Richard III

Presented by **The Acting Company**, at **The Acorn Theatre**, April 29-May 15, 2004. Directed by Eve Shapiro. Scenic Design by Christopher Barreca. Lighting by Michael Chybowski. Sound by Steve Woods. Costumes by James Scott. Fight Direction and Movement by Felix Ivanov. Voice, Speech and Text Consultant, Elizabeth Smith. With Spencer Aste (Richard, Duke of Gloucester), Cedric Hayman (Sir Richard Ratcliffe), Bryan Cogman (Sir William Catesby, Second Murderer), Aysan Celik (Duchess of York), Craig Baldwin (Duke of Clarence, Bishop of Ely), Jason King Jones (Sir Robert Brackenbury, Rivers), Jeff Cribs (Lord Hastings, Sir James Tyrrel, Earl of Richmond), Erin Moon, (Lady Anne, Duke of York), Jenn Miller Cribbs (Queen Elizabeth), Josh Pohja (Marquess of Dorset, Prince Edward, Messenger), Michael Gotch (Duke of Buckingham), Glenn Peters (Lord Stanley, King Edward IV, Lord Mayor of London), Carine Montbertrand (Queen Margaret), Cedric Hayman (First Murderer), and others.

Katharine Goodland, *The College of Staten Island, City University of New York*

Eve Shapiro's interpretation of Shakespeare's *Richard III* emphasizes the combined workings of memory and conscience on Richard's psyche. The production opens with a flash-forward to Act 5, the eve of the Battle of Bosworth. We find the murderous king alone on stage, surrounded by the eight light towers that comprise the spare, elegant set design. The towers are made from scaffolding, mounted on rollers, so that they can be moved into different configurations for each scene. They form the V-shaped council chamber in which Hastings is accused and sentenced. They become the tower of London that imprisons the young princes. Four spotlights mounted on each tower are an integral part of the lighting design. In this opening scene a single spotlight follows Richard's halting steps. His mother's voice engulfs him from the loudspeakers, filling the theater with her disembodied rage. Richard shakes it off, and we hear his voice over the speakers declaring, "Why, I can smile, and murther whiles I smile . . . . . Can I do this, and cannot get a crown?" (*3 Henry VI*: 3.2.182-94). His mother's voice dissolves this bravado, denouncing his birth as a "grievous burthen," his infancy as "tetchy and wayward," and his manhood as "proud, subtle, sly, and bloody." These lines have frequently been interpreted as

a psychological explanation for Richard's evil: the child rejected and scorned by his mother could only grow into a self-hating butcher. The cinematic-style voice-over of the opening suggests this reading. But Spencer Aste's performance reaches beyond this simplification of the source of his evil.

Aste's Richard tentative, even ashamed, as he speaks the famous opening lines of the play. He avoids looking directly at the audience and thus fails to secure our collusion in the ensuing plots he has laid. This unusual interpretation is surprisingly effective. Aste plays Richard more like a Macbeth than a Tamburlaine, more driven by than delighting in the evil that defines him. Michael Gotch's potent Buckingham nearly overshadows this halting Richard during the first part of his rise. But the power dynamic shifts in 4.2 after Richard denies Buckingham's request for the promised earldom. Ironically Richard's stage presence becomes more forceful as his political power in the world of the play diminishes. Clever double-casting emphasizes the shifting currents of power, and the haunting of the present by ghost from the past. The actor playing Edward IV returns as the mayor and then as Lord Stanley. Lady Anne reappears as the young Duke of York. Hastings becomes Tyrell and finally returns as the avenger, Richmond. But just as Richard seems at times to be Buckingham's pawn, so Richmond seems less an agent in his own right than a force conjured by memory, conscience, and the unforgettable grief of the women.

The women's scenes of mourning are the most compelling. They are formidable antagonists to Richard's machinations. Their voices are resonant with the extremes of anger and grief, and rightfully demonstrat the power inherent in these characterizations. Lady Anne's mourning for King Henry is an act of defiance as well as sorrow. She proves Richard's equal in the ensuing sparring match until his expression of contrition and offer of the ring unsettle her. Her

bewilderment springs from her nobility rather than her fickleness, and she has her change of heart while managing to sustain our sympathy for her plight.

Margaret, Queen Elizabeth, and the Duchess of York are equally arresting. Stooped and wild, her long gray hair covering her face, Margaret evokes the mythic crone. She consumes the stage with her enraged voice and thrashing gestures. Each time one of her curses is fulfilled she appears lurking in the shadows. In the long speech in which Margaret calls Queen Elizabeth a "queen of sad mischance," Elizabeth stands tall and proud, like a soldier unafraid to face the most dangerous of foes. And indeed, in this play, the truth is the most dreaded opponent of all. The women prove to be the only ones in the play with the fortitude to face and tell the truth. It is this truth-telling, stirred up by the women's grief, and embodied in the curses of the ghosts at Bosworth, that in the end overwhelms Richard.

Antony and Cleopatra

Presented by **Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival and Boscobel Restoration**, at Garrison, New York, July 16-August 31, 2003. Directed by David Muse. Lighting by S. Ryan Schmidt. Sound by Chris Meade. Costumes by Sara Jean Tosetti. Fight Choreography by Rick Sordelet. With Kurt Rhoads (Mark Antony), Nance Williamson (Cleopatra), Adam O'Byrne (Octavius Caesar), Donald Warfield (Lepidus / Dolabella), Natasha Piletich (Charmian), Katie Hartke (Iras), Hunter Gilmore (Mardian), John Henbest (Alexas), Stephan Paul Johnson (Enobarbus), John O'Mahoney (Dercetus / Menas), Daniel Marzollo (Canidius), James Lloyd Reynolds (Agrippa), Michael Borrelli (Maecnas), Gabra Zackman (Octavia / Schoolmaster), Chris Edwards (Pompey / Eros), Ryan Quinn (Ambassador / Gallus), Earle Hugens (Scarus / Clown), and others.

By Katharine Goodland, *The College of Staten Island, City University of New York*

David Muse's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* emphasizes the play's hypothesis that history, defined as the founding and evolution of empire, is the byproduct of the haphazard intermingling of passion and policy. The production's spare set and artful use of space in and around the performance tent enable the breakneck scene-shifting demanded by the play's structure (this play has the most scenes, 42, of any of Shakespeare's plays). The turbulent pace suggests both the randomness and inevitability of the unfolding events. Human passion, like the sea, is paradoxically constant only in its perpetual flux. And the sea, like Cleopatra, at once unites and separates Egypt and Rome. The production's central stage prop is a large globe: the "world," a word that, as Frank Kermode notes, is used 45 times in this play about "world-altering" events. The "world" is raised and lowered three times during the production, creating a ritualistic, orderly rhythm that suggests the inescapable march of history as policy subdues passion. Each time the world descends, there has been a shift in power. The globe first appears in a brief tableau just before the text's opening scene. Caesar, Lepidus, and Antony stand silently in a triangle around the globe, which sits atop a Doric column at the center of the tent's performance space. The globe ascends, the triumvirs vanish, and we find ourselves in Egypt

frolicking with Antony and Cleopatra. Their lovers' game is telling. She playfully blindfolds him, and they trade clothes; he dons her silken robe and she pulls on his soldier's boots as Philo remarks upon the "dotage of [the General]" which "is become the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy's lust." The Globe descends a second time to mark the marriage of Antony and Octavia and the elimination of Lepidus. Now Antony and Caesar stand opposed on either side of the "world." The depiction ironically evokes the Heroic combat that Caesar, quelling passion with policy, will deny Antony. The Globe descends for the third and final time after the play's closing scene. Caesar enters silently, removes the globe from its perch, and carries it away. Imperial conquest, the subsequent destiny of the world, is firmly in the hands of the politicians.

The production's casting is as keen as its set design and staging. In their 45th performance together (their sixth at HVSF), Kurt Rhoads (Antony) and Nance Williamson (Cleopatra) assume the roles of Shakespeare's middle-aged lovers like second skins. Nance Williamson scintillates as the mercurial Queen: mutating from comic to lusty to violent to childlike to queenly in the space of a few lines. Kurt Rhoads proves her equal as Antony, when, leaving behind the reserve he has adopted as the business-like Roman general, he moves from submission to sorrow to rage in the space of a few scenes, first acknowledging that Cleopatra knows "how much [she is his] conqueror" and then demanding that Thidias be whipped. HVSF veteran Stephen Paul Johnson (Titus, Shylock, Angelo, Parolles) is a fine Enobarbus. But he doesn't impart his character's mystical admiration for what David Bevington has aptly dubbed Cleopatra's "holy amorousness." When Enobarbus notes that "the holy priests / bless her when she is riggish," he needs to convey that this spiritual sensuality is too much for the world to bear. Adam O'Byrne is a superb Caesar: tall and youthful, he expertly embodies the brisk polish of the consummate politician. The director's double-casting choices tease out interesting associations in the text.

Donald Warfield's Lepidus is avenged when, as Dolabella, he deprives Caesar of his opportunity to humiliate Cleopatra. Gabra Zackman doubles as Octavia and the schoolmaster, a choice that lends poignancy to the schoolmaster's plea to Caesar: "Such as I am, I come from Antony. / I was of late as petty to his ends / As is the morning dew on the myrtle leaf / To his grand sea." This clever cross-gender casting highlights the affinity between the characters. Both Octavia and the schoolmaster are subject to Antony's whims. His impassioned, desperate choices have the same de-humanizing effects as Caesar's cold, deliberate policies.

Sara Jean Tosetti's costumes are sumptuous, especially those for Cleopatra. Over the course of the play she luxuriates in silk gowns and pajamas of gold, red, purple, and deep olive. When Antony blames her for his devastating loss in battle, decrying her as "the foul Egyptian," she is appropriately attired in deep scarlet. For the play's denouement, she wears white, a color symbolizing not only marriage, but also purification and sacrifice. She ritualistically robes herself, like a priestess preparing for a religious rite, ceremoniously placing the trademark severe black wig over her golden hair. In her death she is transformed from the willful, complex, ever-changing woman of history into the iconic Cleopatra of myth over whom the "Gods themselves do weep.". The fate of the world may belong to the politicians, not the passionate. But, it is now a "dull world" with "nothing left remarkable / Beneath the visiting moon."

All's Well That Ends Well

Presented by **Theater Ten Ten**, at **Park Avenue Christian Church**, New York, New York, February 6-March 7, 2004. Directed by Lynn Marie Macy. Lighting by George Gountas. Sound and Music coordinated by David Scott. Original music composed and performed by Addie Brownlee. Costumes by Lynn Marie Macy and Emily Rose Parman. Laura Standley (Helena), Dan Callaway (Bertram), Addie Brownlee (Mistress LaVache, Gypsy Dancer), Michael Gnat (Lord LaFeu, Second Soldier), Duncan M. Rogers (King of France, First Soldier), Paula Hoza (Countess of Rousillon), Derek Devareaux (Parolles), Colleen Piquette (Page, Duke of Florence), Ellen Turkelson (Rynalda, Widow), Marni Ann Whitehead (Marianna, Hand Maiden, Gypsy Dancer), and others.

Katharine Goodland, *The College of Staten Island, City University of New York*

Lynn Marie Macy's production of Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well* is set in a storybook land located somewhere between the worlds of Jane Austen and Stevie Nicks. Laura Standley's bewitching Helena, complete with shaggy blonde locks and black bohemian dress, could pass for the Wiccan songster herself. She and the guitar-wielding, ballad-singing, Mistress LaVache in bohemian harlequin seem to have stumbled into the play straight from the Sixties. The first time we meet Mistress LaVache, she is singing the popular 60s ballad "Polly Von," whose dark tale of murdered love descants nicely upon the troubled themes of Shakespeare's comedy. The contrast between these folksy beauties and the rest of the characters, who would be most at home on a set of *Pride and Prejudice*, handily illuminates latent tensions in the plot. Helena, with her mysterious herbal arts of healing, recalls the gypsy wanderers who were reviled by a medieval Christendom that defined itself in opposition to many of the cultures that enriched it. This thematic thread is reinforced by the haunting music of Loreena McKennitt, whose trademark tunes fuse ancient Celtic and Middle Eastern strains.

Macy's innovative choice of using a female Lavache who assumes a knowing, jocular attitude towards her rambling partner Parolles creates a smart parallel to the Helena-Bertram courtship. Mistress Lavache's earthy character contrasts with Helena's otherworldy nature. Helena's sincere romanticism is foiled by Lavache's ironic pragmatism. But by the end these stances appear to be two sides of the same

coin. The witty sparring between Lavache and Parolles foretells what may lie ahead for Helena and Bertram once they are wed.

Laura Standley's Helena is sweet and strong, and we want her to succeed in curing the king and winning Bertram's love. Helena and the King are alone in his chambers when she cures him, a tableau that suggests she is as much his adoptive daughter as his doctor. Is this the real magic that heals? The moment suggests a key movement of the plot: the realignment of family relationships that have been torn and distorted by death, disease, and social codes. When the king's health returns, Helena changes from her black gypsy dress into a white gown, suggesting that the encounter has transformed her as well–from outcast to prize.

But as we know, she is not the prize that Bertram wants. There is palpable chemistry between Helena and Bertram in this production, implying that Bertram's defiance is a more a form of self-assertion than distaste. Helena's soliloquy when she discovers she has driven Bertram to the wars suggests that this once-independent spirit has been tamed by the society she seeks to join. As she stands alone in her virginal white dress, she begins the speech as if in prayer and ends it on a note of compunction–chastising herself for being overly bold. Her pilgrimage in this production seems less a form of disguise than an act of punishment, a kind of self-taming that transforms her into a near cousin of patient Griselda. Is this Helena's education as a Christian woman?

Helena's growing domesticity is also indicated by the setting for the baiting of Bertram by Marian. The women are hanging up laundry to dry. The bed-linens on the clothesline neatly become covers for the eavesdropping by the three women who watch the duping that begins Bertram's own education and return to the folds of family. The set and music seem intended to evoke the ambiguity in human relationships, the way in which their mundaneness coexists with their mystery. For the most part this worked, although the sponged-on confetti pattern on the walls, meant to look ethereal, was too heavy

and became distracting instead. The same is true of the periodic bell ringing, which occurred too frequently. Instead of signifying a kind of ritual mysteriousness it was jarring.

This production emphasized the anxieties and fears of parents and the opposing need for self-assertion and independence on the part of children. All the families begin the story incomplete in some way, and this incompleteness is further threatened when Bertram plays the part of the prodigal–going to war against the king's and his mother's wishes. Just as Helena is tamed, so Bertram returns to the courts' embrace, chastened and submissive. Yet, as these two actors play it, there is genuine love and joy in their union. Echoing Helena's transformation, the countess-widow trades in her black weeds for a white gown to join hands with the king as Helena and Bertram celebrate their union. Gypsy magic blends into courtly codes and society is restored.