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Richard Recast

Renaissance Disability in a Postcommunist Culture

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When I think of the intersection of the English Renaissance and the issue of disability, no one seems to come to mind as prominently as Shakespeare's Richard III. Indelibly categorized as "deformed" by Thomas More (a label faithfully maintained by Hall and Holinshed), the persona of Richard rearticulated by Shakespeare permeated Western popular consciousness far beyond the relatively narrow fields of history and drama. As Sharon Snyder remarks, thanks to Shakespeare, Richard has been infamously elevated to the position of the "arch-defective in all literature," the pinnacle example of "malevolent disability."¹ It is of course up for discussion whether Richard's reported physical disfigurement is historically accurate or inserted by pro-Tudor historians eager to heap damnation on the king.² In this essay, however, I choose to focus elsewhere, namely, on the culturally contextual reception of *Richard III*. I posit that Shakespeare's text, while forceful in its demonization of Richard's body and soul, is surprisingly ambiguous in describing the physical nature of Richard's deformity. This ambiguity is particularly perplexing considering that the text is destined for staging: after all, a theater audience needs to be both told *and* shown Richard's deformed body to subscribe to the larger early modern ideological linking between bodily and psychological evil. Even more importantly, this ambivalence challenges each production to invent its own bodily pro-

jection of Richard's evil interiority to attend to contextually specific modern perceptions of the correlative between disabled exteriority and psychological interiority. Inevitably, the play thus invites a series of stagings, each of which disables the Renaissance text on the par of current discourses of disability in a given cultural context. I will here examine one specific example—a wildly popular production of *Richard III* in the postcommunist Czech Republic—to pursue the ways in which a particular case of disabling the Renaissance may feed off of—and feed into—contemporary political tensions surrounding the normative discourses of humanity, masculinity, and citizenship.

Despite an immense cultural devotion to Shakespeare and a relative cultural notoriety for the formidable “hunchback” Richard, *Richard III* was rarely performed in communist Czechoslovakia.³ The 1989 Velvet Revolution did not bring an immediate change in this trend, although Shakespeare performances in general multiplied on postcommunist Czech stages in the absence of ready material independent of the communist taint. This Richardian dearth came to an abrupt end at the very end of the second millennium, even as the first decade of political transition was expected to give way to the free democratic future promised by the impending acceptance into the European Union in 2004. In the midst of a general disenchantment with new political circumstances, which for much of the Czech population brought a worse standard of living than communism, *Richard III* seemed to offer a relevant opportunity for reflection on the trappings of political power and the futility of political engagement of the average citizen. The Czech late 1990s increasingly were plagued by undisguised battles for political control among the supposedly liberated postcommunist politicians. These battles frequently were punctuated by embarrassing performances of anxious masculinity and resulted in corruption charges that tended to equal or even supersede the “tunneling” scandals of the communist era. The three Czech productions of *Richard III* that opened in 1999 and 2000 (two of them competing with each other in the capital, Prague),⁴ offered three more or less explicitly reflective mirrors of the current political power structure.⁵

Among these three *Richards*, the longest-lived became *Richard III* produced by Divadelní Spolek Kašpar (Theater Guild Clown), which opened in September 2000 at Divadlo v Celetné (Theater in Celetná Street). This production made overtures toward Renaissance theatrical practices in a minimalist set as well as sophisticated and expensive “historic” costumes bristling with armor and showcasing voluptuous fabrics. Moreover, the production gestured toward Renaissance practices in that all but two of the actors doubled in multiple roles, often cross-gendered. The major draw of the production, however, rested on the interpretation of Richard's famed deformity in

casting a well-known and well-liked actor, Jan Potměšil, in the leading role. Formerly a rising star of the Czech theater and film scene whose protagonists included romantic leads in films marketed to young viewers, Potměšil's career came to an abrupt (if eventually temporary) standstill once he began using a wheelchair after an accidental injury sustained while engaging in dissident activities against the communist regime. Hailed as possibly the sole "casualty" of the Velvet Revolution⁶ and celebrated for "beating the odds" of whole-body paralysis, Potměšil in this role became an immense draw for both traditional and nontraditional theater audiences. Far from "disappearing" into his role, Potměšil's performance—buttressed by the theater collective and the media—blurred the boundaries between the actor and character by foregrounding the actor's past in all promotional and evaluative materials, frequently as the defining feature of the production and of the entire collective.

In what follows, I will both explore the ways in which this particular staging disables the Renaissance text and investigate the cultural implications of blurring Richard's ambiguous "natural deformity" with Potměšil's accidental disability acquired in the process of political activism. I am fascinated by the ways in which this production uses Shakespeare's text and cultural capital simultaneously to disrupt and to confirm contemporary stereotypes of disability, particularly as it relates to questions of normative masculine power, while commenting on embarrassing and greedy (if not as bloody, in the Richardian fashion) machismo of corrupt government officials whose scandals in fact shared newspaper pages with reviews of *Richard III*. Ultimately, I suggest that this production's version of Renaissance disability, in its multivalent ambiguity, uneasily captures a postcommunist transitionality wherein (corpo)realities are in flux, the future multiple and uncertain, and the narratives of the past uncomfortably unsettled.

Richard's (Un)fair Proportions

Postcommunist transitionality is not limited to the public political sphere. As the example of *Richard III* demonstrates, the transition from communism has permeated all spheres of public and private life, and profoundly affected intimate conceptions of individual humanity, particularly as it related to citizenship and attendant human rights. In the realm of categorizing and addressing the question of disability, obvious tensions arose from competing pressures: on the one hand, the state was entrenched in its communist and pre-communist past with its legacy of institutionalization—and disen-

franchisement—of bodies deemed mentally, physically, sexually, or politically deviant; on the other, the Czechs needed to respond to the specific pressures of the European Union to impose Western discourses of equality, including disability. This conflict fueled the perception that the ability of Czechs to define the parameters of their own citizenship had been jeopardized, if not made impossible. This perception alone created profound cultural resentment and retrenchment to hostile conservative attitudes. Parallel pressures of the EU that sought to redefine postcommunist parameters of gender and sexuality⁷ further intensified this backlash.

Stepping into these ubiquitous cultural tensions, Kašpar's *Richard III* brought to the table a host of conflicting interpretive possibilities. In presenting a "past" heartthrob in the title role, the production might challenge existing biomedical practices of pathologizing and disenfranchising non-normative bodies. In contrast, the not-so-subtle engrained association of Richard's bodily materiality with evil might solidify existing stereotypes of disability. Potměšil, as the only visibly disabled person in the influential entertainment industry, could be read equally as an early champion of disability rights or as an exotic exception that, as a Czech maxim would argue, proves the rule of a dominant repressive norm. More widely, Richard's exacting hypermasculinity in Potměšil's articulation of Shakespeare's usurping ruler, in the context of neocolonial EU expansion, can serve as a warning against a national future in which an economically exploitive European Union damagingly exacts its power structure on its new (if vainly protesting) potential members. Or the spectacle of an empowered murderous deviant might fuel a growing paranoia that more inclusiveness in terms of citizenship—particularly as it rests on normative, able-bodied masculinity—would politically and socially empower those who previously were systematically disenfranchised.

In Shakespeare's textual template, the link between power, masculinity, and deformity is laid out in Richard's first soliloquy, which serves as a de facto prologue and thus establishes the organizing principles of the play. His disabled masculinity—or the inability to perform normative masculinity adequately—fuels his anxiety of disempowerment and subsequent disqualification from normative courtly activities. Posing the dual prongs of normative masculine power—military and heterosexual conquest—Richard seeks to supplement the shortcomings in the latter: instead of exerting sexual power, he sets out to manipulate his political surroundings through cunning, and sometimes brutal, intrigue. His bodily deformity, though never explicitly articulated, acts as the necessary linchpin that engenders his self-professed villainy. Yet the play's occasional commentary on other characters' comparable brutality (Margaret), duplicity (Buckingham), and selfish

political agility (nearly everyone else) leaves the uncomfortable impression that Richard offends not because he is ruthless, *per se*, but rather because he dares to grasp for power for which his deformity makes him ineligible. In other words, claiming that which all of the other agents of power in the play seek, Richard temporarily transgresses the confines of the implicit imperative conflation of deformity with disempowerment from conventional venues of social and political power. Seen from this perspective, Shakespeare's ending seems to restore power to the Lancastrians not because they are more ethical than Richard but because they are normatively bodied.

The link between Richard's "misshapen" body and his ethics, particularly in the context of Renaissance ideology of interiority/exteriority, as Michael Torrey reminds us, is an ambiguous one. On the one hand, Torrey argues, Anne and Margaret believe that "his deformity is a clear sign that he is odious and wicked," suggesting their concurrence with the ideology of clear overlap between the normative aesthetics of exteriority and the interior moral code.⁸ On the other, the play also poses the real problem of Richard's position as a "successful deceiver."⁹ Despite his "deformity," Richard repeatedly leads others to suppose him virtuous, bringing forth a contrasting Renaissance view that hesitated to conflate one's visage and moral predispositions. Fluctuating between these two views in the course of the play, Richard's "body alternately does and does not seem to give him away."¹⁰ Ultimately, Torrey suggests that "[a]lthough Richard's deceptions might at first seem a rejection of physiognomy[,] . . . they actually mirror an uncertainty about appearances that physiognomy itself betrays."¹¹

Despite the importance ascribed to Richard's body, his deformity is a point of great textual ambiguity beyond the extent that Torrey allows. Richard describes his own body very little, usually as a rhetorical device that serves to underscore his unsuitability to public action. In the opening soliloquy, he tells the audience of his "rudely stamp'd" appearance that mars "fair proportion" (1.1. 16, 18), caused by a premature birth that left him "deformed, unfinished . . . scarce half made up" (20–21).¹² He mentions a more specific nature of this deformity twice: at the outset of the play, Richard refers to a limp (1.2.250), and, when in need of an excuse to behead Hastings, Richard produces a previously unmentioned "arm . . . like a blasted sapling, all withered up" (3.4.68–69). It is important to note that the positive correlation between Richard's deformity and his ability to achieve publicly—whether as a ruler or a lover—is more fictional than factual: as an aspiring ruler, Richard out-politics all his opponents; as a lover, he succeeds in wooing not just once, in one of the most spectacularly incredible seductions of the English stage, but nearly twice.

If Richard is unreliable in describing his disabled body or in outlining its cultural efficacy, other characters are equally unhelpful. His deformity is *never* mentioned by characters who harbor any real or feigned loyalty to Richard of York, later Richard the King. Those who lack such loyalty—mostly because they have been affected by his ruthless politicking—do not stint with negative epithets. It is crucial to note, however, that as a rule they resort to name-calling once they grasp the (negative) impact of Richard’s machinations as well as their inability to take corrective action. This resort to opportunistic Othering therefore serves symbolically to disempower an unexpectedly—and presumably undeservedly—powerful agent. Even then, negative references to Richard’s body consist of rather vague, general epithets ranging from the well-used “dog,” to “devil,” to “villain” and “toad,” which seem commensurate with the anger of each speaker but do not provide a bodily description of the addressee. Even Margaret’s more imaginative and more descriptive “bottled spider” and “poisonous bunch-backed toad” (1.3 241, 245), repeated later by Elizabeth (4.4 81), and relation-slandering “elvish-mark’d, abortive, rooting hog! . . . seal’d in [his] nativity! . . . the slave of nature and the son of hell! . . . slander of [his] heavy mother’s womb! . . . loathed issue of his father’s loins!” (1.3 225–31), seems to zero in on the non-normative aspects of Richard’s bodily materiality only as *an afterthought* of his actions.¹³ This deferred labeling suggests a culture of deep fear of the other, coated by a thin layer of political correctness (or, in Renaissance approximations, good breeding and manners) that breaks in an instant of power rupture. As much as other characters do not seem to ascribe any significance to Richard’s non-normative body while he conforms to social expectations, his corporality becomes the central focus of the process through which his inappropriate assertions of power are explained.

The conflicting accounts of Richard’s motives, combined with an absence of a definitive word on his bodily state in the text of *Richard III*, forces the discourse of embodiment, power, deformity, and disability into the exceedingly culturally determined stage-world of the play. When Richard refers to his body as “misshapen thus” (1.2 250), he foregrounds his own performativity, calling the audience’s attention to the deformity it sees. Such visual deformity calls for a performance of physical deviance that is highly context- (and culture-) specific. Not explicitly articulated, such expression of a culture’s commitment to normativity is perpetually lingering in the play’s margins. Thus, each production of *Richard III* plays into the temporal expectations of its theatrical audience, contemporary discourses of (dis)ability and deviance, masculinity, citizenship, power, and sexuality. All are further blended with the cultural capital of transcendental Shakespeare, his own unreliable and

ideologically tainted historical accounts, as well as the stage and film legacies of preceding productions. More than any other Shakespeare play, I propose, the definition of “monstrosity” and “disability” thus becomes a self-reflexive cultural text to be read, revealing the underpinnings of the cultural context in which the play is produced.

Postcommunist Disability

It is somewhat of an understatement to claim that a performance of an unexpectedly disabled Richard challenges the Czech normative discourse of disability, which—around the time of incorporation into the EU—was not favorably predisposed toward including persons with disabilities in the category of equal citizenry. The unwavering tendency to conceptualize disability biomedically as a pathology in the Czech context (and in Central Eastern Europe in general), as Daniel Holland has found, has resulted in an understanding of disability as an “impairment in psychological, physiological, or anatomical function.”¹⁴ Disability, thus categorized, becomes “a deficit that is ‘possessed’ by an individual and necessitat[es] individual treatment.”¹⁵ Consequently, it is possible to deny a group of such separate individuals—deprived of the benefit of structural collectivity of persons who depart from standards of bodily and mental “wholeness”—collective political platform that would help lessen some of the “particularly severe challenges to health status and quality of life” and, more broadly, elicit a shift in discourse delineating individuality and citizenship.¹⁶

The overwhelming majority of Czechs living with disabilities has been in the care of a state that has continued the communist practice of sequestering them from the able-bodied population in separate institutions where they are not likely to interfere with the accepted societal norm. As a result, departures from the norms of “ability” have remained invisible, sensationalized, deviant, abnormal, and taboo.¹⁷ The removal of persons who do not meet standards of mental and physical normalcy from the normative collective eye into separate facilities has been strengthened further by the reluctance with which authorities have provided required public accommodations. The U.S. Department of State, for the first time in 2002, included disabilities as one of its foci in human rights reports on individual countries. According to this report, the Czech Republic performed poorly in providing necessary support for the disabled.¹⁸

The great reluctance to accommodate persons with disabilities, even in the face of potential sanctions by the European Union, speaks to a degree

of cultural disruption that spans beyond mere logistical change. A shift in the level of provisions to persons with specific needs would inevitably open the question of equality of all, starting with the public education system. There, the engrained cultural practice since the nineteenth century has been an early separation (in the fifth or ninth grades, depending on school) into vocational tracks—academic, technical, vocational, special—that affirms a sociopolitical practice of constructing an intellectual hierarchy that divides the young citizenry into implicit tracks of (in)ability. In the great majority of cases, these tracks delineate the lifelong career options of each individual. After the fall of communism, as Mel Ainscow and Memmenasha Haile-Giorgis have charted in their research, changes to the Czech curriculum have made it “more demanding in the belief that this will raise standards in education” relative to international educational achievements.¹⁹ This persistent practice of early categorization systematically discriminates against children from less affluent backgrounds, rural areas, and ethnic minorities. Ainscow and Haile-Giorgis point out that, for instance, “between 25 and 100 per cent of pupils in schools for children with moderate learning difficulties are from Romany backgrounds. In explanation of this, it has been argued that mainstream schools have too many socio-cultural/racial tensions and conflicts for Romany children.”²⁰ As the elementary example of education attests, any discussion of disability is a discussion of enfranchisement that threatens to undermine the very classificatory system that fuels Czech culture and its society, economy, and political system. Alex McClimens, a Western disability scholar, proposed that accepting established Western discourse of disability would equal a “loss of national identity and culture” for many postcommunist societies.²¹ In other words, the question of establishing individual norm of ability and humanity lies in the core of the national conception of citizenship, so much so that reorienting toward Western (dis)ability discourse would threaten to undermine the entire ideological system of a society.

It is not surprising, then, that the Czech tradition in which the Kašpar *Richard III* inevitably positions itself sees Richard mainly as an evil malcontent whose external physique merely reflects his inner malevolence. An eminent Shakespearean, Zdeněk Stříbrný, provided a more nuanced assessment of Czech Richards performed since 1945, calling the title character “both a Machiavellian titan and a cripple suffering from a deep-seated sense of inferiority, a raging tyrant and wisecracking comedian, God’s chief enemy and the scourge of God avenging the old crimes of the Red and the White Rose upon the two houses and opening the way for historical progress.”²² Though broader in its interpretive possibilities than the unequivocal popular view, such interpretation continues to collapse implicitly Richard’s behavior with

his deviant body, reluctant to acknowledge the structural implications of damaging discourses of disability and deviance that permeate both worlds of the play and the Czech culture.

In a context where disability is a widely pathologized umbrella term that inadvertently catches all groups that are to be culturally disenfranchised, putting an explicitly disabled—yet profoundly able—body on ritualistic public display in a Shakespeare play is likely to create a rupture in existing discourse. This publicized non-normative body cannot escape, as Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander remind us, being understood as solely “about disability.”²³ The superimposition of contemporary views of disability discourages—even actively prevents—the actor from “disappearing” into his role as is usually expected.²⁴ Instead, the overlay of disability inevitably demands additional narratives that inescapably interact with a plot of whichever play or character is onstage. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that “the disabled body is novelty writ large for the captivated starrer, prompting persistent curiosity and launching a troubling tangle of identification and differentiation,” so that the able-bodied audience is perpetually “seeking a narrative that puts their disrupted world back in order.”²⁵ Moreover, these narratives are always already circumscribed by the able-bodied mentality that requires narratives that, as Sandahl and Auslander maintain, articulate the balance of disability and power in that they “must inevitably show how we conquer our disabilities or how they eventually conquer us.”²⁶

Intriguingly, in the case of Kašpar’s *Richard III*, the superimposed narrative of the disabled actor is in conflict with the traditional interpretation of the character he portrays. While Potměšil’s commanding presence on stage provides unarguable evidence of his victory over the assumed limitations of his impairment, his stage persona Richard is gradually stripped of every last vestige of whatever power he temporarily grasped. Potměšil’s Richard further disrupts the ingrained binary between the two apparently opposite discourses of disability, drawing together Richard’s congenital difference, which left him “misshapen, scarce half made up” with the actor’s “tragic” accidental disfigurement. This overlap is further strengthened by the perpetual rearticulation (by the theater and the press) of Potměšil’s progression from Romeo to Richard, recalling that the fateful car accident caught the promising, handsome actor in the midst of rehearsals for the title role in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Since the only marker of Richard’s deformity is a wheelchair, this performance offers a potential cognitive impasse that invites alternative interpretations of the character, normative difference, as well as of the wider social context. Have we just witnessed a Coriolanian tragedy wherein a national hero has been stripped of his just deserts, only to descend into villainous

rage and lash out at his discriminatory environment? Or, have we witnessed another Iago-like treachery that reinforces the red flags that non-normativity presumably raises in any good citizen?

Richard's Romeo

The sheer success of the production, which kept it on stage for the last decade²⁷ and carried it through more than three hundred performances in the repertory theater, tells us little about the specific reaction of Czech audiences beyond their voracious appetite to see an exotic celebrity performance. More informative are the ways in which the production is promoted by the Kašpar collective and reviewed by the press. While wrapped in commendable rhetoric of equality, Kašpar unabashedly cashed in on its unique member, promoting his contributions to the collective efforts while charging disproportionately inflated prices for performances in which he appears. The reviews, in turn, divide between badly hidden condescension and admiring sensationalism. Thus far, the focus on all fronts is a surprise encounter with the previously unknown and, more so, a surprise at the ability in the presumed disabled that ironically parallels the discomfort felt at Richard's usurpation of state power.

Kašpar promotional materials seem to confirm the already cited assumption that “the disabled body is naturally about disability.”²⁸ Since his first theatrical appearance in Kašpar productions after his accident, Potměšil was cast in a series of roles marked by various degrees of physical and mental deviance. For instance, in the case of the theatrical adaptation of Daniel Keyes's *Flowers for Algernon*, Potměšil's physical difference was to symbolize—or to accentuate—Charlie Gordon's considerable mental impairment. *Richard III*, then, is merely another in a series, one that Potměšil ironically deems the most “normal” compared to the others he performed previously. His presumed, and by now inevitably acquired, “expertise in disabled characters” provides an identity for the entire ensemble. Indeed, in all substantial interviews with the director, Jakub Špalek, whether about the production or the Kašpar company in general, Potměšil is its only member who is mentioned at any length.²⁹ In sum, regardless of whatever arrangement exists inside the Kašpar collective, the materials suggest a profitable exploitation of Potměšil's non-normative body to satisfy the public's craving for a safe spectacle of deviance that, despite its inroads into a deliberately uncharted territory, validates the boundaries of normative discourse of ability and citizenship.

With few exceptions, the overwhelming majority of reviews seem to share and fuel further this notion of an exciting non-normative spectacle neatly articulated for consumption by eager audiences. As if working from a template, most reviews of *Richard III* follow the introductory paragraph with an overview of Potměšil's accident and his subsequent recovery. While some depart into the specifics of overwhelming (and ultimately erroneous) medical prognoses, others stress Kašpar's generosity in providing a space for Potměšil to "resurrect" his craft, or offer accounts of the actor's personal life marked by consistent humility in face of public scrutiny and crowned with the birth of a son. All of these responses then tend to transition seamlessly into polite praise for the actor's performance as Richard, frequently mentioning—but failing to reflect on the effects or implications of—the discrepancy between the actor's positive attitude and Richard's villainy. Indeed, Karel Kříž calls Potměšil "an institution of goodness,"³⁰ and Zdeněk Tichý sees him as "predestined for protagonist roles."³¹ Most also speak admiringly of Potměšil's ability to act *despite* his impairment. Some comment on his commendable ability to "make up" for his physical shortcomings: Martina Hrdličková, for instance, notes that Potměšil "balances out his physical handicap with the dynamism of his dialogues."³² The reviews, as a rule, end with cursory courtesy nods to the rest of the cast, who appear as the more-or-less (depending on the reviewer) successful and/but necessary also-rans. All in all, the reviews equally underscore the narrative of an unfortunate-but-grateful gifted subject who is happy to be subjected to public personal scrutiny thinly veiled in the guise of theatrical performance.

Rather than *Richard III*, Richard III, or even Potměšil as a celebrity, it is Potměšil's non-normative body that is the heart of this sought-after spectacle that provides an audience with the unprecedented ability to indulge the otherwise forbidden (yet difficult to resist) urge to stare at the disabled body. Indeed, since staring here is a prerequisite of the exercise of theatrical performativity, such exercise is hardly to be questioned. Yet such a stare is not likely to produce the necessary familiarity that might lead to detabooization of the non-normative bodies in the larger social and cultural context. The unclear and unexplored link between bodily non-normativity and moral depravity in *Richard III*, together with the pervasive discourse of *inability* attendant upon the concept of "disability," undermines the potential this particular production could have had to begin renegotiating the categories of (in)ability in the Czech context. Potměšil's progress from Romeo to Richard, particularly in the framework of the transcendental Shakespearean cultural capital that is tapped to sanctify most Czech productions' ideological message, provides a clear narrative of cultural categorization that

seems ready to counter the overtures of the European Union for cultural assimilation.

Notes

1. Sharon Snyder, "Unfixing Disability," in *Bodies in Commotion*, ed. Sandahl and Auslander, 272.

2. At the time of publication, this very question is being pursued subsequent to a recent archeological recovery of remains that are thought likely to be Richard's. Perhaps not surprisingly, the question of physical "deformation," pending a successful DNA identification of the remains, is paramount to the research agenda (Martin Wainwright, "Richard III: Could the skeleton under the car park be the king's? Remains at church near Bosworth Field battle site show signs of violent death and severe curvature of the spine," *The Guardian* online, 12 September 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2012/sep/12/richard-skeleton-king-remains-bosworth>).

3. Only nine Czech productions of *Richard III* have been noted between 1945 and 1999, a very small number in comparison to some of Shakespeare's more popular plays such as *Twelfth Night* (produced 97 times in the same interval), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (91), or *Taming of the Shrew* (78).

4. The first to open was *Richard III* at Velké Divadlo (the Large Theater) by a regional theater in Plzeň during the 1999–2000 season. The Kašpar production of *Richard III* ceremoniously opened the scaled-down Czech replica of the Globe Theatre during the 2000–2001 season.

5. For explicit references, see reviews by Eva Jeníková, "Richard Třetí odráží stav české politiky," *Zemské Noviny: Kultura*, 22 April 2000, "Potměšilovi slouží vozík jako exkluzivní rekvizita," *Zemské Noviny: Kultura*, 25 September 2000, and "Richard Třetí odráží stav české politiky," *Zemské Noviny: Kultura*, 22 April 2000; Martin Putna, "Shakespeare a klid na práci," *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, 25 September 2000; Zdeněk Tichý, "U Kašparů může být i zlo fascinující," *Mladá Fronta Dnes*, 13 October 2000, "Kašpar by měl s námi i vymřít, míní Špalek," *Mladá Fronta Dnes: Kultura*, 20 September 2000, and "Potměšil tasí meč jako Richard III," *Mladá Fronta Dnes: Kultura*, 20 September 2000; Jiří Kříž, "Prahou zní: Království za koně," *Právo*, 29 September 2000.

6. See, for instance, Ivo Toufar, "Ríjen: Divadelní Blázinec," *Hospodářské Noviny*, 13–15 October 2000.

7. See Marcela Kostihová, *Shakespeare in Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), particularly chaps. 3 and 4.

8. Michael Torrey, "The Plain Devil and Dissembling Looks: Ambivalent Physiology and Shakespeare's *Richard III*," *English Literary Renaissance* 30, no. 2 (2000): 123.

9. *Ibid.*, 126.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. This and all citations hereafter come from *Richard III* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ed. Herschel Baker et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 748–804.

13. Further points of ambiguity complicate our understanding of Richard's bodily materiality. The young Duke of York relays an origin-less rumor that Richard "grew so fast / That he could gnaw a crust at two hours old" (2.4.27–28). This rumor is implicitly belied by Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, when she reports that he was "long a-growing" (2.4.19). And, despite her measureless disappointment at the discovery of Richard's involvement in the disempowerment of his other brothers, her report of Richard's growth does not allude to anything but a generally labor-intensive child:

Thou cam'st on earth to make the earth my hell.
A grievous burthen was thy birth to me,
Tetchy and wayward was thy infancy;
Thy school-days frightful, desperate, wild, and furious,
Thy prime of manhood daring, bold, and venturous;
Thy age confirm'd, proud, subtle, sly, and bloody,
More mild, but yet more harmful—kind in hatred. (4.4.167–73)

14. Daniel Holland, "Grass Roots Promotion of Community Health and Human Rights for People with Disabilities in Post-communist Central Europe: A Profile of the Slovak Republic," *Disability and Society* 18, no. 2 (2003): 137.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, 133.

17. Holland's findings are echoed across Western research on the Czech Republic and Central Eastern Europe. Hannah Roberts, for instance, argues in parallel that "'Social care homes' in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union were originally designed to hide away people with mental health problems, because such people were not supposed to exist in the utopia of the communist system. Today the lack of community-based care in the region means that beds in such institutions are still in demand, despite their frequently harsh living conditions and the severe restrictions they typically impose on residents' liberty"; see "Mental Health Care Still Poor in Eastern Europe," *The Lancet* 360 (17 August 2002): 552. The lack of basic rights was reflected in the overwhelming license given to legal guardians who "typically have unchecked powers to decide not only a person's place of residence, but also his or her financial affairs, legal actions, and medical treatments" (*ibid.*).

18. The report states that "persons with disabilities suffered disproportionately from unemployment[, even though] businesses in which 60 percent or more of the employees were disabled qualified for special tax breaks and the Government provided transportation subsidies to disabled citizens. . . . In Prague 24 of the 50 metro stations were wheelchair-accessible; however, most of those stations were in the suburbs, and the majority of stations in the city center remained inaccessible. . . . Access to education was a problem for children with physical disabilities due to the lack of barrier-free access to most public schools." See "Czech Republic: Country Reports on Human Rights Practices—2002," released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (the US Department of State), 31 March 2003. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2002/18361.htm>.

19. Mel Ainscow and Memmenasha Haile-Giorgis, "Educational Arrangements for Children Categorized as Having Special Needs in Central and Eastern Europe," *European Journal of Special Needs Education* 14, no. 2 (1999): 109.

20. *Ibid.*, 115.

21. Alex McClimens, "lost in translation," *Learning and Disability Practice* 8, no. 6 (July 2005): 34.
22. Zdeněk Stříbrný, *The Whirligig of Time: Essays on Shakespeare and Czechoslovakia*, ed. Lois Potter (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), 89.
23. Sandahl and Auslander, "Introduction," *Bodies in Commotion*, 4.
24. For more discussion of the implications of mainstream theater's requirement to "disappear" into a character for actors with disabilities, see Carrie Sandahl's "The Tyranny of Neutral: Disability and Actor Training," *Bodies in Commotion*, esp. 257.
25. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, "Dares to Stares: Disabled Women Performance Artists and the Dynamics of Staring," *Bodies in Commotion*, 31.
26. Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander, "Rehabilitating the Medical Model," in *Bodies in Commotion*, 130.
27. At the time of final revisions of this article (fall 2010), the play was still on the active repertoire at Kašpar, though appearing only infrequently.
28. Sandahl and Auslander, *Bodies in Commotion*, 4.
29. Jakub Špalek, *Richard III*, Divadelní spolek Kašpar, Divadlo v Celetné, 20 September 2000.
30. "Prahou zní," 10.
31. "Kašpar by měl s námi i vymířit, míní Špalek," 23.
32. Martina Hrdličková, "Richard III: Jan Potměšil nehraje neřest v moraliťě," *Reflex* 47 (2000): 87.