, I always like to see how it's interpreted. It's a play that has a particular hold on me because of the poetic language, and the fact that it feels very modern. There are lines in this play like no other Shakespeare that seem to ring out, that feel like they've been written in our time.

So I'm really looking to do another Shakespeare in this space - my final Shakespeare in this space, my final play in this space - because it's a writer I've come to have a relationship with at the Donmar in a very specific way; with Othello and Lear, and with Twelfth Night and Hamlet in a bigger space at the Wyndham's. I felt that the Donmar Shakespeare under me needed maybe just one more before I went.

It's interesting that two of the Donmar's most famous productions have both been of new plays, Frost/Nixon and Red. So the classical repertoire has easily been balanced out during my time with productions from the European repertoire and everything else. But Shakespeare we still haven't done that much of if you think about it. Nearly seventy productions over ten years and there's still only been two Shakespeare's at the Donmar, and two outside, under me. So going out with our greatest writer seemed like an appropriate exit.

You say your introduction to Shakespeare in performance came through youth theatre, but where did you first encounter his plays? At school? Was it there your imagination was captured?

Unfortunately it wasn't at school because the main set text during my time was Julius Caesar, and despite a perfectly good English master it was never tackled through performance. It was really through performance that it came alive for me and the National Youth Theatre was my first experience of performing Shakespeare with another group of people. I hadn't even begun to realise how accessible it could be and how easy it was once you got over the hurdle of trying to work out what the language means.

It's a huge hurdle but there are ways into that that make it easier. Not worrying about metre so much that it puts you off, but actually understanding the metre is there as a help. All of those things I only really discovered in performance. But when I discovered them at a young age, still a teenager, the world was opened up to me. And one of the things we can do at the Donmar, which happened to me at my very first Shakespearean performance as an audience member - Twelfth Night, 1978, a Royal Shakespeare Company tour to Cornwall - was seeing in close-up people speaking the language. But seemingly just speaking it as an extension of themselves.

And I think that was my other big way in. The eye-opener for me was seeing that it wasn't a different kind of acting that was required, it wasn't a different kind of speaking to how we speak in life, it was just an extension. And once that had



been presented to me in that way there were no more obstacles to Shakespeare. He became something fluent, in the way we're speaking now. It's not like, for example, working in a foreign language. It's not like working on a French play, having to translate it in order to understand it; the speaking of it helps the understanding.

Were there any specific practitioners who helped your understanding of Shakespeare in performance? I'm thinking of Harley Granville-Barker's Prefaces to Shakespeare and, more recently, John Barton's Playing Shakespeare?

Mainly actors. All my work really has been contextualised by actors in performance, rather than academics. Although I will say the Granville-Barker Prefaces are a great way in. Going back to me in 1978, I was 16 then, I was watching Ian McKellen playing Sir Toby Belch, Roger Rees playing Andrew Aguecheek and the late Bob Peck playing Malvolio. It was really through them, as actors breathing life into characters that have been on a page for over four hundred years and making them feel like we were watching them in 1978, that I was inspired.

The fact that actors could prove that Shakespeare in performance was as alive as anything on television, as alive as anything on the cinema screen, and as alive as any new play in the theatre. So I took a lead from those great practitioners, sometimes watching Shakespeare on film, seeing everybody from Olivier to Branagh.

They want to discover the writer anew for their own time. So actors, if you like, are unwitting mentors for me as a director in Shakespeare. They keep my hope alive for Shakespeare being endlessly contemporary.

So you've learnt a lot from actors, and you yourself trained as and were an actor. I've always been struck by the fact that your rehearsal room is very much a learning environment in which you yourself are learning alongside the actors. You don't take up an expert position, arriving at rehearsals with all the answers.

Well I can't have all the answers because if I do, or if I pretend to, then I deny them a process. Part of the joy of performing is creating the performance from within. What directors can do is have discussions in which we talk about what might be inside them so they can access certain bits in order to bring them out, but I can't come along and say, 'This is the way this part must be played, why don't you do it like that?' Because it means they will never inhabit it. They will always be wearing it like clothes - somebody else's idea. In the Donmar space that will look like a lie, and you'll see it as a lie.

What you need to do is encourage them to come up with something that you can then debate within the context of the bigger production, and debate within the context of their relationships with other characters. And in that respect you act more as an umpire. Seeing some things that if they don't work for you - me - then it probably means they won't work for an audience. So my job is to steer away from something I see not working, even though the actor might have found a reasoning for it, and push them to something else. But at least we do so, even in that case, from the point of them coming up with something.

Reflecting on the 17-year-old Michael's first encounter with Shakespeare, what would you like a teenager today coming to see Richard II at the Donmar to take from the experience?

The first thing I'd like to do is extend an invitation to them not to be passive in their role in coming to the theatre. It's an active role. It's no mistake that there's a famous theatre company called Shared Experience, and that is what the theatre should be. It's a shared experience between the auditorium and the action on stage. We, the people who've created the piece, have a bigger responsibility than they do because we have a responsibility to encourage them to stay active throughout the performance.

It's a two-way journey; providing they come with an open mind, we will always have the potential to engage them. So what you go away with at the end of the evening is something that has been able to touch you in a creative way and make you think, and most importantly make you consider something about yourself as a human being.

Taking on a collective responsibility, taking on a shared experience, that's what I think anybody who's starting out going to the theatre should do because if you do and it works it'll give you a lifelong connection.

You've said before that the Donmar stage allows you to explore a piece of theatre in a very 'forensic' way.

That's right. It's a very unique dynamic. It's like a front room. And if you're at home, in your front room, and the degree of drama that frequently gets played out on the Donmar stage got played out in your own room, you'd have a response, you'd have a point of view. That's all that's demanded of you in the world, I think, to have a point of view.

So the forensic nature of the space at the Donmar is probably a very good starting point for anybody who doesn't go to the theatre much because it's a very clear way in, where you have to just lean forward in your seat to be a part of it. It's more problematic in a bigger auditorium. It's very difficult to have an emotionally connected, forensic response to drama at a distance.

Is that one of the things you'll miss, that ability to examine something so intimately?

Yes, I think I will miss that. But in a weird way when I came here from Sheffield Crucible, which is the second or third biggest stage in the country, quite quickly I missed playing on the epic scale. I then adapted and played it on a more forensic scale.



I think the whole point of moving on, for me personally, is about being able to take on a career where you can do everything. So I can say yes to people who offer me plays in small spaces, I can say yes to people who offer me plays in big spaces, I can say yes to other mediums to work in. I can do all sorts of things. When you're running your building as Artistic Director you put everything into running that building. Now I can put everything into a company with no building, and hope that I can continue to grow as an artist.



An interview with Eddie Redmayne, playing Richard

It's been a couple of years since we last spoke, during the previews for John Logan's *Red* at the Donmar Warehouse. That was a very different experience to this – a new play and a two-hander – whereas now you're leading a company of sixteen in a Shakespeare history. What does that feel like?

It's mildly terrifying, I suppose! What's nice is that I'm not incredibly well read when it comes to plays. I've done several Shakespeare plays in my life, at school and one professionally – a production of *Twelfth Night* – but I didn't know *Richard II*. I'd seen it with Kevin Spacey but didn't know it well.

Various people over the past few years have said to me, 'You should play Richard.' And I kept meaning to read it, but then Michael called me and said, 'I'm going to say two words and I want you to say yes or no...' And they were 'Richard II'. And I thought, 'Well, if all these people have said it, clearly they must know better than I do!'

And I kind of like that, in a way, that they see something in you that can play the part and that gives me confidence. So it was really Michael's faith in me that gave me the confidence to do it.



So the background to this production is that Michael called you after the experience of doing *Red*?

Exactly. And we'd had an amazing experience, a sort of maturing experience, of taking *Red* to Broadway, which was a totally different beast – a different environment, a different audience – so a really new experience. There was also a sense that taking a play from the intimacy of the Donmar, where you have an audience on three sides, particularly in *Red* where you're imagining paintings on three sides – to suddenly take that to a nine-hundred seat proscenium arch theatre in New York, that created a load of challenges.

Also being two British actors taking a play set in New York to an audience in New York comes with challenges, culturally, but it was an amazing experience and I enjoyed it hugely. I became very close with Alfred Molina, John Logan, who wrote it, and Michael. There is that wonderful thing about acting that doesn't really change, if one's lucky, when you get into it professionally, that it still retains that sense of community it had when you did it at school with your mates – that amazing sense of company.

So it was lovely to be asked to do another Donmar production. It's the third play I've done there and there's a reason the world thinks it's one of the great spaces. I'm thrilled to be back.

In a way you're going on a journey with Michael, with him suggesting – among others – that you play this character. Obviously you then had to read the play, what were some of your first thoughts encountering the text?

My first thoughts were that this man, Richard, had a facility with words unlike anything I'd ever seen. He has this amazing capacity to be living in a situation, whilst at the same time looking down on it and sort of scrutinising it. He'll be having thoughts, then he'll pause from those, go off on some extraordinary anecdotal tangent and then come back round. There's a real sense of his love of language.

The most important aspect for me, in terms of understanding the text, was believing in the Divine Right of Monarchy. It's something that we as a modern audience may have difficulty contending with, really believing that everyone thought God had chosen the King.

What's interesting for me is that Richard starts almost God-like, then comes into being King, then into being man and then into being broken man. It's almost like the fall of man, the four facets of the guy. In the same way that he can't reconcile all those things, he's trying to battle with it. And the audience watches him deteriorate. It's almost like the more he deteriorates, the higher his sensitivity and sensibility become to analysing and scrutinising himself.

I was going to ask you about the journey Richard goes on, because at the start of the play he's not immediately the most likeable character.

No. I love that! It's one of the worst burdens for an actor, to play a part that has to be likable, because you can only screw it up. One of the most interesting aspects of the play for me is how flawed Richard is. There's a sense that he was a child star. He'd come to the throne aged 14, had dealt with various uprisings and revolts – with his counsellors – and believed the hype.



It must be a really odd thing... You've been in charge since you were 14-years-old, you've had these people – counsellors – who are very informative, and suddenly you want to break away from that, in the same way an adolescent does from their parents. To stamp your own sense of character on a situation. And I feel that's what's going on at the beginning of the play, in his relationship with Gaunt and York. He's saying, 'No, I'm taking a grip on this and I'm doing it my way.' And out of that same adolescent stubbornness and tunnel vision comes his downfall.

It's this sort of precocious talent he has a young man, isn't it? We're imagining he's in his middle-20s?

He dies aged 32 or 33, so I would say he's late 20s.

The other interesting thing, not having played a Shakespearean king since school, is how important the history is. It's really interesting because I've done a few television and film adaptations of books recently, either true stories or based on novels that are loved, and there's always that divide whether to use the book as the source material or the script.

For example, I just did *Bird Song* and you know many people are huge lovers of that novel. So you read the book and take anything you can, see whether you can use it in the script. But there comes a point when you have to get rid of the book and only focus on the script, because for something to be an adaptation there are holes in it in which the audience aren't going to know. Fred Molina always used to say, 'There's nothing worse than an audience being shown your homework.' Like saying, 'Look, I've done all this study.' That's not character, that's not what's interesting.

And it's the same with Richard II. You do as much research as you can in order to validate the choices you make, but there are some things where you come completely a cropper, and you realise there's no point doing biographical stuff – particularly with the Queen. She's really eight but, as Pippa Bennett-Warner [playing Isabel] discovered, she's probably an amalgamation of Richard's two queens. He was very fond of his first wife, who died, and knew Isabel for less time. And obviously there was a massive age disparity. The purpose of the Queen in the play is very important, so you get rid of the biographical reality and find a new reality within the context of the piece.



It is mindboggling, the history of this play, when you first encounter it, isn't it? To try and understand who's related to who.

I know. I certainly know that my family when they come and see it, and they're not Shakespeare nuts or anything like that, in order for them to enjoy the play I want to say at the start that one of my uncles has been killed and I get the impression that probably the entire country knows I'm implicated – although I didn't commit the murder – in terms of having catalysed the killing.

And yet it's the big unspoken secret of the entire nation and no one will have the balls to challenge me or bring it up in front of me. It's almost like an open secret and my reading of it is to do with the idea that his uncles have been his counsellors and now he wants to step up. If one understands that – and it's mentioned in the first scene, Gloucester's death – the importance of it is really... I kind of want it to be written across the programme!

I was there when you were discussing it in rehearsal and it hadn't really occurred to me who the Duke of Gloucester was, because he's not on stage. When it becomes apparent that Mowbray, one of Richard's closest followers, is very much aware of your possible involvement and is therefore a threat, no wonder you then have to banish him for life.

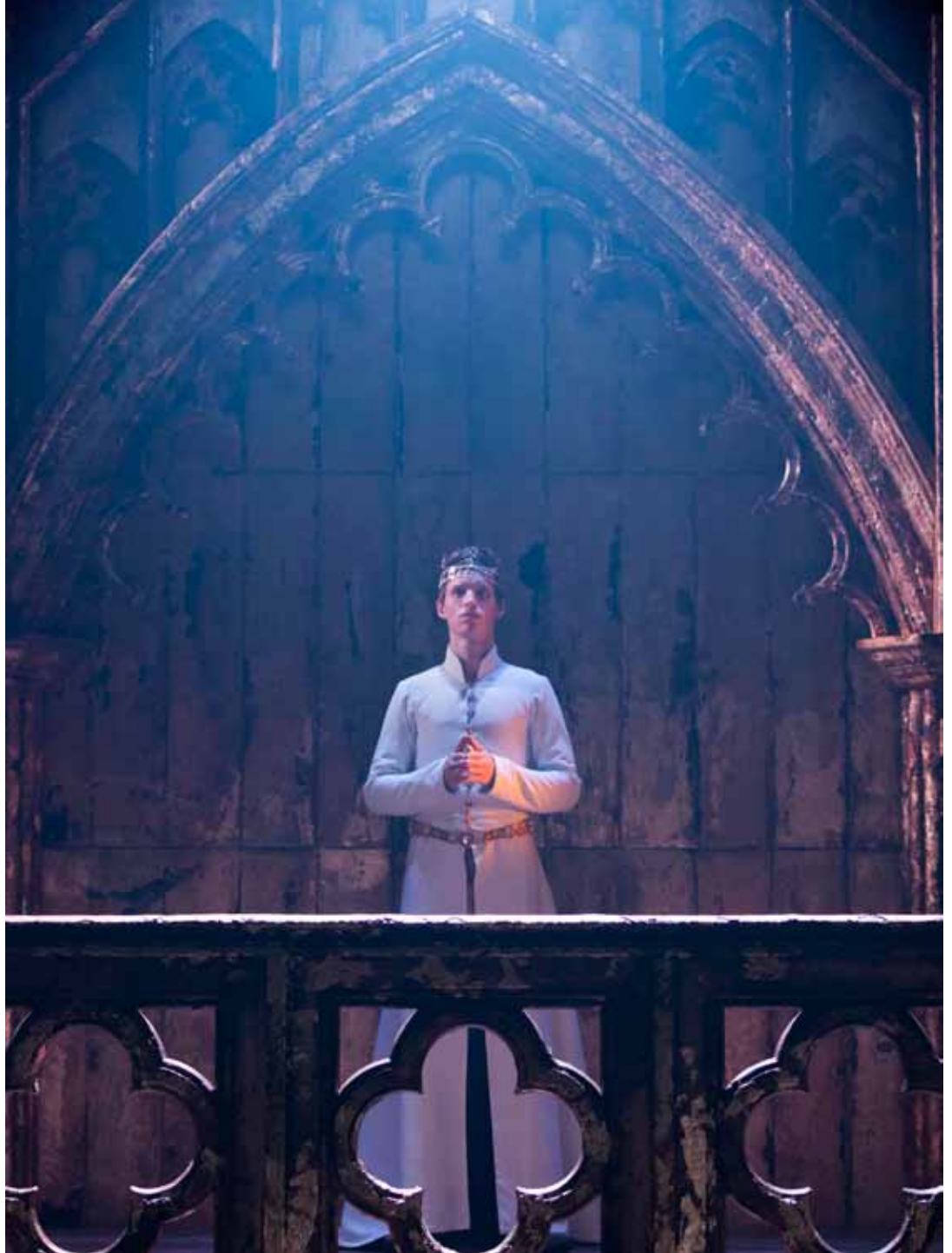
That's what's been so interesting for me, the clarity that comes through the research. When I first read that scene, that first paragraph, one line and it's all a question: 'Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster' – so one guy has already got two names – 'Hast thou according to thy oath and band / Brought hither Henry Hereford' – also known as Bolingbroke – 'thy bold son' – so your son – 'Here to make good the boisterous late appeal – / Which then our leisure would not let us hear – / Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray' question mark! I thought, 'How can you introduce an audience to three different characters in one question without it sounding mannered and tricky?'

It really doesn't help that they all have different names and titles, does it?

I know. And that's the real frustration for me, because I think it's what people are scared of in Shakespeare. I know when I go and watch Shakespeare, if I'm confused from the outset I turn off. And that's what's great about the way Michael works, finding real clarity in his storytelling and making sure that we're all on top of what we're saying so that hopefully that clarity comes across.

It's a young person's play in many respects, isn't it? It's about the struggle between these two relatively young men. What do you think will resonate for young people coming to see Richard II?

I think there's a sense of that confidence, the bravura of youth, which I think is wonderful. It's interesting because I've just done this film called *My Week with Marilyn* and the guy starts aged 20, just out of university, thinking he can take over the world and the film gives him an emotional education. In some ways, in much more extreme circumstances obviously, Richard starts believing he is God's chosen one on earth and ends up in a prison cell, murdered.



What I keep going back to, and there's no relation to it in our production, is how contemporary it feels with regard to Colonel Gaddafi and at what point, when he found himself hiding in a sewer, did he think, 'Maybe I was wrong?' If one believes that people can't simply be inherently evil, then there must have been a moment when he thought, 'Am I just a man?'

So that idea of power, what power is, and how it blinds you has been really interesting. I also think Richard has an incredible emotional education through the play, which is made more scintillating by his capacity to self-analyse whilst doing it.

Many of Shakespeare's protagonists – Hamlet, as an obvious example – have a capacity to self-analyse, but with Richard he seems able to offer a commentary in the moment. I was watching you and Michael rehearse Richard's final scene in his prison cell. That's a huge speech, both technically and in terms of the journey he goes on. Throughout the play, as he progresses from King to man, he becomes more human, doesn't he?

He does become more human and I hope that's clear in the production. I think it's so important. And I think what Michael wants to do with sound and design

and even the vocal, he starts with this pomp, and certainly at the 'Lists Scene', is something declamatory.

But what's clever about Michael is that he sold the play to me as a thriller. And I absolutely see it the more that we do it, particularly the 'Deposition Scene', handing over the crown – Richard said he's going to do it, he said he's done it, then he can't let himself... A lot of the play is one thing being spoken and another thing being felt, and if we can keep that thing being felt taut like a string underneath what's spoken, then I think what's being played on the surface will be energised by it.

And of course the audience don't know what's going to happen, so Michael equating it with a thriller is true.

And that's one of the great things about *Richard II* not being one of the plays we know as well, it's not *Richard III* or a *Midsummer Night's Dream*. As Michael keeps saying, a large percentage of the audience will never have seen this play before and that's really exciting.

Most actors say they don't concern themselves with previous interpretations of a character they're playing. Is that true of you? Are you aware of other performances of Richard?

I saw Kevin Spacey's one and thought he was magnificent. It was interesting because it had a contemporary setting – lots of screens and cameras and stuff – but what Michael wanted, and what in some ways the text helped to dictate, was this medieval, slightly placeless setting. It has to be in a time in which we can persuade an audience that the belief in the Divine Right of Monarchy is tantamount.

So I only saw Kevin's production, nothing else. I know Mark Rylance, who did a wonderful production at the Globe Theatre, and I asked him for some tips. Mark gave me my first job. I played Viola opposite his Olivia in *Twelfth Night* at the Middle Temple Hall, for where it was first written, so I have him to thank for a lot.

I asked Mark's advice when I saw him in New York recently and he reminded me how funny Richard can be, and that's interesting because I haven't found that colour in him yet. I can see it there, staring at me, and I think, 'God! Am I not releasing that?' but I don't want to make things flippant. Hopefully, with more time, I'll find those moments of wit.

But Mark also gave this wonderful description of Richard, basically likening him to Michael Jackson. I was like, 'What?!' 'He's a child star, cocooned in a world of his own, believing all the managers and agents around him, having no idea what his public image really is.' That was an interesting take on it, I thought. Relating it to a contemporary celebrity and that weird world was very helpful. I haven't told anyone that by the way!

What's been one of the biggest challenges, for you personally, taking on this character and play?

It's been challenging in lots of ways. Challenging in terms of self-confidence, believing you can do it. It's interesting because I oscillate between, 'Wow! I can do this' and 'What am I thinking?' So that's a constant battle.

The other thing is finding the timbre of the piece to play at the Donmar. One of the lovely things about the Donmar is its intimacy. I want to be able to make it ring modern but at the same time, as Michael correctly points out, to serve the metre and not to drop things. There are moments when I feel like I'm possibly being over-mannered in my articulation, and I desperately don't want it to sound like a cliché of what people find old-fashioned about Shakespeare. I want to serve the space but at the same time serve the text and that's a real challenge, so it'll be interesting to see how that resonates when we get into the theatre.

The other challenge, I suppose, is stamina. I haven't played a part this big before, so I'll be living quite a monastic life.

I think some of the challenges are choices that every actor confronts when doing Shakespeare, like in my last speech: 'I have been studying how I may compare / This prison where I live unto the world.' Do you address that directly to the audience or are you in your own mind? And what clues do you have to do that, and even if the clues are glaringly obvious, do you then make a choice against it?

I'm trying to find a sort of hybrid. A lot of it's about his own mind at that point, and also the formality of boredom – how you try and keep yourself entertained. At the same time I want, in some way, to incriminate the audience – you may have been sat there judging me but we all have some of these foibles, although I may be an extreme example of it.

And we are incredibly implicated, aren't we? We're there with you in the prison cell, because at the Donmar there's no escape from the stage and what's happening on it.

I think so. I hope so. I think with all the ideas, with the sound and design, I'm hoping the audience will really feel right in there. That's what makes it so great a space, that you're forced to watch.



RICHARD II in performance

Journey of the speech

The following practical exercises consider approaches to Shakespeare's text with reference to a key speech from *Richard II*. In the first instance they aim to free the language from its literal meaning, encouraging the participants to play with the sound, shape and texture of words.

The speech below is spoken by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster near the beginning of Scene Five (Act Two, Scene One). Grievously sick, he rails against his nephew's reckless behaviour, accusing Richard of damaging his country's reputation by plundering it to pay for his excesses. Lancaster's brother, the honourable Duke of York, looks on sympathising with his views but remaining loyal to the King.

RICHARD II by William Shakespeare

An extract from Scene Five (Act Two, Scene One)

Gaunt Methinks I am a prophet new-inspired,
 And thus, expiring, do foretell of him:
 His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last;
 For violent fires soon burn out themselves.
 This royal throne of kings, this scept'red isle,
 This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
 This other Eden – demi-paradise –
 This fortress built by Nature for herself
 Against infection and the hand of war,
 This happy breed of men, this little world,
 This precious stone set in the silver sea,
 Which serves it in the office of a wall,
 Or as a moat defensive to a house,
 Against the envy of less happier lands;
 This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
 This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
 Feared by their breed and famous by their birth,
 Renowned for their deeds as far from home
 For Christian service and true chivalry,
 As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
 Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son;
 This land of such dear souls, this dear dear land,
 Dear for her reputation through the world,
 Is now leased out – I die pronouncing it –
 Like to a tenement or pelting farm.
 England, bound in with the triumphant sea,
 Whose rocky shore beats back the envious siege
 Of watery Neptune, is now bound in with shame,
 With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds.
 That England that was wont to conquer others
 Hath made a shameful conquest of itself.
 Ah, would the scandal vanish with my life,
 How happy then were my ensuing death!

As a group, stand in a circle and speak the whole speech, but only one word at a time. The first person speaks the first word, the person on their right the second, and so on round the circle until the speech is finished.

- Repeat the exercise, this time participants doing one of two things: when it's the turn of an individual to speak, if they find the word interesting – for whatever reason – they should emphasise it, saying the word to the circle as a whole; if they do not find the word interesting, then they should simply say it without emphasis to the person on their right.
- The group should experiment with what sounds the words can make by, for example, elongating the vowel sounds or stressing the consonants. Participants need to relish the taste and texture of the language and be aware of what their mouths and tongues have to do in order to say the words in sequence. How do particular word sounds – harsh, smooth, polysyllabic, etc.?
- Participants should look at the speech again and select two lines from it. They should not tell anyone else what they are.
- The group is going to discover who has chosen which lines in the following way: they should try to 'hear' the whole speech in their heads and when – and only when – they think it's time to say their line/s, speak it aloud.
- Someone signals when the exercise starts and everyone should concentrate and try to 'hear' the progression of the speech. Of course no one knows who has chosen which lines and there might be no one at all to speak the first, or first few, line/s. If this is the case, when repeating the exercise, a volunteer should speak the missing lines.
- Remember, when someone does speak the rest of the group should adjust the pace of the voice in their head by slowing down or speeding up.
- Afterwards discuss who chose which line and why. Often people have chosen the same line/s. What does this reveal? Is there an unspoken agreement among the group that some words or lines are more significant than others?

The next exercise explores physical ways into Shakespeare's language in an attempt to avoid over-analysing the text, which can often result in paralysis of thought and movement. The physical freedom is meant to encourage greater mental freedom in the participants.

- Working individually, participants should read the speech aloud – but to themselves – while moving round the room. At each punctuation mark they should change direction. The stronger the punctuation, the greater the change. For example, a comma might suggest a veer to the left or right, whereas a full stop should signal exactly that.
- Afterwards, the group can discuss how many change of directions they made. How much punctuation is there within the speech as a whole and what does that suggest about the thoughts of the character?
- Participants should repeat the exercise, this time ignoring the punctuation and only changing direction whenever they think the thought changes.
- People often talk about their thoughts being 'all over the place' or of 'going round and round in circles'. Participants should think of the speech as a map designed to help them, the actor, navigate a complicated journey in the mind of the character. The aim is to plot this journey step-by-step, stage-by-stage, within the room. Is the journey of the speech linear? Does it progress in a straightforward, uncomplicated manner or is the route circuitous and complex? What clues are there within the text to indicate a change in the direction of thought?
- Next, participants should speak the speech again but this time remaining still while recalling the physical journey in their mind.

Textual Analysis – Shakespearean to Modern English

During the first week of rehearsals, director Michael Grandage sat down with the actors involved in each scene, read through them once, then re-read them 'translating' the text from Shakespearean English to modern English. This ensured that everybody understood exactly what they were saying, and also helped clarify words whose meaning might have changed. During the first week of rehearsals, this exercise enabled the actors to quickly create a solid foundation upon which to build.

Below is an edited extract from the opening scene of *RICHARD II*. Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, have been summoned before the King to outline their grievances against one another.

RICHARD II by William Shakespeare

An extract from Scene One (Act One, Scene One)

Enter King Richard and John of Gaunt, with other nobles including the Captain whom is executing the role of Lord Marshal, and attendants.

King Richard Old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster,
Hast thou according to thy oath and band
Brought hither Henry Hereford, thy bold son,
Here to make good the boisterous late appeal
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

Gaunt I have, my liege.

King Richard Tell me, moreover, hast thou sounded him,
If he appeal the Duke on ancient malice,
Or on some known ground of treachery in him?

Gaunt As near as I could sift him on that argument,
On some apparent danger seen in him
Aimed at your highness.

King Richard Then call them to our presence.

Exit Captain.

Face to face,
And frowning brow to brow, ourselves will hear
The accuser and the accused freely speak.

Enter Bolingbroke and Mowbray, with Captain.

Bolingbroke Many years of happy days befall
My gracious sovereign, my most loving liege!

Mowbray Each day still better other's happiness.

King Richard We thank you both. Yet, one but flatters us,
As well appeareth by the cause you come,
Namely, to appeal each other of high treason.
Cousin of Hereford, what dost thou object
Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

Bolingbroke In the devotion of a subject's love,
Tendering the precious safety of my prince,

Mowbray I do defy him, and I spit at him,
Call him a slanderous coward and a villain;
Let this defend my loyalty:
By all my hopes most falsely doth he lie.

Mowbray *takes up the gage.*

In pairs read through the scene as it appears in the script.

- Next, experiment with staging the scene.**

- 56

Questions on the production and further practical work

You may wish to work individually on completing these questions.

- When you go to see the Donmar's production of *RICHARD II* consider the following:
- How does the design establish the world of the play, in terms of its location and atmosphere?
- How does the production utilise lighting and sound to realise the above scene?
- Elsewhere, what transformations take place within the main characters through the journey of the play? How do the actors embody these changes?



Reading and research

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Endnotes

(Endnotes)

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- 8 *King Richard II* by William Shakespeare, ed. Charles R. Forker (Arden Shakespeare, 2002), p.1
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- 16 *King Richard II* by William Shakespeare, ed. Charles R. Forker (Arden Shakespeare, 2002), p.70
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About the Donmar Warehouse

The Donmar Warehouse is an intimate not for profit 251 seat theatre located in the heart of London's West End.

Since 1992, under the Artistic Direction of Michael Grandage and his predecessor, Sam Mendes, the theatre has presented some of London's most memorable theatrical experiences and has garnered critical acclaim at home and abroad. With a diverse artistic policy that includes new writing, contemporary reappraising of European classics, British and American drama and musical theatre, the Donmar has created a reputation for artistic excellence over the last 19 years and has won 40 Olivier Awards, 23 Critics' Circle Awards, 21 Evening Standard Awards, two South Bank Awards and 20 Tony Awards from ten Broadway productions. In January 2012, Josie Rourke will succeed Michael Grandage as the Artistic Director of the Donmar.

Alongside the Donmar's productions, we offer a programme of Education events, which includes subsidised tickets, introductory workshops and post show discussions, as well as special projects which give young people an opportunity to involve themselves more closely in the work of the theatre.

For more information about the Donmar's education activities, please contact:

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