

“My native English, now I must forego”: Reflections on an Original Pronunciation
Production of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* for the Prague Shakespeare Company

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1. Tradition, form, and ceremonious duty

I have a confession to make. I’ve never really “got” *Richard II* as a piece of theatre. Which is surprising on so many levels. As a rule, I’m powerfully attracted to Shakespeare’s medieval histories, which rejuvenate the baleful portraits and remote events of his sources as vibrant figures arresting the stage in colorful pageants and so many mighty battles. As the first of a tetralogy, or four-part sequence of plays, *Richard II*, moreover, cycles directly into my favorite work in the canon, *Henry IV, Part 1*, an extraordinarily rich tapestry of the British Isles woven from the threads of rule, misrule and teenage rebellion, and shot through with the anarchic energy of the glorious Sir John Falstaff. We can’t say that *Richard II* lacks characters, and therefore character, since key figures in the play, Bolingbroke and Percy carry through to *1 Henry IV*, while others, such as King Henry’s son, the rebellious Hal, are announced in advance. Even allowing for the titular Richard’s anti-heroic, somewhat bloodless reputation, the two plays share a DNA, a *dramatis personae*, and a pedigree that will run through to its triumphal conclusion in *Henry V*.

Richard II’s central theme is no less compelling. The deposing of an incapable yet anointed ruler by a more able yet illegitimate one is a multifaceted central action that moves beyond competing cousins and clashing dynasties (the tinder for the later Wars of the Roses) to describe conflicting ideologies of governance, with feudal notions of divine monarchy confronting the pragmatism of early modern *realpolitik*, fueled by a new kind of party

factionalism we recognize all too well today. Which is to say that the play doesn't lack for contemporary relevance, that much vaunted goal of the theatre maker, any more than it did at the point of its premier performances. I was first drawn to *Richard II* because of its association with the 2nd Earl of Essex's alleged rebellion against the aging Elizabeth II in February 1601. Elizabeth had long recognized her association with Richard, a childless monarch offering an uncertain succession, overtaxing her people, and finding comfort in costly favorites (of which the disgruntled Essex was one). So, when members of the powerful Essex faction commissioned Shakespeare's company to mount the old play (it had not been performed for at least five years), the day before an attempted rebellion, it set historicist scholars sleuthing around a potentially unique event in theatrical history. If the play's Act 4, scene 1 deposition scene staging the willing surrender of a crown was intended to inflame Londoners to rebellion, then Shakespeare was dangerously entangling his company in high treason. Hot stuff! I was one such sleuth, and the resulting investigation became the genesis for my doctoral dissertation on factional playwrights operating within the Essex circle. *Richard II*, then, is a key piece of my own scholarly DNA, which makes my claim that I don't quite "get it" even more embarrassing, shameful even.

In my defense, I am not alone. For much of its performance history -- and for two-hundred years it was barely performed at all -- *Richard II* was admired more as a political treatise than as a piece of drama. In a tetralogy that Shakespeare rhetorically structures along seemingly Aristotelian lines, *Richard II* is the hypothesis to *Henry IV, Part One's* rambunctious *confirmatio*, *Part 2's* nostalgic *refutatio*, and *Henry V's* resounding conclusion. As such, *Richard II* is a play of ideas, it lays out a thesis; it is, by its nature, extremely wordy. And to some, the

very beauty of the language – it is widely considered the apogee of Shakespeare’s poetic art – comes at the cost of dramatic vitality. As one nineteenth-century British critic sniped: “successive audiences of more than a century have respectfully slumbered over it, as often as it has appeared on the stage.” The play hasn’t fared much better in America, where it was first performed in 1831 by the inauspiciously named Junius Brutus Booth, sire of a line of classical actors and presidential assassins. That a disgruntled audience member would later try to assassinate Booth while he performed the title role eloquently explains why the play has long been considered as “unkind to actors,’ as it is to audiences, who have to endure what one New York critic described as “a pageant rather than a drama.”

The notion of *Richard II* as a pageant, its dramatic action a procession of stylized *tableaux vivant*, perhaps gets to the nub of what I struggle with in the play: its dramaturgical design and its tone. Notwithstanding Richard’s request for us to all “sit upon the ground, / And tell sad stories of the death of kings,” the drama does not, in fact, involve people sitting around talking endlessly about politics, which would be very un-Shakespearean. Rather, it promises a series of events and encounters only to forestall or undermine them at the point of performance: a tournament shut down before it can get going; a death-bed grievance casually dismissed with a “So much for that”; murders under pillows and gages raining like leaves in farcical challenges; royal homecomings played out to empty sand dunes and the shifting of dynastic tectonic plates staged as an unseemly tug-of-war over a piece of metal. It’s not so much that nothing happens in *Richard II*; rather, lots of things *almost* happen: a severe case of *dramatos interruptus*.

Supporting this persistence of compromised action is a notably un-theatrical consistency of style. Everyone speaks in the same high manner, a gorgeous elevation of tone and rhetoric that more than one critic has described as operatic, but which Sir John Gielgud, a celebrated Richard from the early twentieth century, cautioned as being so “tapestried” in its poetic style as to be “more musical than revealing of character” and which risks becoming “indigestible” to modern taste. Much of this musicality derives from Shakespeare’s radical choice to pen his play entirely in verse. 75% of the lines are in blank, or unrhymed, verse; the remaining 25% in perfect rhyme, more than in any other history or tragedy, and higher than all but three of the comedies, a genre for which romantic resolution is the name of the game. In the rest of the canon, Shakespeare interweaves verse with marvelously muscular prose to distinguish high brows from low lifes, formal matters from casual ones, comic from serious characters. In *Richard II*, characters either philosophize or complain in something approaching a wistful, “olde worlde,” style: dramatic speech clad in ivy that is so dense it risks suffocating the life out of its characters.

In the plays that follow *Richard II* in the cycle, in sharp contrast, Shakespeare broadcasts a cacophony of national and regional accents – French, Welsh, Scottish, Irish, Northumbrian, Cockney – sometimes transcribing these effects for his actors with phonetic rigor. But in *Richard II*, his thesis play, Shakespeare draws no distinction between governor or gardener: everyone is a political philosopher, framing their thoughts with the acuity of a Machiavelli and the majesty of a Montaigne. To my ear, this sense of heightened unreality pervades the play, drawing attention to its own artificiality. It is as if, in *Richard II*, Shakespeare is intent on undermining his own theatrical credentials, of penning a play that really is, in the words of one

editor, “more vendible than performable,” designed to be purchased for the study rather than seen in company. And it is this anti-theatricality that I don’t quite get. Shakespeare certainly wrote radical dramas that his company may have deemed un-performable – *Timon of Athens* and *Troilus and Cressida* come to mind -- but *Richard II* begins a tetralogy; it has to work theatrically because it launches the cycle. In a play in which figures bemoan their loss of language through banishment – Mowbray describes his tongue as “an unstrung viol” – and the vagaries of an absolutist monarch – “How long a time lies in one little word?” asks Henry Bolingbroke – I worry whether we’ve lost in the translation of time something of Shakespeare’s linguistic purpose in this curiously mono-vocal play. What am I missing? Such is the kind of question this talk, at its root, considers.

What follows, then, is a personal journey not through *Richard II* so much as one idiosyncratic version of that text. Each production, after all, writes a play anew. Our especially unique feature was to recreate the sound of Shakespeare actors: *Richard II* would receive its first original pronunciation production in 400 years. How would new audiences hear these old sounds, and would that make sense of the play as medieval, like an old wood-cut? Or would the old sounds reveal something in the language, an immediacy that speaks to us today? So many questions? So little time to learn my native English all over again.

2. “Such rackers of orthography.”

There’s an adage in the theatre, especially among Shakespeareans, that if you don’t “get” a play, do it. For in producing, directing, or performing, you will unlock some of its secrets and assuredly come to love it. My current production of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* at the American

Shakespeare Center in Staunton, Virginia is a living testimony to this axiom. I took three swings at a play in which *really nothing happens* before landing a home run: it was worth the wait. I now love what I once found so laborious. In taking on the role of Bolingbroke in a production for Prague Shakespeare Company, which would be produced in very particular conditions with a particular actor playing Richard, I hoped to gain some insight into how *Richard II* works in performance, to learn to appreciate it, perhaps even to love it. If I talk of finding a “key” to that discovery, I do not refer to that tired, misplaced metaphor that unlocks a mystery -- since plays really aren’t boxes or hidden chambers -- but a tonal register, a way of sounding the play to recover some of its meaning lost to the modern ear: namely, Original Pronunciation, or, for sake of brevity, OP.

Before elaborating upon OP, let me take a moment to lay out my terms of employment, the nature of my employer, and the cast of characters, some quite colorful, who will feature in the following pages. Meet Guy Roberts, actor and Artistic Director of Prague Shakespeare, a Houston-native and former head of Austin Shakespeare, who, in 2005, while I was studying with Jamie Jesson at UT Austin, cast me as Buckingham opposite his Richard III, a similarly close but competitive pairing to that of Bolingbroke and Richard II. Aside from its obvious charms, Prague offers the opportunity to experience something of the conditions of early modern theatre making in London, another kind of OP: Original Practices. Like much of middle Europe, Czech theatre operates on the company system, in which affiliated actors perform a stock of plays in the repertory, adding new offerings five to ten times a year. A play will be premiered, then added to the rotation, to be performed once or twice a year for up to ten years. There are none of the previews, long runs, or final shows we find in the western tradition. Performances don’t

develop over time in front of audiences: immediacy is all. And actors have to be ready to revive numerous roles per season, much as Shakespeare's men had to remount *Richard II* with, at most, two-day's notice. What seems unimaginable to us is commonplace to a Czech actor, and closely resembles the early modern playing conditions in which Shakespeare's plays were produced.

As part of a Summer Intensive, *Richard II* would join three other plays -- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Death of Kings*, a compilation of scenes from Shakespeare's histories, each show with a guest director and unique cast performing twice in a week-long repertory at the end of July. Casts were made up of local Czech actors, invited professionals from the US, UK, and Australia, and students of mixed experience and ages from all around the world. Shakespeare's company was not so cosmopolitan, although none of Shakespeare's permanent members, the sharers, were Londoners: all were incomers bringing their regional experiences and accents with them. While the student players were on a steep learning curve, their experience and skill levels may well have reflected another early modern practice, filling out the middling to minor roles with journeymen, young actors looking for apprenticeships in the company. With their large casts, Shakespeare's histories in particular would have been filled with such journeymen doubling and trebling roles.

While the short rehearsal period worried some directors and their casts, the production team behind *Richard II* had no such concerns. Long-time collaborators Rob Gander, of the University of Nevada-Reno, and actor and author Ben Crystal, leading proponent of OP had worked on six productions under the banner of Passion in Practice, an ensemble-driven company formed to explore original practices in pronunciation, textual transmission via cue

scripts (in which actors had only their lines interspersed with one-to-three word cues), rehearsal practices, and audience contact in venues such as the Middle Temple, where Shakespeare's actors first performed *Twelfth Night* in front of Queen Elizabeth, and the Globe's intimate, candle-lit indoor playhouse, named after American actor and founder Sam Wanamaker. Building on what little we know of Elizabethan rehearsal practices, the *Richard II* company would spend most of its allotted time in training, character exploration, and text work, and rehearse on stage for a maximum of three half-day sessions – twelve hours -- with a minimum of blocking, props (we ended up using just a crown), and costumes. (In the MFA program in Shakespeare and Performance at Mary Baldwin University, we allow our students, when preparing their Ren show under Shakespearean staging conditions, a generous six days, although they work without a director or designer, roles that are nineteenth century innovations.) Overall, conditions were ripe for a stripped back production of *Richard II* that relied less on properties and visual effects than on Shakespeare's dramatic prosody. Which brings us back to OP.

While Ben and I recently enjoyed working together on a radical adaptation of *Hamlet*, called *Believe None of Us*, and were intrigued by the idea of my Bolingbroke fighting his Richard over a crown, I had little experience of OP, was somewhat skeptical of its applicability, and had certainly never assayed it (let alone opposite its leading performer). I was thus excited and relieved to learn that our project would be ballasted by Ben's father, David, the intellectual drive behind the OP movement, who would join the Summer Program to run workshop and one-on-one sessions. A celebrated linguist and academic, with 120 authored, co-authored, or edited works to his name (three of them with Ben), David Crystal, OBE, had been training actors

at the Globe since 2004, and has written various articles and chapters on the value of recovering the sound of Shakespeare's original players.

One article, in the series *Language and History*, traces the fitful evolution of OP from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day. In it, David clarifies that OP isn't an accent, of which there were as many in Elizabethan England as there are today, but an underlying system of sounds, or phonology, which was itself undergoing rapid change during the second half of the sixteenth century. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Tybalt is mocked as a "new tuner of accents," the pompous pedant Holofernes from *Love's Labour's Lost*, berates the illiterate who are unaware of, and therefore don't pronounce, the "b" in debt, or "l" in calf (just as we don't today). Even the word "pronunciation" would be pronounced differently over the course of Shakespeare's lifetime, evolving from pronuncia-SI-ON, to pronuncia-SHI-on, to the more familiar pronuncia-SHUN. So, while phonologists and linguistic historians are confident they can build up a general soundscape of early modern pronunciation, it is not fixed. Since the first bi-pronuncial performance of *Romeo and Juliet* at the Globe in 2004, the Crystals have acted in, or advised on, about ten OP productions around the world: *Macbeth* and *As You Like It* also at the Globe; *Pericles* in Stockholm and, later, Savannah; *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Winter's Tale* at the Shakespeare Factory in Baltimore; *King Lear* in Bloomington, and Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* (which, they discovered, was originally pronounced "Fawstus"), at the Sam Wanamaker indoor playhouse. Each production met new challenges – how to combine the phonetics of those Welsh, Scottish, and Irish Captains with the phonology of OP in *Henry V* – and discovering new readings; perhaps, even, a new way of playing Shakespeare. If not quite the "global movement"

David Crystal writes about, in production OP has gained new adherents, while doubtless rattling a few cages along the way.

To the doubters (or douBters), of course, the very variability of pronunciation undermines its evidentiary stability. In the absence of recording devices or a system of received phonetics, where's the proof? I shall leave the expert to answer this. This is David and Ben Crystal being interviewed at The Globe in 2011:

The first and most important piece of evidence is the observations made by people who are writing on language at the time. There were several people who commented on how words sounded, which words rhymed, and so on. For instance, how do we know that the "r" was pronounced at the time. Well, Ben Jonson, the dramatist, actually tells us at one point. He says we actually pronounce the r after a vowel. He actually calls it a "doggy sound, "grrr," or something like that. [...] The second kind of evidence is the spellings that people used at the time. Spelling was a much better guide to pronunciation then than it is today. So, at one point in *Romeo and Juliet*, the word film is spelt 'philome.' And that's a very important indication. The third kind of evidence, which is absolutely critical from a dramatic point of view, is that there are rhymes and puns, which don't work in modern English that do work in OP.

And the fourth kind of evidence, which David doesn't mention, perhaps because the venue speaks for itself, is performance: the word in action. Let's look at some examples of the puns and rhymes the Crystals have discovered.

While Samuel Johnson might have considered "punning the lowest form of humor," it was one of Shakespeare's favorite linguistic traits. Playing on the multiple meanings of words was a recognition of the almost procreative state of flux language found itself enjoying during the period. Some of the Crystals' uncovered puns elevate, or complicate biological readings, such the *R&J* Prologue's, "From forth the fatal loins of these two houses, / A pair of star-crossed lovers take their lives." In OP, loins (in the biological sense) is pronounced as the diphthong "loynes"; as, also, is "lines." The pun, in other words -- or in the same word -- works both ways,

as the biological imperative of young love fatally crosses the hereditary imperative of warring families. More commonly, though, modern audiences miss out on Shakespeare's ribald early modern humor. We better understand why *As You Like It's* cynic Jaques finds the "motley fool," Touchstone, so hysterical when opining the axiom, "And so, from hour to hour we ripe and ripe, / And then, from hour to hour, we rot and rot," when we hear the 'h' dropped, as was common, and the vowel shift from "our" to "oor." The two words come together to create a perfect pun on spending too much time with ladies of the night: or whores, also pronounced "hoors." This pun, in turn, sets up the punchline, "and thereby hangs a tale," which creates a different kind of pun: the homophone with "tail," or a male member. Cue RIM SHOT! Whether or not we always appreciate it, such subtlety – or crudity – which is lost in modern pronunciation, reminds us that Shakespeare's comedies are often bawdier, rougher, darker than we imagine.

Because Shakespeare and his contemporaries almost universally wrote verse plays (albeit mingled with prose) that followed an accentual-syllabic pattern called iambic pentameter – five iambs, made up of a weak and strong stress unit, making ten syllables -- the interplay of meter and rhyme offers a relatively stable guide to pronunciation. This can be useful especially in naming characters. We know, for instance, that *Twelfth Night's* ingénue is VI-ola, rather than the commonly mispronounced Vi-OLA (a musical instrument) because of its placement in an Act 5 verse line that scans metrically. And here I shall offer you the briefest crash course in scansion, the "mystery" of the Shakespeare actor. Although two-thirds of Shakespeare's canon is written in blank, rather than rhymed, verse, his sonnet sequence, published in 1609, since it adheres to a rigid rhyme scheme – generally abab | cdcd | efef | gg – offers a treasure trove of information on pronunciation. The Crystals also discovered, after

close phonetic reading, that nearly two-thirds of the 154-sonnets have rhymes that no longer work in contemporary parlance. While I had long believed – and worse, directed; and worse still, taught! – that off- or half-rhymes were the sign of the sophisticated poet – to the early modern ear, David informed me, words either rhymed or didn't: the half-rhyme was a contradiction in terms. As we shall see, the significance of increased rhymes would emerge as we worked on the play.

Whatever pleasure linguists and literary scholars take in the occasional discovered pun or rhyme, for actors and audience the excitement resides in how much OP alters the theatrical experience. So, now it's time you heard what OP actually sounds like. I could offer you my own rudimentary version, but suspect you'd prefer to hear the sound of the Elizabethan actor demonstrated by a master. In this clip, taken from a talk Ben recently delivered in Poland for Macmillan, he performs the opening Chorus from *Henry V*, first in RP, or Received Pronunciation and then in OP:

O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend
The brightest heaven of invention,
A kingdom for a stage, princes to act
And monarchs to behold the swelling scene!
Then should the warlike Harry, like himself,
Assume the port of Mars; and at his heels,
Leash'd in like hounds, should famine, sword and fire
Crouch for employment.

As Ben demonstrates here, Shakespeare's actors delivered their lines from the gut and at pace. They don't wait for psychological motivation, like the modern actor, but express what they feel or think in the moment of feeling or thinking it: we call it "acting on the line." And what an extraordinary mélange of accents OP contains. Everyone hears something of their own background – bits of Irish or Scottish, Devon or Cornish, northern or cockney, Australian or

American – which is hardly surprising, since, as David Crystal notes, “the accents which were around in Shakespeare’s time traveled the globe soon after.” The earliest settlers on the American east coast spoke localized versions of OP, not American. And it is, without doubt, viscerally exciting to perform. Here’s my Henry Bolingbroke waiting to confront Richard at Flint Castle

Methinks King Richard and myself should meet
With no less terror than the elements
Of fire and water, when their thundering smoke
At meeting tears the cloudy cheeks of heaven.
Be he the fire, I’ll be the yielding water;
The rage be his, while on the earth I rain
My waters on the earth, and not on him.

Earthy, easy, energized, and not remotely what we expect at the RSC or the Shakespeare Theatre in DC. What does not yet exist in Shakespeare’s time is an upper-class accent; what we call RP, or the Queen’s -- or B.B.C. -- English: the prestige accent of the ruling class that transcends geography and time, and continues to dominate the Shakespeare industry. For this reason alone, perhaps, OP, which reminds us of the commonality of Shakespeare’s work, warrants a place in our modern performance tradition. But what kind of a role remains to be seen. The extent to which OP unlocked, recovered, or confounded meaning in our Prague production or *Richard II* is the subject of my third section.

3. “In states unborn and accents yet unknown.”

So, what did we learn about *Richard II* as actors in a quasi-OP company? The first thing to acknowledge is that we didn’t land on many dynamite new puns. This is partly because the play is not especially funny -- or punny -- partly because of the hard 90-minute cut required of the

management, and partly because the resulting narrative was radically rearranged in the form of a memory play, beginning at the end with the imprisoned Richard, and then rotating back to final speech: I haue bin studying, how to compare / This Prison where I liue, vnto the World.” That said, critical examples of OP word play emerged. As we heard in Bolingbroke’s speech above – “At meeting tears the cloudy cheeks of heaven” – the collision of crying and ripping resonate throughout the text. The youngest member of our company, nineteen-years-old American student Nick Freedson, noted how the faithful Ricardian, Scroope, transmits brute truths through soothing terms, describing Bolingbroke’s return as, “Like an unseasonable stormy day, / Which makes the silver rivers drown their shores, / As if the world were all dissolved to tears.” Such double meaning forged the impression of a land and its people enduring both emotional and physical torment. Nick felt that the OP encouraged him to create a character that, in his own words, “is more grounded and rooted,” in language that echoes the play’s theme of a country being pillaged and pillied, partitioned and sold off to the highest bidders to pay for Richard’s increasingly indulgent lifestyle. The sense of a country being torn apart is everywhere in the OP phonetic landscape. The sound of war, or “warre,” echoes throughout the text, from favorites “sWARming like caterpillars” across the land, to the banished Bolingbroke’s ominous farwell: “The sun that WARms you here, shall shine on me.”

Another young American, Juliet Wolfe, who played Richard’s French wife Isabel, found her character rich with phonetic ambivalence and complexity, despite her young age and foreign upbringing. She especially enjoyed the following lines, or “loines,” as Isabel attempts to provoke her stunned husband to action following his mistimed return from confronting rebels in Ireland: “The lion dying, thrusteth forth his paw, / And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with

rage, / To be o'erpowererd." Recalling that hereditary pun in *Romeo and Juliet*, the opening homophone on "lion" and "line" is viscerally energized by the internal OP rhyming of "loin" and "dying," and "paw" and "o'erpowered." Young Isabella, who is ultimately returned to her kingdom (historically, she was only seven), is all too aware of the impending cauterizing of Richard's royal line and the judgment of history. In hereditary terms, Richard is going nowhere. Look how hard it is to find him on a genealogical chart. To Wolfe, OP altered her perception of the play's heightened language as being not "remote and distant [but] spontaneous and down-to-earth," and she found an Isabel "younger, more playful and forceful" than she's first envisaged. Through OP, she discovered the "potential for play" behind the "distancing layer of formality involved in being a queen." Her Isabel was heartbreaking because she was fun and in love, and about to lose it all. Our philosophical text was gaining some heart.

The relationship between Richard and his young Queen, and what that implies about his own sexuality, was Ben's greatest discovery in performing a figure who is often presented as asexual or implicitly homosexual, like Edward II before him, the only other medieval king to be deposed. Indeed, recalling Touchstone's maxim about rotting "hours," Bolingbroke makes such an insinuation when condemning Richard's favorites, Bushy, Bagot, and Green: "You have in manner with your sinful HOURS, / Made a divorce betwixt his Queen and him / Broke the possession of a royal bed." On one level, the divorce is effected by the courtiers, at another by those they hire by the hour for their entertainments: Bolingbroke seems intentionally ambivalent in order to play on the effete reputation of a king that had, after all, introduced Bohemian manners, music, and couture to his court -- he was first married to Anne of Prague, as our Czech hosts proudly reminded us -- recipe books to the kitchen, forks to the dining table,

and a razor to his chin: all deeply suspect behavior to a sturdy Englishman. This is the superior, subtle, remote figure portrayed by Gielgud. Let's hear a little of him.

In place of the effete and precious figure that still dominates performance of Richard – Ben Whishaw in *The Hollow Crown* for the B.B.C. and David Tennant's recent long-haired, ethereal portrayal for the Royal Shakespeare Company are recent examples of high-pitched, fluty, ethereal portrayals – Ben found in Richard's language what he called a "grounded earthiness" (note, again, the terrestrial imagery) in a character who was not so much an overtly sexual creature, as "lithe and virile, perfectly capable of taking out a few assassins before being struck down himself." If anything, Ben felt that his Richard had a closer affinity with Richard III than with Edward II, which, he admits, "is pretty unusual and quite unexpected." The resulting energy and pace of Richard's delivery, as you will hear now, transforms the "chamber piece" we are accustomed to into something more atavistic, visceral:

I haue bin studying, how to compare
This Prison where I liue, vnto the World:
And for because the world is populous,
And heere is not a Creature, but my selfe,
I cannot do it: yet Ile hammer't out.
My Braine, Ile proue the Female to my Soule,
My Soule, the Father: and these two beget
A generation of still breeding Thoughts;
And these same Thoughts, people this Little World
In humors, like the people of this world,
For no thought is contented.

What I hear is the bemused, somewhat amused plaint of the medieval voice lost in translation, its fixed world transitioning to something more mutable, less proscribed – the early modern skepticism of Bolingbroke, who has a more utilitarian use for language and who, notably, speaks less the closer he approaches power. His spare dialogue in the deposition scene, which

reads thinly on the page, plays out as a masterclass in realpolitik on stage, where words become weapons: and, in OP, “word” rhymes with “sword.”

The infusion of OP rhyme had perhaps the greatest impact on my own appreciation of this obdurately tricky text and my understanding of Bolingbroke’s place within it. In this verse play, it’s not surprising that the perfect rhyme count rose considerably from the 25% traditionally accounted for in modern pronunciation. Some recoveries make sense of misplaced half-rhymes: “He does be double WRONG, / That wounds me with the flatt’ries of his TONGUE”; or, “God save King Henry, un-King Richard SAYS, / And send him many years of happy DAYS,” a pronunciation that would be familiar to the northern English ear, but nowhere else. Other end rhymes work in both OP and modern pronunciation, which makes them sound ancient and strange and compelling: “Thou chid’st me well: proud Bolingbroke I come / To change blowes with thee for our day of Doome.” (Bolingbroke elsewhere rhymes “room with doom.”) More remarkable still are the three and four rhyme strings, which are extremely rare in the Shakespeare canon, but emerge here like tonal signposts, rooting exchanges deep in the earth:

BOL: Part of your cares you give me with your CROWN
RICH: Your cares set up do not pluck my cares DOWN.
My care is loss of care, by old care DONE;
Your care is loss of care, by old care WON.

At other times, end rhymes interlock with mid-line assonance clusters. This example between the bickering Yorks, sounds a rare comedic note:

YORK: Ill mayst thou thrive if thou grant any GRACE.
DUCH: Pleads he in earnest? Look upon his FACE.
His eyes do drop no TEARS; his PRAYers are in a JEST.

Enhancing end rhymes with these internal phonemic echoes, like chords playing on a melodic line, the OP soundscape repeatedly reaches beyond the patterned liturgical and ceremonial tone often remarked upon by scholars and critics to suggest older rituals of blood and ancestry:

I'll use th'advANTage of my POWER,
And lay the summer's dust with SHOWERs of BLOOD,
Rayned from the wounds of sLAUGhtered Englishmen.

warns Bolingbroke flintily before Flint Castle. If *Richard II* stages a political treatise between competing value systems, OP reminds us that it is heatedly debated by combatants hewn from English oak. Or should that be French oak?

Perhaps my greatest revelation, and the key I had been seeking, rhyme also became a critical means of differentiating character, most pointedly Henry's from Richard's. If we allow that the proliferation of OP rhymes enriches the sense of *Richard II*'s text as being symphonic -- not only in its pattern of images and tropes, as critics often note, but in the soundscape the audience receives -- then it seems Bolingbroke is not as musical as Richard. While the ceremonial challenges of the opening scenes with Aumerle require the rhyme of couplet strings, Bolingbroke largely foregoes end-rhymes once he returns from banishment, resorting to them only at the play's conclusion as he vows to expiate his sins on a holy crusade. Having witnessed a series of rather stolid portrayals of Bolingbroke, I assumed this lack of musicality was indicative of a prosaic personality, of Bolingbroke as more political strategist than imaginative thinker. After all, it's the banished Bolingbroke who shuts down his father's assertion of the power of positive thinking with the literalist counterargument:

O who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?
Or cloy the hungry edge of appetite
By bare imagination of a feast?

Bolingbroke's sentiment, which borders on the anti-theatrical, suggests that, in the theatre of politics that both men play out, Richard is the proto-Method actor to Henry's stage manager.

But the richness of Bolingbroke's internal rhymes encouraged me to find an alternative reading, one which found support from the felicitously timed work of a graduate in our Shakespeare and Performance program. In her Master's thesis, "The French Shades of Shakespeare's 'Henriad,'" Katie Little, a fluent French speaker, argues that the deployment of French language and rhyme prosody through the cycle stages the displacement of French as the language of power since the Norman Invasions by a modified Anglo-Saxon we now know as the middle English penned by Chaucer. While I do not have the space here to prosecute this fascinating argument, Katie's thesis reminds us that Richard was a Frenchman, born in southwest France, and now married to a French queen. "Richard of Bordeaux," as his assassin Exton pointedly calls him, while being England's first bi-lingual king, was a resolute Francophile and French-speaker at court during a period in which that language was increasingly resented by the populace as arrogant, mannered, rude, remote, dictatorial. When Henry Bolingbroke, returns from exile in a country whose language he in fact speaks fluently, he comes not as a Norman aristocrat but as a fellow Englishman. He "did seem to dive into the hearts of the common people," Richard bemoans, "with humble and familiar courtesy." Which is another way of saying, he spoke to them in English. And when Henry addressed parliament in order to validate his usurpation, he did so, arguably for the first time, in English. Subsequent historians, therefore, often present Bolingbroke's English orations as "the beginnings of a deliberate policy of the Lancastrian monarchs to substitute English for French as the prestige language."

Although Shakespeare includes no actual French in *Richard II* – whereas he scatters it through the *Henry IV* plays, and writes an entire French scene in *Henry V* – its dominant verse form, especially its persistent rhyming, is acutely French. Whether Elizabethan audiences would have recognized it, the lyricism that the French poets had introduced to the heavily accentual and alliterative style of the early English poets is registered in the language used to describe the accentual-syllabic verse forms employed by Shakespeare and his contemporaries: feminine endings, enjambment, and the like. Moreover, as one scholar notes, the court’s tendency towards “ornamental [flourishes] of patterned musicality, in the verse and its rhetorical touches, mirrors the king’s hedonistic taste, while standing in stark contrast to the plainer oratory spoken by Bolingbroke and his fellow northern rebels.”

Rather than flattening out with an imposed accent the differences between competing rulers, OP offered me a way to define Henry tonally and, therefore, psycho-physically. Charting Henry’s prosodic style through our cut of the play, I noted a progression from Francophone to Anglo-Saxon forms, not just in the decline of end-rhymes, but in the politic way he shapes his language to his listener. When he addresses York on his return from France, for instance, he retains a style recognizable to an Uncle he desperately needs to win over: “My gracious uncle, let me know my fault (faut) / On what condition stands it, and wherein?” Note the Latinate “tion” and the French pronunciation of fault during this period. But, to justify his return from exile, the populist Henry’s language becomes harsher, less Latinate, and more guttural. It also seemed to encourage the application of one of my innate accents, the northern tone with its short “u”s and dropped “h”s:

BOL: As I was banished, I was banished Hereford (HARford)
But as I come, I come for Lancaster. [...]

Will you permit, that I shall stand condemn'd
A wand'ring vagabond; my rights and royalties
Pluck't from my arms perforce, and given away
To upstart unthrifths. Wherefore was I born?

Note not only the dropped “h” for Hereford, but also the OP pronunciation of Bolingbroke, which is spelt and articulated quite differently as BULLingBroke. Such a name speaks of the English yeoman, and of a bull willing to wreak havoc in a French china shop. This OP-style Henry, while certainly a shrewd political operator, is no subtle Machiavel. Rather, he rides a populist wave as forcefully as he rides to the coronation on Richard’s roan Barbary, the exotic Arabian tightly reined by the yeoman king. This an interpretation dug from the rich earth and tangled roots of Original Pronunciation that, for me, turned a political treatise into visceral theatre.

4. “So, what?” Or, does OP have a future?

“So, what?” is a question that gets asked a lot of Original Pronunciation, and responses range from the polite 1950s BBC reviewer, who felt OP might prove “occasionally useful,” to its wholesale rejection by Andrew Gurr of Globe fame (of all people), who concludes that, “a retrieval process yearning all the way back to Shakespeare invites only despair.” David Crystal argues that such skepticism is based on a fundamental misconception of the OP project, which seeks not the authentic Elizabethan accent, which doesn’t exist in a single form and is subject to too many imponderables. “OP results, rather,” David argues, “in the reconstruction of a set of plausible accents, all distinct from what is heard today. And the excitement comes from exploring these possibilities to see what insights into meaning, aesthetic, or performance can be obtained.”

So, what insights into *Richard II* did we as a cast gain through the OP aesthetic? Above, all, we felt strongly that our plethora of accents, yoked by the OP sound, energized Shakespeare's brilliant thesis play with the vibrant voices of England's powerbrokers, who are not remote aristocrats but fiercely regional stakeholders in the unfolding historical events. In a sense, this multiplicity of sounds reinforced a medieval view of Richard's increasingly restless barons trying desperately to maintain their regional autonomy, their statehood, in the face of increasingly centralized power: a medieval tension that alludes to restless tensions within the body politic of Europe, the United States and beyond.

Performing in something approximating our forebears' accents gave many of us, in the words of Juliet Wolfe, an added sense of lineage and inheritance. "Doing Shakespeare in OP," she told me, "I felt a direct sense of connection to these original players. I thought of how many different ways our story had been told, and how many different ears have heard it." In a small way, we had become stakeholders, and the outcome of the story mattered to us intensely. Through his linguistic manipulations, I gained insight into Henry, as both a shrewd politician with a keen eye for the optics of his situation, but also as a passionately rooted, northern earl, who would come to admire, even love, Harry Hotspur more than his own son. Yet, in our resolute OP earthiness, we also lost some of the text's finer grace notes: the intellectual gravity of the Lords in debate; the acute sensitivities of Richard, whose head is in the clouds and spirit with the angels (he feels), even as he physically nourishes his earthly desires; or the lasciviousness of his smooth-tongued flatterers. Living in the lower registers, we were more fiery pirates than proud prelates. In the absence of a prestige accent, with its cultural short cuts, the OP actor needs to perform authority, class, superiority. OP demands more acting of

the actor, not less. Within the limits of our production and company experience, we weren't quite up to that task. Perhaps with practice, we would be.

"So, what" becomes "for what?" when we start to consider the application of OP for the modern actor. While few of us envision performing in OP productions on a regular basis in the future, we appreciate that we now own a new tool that can scan text not for meter or for rhetorical figures but for phonemic meaning: through puns, and rhymes, euphemism and innuendo. Of course, such knowledge can be frustrating if we can't make the modern ear hear it. Is it enough to play the intention of a pun, to be aware of a rhyme value you cannot sound? Or do you try and somehow play the "whore" in "hour," with all the ghastly physical choices that might entail? While these remain open questions for me, I still favor more knowledge over less, especially in a transaction that patently works both ways: on text and in performance. "OP is like the Nashville Parthenon," a classicist colleague recently declared, before explaining that the 1897 Nashville Parthenon, or Museum of Modern Art, is an exact replica of the original Athens edifice, save for one detail (and the fact that it's all there). Due to safety regulations, the disappointed reconstructionists had to install a fire escape. Going back to the architectural drawings of the ancient structure to figure out where best to place this modern encumbrance, they discovered that previously overlooked lines at the roofline were, in fact, an ancient Greek fire escape. "And that's OP," my friend concluded triumphantly. By applying old techniques to new performances, we also uncover new truths about old texts. OP is a two-way street, which leads me to a final question: "Now what?"

When we think about where OP might be headed, I feel competitively compelled to employ an equally roundabout metaphor to get at something resembling a straight answer.

Perhaps due to my abiding fondness for the history play genre, throughout the project I was troubled by the question of how reviving an historical narrative in the moment of its first performance might impact the play's reception for an audience. Despite its encoded senescence, the history play endures because of its inherent time-traveling capabilities. *Richard II* operates in three periods, engaging three levels of perception: the historical moment being written about (the seeds of civil war in 1390s England); the political milieu of the play's composition and first performances (the Elizabethan succession crisis of the late 1590s), and the historical reflection it casts on the period of its revival (in our case, a central European country abuzz with talk of Brexit and Trump, and the re-emergence of a right-wing movement led by billionaire Andrej Babis, who was subsequently elected). The stage histories that endure are those that continue to engage this trans-historical conversation, to excite contemporary audiences and new meanings. Despite the federalist multiplicity of voices with which we presented this monvocal drama, I heard nobody following our performances talking about the political implications of *Richard II*, only about the mode in which we were talking. To an extent, we had isolated *Richard II* in 1595. This is not an issue for OP alone. My concern with all historical recuperations is that, by fixing a history in one of its substrata, we diminish its *polyglossia*, its plurality: as an audience, we leave the forum of engagement and debate as we enter the museum.

As I walked to work each day, I pondered this anxiety I have with theatre as historical recreation while crossing the Most Legii, or Legion Bridge, that takes me from my lodgings in nineteenth-century Prague to the theatre nestled beneath the mighty Prague Castle on the city's medieval left bank. And I discovered that if you walk across a bridge often enough it, too,

will become a metaphor. For, while the Legion Bridge looks like a single span structure from the road, it is, in fact, two bridges meeting at an island in the middle of the Vltava River. In time, this island came to serve as a metaphor for OP, a piece of firm ground mid-stream in the evolution of the English language that allows a bridge to form, with one side reaching back to the late medieval tongue of *Richard II*, and the other to the way we hear Shakespeare today. OP is simply a bridge, another two-way metaphor that encourages us to look forward as well as back.

So, what might OP find in its future? As a theatre maker, my aspirations tend toward staging concepts, such as the potential an OP/contemporary hybrid production might sound and look like. What would happen, I wondered in my daily travels, if Richard and his prestige courtiers engaged in Received Pronunciation, while the returning Bolingbroke roused the English in an earthy, provincial OP to rise up against their Norman overlords? How might that discourse populate the dramatic narrative? Where, and with whom, would it stop? And how long could King Henry IV sustain it against continental pressure, impending war with France, and a subsequent alliance with Catherine de Valois? I'd be intrigued to test these ideas in the theatrical arena.

For Ben, however, the future of OP takes a surprisingly different route, one that is more ideological but also potentially self-negating. For *Passion in Practice*, the end game is not to teach us to perform Shakespeare in OP but to empower us to perform Shakespeare in our own accents. OP, which contains the seeds of so many cultural flavors, ushers Shakespeare away from the Anglophone elites to stand among us all. Our company was so internationally and ethnically-mixed that, in populating Gaunt's "teeming isle" with Shakespeare's future voices,

Ben and Rob felt we were helping define the future of Shakespeare's own enduring voice. For the future of Shakespeare lies not in recreation but in the innovations of multicultural companies performing his wondrous language in "states unborn and accents yet unknown."