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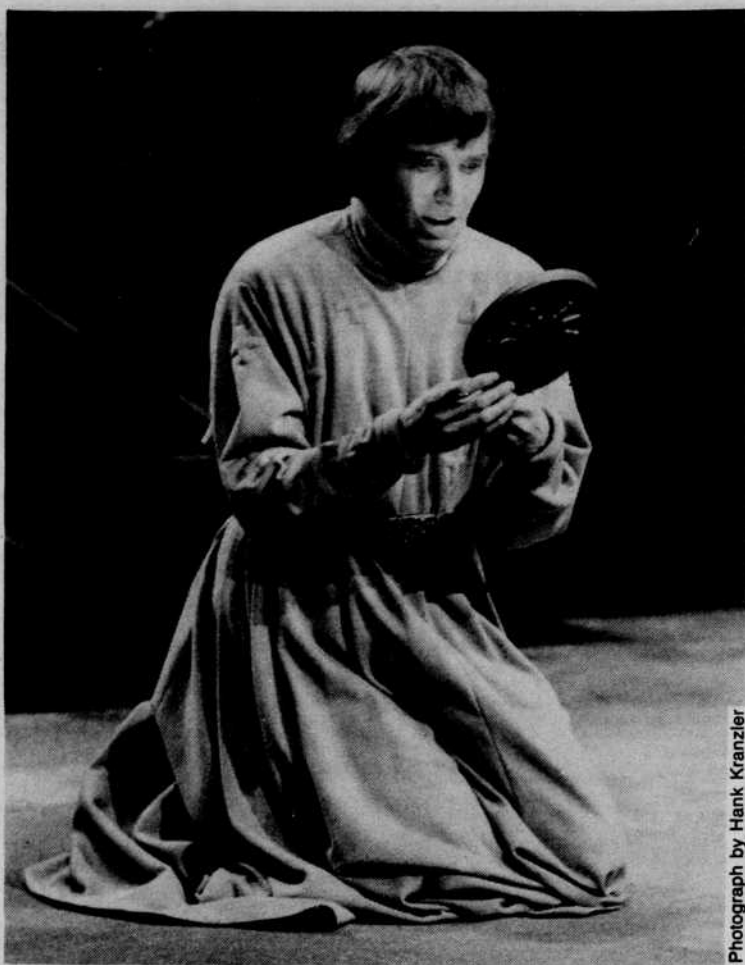
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"If there is not much action and excitement in *Richard II*, there is at least brilliant poetry and thoughtful themes."

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THEATRE

Oregon Shakespearean Festival's *Richard II*

Review by Dorothy Velasco

Although none of Shakespeare's works lack intellectual interest, *Richard II* is not the greatest of his plays, and the latest version at the Oregon Shakespearean Festival is not the greatest of productions. It's another one of those pewter productions in which everything is dull gray, as tiresome as earthenware productions in which everything is the color of dried blood.

Richard II is gray enough to start with, and could use some bright medieval colors to catch our attention. Richard is king by Divine Right. However, he is weak, unethical, and not a natural leader. After sentencing his cousin Henry Bolingbroke to exile, he prepares to fight the rebels in Ireland, first visiting Henry's dying father, John of Gaunt. Richard seizes Gaunt's estates to finance his trip to Ireland.

Upon returning to England, he discovers Henry has reentered the country and has organized an uprising against him. Richard is forced to abdicate, Henry is crowned king, and Richard is soon murdered in prison.

The ethical question posed by Shakespeare and left for the audience to decide is whether a good leader can legitimately usurp power from a rightful king, even if the king is a poor leader. The dilemma is not drawn in black and white. Richard may be bad, but he is often sympathetic, and Henry, well played by Robert Sicular, is never entirely good.

It's not a cheerful story, and unfortunately not even very inter-

esting in this production. In spite of Rex Rabold's polished performance as Richard, the production never really comes to life. The script has been changed drastically, beginning and ending differently than in the printed version, deleting the Duchess of Gloucester, and transferring speeches from one character to another.

John of Gaunt's deathbed speeches are among the most beautiful Shakespeare ever wrote. Dan Kremer as John has a commanding deep voice, but the staging doesn't allow him to give emotional depth to the lines. Gaunt's famous speech containing the line, "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England," requires the stage to be perfectly still, with a spotlight on Gaunt's face, and perhaps a little haunting music far in the background. In this production the whole stage is lit up and the laughter of those who are waiting for Gaunt to die is an annoying distraction.

If there's not much action and excitement in *Richard II*, there is at least brilliant poetry and thoughtful themes. Those elements are neglected or lost in this rewritten version. Some audience members may turn to the script for clarification, but others may simply turn away.

[Dorothy Velasco's reviews can be heard on "The Ashland Report" produced by D. Roberts and airing on KLCC-FM's "Morning Edition" and "Sunday Morning" programs.]



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