

Director's Statement, *Richard II*, 11/26/21

Dominic approached me early this year with the vision of creating a Shakespeare festival here at Yale. The vision for the festival was to create a yearly body of work—consisting of three plays, lectures, and classes—put together by a company of Yale undergraduates. All of this work was to be shown in a single week towards the end of the spring semester in courtyards around campus and New Haven at large. For the first season, we are only producing one show, *Richard II*, and an evening performance of Shakespeare's Sonnets. We hope to actualize the complete vision for the festival next year, with auditions for the company happening in the fall of 2022. The vision for the Shakespeare Festival is to create a space that approaches Shakespeare with the following goals in mind:

- A. We mean what we are saying.** Our shows are not interested in 21st century ironic distance that plagues much of classical theater. Our productions should never apologize for existing.
- B. We believe in the text.** The text is our biggest ally. We do not think we are better than it. If we live authentically through the language, rather than fight it, magic happens.
- C. Our shows are accessible and alive.** Our outdoor showings will be without preciousness. A low-stakes atmosphere of freedom, play, and wonder (for actors and audiences alike) is an environment conducive to revelation.
- D. Accepting artifice is the gateway to the Real.** Everyone in Shakespeare knows they are in a play. If we lean into the artifice of the theater, we have the potential to make work that is Real rather than simply plausible.

These four goals are at the heart of this production of *Richard II*.

Why *Richard II*?

Richard II is a play about performing versus being. At the start of the play, Richard has lived his whole life as royalty and King, a role which to him is immutable and ordained by God. In a matter of scenes, the great right of kingship is revealed to be nothing but a farce. As Richard is stripped of the veneer of kingship, he is forced to confront his humanity and mortality unencumbered by the role he understood himself *to be*. At the end of the play, all he is is a man who must contend with "being *nothing*." In the fall and murder of Richard, an existential tension of human life is revealed, one Shakespeare explores in every play: how does human life and the roles we occupy—which feels boundlessly real while the performance is happening—collapse into vanity when we watch the curtain fall?

The genius of this play is the ability to transport this reality of life unto the machinery and workings of the theater. As Richard loses the crown, the heightened wordplay and language of the beginning gives way to stark verse. Our production will begin by playfully constructing a

world of pretend, which will slowly be torn down until we are left with nothing but actors in a courtyard. Our show is as much set in 2022 New Haven as it is in 1399 England. Therefore, our production design does not seek to recreate 1399 England, but rather, recreate our shared ideas of what we, as a cast and crew, think and feel England was like, how we think and feel kingship should present itself.

This production is as much about the rise and fall of an evening's show as it is about the rise and fall of Richard.

Thank you,

Leo Egger