**Villainy amplified in stark ' Richard '**

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In the universe of tragic characters, Shakespeare's Richard III stands out for his snarling, murderous infamy.

The production of " Richard III " at Theatre Memphis' intimate Next Stage is a fascinating and wrenching experience shaped by director Bo List. The black leather and metal costuming, minimal set and arena environment serve to amplify the already devastatingly acid discourse that tracks the fall of a dynasty.

It is, of course, highly biased in favor of the Tudors, who, in killing Richard III in battle, ended the Plantagenet dynasty as well as any hope of decent PR for Richard. And Shakespeare did, after all, write for the entertainment of the Tudors.

So while the record, sketchy as it is, doesn't quite support Shakespeare's version, the play itself transcends the history and offers up how a man might be "determined to prove a villain," exploiting the complacency, confusion, lesser ambition and diffidence of others. And the Theatre Memphis production, even with some rough spots, keeps up both energy and interest.

Greg Boller's limping, hunchbacked Richard is never less than threatening, maintaining a steady rage from the winter of his discontent right through to his final agonized breath. In that limited spectrum, Boller makes the most out of scaring the bejabbers out of the audience.

His character also frightens the unfortunate members of Richard 's friends and family plan, although most don't realize the treachery until too late. But Shakespeare gives them splendid expressions of fear and misery, and while there is unevenness afoot, a few of the performances are remarkable.

Anita Jo Lenhart is a mesmerizing actor. In the scene where her fiery Margaret of Anjou hands out curses and dire prophecies, it's impossible to look away from her brilliant use of physical nuance and vocal inflection.

Other standouts in the cast include Kell Christie, whose range and passion are riveting; Chuck Hodges, convincing in utterly different dual roles; Meghan Lisi's superb and tortured Lady Anne Neville; and Gregory Szatkowski's authoritative and doomed Duke of Buckingham.

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Review

' Richard III '

8 p.m. tonight and Saturday at Theatre Memphis' Next Stage, 630 Perkins Ext. Tickets $23; $15 students. Call 682-8323, or go to [theatrememphis.org](http://theatrememphis.org" \t "_blank).