

The Quill

The Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival Newsletter • Summer 2018



Dueling Knights for the Heart of Fair England... and the Audience

By Heather Helinsky, Dramaturg

In “The Knight’s Tale,” one of Chaucer’s stories in *The Canterbury Tales*, two knights fight to restore the social disorder they see around them. The story swells into an epic battle over the beautiful Lady Emelye. Palamon prays to the goddess Venus that he will triumph only by winning Emelye’s love. Arcite prays to the god of war, Mars, for victory. Meanwhile, Lady Emelye prays to the goddess Diana, wishing the winning knight will be the one who loves her the most.

Ultimately, in “The Knight’s Tale” all their prayers come true in an ironic twist of fate. The knight Palamon wins Emelye’s love but loses to Arcite; Arcite wins the battle but then loses his life, as well as happiness with Emelye. While it’s a simple plot, Chaucer’s heightened poetry details lavish scenes of medieval court rituals. Chaucer gave the English reader imaginative, witty verse at a cruel time in history—the Black Plague had devastated the English population, taxes burdened the common man, endless, expensive wars with continental Europe continued, and the elite wealthy lords struggled against each other to rule England.

For a medieval poet, we know much of Chaucer’s life because of his close relationships to two Kings of England: Edward III and Richard II. King Edward III was a warrior-king who had a strong hold over England for a period of 50 years. As a boy, Chaucer apprenticed in the household of King Edward III’s second oldest son Lionel. As a teenager, Chaucer entered into the court circle and worked for the Kings of England for the rest of his life in various jobs.

Before countries honored poets with the title of ‘poet laureate’, King Edward III honored Chaucer by bequeathing him “a gallon of wine daily for the rest of his life”—perhaps the best gift any writer in history could ask for! After King Edward III’s death, King Richard II continued Chaucer’s grant, as Richard II’s love of poetry and objects of beauty is well documented.

Chaucer witnessed a tight family circle of royals at a time of great tension between the wealthy lords and the poor peasant farmers who were overly taxed to support expensive wars. At the heart of many of these conflicts were battles over inheritances and titles. Who should rule England? Did the king rule with a divine right and power from God, or should the strongest, most capable ruler guide the country?

The word of an English king, at this time, held immense powers of life and death. As Richard II matured into his reign, the circle of people he trusted grew smaller and smaller. Even though he was the rightful heir, Richard took revenge on those who challenged him, many of whom were executed or exiled. A period of his reign was known as “Richard’s tyranny,” which gave other nobles justification for taking him down in 1399.

His grandfather, King Edward III, was the patriarch of a large family. The other men in the family

were John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, Edmund, the Duke of York, and Thomas of Woodstock, the Duke of Gloucester. They all had children waiting in the wings, putting pressure on King Richard II. All these noble houses would ultimately lead to England’s next war—The War of the Roses.

Richard II’s reign lasted 22 years, cut short when he was overthrown and imprisoned by his cousin Henry, the oldest son of Uncle John of Gaunt. Henry and Richard II were both born in the same year, 1367, and it’s not surprising that the two cousins were in a struggle for the throne.

Two hundred years later, Queen Elizabeth I’s reign was threatened by the Earl of Essex. Queen Elizabeth knew the parallels between her reign and Richard II, as she famously declared: “I am Richard II; know ye not that?”

continues on page 3



Christian Coulson, a featured actor in the *Harry Potter* film series, will play the title role in Shakespeare’s epic *King Richard II*.

Notes from the Producing Artistic Director

The second half of the Festival summer season is always a thrilling time.

This is the period when a patron traveling to PSF can see three different plays in a single visit in the course of a few days. In the last two weeks of the season, we offer more than 50 performances of six different productions in our two theatres, often offering six performances in a single day.



Patrick Mulcahy

By now, you may already know that this summer's production of *Twelfth Night* is a magical journey to Illyria with deeply romantic musical strains and plenty of light-hearted laughs counterbalanced with moments of truth-telling poignancy.

Shakespeare in Love will open soon on the Main Stage as a comic what-if riff on our favorite playwright, inspired by the Academy Award-winning film. I am delighted to take the director's seat for a play that is so filled with passion, wit, ingenuity, and iconic characters.

King Richard II will be the 30th of Shakespeare's plays that PSF has produced and begins the first chapter of Shakespeare's epic cycle that will continue at the Festival in coming years. The distinguished actor Christian Coulson will take on the role of the reckless King Richard II, as well as Lord Wessex in *Shakespeare in Love*, playing in rep.

All's Well That Ends Well concludes our season with a bittersweet comedy of love and longing. This production is in the hands of the actors—countless returning Festival favorites—who take charge in our "Extreme Shakespeare" process, which mirrors many of the circumstances of Elizabethan rehearsals.

And the children in your life will be delighted by two rollicking productions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *Shakespeare for Kids*, each of which run through the first week in August.

Make sure to come early to performances and enjoy the beauty of our outdoor space, On the Green, with enhanced dining and seating options that are not to be missed.

We look forward to seeing you in the lobby. Thank you for joining us.

Patrick Mulcahy

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Festival Host



Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival's productions of *Twelfth Night*, *King Richard II* and *All's Well That Ends Well* are part of *Shakespeare in American Communities*, a program of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with Arts Midwest.



PSF receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.



KING RICHARD II

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

MAIN STAGE
JULY 19 - AUG 5

Dueling Knights *continued*

It would take another poet, Shakespeare, to tell this politically dangerous story. Unlike Shakespeare's other plays, *King Richard II* put his company in real danger. In 1601, the day before the Earl of Essex planned a march on London to overthrow Elizabeth, Essex paid the Lord Chamberlain's Men 40 shillings to revive "the deposing and killing of King Richard II" at the Globe. The theatre troupe was tried for sedition, but declared innocent and escaped punishment.

Good new plays that wade into dicey politics strive to strike a balance on both sides of the issue so the audience has the opportunity to draw their own conclusions and walk away debating what the playwright was trying to say with his work. But how can a playwright write a play that represents the overthrowing of an English monarch and then perform it for the Queen of England?

Shakespeare had to walk the line. He opens the play with a mess of a situation. Richard's government has been completely compromised by his small group of hand-picked advisors, which makes his uncles and cousins jealous of their influence. There are accusations of money laundering, treason, and murder. What's truth and what's a lie is also difficult to discern. When is it an act of justice to overthrow a monarch? Yet do we ever really know how the playwright really feels about both sides? The answer is elusive.

When we hear the term history play," says the production's director Gina Lamparella, "people are afraid it will be stodgy, distant, and informative—and that's not why we go to the theatre. And that is not this play, which is immediate, dangerous, and challenging.

"I love it when I walk out of a play and I can't stop talking about it," says Lamparella. "I like it when the answers aren't all spelled out for me. *King Richard II* is open-ended and it can lead to some great conversations on the drive home. Who do we choose as our leader? What qualities do we want in our leaders? Then when we're unhappy with what we've chosen, where do we go from there? What I'm hoping will come across in this production is that while Richard II is not right for the job, when Henry Bolingbroke takes over, he has his own problems."

Gina Lamparella began her research on the play by watching a documentary with English actor Derek Jacobi, who described the play as "a cautionary tale for would-be despots." Lamparella adds, "I think it's more of a cautionary tale for the rest of us."

As casting began for the play, Lamparella articulated what made the two cousins different from each other. "Richard II has no concept of what life is like for other people. Yet he's honest and compelling, you want to know more about him. Richard II is the right man for the wrong job. He is a thinker, a poet-king, he loves beautiful things. If you were told as a child you were chosen by God to rule England, it would be hard to be grounded and in touch with the problems of the common man."

Conversely, Lamparella defines Henry Bolingbroke as clearly, "a Man of the People. He's of noble birth, like Richard, but he's a soldier who has come into contact with English commoners and had to lead them into battle. Henry is practical. He's a fighter."

"Still," Lamparella considers, "how do we know what his real motivations are? Is Henry fighting for what he feels is right and just? Or is it more of a personal revenge against Richard for banishing him from England and taking away his inheritance in the first act of the play? How much of it is ambition? What parts of the play are his plans, and what falls into his lap because of Richard's own political mistakes and miscalculations?"

"However, Henry is a different kind of politician. He says very little, while Richard II has elegant speeches. Henry has a lot going on underneath the surface. We should see he's constantly strategizing. What makes him a better politician is that he is able to get the support of most of the people, including the common man."

Shakespeare gives us more of a power-struggle than these dueling cousins for the throne. In *King Richard II*, we see Shakespeare's real love and pride for his country. However, if the King's authority is challenged, it's a play that asks, "What does it mean to be English? Where is our commonality when our core values and beliefs have crumbled?" During a war, there's a common enemy for a nation to unite around, but during a period of civil strife, when the nation is divided by support for either Richard or Henry, what is it that unites us all?

continues on page 6

— ALL'S — LOVE ALL WELL TRUST A FEW DO WRONG TO NONE

By Megan Diehl, Dramaturg

With the death of Queen Elizabeth I in the middle of his career, William Shakespeare may have feared his world would soon be turned upside down. A successful poet and playwright under his patron and beloved “Virgin Queen,” his future was somewhat unknown as he watched James I’s accession to the throne. Would his company of players still find their home in London under the reign of a new king?

He penned *All’s Well That Ends Well* in the years between 1601 and 1605, with the monarchical transition directly in the middle. Although it is complex and categorized as one of Shakespeare’s “problem plays,” it is simple to see reflections of the heady themes in *All’s Well* that may have circled in his mind at the time—life and death, the passing of generations, truth and fidelity, power and gender roles, etc.

All’s Well blends the comedy and drama of love affairs and class conflicts with nuanced humanity touched by a fairy tale flair. Shakespeare abandons the promise of neatly classified heroes and villains and attempts to reconcile those traits twisted within us of both good and evil as he writes, “The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.”

The plot focuses on Helena, recently orphaned, with a pure heart and a unique family potion that cures the King of France. As repayment for this favor, he grants Helena her heart’s desire, the young Count Bertram, in marriage. Bertram at first refuses to marry beneath his status and later escapes his marital duties by joining the war in Italy. With a bittersweet mixture of honesty and light-hearted clowning around, *All’s Well* follows Helena’s journey to win Bertram’s heart.

“The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud, if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair, if they were not cherished by our virtues.”

The play shirks the expectations of Shakespeare’s era by adhering to neither the strict rules of comedy and tragedy, nor the unities of time and place that had become popular for those audiences. Although the story, like many of his others, may end in a wedding, is the ending indeed a happy one? Has Helena achieved her true desire by finally winning Bertram as her bridegroom?

But for all the various elements that may classify one of Shakespeare’s texts a “problem play,” *All’s Well* and its insights still function as what *The New York Times*’ Frank Rich

called “still a mirror, however cracked, held up to the world.”

Much is unknown about the history of *All’s Well*. Scholars believe that Shakespeare collaborated with Thomas Middleton to adapt the tale from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, and some even venture that Bertram’s surprising reversal at the play’s sudden resolution suggests a substantial section of missing text. Few records exist of early performances until the 18th century. Soon after, the play

aroused superstitions when it became a trend for cast members to fall ill during production.

Nevertheless, Shakespeare invites us into a fantastical world of ambition and courage, while visiting themes that still echo with a contemporary resonance.

In Helena, he has found a heroine who is flawed yet admirable, stopping at nothing to achieve her one desire, and still victim to Bertram’s ignorance of her true nature. Helena was a precursor to Henrik Ibsen’s “New Woman” as portrayed in *A Doll’s House*, and a favorite of that era’s more progressive authors including George Bernard Shaw.

Shakespeare’s unorthodox approach to the fairy tale gender roles charges Helena with single-mindedly pursuing her beloved. Even with royal assistance on her side, she faces a challenge to win over Bertram by proving

WATCH FOR...

CHANGING LOCATIONS

Shakespeare shifts location often to weave his tale. The French locales are winsome and romantic, reflecting the hopeful fairy tale elements of the story. Italy, on the other hand, is a more dangerous setting for battling young men who are tricked in their pursuit of passion.

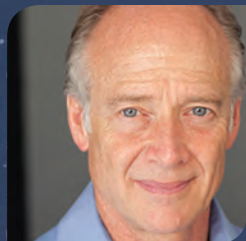
LISTEN FOR...

LOVE AS A BATTLEFIELD

Bertram escapes to the battlefield to avoid his marital obligations, but Shakespeare’s poetry throughout *All’s Well* continues to play on the idea of combat and war and its similarities to the characters’ struggles with love, sex, and class.

PSF VETERANS GO TO THE "EXTREME"

All's Well That Ends Well will continue PSF's tradition of concluding the season with "Extreme Shakespeare." These productions are rehearsed akin to the way we believe Shakespeare's company would have: the actors arrive with their lines learned, rehearse on their own, wear whatever they can find, and open in a matter of a few days. Without a director or designers, the cast collaborates over four fast-paced days and opens for an audience later that week.



Greg Wood
King of France

"I love the 'Extreme Shakespeare' process! You can't fall back on default acting tricks. Everyone is always acutely aware of what is going on around them at all times. You have to depend on the people on stage with you. When you get in front of an audience, you have no idea whether you have a show or not. Anything could happen at any time. And it does! It's incredibly exciting as an actor. And I think the audience feels that as well. There's a real electricity in the theatre."



Akeem Davis
Bertram, Count of Rossillion

"Ultimately, the actors shoulder so much more responsibility in the 'hit and run' than a conventional process. Without directors and designers, I found the cast was challenged to think of our characters and our production in a much broader way. The most magic happened when the group said 'yes' to each other, that way the production bubbled into a brew as unique as the cast itself, which is the glory of the 'hit and run' shows."



Susan Riley Stevens
Countess of Rossillion/Widow

"I have done four of these before, and every time—at about halfway through the rehearsal process, which is late in day two—I say, 'Never again.' But every time, I feel completely different after the first audience. The process is grueling, demanding, unforgiving. It is also exhilarating and surprising. The way I imagine a baby bird feels when it has to just jump out of the nest and hope the wings work. There have been more moments of flying during an 'Extreme Shakespeare' production than with almost any other. Add to that the feeling of collaboration and artistic ownership, and well, now I've learned—I'll get through day two."

herself. She is the Prince Charming who must rely on her wits and character to earn the right to her one true love, despite the tricky means she may take to achieve the ends.

All's Well That Ends Well examines the modern idea that merit, and not class, can determine our worth. With a heartfelt and nuanced story accompanied by some of Shakespeare's classic clowns, the story ends "well" as the old adage insists, but with a bit of a question mark. *All's Well* inhabits an

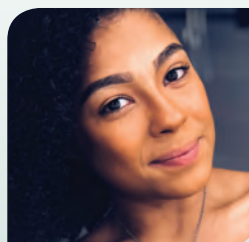
exciting corner of Shakespeare's canon by mixing poignancy and passion, and allowing us to examine the tangled natures that exist in all of us. ■

Megan Diehl (Advancement & Communications Manager) is a dramaturg, director, and writer in her 15th season with PSF. She recently obtained an MA from Villanova University with a Certificate in Nonprofit Management, and is an alumna of DeSales University.



Jim Helsing
Parolles

Jim returns to the PSF stage for the first time since Lady Bracknell in 2013.



Victoria Janicki
Helena

National Tour:
Joan in *Fun Home*;
TV: *The Blacklist*,
Elementary, Gwen in
The Royal Family at
The Guthrie Theatre

THAT ENDS WELL

SCHUBERT THEATRE
JULY 25 - AUG 5

by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Dueling Knights *continued*

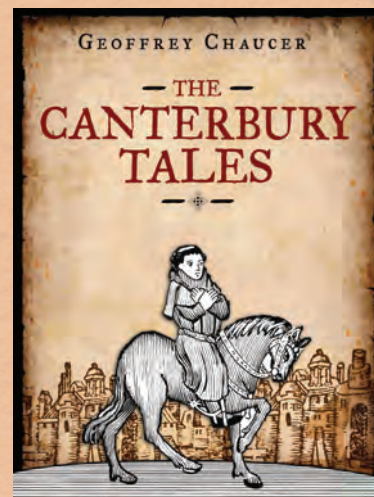
Lamparella sees in the speech that John of Gaunt makes in the play, that by questioning Richard II's divine right to rule, they are questioning their own belief in God, so this play is a real faith crisis—a faith crisis in patriotism.

“When there’s so much that divides us,” says Lamparella, “you have to go back and ask what is it that unites us so that the country can move forward in the world?”

If Henry and Richard are two knights locked in a more complicated battle than Chaucer’s romantic “The Knight’s Tale,” the Lady they are battling over is England. It’s

in this play where we hear some of the most lyrical speeches about “This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England...” Chaucer’s knights may have waxed poetic about a beautiful lady; Shakespeare’s knights are in love with the rivers, forests, hills, fields, coastlines, towns and cities of their homeland. ■

Heather Helinsky is a DeSales Theatre grad from ‘01, with an MFA in Dramaturgy from ART/Harvard in ‘07. She’s a lead teaching artist in dramaturgy for The Kennedy Center, a current Barrymore Judge for Theatre Philadelphia, and a newly elected board member for the national Literary Managers & Dramaturgs of the Americas.



For more information on “The Knight’s Tale,” reference Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*.



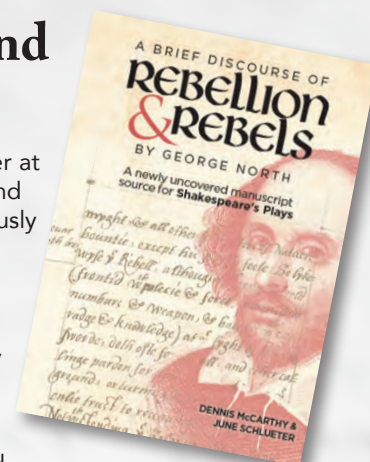
Noted Shakespearean Scholar and PSF Featured Speaker

June Schlueter, noted Shakespearean scholar and featured speaker at PSF’s Savoring Shakespeare events, recently co-authored a new and groundbreaking book with Dennis McCarthy that identifies previously unknown source material for 11 of Shakespeare’s plays.

The book, “A Brief Discourse of Rebellion and Rebels” by George North: A Newly Uncovered Manuscript Source for Shakespeare’s Plays, analyzes parallels between Shakespeare’s plays and a nearly 450-year-old unpublished manuscript by George North.

June and her colleague used plagiarism software to identify multiple instances of matching passages between North’s text and Shakespeare’s plays. The scholarly world continues to investigate and debate these new claims, which, if proved true, would be a once-in-a-generation find.

Drs. June and Paul Schlueter are sponsors of PSF’s pre-show Prologues, which illuminate the plot and characters before every performance of Shakespeare productions with PSF staff in a relaxed, informal setting, held in the theatre 45 minutes before curtain. You can also hear June speak to the plays in PSF’s 2018 season at our Savoring Shakespeare dining events this summer. ■



PSF WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS TO THE BOARD

Composed of volunteers from around the region, PSF’s Board of Directors serve as community representatives that support the company’s mission and administration. PSF is proud to welcome four new board members: Phoenix Best, Martha Huston-Saxton, Ph.D., Ian Smith, Ph.D., and Father Kevin Nadolski, OSFS.

“We have long been blessed with a caring, engaged, and insightful Board of Directors,” says Patrick Mulcahy, producing artistic director. “That tradition continues with our newest members and we thank them for joining in promoting the good work of the Festival.”



Phoenix Best is currently playing Alana Beck in *Dear Evan Hansen* on Broadway. She is a Daytime Emmy Award Winner. Other Broadway/Tour credits: Tony,

Emmy, and Grammy winning revival of *The Color Purple*, Eponine in the recent North American Tour of *Les Misérables*. Phoenix is a former PSF acting intern and has spent many summers performing at the Festival.

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EDITOR
EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
DESIGN

Tina Louise Slak
Julie Sullivan
Laura Zielinski,
Laura Zielinski Designs
Hayley Killian
Heather Helinsky
Megan Diehl

DESIGN ASSISTANT
CONTRIBUTORS

FR. GERARD J. SCHUBERT, OSFS (1929-2015)
Founder



Martha Hutson-Saxton, Ph.D. has lived in the Lehigh Valley for nearly forty years. She has served on many nonprofit Boards during that time. As an art his-

torian specializing in American art, she has been a museum curator and an art magazine editor. Missy writes under the name of Dr. Martha Hutson-Saxton for books, articles and museum catalogs in her field.



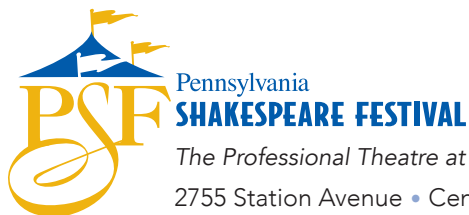
Ian Smith, Ph.D. received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and is a professor of English at Lafayette College and holds the Richard and Joan Sell Chair

in the Humanities. He is the author of *Race and Rhetoric in the Renaissance: Barbarian Errors* (2009), and his work on Shakespeare and early modern drama has been published in several anthologies and journals. He is currently preparing a book on the relevance of Shakespeare and the politics of race for modern audiences titled *Black Shakespeare*.



Father Kevin Nadolski, OSFS a priest with the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, is a graduate of Temple University, Catholic University of America, and DeSales School

of Theology. He holds degrees in journalism, theology, and education administration and is eagerly awaiting the conferral of his Ph.D. in Catholic higher education from Fordham University. Fr. Kevin is presently the assistant provincial and director of development and communications for the Oblates. In July, he will join the administration of DeSales University as the vice president for mission where he will also teach theology.



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