Farewell, king! staging the Middle Ages in nineteenth-century London performances of Shakespeare's "Richard II"

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Chapter 1

The Brightest Heaven of Invention: The Theatre as a Political Space for Historical Reconstruction

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!

(*Henry V*, Prologue, 1-4)

The Chorus in William Shakespeare's *Henry V* invited the audience's "imaginary forces" to work for the first time in 1599, the year that Robert Devereux (1565-1601), the 2nd Earl of Essex, returned from his failed enterprise in Ireland, and also the year when The Lord Chamberlain's Men moved to the new Globe Theatre (Craik 3–5). The Earl has an intrinsic connection to the performance history of *Richard II*, granting notoriety to the play's political capability. The powerful prologue draws attention to the act of historical reconstruction happening on stage and invites the audience to reflect on their own role in this interpretative and creative process.

In the Chorus's own words, delivered directly to the audience, "'tis your [the audience's] thoughts that now must deck our kings, / Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times, / Turning th'accomplishment of many years / Into an hour-glass" (*Henry V*, Prologue, 28-31), and "gently to hear, kindly to judge our play"

(*Henry V*, Prologue, 34). Shakespeare invites the audience to use their imagination, transforming the actors on stage in embodiments of historical figures and understanding the few hours of theatrical production as the condensation of many years. The Chorus becomes a threshold between the contemporary world of the theatre and the historical world performed on stage (Bruster and Weimann 2).

The need for the spectator's participation in the process of historical reconstruction on stage illustrates the power of the dramatic text as *theatre*: it reaches full potentiality when acted *by* actors *to* an audience. However, that is not exclusive to Shakespeare's *Henry V*, since all historical plays require it. In the Shakespearean canon, at least eight history plays reached the stage before *Henry V*[2], including *Richard II*.

In analysing the political potency of *Richard II*, Jeffrey Dotty writes how "Shakespeare invites his audience not to wield 'opinion' themselves, but to understand, reflect upon, or resist how – as a collective of private people – they are positioned by elites through emotional appeals and the occasional public airing of political controversies" (185). The development of the theatrical spectatorship's consciousness of being a group of private individuals who collectively form a public circle of influence, and who realise their role as critical observers of local politics, is essential to understanding the power of Shakespeare's play in its origins in Early Modern London, as well as its repercussions and adaptations in the nineteenth century.

I brought *Henry V*'s prologue to open my discussion on historical reconstruction in the theatre because it makes explicit the audience's role in recreating the past in their minds aided by the dramatic text performed by actors. Around four years before the Chorus in *Henry V* spoke on the Globe stage, Shakespeare's *Richard II* already engaged the audience with a developing sense of historical awareness. The play dramatises Henry Bolingbroke's challenge of Richard's power as the anointed representative of God on Earth. The historical Richard was eventually forced to renounce the crown and was officially deposed. Bolingbroke, a figure also adapted by Shakespeare, was crowned King Henry IV on 13 October 1399.

Outside the theatre, ordinary people would normally be isolated from the discussion of political matters, and even liable to be sentenced for treason for challenging the authority of the ruling monarch. However, when within the four walls of the theatre, they could feel free to "kindly judge" the play, along with the

[2] *King John* (c.1590-1595), *Henry VI Part 1* (c. 1590-1595), *Henry VI Part 2* (c. 1591), *King Henry VI Part 3* (c. 1592), *Richard III* (c. 1593), *Richard II* (c. 1595), *Henry IV Part 1* (c. 1596), and *Henry IV Part 2* (c. 1597).

historical figures and acts there portrayed. It was a political freedom justified by the apparent 'fictionality' of the stage.

In the next section of the chapter I discuss the stage history of Shakespeare's *Richard II* until Edmund Kean staged it in 1815. I also examine the theatre as a place for political debate in nineteenth-century London and its reverberations in the productions analysed in this dissertation. A public sphere emerged in London at the end of the sixteenth century, fostered by the role of the theatre as providing the space for political awareness and discussion. This informal environment included an illiterate population, who could not read but could *watch* politics on stage. With the fast urbanisation, industrialisation and population growth in the nineteenth century, the number of theatres increased, enlarging the theatrical public sphere. Minor theatres expanded beyond the West End, offering an alternative to the patent theatres Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and allowing a wider audience to participate in the public sphere.

1.1 *Thou art a traitor: Off with his head!* – The Early Stage History of *Richard II* c.1595-1815

Going back to the first production of Shakespeare's *Richard II* is no easy task; that is because there is no consensus as to when exactly the play was first staged. Chris Fitter (2005) forcibly argues that it was performed between October 1594 (when Samuel Daniel's *The First Fowre Bookes of the Civile Warres* was registered, which Fitter regards as one of the play's sources) and August 1597 (when the First Quarto of the play was published). Fitter affirms that the first performance could have been some time after the Accession Day tournaments in November 1595, since the spectacular appearance of the Earl of Essex then bears parallels to Bolingbroke's appearance in the first scene of *Richard II*'s Act 1 (Fitter, paras 5–8).[3]

In her overview of *Richard II*'s textual and theatrical transformations, Margarida Gandara Rauen explains that the play was published in six Quarto editions: the first in 1597, two in 1598, one in 1608, the fifth in 1615, and the latest in 1634 – eleven years after the publication of Shakespeare's complete works in the Folio of 1623, in which *Richard II* is of course also included (Rauen 11). This set of quartos suggests that the play was rather popular with Shakespeare's contemporaries. In

[3] The Accession Day tilts were annual festivities celebrated on Elizabeth I's Accession Day, November 17th.

comparison with the other history plays, only *Richard III* and *Henry IV – Part 1* were more popular, each with eight Quarto publications. *Henry VI – Part 2* and *Henry V* had three Quarto publications each, *Henry VI – Part 3* two Quarto and one Octavo publications, *Henry IV – Part 2* had one Quarto, and *King John* and *Henry VI – Part 1* were only published in the Folio in 1623.

One of the crucial differences in the early editions of the play is the presence (or absence) of the so-called "deposition scene" in Act IV,[4] in which Richard is forced to 'de-crown' himself and to pass the throne to Henry Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV. This is undoubtedly the most politically charged scene in the play, since it stages the forced abdication of an anointed monarch. This discussion consequently raises an enticing question: was the play originally performed *with* the deposition scene, which was not printed due to censorship; or, was the scene only created and added in Q4? In other words, was the scene first staged or printed?

The first time the deposition scene was printed was in Q4 (1608), not coincidentally five years after Queen Elizabeth I's death. Q2 and Q3 were both published in 1598, when the queen and the Earl of Essex were still alive, and all mentions – direct or indirect – to the old age of the childless queen or to Essex's suitability as an alternative king were considered acts of high treason.[5] In fact, Shakespeare's play draws attention to the issue regarding who was more suitable to govern: the anointed monarch who has divine sanction to rule but abuses his/her power and therefore fails to care for his/her subjects, or a usurper who claims to be a better and more effective ruler but who has challenged the divine hereditariness of the crown?

Q4 included significant new information on its title-page: "With new additions of the Parliament Scene, and the deposing of King Richard, As it hath been lately acted by the King's Majesty's Servants, at the Globe" (Dawson and Yachnin 11). This information might suggest that the added scene was new and had only recently been performed. However, Dawson and Yachnin disagree. They believe that the text of *Richard II* as originally conceived included the deposition scene, which was performed on stage but censored from print until after Queen Elizabeth's death. They affirm, and I concur, that it would be extremely unlikely for the play to have

[4] Lines 162-318 in Act IV, Scene 1.

[5] The 1571 Act of Parliament also known as the Treason Act of 1571 "declared, among other things, that anyone who pretended to the crown was a traitor. Furthermore, anyone who denied the right of the Queen and Parliament, jointly, to name her successor would be held a traitor" (Regnier 51).

been revised and extended ten years after its creation (Dawson and Yachnin 9–11). Furthermore, "an important factor is the style of the sequence, which is entirely consonant with the rest of the play, and with the style of other plays written in the mid-1590s" (Dawson and Yachnin 11). Another important piece of evidence presented by Dawson and Yachnin in favour of the performance of the deposition scene prior to Q4 is its role in the Essex Rising in 1601 (15), "one of the most famous, even notorious, events in the long reign of Queen Elizabeth I" (Hammer 3).

Richard II was arguably commissioned by Essex's supporters and staged at the Globe on 7 February 1601. For their purpose, the acting of the king's deposition would have been crucial. Paul Hammer explains that "on the morning of Sunday, 8 February, Essex and about one hundred gentleman followers marched out of Essex House and tried to rally the people of London to protect the earl from his private enemies" (Hammer 3). Hammer states that Essex's followers aimed at protecting the earl from his enemies' accusations, especially Robert Cecil (1563-1612), the Queen's Secretary of State. However, the public conviction was that Essex had gathered supporters to seize the castle and force the queen's deposition. Given the special production of *Richard II* the day before, such an assumption gained credibility, leading the queen to proclaim Essex and his followers traitors to the crown. Essex was executed in the Tower of London on 25 February of the same year.[6]

Several scholars have explored the links between the Essex Rising and political matters within *Richard II*. Essex had several parallels with Henry Bolingbroke: a military man bound to codes of chivalry and honour. Moreover, Essex was a highly popular man before his failures in Ireland. Bate and Rasmussen point out that Shakespeare's Bolingbroke is also portrayed as extremely popular within the play, the opposite of Richard at the end of his reign. Significantly, Bolingbroke's popularity is not mentioned in Shakespeare's sources of the play, which suggests that it was the playwright's own addition (Bate and Rasmussen 5–6). Another possibility is that Essex appropriated the image of Shakespeare's Bolingbroke to foster his own.

Fitter adds that "the parallels between elements of the Accession Day of 1595 must, given their number, surely have been evident to Shakespeare: and to almost anyone who knew of the November tilts" (Fitter, para.10). As we have seen, the exact date of the first production of the play is unknown. However, if it was indeed staged after November 1595, the audience might associate Bolingbroke's challenge

[6] It is not clear if the deposition scene was indeed staged in the 1601 production at the Globe, since, as we have seen, it was only printed in Q4, thus seven years later.

to Thomas Mowbray in *Richard II* with Essex's knightly extravaganza at the Accession Day tournaments; on the other hand, if the play had been premiered before that month in 1595, the November tilts would have added new topicality to the play, adding to the parallels between Bolingbroke and Essex. Additionally, these associations would strengthen the vision of Essex as a threat to Elizabeth, giving credibility to the belief that Essex indeed intended to steal the crown. However, "as Leeds Barroll warned, some of these claims have been wildly exaggerated and reflect a severely distorted understanding of the events of 7 and 8 February 1601" (Hammer 3). Hammer believes Essex's supposed *coup d'état* was created by the Earl's enemies in court as a means to strain him from the select group of the queen's favourites for good.

The Essex Rising added new topicality to the play, creating a resonance that did not yet exist when the play was written some years earlier. A powerful aspect of Shakespeare's history plays is that they collect new possibilities of meaning as they are performed throughout the years in different contexts. After the iconic production in 1601, the play was staged at the Globe by the Lord Chamberlain's Men for a benefit production for Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, on 12 June 1631 (Dawson and Yachnin 79). After that, the play went through a period of unpopularity – possibly, it became even more contentious during the period of civil wars. The only attempt to produce it was carried out by Nahum Tate (1652-1715) in December 1680, after the monarchy had been restored. As Bate and Rasmussen explain, Tate tried to avoid censorship by moving the plot to Sicily and by naming the adaptation *The Usurper of Sicily*. The production was banned only two days after its premiere, and banned again the following month when Tate tried to bring it back to stage under the new title *The Tyrant of Sicily* (Bate and Rasmussen 128). Dawson and Yachnin add that Tate "complained in a Preface to the published version (1681) that his innocent attempt to portray a 'dissolute' and 'ignorant' age was unjustifiably suppressed as a 'libel' upon the present" (Dawson and Yachnin 80). The topical power of the play was still too latent for seventeenth-century theatre play-goers, who had witnessed the execution of Charles I in 1649 and the restoration of the monarchy with his son Charles II in 1660.

Tate's adaptation, as Yachnin puts it, started a trend that would go on into the eighteenth century: "a tendency to want to fill in what they [the adaptors] see as explanatory gaps in Shakespeare" (124). For instance, York's abrupt change of sides from Richard to Bolingbroke and his condemnation of his own son for staying true to Richard is explained in Tate's adaptation: "Tate re-conceives York as a plain-talk-

er, an opponent of Bullingbrook [sic], who, upon reflection, decides to support the new king because he has risen to the throne by due process of law" (Yachnin 132). Yachnin calls this process "rational characterization", an attempt "to make transparent and graspable what Shakespeare seems to prefer to leave obscure or indeterminate" (123). What ensues is a simplification of the interpretative layers in the Shakespearean text.

Tate made significant changes not only to *Richard II*, but also in other Shakespearean adaptations. For instance, he famously rewrote the tragedy *King Lear* in 1681 with a happy ending. Michael Dobson explains that Tate adds a love interest between Cordelia and Edgar, along with a different denouement to the story in order to "conclude in a Success to the innocent distrest Persons", as Tate explains in the preface to the printed edition (Dobson 81). Samuel Johnson writes that the observation of justice – Cordelia finding victory and felicity in the end – does not make a play worse (Johnson, *Johnson on Shakespeare* 161). Dobson, however, sees Tate's explanation as "a patent *non sequitur*" (81); it was, in fact, a way to misdirect the attention from the play's political power.

After Tate's censored effort to bring *Richard II* back to the London stage, there was another gap in productions until 1719, when Lewis Theobald (1688-1744) staged the first *Richard II* of the eighteenth century at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Theobald followed the trend initiated by Tate of heavily altering the Shakespearean text. It was a period when the commercial potential of the play was favoured over reverencing the original Shakespearean text. According to Dawson and Yachnin, Theobald cut the first two acts of *Richard II* entirely, erasing much of Richard's reproachable behaviour, and included a tragic love story between Lady Percy, an invented daughter for Lord Northumberland, and Aumerle. When Aumerle is executed for treason, the broken-hearted young girl commits suicide (Dawson and Yachnin 81). In the preface, Theobald "excuses the many changes he made by declaring that what Shakespeare's play needed was a way to incorporate its 'many scatter'd Beauties' into a 'regular Fable' – i.e. one ordered according to eighteenth-century principle of dramatic unity" (Dawson and Yachnin 81). As the editors affirm, the production was extremely popular; it was staged seven times in that season and three more in the following two (81).

Theobald's alterations reflect the period's Classicist influence, which revived the theatre's classic Greek roots for inspiration and models. According to Forker, "generally speaking, Restoration and eighteenth-century critics objected to the play's quibbling and rhyming style, to its unclassical structure and violations of

decorum (such as onstage murder), to its paucity of stage action and to the unheroic weakness of its protagonist" ('Introduction' 92). Therefore, Theobald took it upon himself to rearrange the Shakespearean material according to the standards of his time, focusing rather on *pathos* than on political drama, and unifying it into a "regular Fable". Dawson and Yachnin explain that Theobald concentrated the action in the period between Richard's return from Ireland and his death, and within the physical space of the Tower of London (81), challenging the Shakespearean neglect of the unities of time, space and action.

The political potency of the play was nonetheless still an issue, and new layers of meaning could be added to the interpretative spectrum of the play. Theobald's *Richard II* was performed during a period of political unrest in 1719, four years after the death of the heirless Queen Anne (1665-1714) who passed the English crown to the German House of Hanover. Another Jacobite Rising attempted to restore to the throne the exiled James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766), James II's son, but failed. The parallel between Richard's and George I's threatened royal positions could easily be drawn. In order to avoid censorship, Theobald made it clear in the added prologue to the play that: "The Muse presumes no Parallels to Draw" (Dawson and Yachnin 81), neutralizing any possible political associations with his present time, although simultaneously encouraging the audience to draw such parallels.

The only other production of *Richard II* in the eighteenth century was staged by John Rich (1692-1761) at Covent Garden by request of the Shakespeare's Ladies Club, a group of upper-class women who wished to revive Shakespeare's plays. According to Emmett Avery, the club was organised in 1736 and "set about promptly to persuade London's theatrical managers to give Shakespeare a greater share in their repertoire" (153). And the ladies were quite successful; they "restored many of Shakespeare's neglected plays to the boards, increased the frequency with which many of the familiar ones were presented, brought his works a great deal of publicity in an exceedingly short time, and became a model to later groups which similarly wished to improve the stage" (Avery 153). *Richard II* was one of the plays chosen by these ladies, and, according to McManaway, this was the first time that Shakespeare's original text was performed instead of Tate's or Theobald's adaptations in over a hundred years (163).

Fiona Ritchie writes about the group's influence on the revival of Shakespeare's history plays. According to the author, the Ladies condemned pantomimes, the popular entertainment of the time. An anonymous letter signed by "Shakespear, Johnson, Dryden, Rowe", published in the *Grub Street Journal* on 3 March 1737,

praised the Ladies' encouragement of "Common Sense". The authors criticised the fact that the contemporary English stage was filled with "several French Vagrants, called HARLEQUIN, PIERROT, and COLOMBINE", who "have had the impudence to appear on the British Stage, to the great discouragement of good Sense, true Humour, and Morality" (Ritchie 149–50). One way to replace French pantomimes with British nationalism was by means of Shakespeare's history plays. Ritchie lists the plays requested by the Shakespeare's Ladies Club during the seasons 1736-7 and 1737-8 in the two theatres, demonstrating the group's interest in the historical chronicles: in the first season, out of the thirteen Shakespearean plays, three were history plays (*1 Henry IV*, performed twice, *2 Henry IV*, and *Henry VIII*); and in the second season, out of the twelve Shakespearean plays, seven were history plays (*2 Henry IV*, performed three times, *Richard III*, performed twice, *Richard II*, performed four times,[7] *Henry V*, performed three times, *King John*, *1 Henry VI*, and *1 Henry IV*) (Ritchie 151–52).

I must emphasise that 1738, the year in which Rich revived *Richard II* at Covent Garden, was one year after the imposition of the Theatre Licensing Act. This Act conceded the monopoly of legitimate spoken drama to two playhouses only, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, and determined that all new plays should be approved by the Lord Chamberlain. As Russell Jackson explains, the other playhouses had to adapt their repertoire, "transforming popular dramas into legally permitted 'burlettas' by adding a token musical accompaniment" (Jackson 3). In this context, Shakespeare's plays grew in production and popularity at Drury Lane and Covent Garden, since as classic works they were considered "safer" from censorship. However, Ritchie points out that there was already an increase in Shakespearean drama in the 1736-7 season at Drury Lane, before the Licensing Act, where 27% of the repertory was Shakespeare's. The Shakespearean success was thus prior to the June 1737 legislation, which is another confirmation of the Ladies Club's role in the mid-eighteenth-century Shakespearean revival.

With the establishment of the 1737 Licensing Act, there was intense censorship in the London theatrical scene. McManaway refers to a letter written by one 'C. C. P. L.' published in *The Craftsman* in July 1737 that reinforced the Licensing Bill and the Lord Chamberlain's power to censor the stage. The unidentified writer of the letter gave extracts of Shakespeare's *King John* and *Richard II* as examples

[7] The four productions of *Richard II* were staged at Covent Garden during the season 1737-8 under the management of John Rich.

of what should be banned from stage. This letter caused a stir and prompted responses from different sides of the debate regarding the freedom of the press and stage. Interestingly, all the lines quoted in the letter appeared in Rich's production months later, which leads McManaway to infer that the manager's choice of staging *Richard II* was not accidental, but wished to attract the public to the theatre to see for themselves what C. C. P. L. considered so dangerous (McManaway 167–69). In 1737, the publication of the letter in *The Craftsman* and the effort of the Shakespeare's Ladies Club revived interest in *Richard II*. However, after this popular production, the play was not staged again until the first decades of the following century. The political intensity of the play as well as the Theatre Licensing Act may have caused the play's silence. It was only with the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 that the censorship power of the Lord Chamberlain was restricted. The gap between Rich's *Richard II* and the subsequent staging in London was almost eighty years, until Edmund Kean revived it at Drury Lane.

1.2 The Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Scene and the Public Sphere

The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of intense change and productivity in London's theatrical scene. Katherine Newey explains that "in these decades, the material practices of the London theatre industry collided spectacularly with broader movements in British culture and politics in a series of skirmishes over the place of theatre in the reformed constitution" ('Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' 13). In 1832, the Great Reform Act changed the electoral system in the United Kingdom, broadening the right to vote to less-favoured citizens, although women were not yet included in the reform. The rise of the middle class and the urban population brought about changes in the composition of London society and fed the need for political renovation. According to John Randle, not only the size of the middle class increased, but its spending power as well, which doubled between 1815 and 1830, and again in between 1830 and 1850 (110).

Following the Reform Act, an active political debate on the stage mirrored the increasing political freedom in Parliament. In her study of the London theatrical scene up to the First Reform Bill, Newey explores the commercial rivalries in the two main London theatres of the time, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, and the parallels between the political agitation of the period with the choices made by the competing theatre managers. As Newey explains, certain characteristics of the

Victorian theatre were already manifest in the first decades of the century, such as the oppositions between 'high' and 'low' culture, and between 'legitimate' and 'popular' theatre. One of the main names in this cultural struggle was Shakespeare, who "was invoked and reified as the national poet and dramatist, with a clear sense of the cultural capital and, even more obviously, the commercial value connected with his name" (Newey, 'Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' 13). Shakespeare's body of dramatic work was a constant presence on nineteenth-century London stages, and the revival of specific plays can be associated with national political debates. That is especially the case with history plays such as *Richard II*, since they dramatise Britain's political past.

Although Shakespeare was essentially a popular dramatist during his lifetime, pre-Victorian theatre attempted "to remove Shakespeare from the popular theatre, and annex him to *élite* literary culture. This division between literature and theatre, and between commercial success and aesthetic credibility, endured throughout the nineteenth century, expressed in the terms of 'the National Drama' of whom Shakespeare was the iconic representative" (Newey, 'Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' 14). The theatrical monopoly in London held by Drury Lane (erected in 1663) and Covent Garden (1732) is a consequence of this chasm.

There were certainly other theatres in London at the time, such as the Haymarket Theatre (granted licence in 1720 to perform "legitimate" drama during the summer) and the other "minor theatres", for instance the Sans Pareil (renamed the Adelphi in 1819), the Olympic (created in 1806) and the Lyceum (licensed in 1809). What changed for these theatres in relation to the patent playhouses was that until 1843 they were not allowed to stage spoken drama. As Rosalind Crone puts it, the minor theatres "were forced to adopt new dramatic sub-genres or styles, such as pantomime, burlesque, burletta, farce and melodrama, which many considered to be popular and plebeian" (127). As a consequence, there was an emerging countercultural scene at the margins of the patent theatres, intrinsically connected with popular culture and melodrama, in response to the monopolisation of the legitimate drama at Covent Garden and Drury Lane.

The minor playhouses were also established at a distance from the main theatrical districts, in neighbourhoods in the brink of the city and Westminster that had expanded due to urbanisation and population growth:

> On London's south bank, the Surrey in Southwark opened in 1805 and the Coburg (later renamed the Victoria), situated on the edge of the New

> Cut, began to stage plays in 1818. The fast-expanding districts to the east of the City also attracted theatrical speculators: the Pavilion and Effingham were established in Whitechapel (1828 and 1834 respectively), the City Theatre in Cripplegate (1831), the Garrick in Leman Street (1831), the Standard in Shoreditch (1835) and the City of London in Norton Folgate (1837). An alteration in licensing laws also encouraged the emergence of theatrical saloons in these neighbourhoods, such as the Grecian, Albert and Britannia in Hoxton, founded between 1838 and 1841. By 1866, the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses listed twenty-five metropolitan theatres with a total audience capacity of just over 48,000, the majority of which had been founded before 1845. (Crone 126)

The definition of what "legitimate" theatre meant was imprecise, but it was normally attached to Shakespeare's name. Just as the Chorus offers legitimacy to the historical account performed on stage in *Henry V*, Shakespeare's name secures legitimacy to the theatrical practice of the patent theatres in the nineteenth century. According to Julia Swindells, Shakespeare conferred status of a tradition of learning, and through the performance of his plays, theatre managers and actors could "demonstrate their own cultural credentials, their dramatic abilities and values" (34).

The distinction between "legitimate" and "popular" drama was certainly also a commercial choice. Categorising Shakespeare as legitimate would render his plays exclusive to the repertoire of the main theatres. As Swindells puts it, Shakespeare became synonymous with "the grand acting style of the eighteenth-century, [...] associate[d] with large spaces and exhibitionist manners, with Kean and Garrick and Siddons; and with the patent theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden" (35). In this manner, she concludes, "the debate about 'the regular theatre' is, then, for the most part, framed in terms of a defence of the large theatres" (35). As the London theatrical scene was eager for change, pressure became fierce to end the monopoly and to 'free' Shakespeare to a wider audience and to different acting styles. Concomitantly, conservative views manifested a desire to cling to an acting tradition linked to Garrick that was being threatened in the first decades of the nineteenth century.[8]

[8] David Garrick was the main Shakespearean actor in the eighteenth century. His acting style focused on representing emotions by means of gestures and facial expression – a style that became outmoded in the nineteenth century, as I explain in Chapter 7.

The fact that Shakespeare was the preeminent name at Drury Lane and Covent Garden does not mean that he was completely absent from the "minor" playhouses. Quite the contrary, these venues offered their own interpretation of Shakespeare's works, adapting the original text to the restrictions imposed by the government. Shakespeare was thus transformed into burlettas, operas, and satires. Richard Schoch adds that the great theatre managers of the nineteenth century (Charles Kemble, William Macready, Charles Kean, Michael Phelps and Henry Irving), their lavish Shakespearean productions, their projects to instruct history and morality through Shakespeare's plays, and their ambition to be regarded as respectable gentlemen, incited a comic attack from the 'minor' theatres – a "burlesque backlash", as Schoch calls it (*Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century* 3). Schoch writes that their "pious pretensions of 'legitimate' Shakespearean culture" were "simply begging to be ridiculed" (*Not Shakespeare* 3). These burlesque vibrant productions were humorous and controversial, because "they seemed to imperil the sanctity of Shakespeare as a national icon" (Schoch, *Not Shakespeare* 3). Schoch cites as examples of this theatrical counterculture John Poole's *Hamlet Travestie* (1810), Richard Gurney's *Romeo and Juliet Travestie* (1812), E. L. Blanchard's *The Merchant of Venice (very far indeed) from the Text of Shakespeare* (1843), James Morgan's *Coriolanus; a Burlesque* (1846), the anonymous *Kynge Lear and Hys Faythfulle Foole* (1860), W. S. Gilbert's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (1891), amongst others.

Prohibited from staging the original Shakespearean drama, minor theatres had to adjust in order for their productions to be approved. But, "however mangled or adapted into burlettas, pageants, or adaptations from the French, [they] were successful, in part because of their marginal legal status" (Newey, 'Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' 24). Indeed, this marginal character is precisely what renders this theatrical scene powerful. Newey calls this attempt at asserting participation in national culture a creation of a "counter-public sphere" ('Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' 15). In their "illegitimacy" and dissenting addresses, the minor theatres become a reaction to the bourgeois public sphere. They also provided a social space for informal political discussion apart from the mainstream venues, creating what Dotty and Gurnis called the "theatre scene": "an immediate contact zone between the stage and the city" (Dotty and Gurnis 12). The southside London theatres offered space for oppositional political debate and public meetings, along with a selling point for radical papers and pamphlets. According to Newey, "debates over the political constitution of Britain were often translated between the media of the streets, newspapers, shop windows, and stages

of the local theatres in Southwark and Lambeth" ('Shakespeare and the Wars of the Playbills' 15). As such, the effervescent London theatrical scene went beyond the production of plays, encompassing a myriad of public gatherings for political discussion, planning and action, which illustrates the strong connections between theatre and politics in the nineteenth century.

1.3 The City and the Actor

The example of the cultural scene of the minor theatres in nineteenth-century London indicates a change in the public sphere of the city. As the 'public' became increasingly detached from the private home, it also locates in the city the point of contact between private individuals, enhanced by modernity and industrialisation. As Richard Sennett explains, "'public' thus came to mean a life passed outside the life of family and close friends; in the public region diverse, complex social groups were to be brought into ineluctable contact. The focus of this public life was the capital city" (17). Gregory Dart analyses the development of the new mass audience in London in the first half of the century, which included the expanding professions and skilled workers, who were "imperfectly educated but hungry for culture" (15). They formed a new class of people with aspirations and with an increasing prominence in society, who turned to print and the stage as an informal means for self-education

With the growth of capitalism, culture also underwent significant changes, such as the mass production of clothes, the opening of department stores, large-scale printing of books and magazines, and the expansion of the theatrical business in view of profit. The actor or the artist gained new status as the century unfolded, although the working conditions were far from ideal. In the preface to *The Road to the Stage; or, the Performer's Preceptor* (1827), Leman Thomas Rede (1799-1832) writes about the acting profession, which is "fraught with toil, anxiety, and misery, beyond any other" (Rede iii). By exposing the harsh reality of an actor's life away from the spotlight, Rede wishes to dissuade the young and inexperienced from falling victim to the alluring illusion of the theatre. He describes the typical circumstances of a young provincial actor at the time:

> A country actor in a small company, and aspiring to a first-rate situation, will invariably have to study about five hundred lines *per diem* – it is as-

> tonishing how many persons are cured [of the wish to be an actor] by this alone; this will occupy the possessor of a good memory for six hours – his duties at the theatre embrace four hours in the morning for rehearsal, and about five at night; here are sixteen hours devoted to labour alone, to say nothing of the time required to study the character, after the mere attainment of the words. Let the stage-struck aspirant endure this, and, if a radical cure be not effected, he has the scenic *phobia*, and had better be given to the stage at once, for he will never fix to any thing else. (Rede ii)

Although the acting profession continued to be demanding as the century progressed, the theatrical business gained in social respectability. For instance, Henry Irving (1838-1905) was the first actor to be knighted in 1895. In a paper read at the Congress of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in September 1884, the actress Madge Kendal (1848-1935) rejoiced that "there [was] at last a recognized social position for the professional player" ('The Drama', qtd. in Jackson 131). She adds: "the Theatrical Profession was considered outside, if not beneath, all others, and was regarded with something like contempt. It was a wrong, cruel, and an absurd state of things, for even then the Theatre was popular, and was doing good work" ('The Drama', qtd. in Jackson 131). By the end of the nineteenth century, that had finally changed: "The Theatrical Professional is acknowledged to be a high and important one, and the society of the intelligent and cultivated actor is eagerly sought after" ('The Drama', qtd. in Jackson 131).

As Sennett points out, "the actor and musician rose in social status far beyond the level of servanthood which they occupied in the *ancien régime*.[9] The performer's social rise was based on his declaration of a forceful, exciting, morally suspect personality, wholly contrary to the style of ordinary bourgeois life, in which one tried to avoid being read as a person by suppressing one's feelings" (26–27). Artists belonged to a different realm of private individuals, whose private selves were inevitably intermingled with their public personas. Hence the public fascination for the details of the private lives of actors and actresses in the nineteenth century, as the "Theatrical Gossip" column in *The Era* illustrates. For instance, the edition of 12 July 1846 informs the public that "Mr C. Kemble, the tragedian, is at present in Paris"; that George Handel Hill (1809-1849), also known as Yankee Hill, "is giving

[9] The *Ancien Régime*, or Old Regime, was the political and social system of the Kingdom of France until the French Revolution of 1789 abolished hereditary monarchy.

entertainment in Brooklyn"; and that there was "some slight stir" in New York after the runaway match of the only daughter of the actress Céline Céleste-Elliott (1815?-1882), also known as Madame Celeste, with "a Mr. Johnson, of the eminent banking firm of Lee and Johnson" (*The Era*, Sunday 12 July 1846).

Sennett refers to the man that inhabited the public realm as "an actor, a performer", and "the public actor is the man who presents emotions," involving him and other in a social bond (107–08). As the character Jaques famously states in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players. / They have their exits and their entrances. / And one man in his time plays many parts" (III, 7, 142-145). Therefore, the idea of the city as a big stage where men and women play daily different roles was already accepted during the English Renaissance. It developed from the Ancient Greek metaphor also present in Plato's allegory of the cave. Sennett points out that by the mid-eighteenth century, the idea of the *theatrum mundi* "was an old cliché dressed up in new ways" (109). Sennett remarks that the big city allows larger freedom for people to navigate through different social roles. For instance, a man who has harmed others in the past can start anew with a new role: "And why should he not reform, since no appearance, no role, is fixed in the great city by necessity or by knowledge others have of one's past?" (Sennett 110). Thus the big urban centres, given their multiplicity of trades and large population number, offer the individual more possibilities to change the role they play within society.

In *Paradoxe sur le Comédien* (1830), Denis Diderot (1713-1784), an important name in the theory of acting at the end of the eighteenth century, poses the following question: "Do we not say in the world that a man is a great actor? We do not mean by this that he feels, but on the contrary that he excels at simulating, even though he does not feel anything."[10] (101). Different from the civic man, who plays different roles in civil society, the actor on stage needs to have the ability to reproduce different human feelings convincingly. This means that it should be done naturally and without exaggeration.

According to Sennett, Diderot broke the "connection between acting, rhetoric, and the substance of the text", creating "a theory of drama divorced from ritual", being "the first to conceive of performing as an art form in and of itself, without

[10] All extracts from Diderot's texts were translated from the French by me. The original reads: "Ne dit-on dans le monde que'un homme est un grand comédien? On n'entend pas par là qu'il sent, mais au contraire qu'il excelle à simuler, bien qu'il ne sente rien".

reference to what was to be performed" (Sennett 111). Diderot proposed a dramatic art that is not concerned with the audience, anticipating the idea of the fourth wall separating the audience from the stage. He advises the playwright and the actor: "Whether you are composing or playing, do not think of the spectator, it is as if he did not exist. Imagine, on the proscenium, a large wall that separates you from the stage; act as if the curtain would not rise"[11] (Diderot, *Discours de La Poésie Dramatique* 66). In order to maintain the illusion created on stage, the audience should be ignored. In addition, there should be as little contrast in acting as possible, since the contrast reveals the artificiality of the art. In this manner, Diderot advocates a naturalistic acting style that would not compromise the theatre's illusion of reproducing reality. For the same reason, Diderot condemns extravagance: "Pomposity spoils everything. The spectacle of wealth is not pretty. Wealth has too many caprices; it can dazzle the eye, but it cannot touch the soul. Under a garment overloaded with gilding, I never see anything but a rich man, and it is a man I am looking for"[12] (*Discours de La Poésie Dramatique* 98–99). Therefore, the costumes and settings should not be excessive, since the attention should be on the representation of human feelings without unnecessary decoration.

In relation to acting, Diderot believed that a good actor is the one who can distance himself from his own feelings, and that good acting should favour artifice over natural expression, meaning that the actor should understand the nature of the feeling in order to be able to reproduce it; that is why the same emotion can be acted by an actor more than once, which is not possible for a human being in ordinary daily life. According to Sennett, "by withdrawing his own feelings from the material world, [the actor] has acquired the power to be conscious of what form is inherent in the realm of natural feeling. Because the performer builds on nature, he can communicate with people who remain in that chaotic state" (113). Diderot was thus against the explosion of feelings characteristic of the popular eighteenth-century emotional acting. As Sennett explains, the so-called "war between Sentiment and Calculation" emerged in the 1750s (114). The author illustrates this battle between sense and sensibility on stage with an occurrence at

[11] The original reads: "Soit donc que vous composiez, soit que vous jouiez, ne pensez non plus au spectateur que s'il n'existait pas. Imaginez, sur le bord du théâtre, un grand mur qui vous sépare du parterre; jouez comme si la toile ne se levait pas".

[12] Translated from the original: "Le faste gâte tout. Le spectacle de la richesse n'est pas beau. La richesse a trop de caprices; elle peut éblouir l'œil, mais non toucher l'âme. Sous un vêtement surchargé de dorure, je ne vois jamais qu'un homme riche, et c'est un homme que je cherche."

the Théâtre Boule-Rouge in Paris: the two rival actresses Clair Josèphe Hippolyte Leris (1723-1803), known as Madame Clairon and considered by Diderot "the female Garrick" (Sennett 114), and Marie Dumesnil (1713-1803) were debating the role of sensibility when preparing for a character: "Madame Dumesnil declared, 'I was full of my part, I felt it, I yielded myself up to it.' To which Madame Clairon replied abruptly, 'I have never understood how one could do without calculation'" (Sennett 114). Dumesnil relied on *feeling* herself what the character would have felt in such situation, whereas Clairon invested on *understanding* the feeling in order to be able to recreate it with her body. Such a battle between emotional and realist acting was also the topic of theatrical disputes in English playhouses, and remained a controversy in the nineteenth century. An example is the changing of actresses during the 1842 season of *As You Like It* managed by William Charles Macready (1793-1873) at Drury Lane. The season began with Louisa Nesbitt (1812-1858) cast as Rosalind, but Helena Faucit (1817-1898) replaced her in later performances. While Nesbitt was criticised for lacking in sensibility, Faucit revelled "in the most joyous outbursts of sparkling fancy amid the freedom of the forest", as stated by the reviewer from the *Edinburgh Observer* in 1845 (Brissenden 57). Faucit's positive reviews in 1845 demonstrate that, despite Diderot's criticism of sentimental acting in the late eighteenth century and the turn towards a more naturalistic approach to acting in the mid-nineteenth century, the school of sentiment was not completely rejected. The example of Edmund Kean's *Richard II* in Chapter 5 will also corroborate this idea.

1.4 *This insubstantial pageant* – Sensation and History on Stage

A nineteenth-century playgoer had access to wide-ranging entertainment options in London. In addition to the traditional Covent Garden and Drury Lane, the city offered pantomimes, circuses, magic spectacles and animals shows. The 2016-17 exhibition *There Will Be Fun* at the British Library showcased examples of Victorian popular entertainment, with focus on five performers: the mesmerist Annie de Montfort , the "Royal Conjuror" Henry Evans Evanion (1832-1905), the magician John Nevil Maskelyne (1839-1917), circus proprietor 'Lord' George Sanger (1825-1911) and the comedian Dan Leno, stage name of George Wild Galvin (1860-1904). This exhibition demonstrates the diverse assortment of entertainment venues available for a London inhabitant or visitor during the nineteenth century. Additionally, one same venue could combine different genres in the same night

in order to attract a broader audience. For instance, the playbill advertising the show at Drury Lane on 21 October 1843 includes a new ballet *The Peri*; the "Grand Comic Opera" *Cinderella, or the Fairy Slipper* in three acts, followed by "an entirely New and Original Absurdity, or Fairy Extravaganza" *Fortunio and his Seven Gifted Servants* in two acts (See figure 2). As Russell Jackson explains, "in the nineteenth century the British theatre was almost exclusively commercial and was central to popular culture and to what may be called the entertainment industry of an urban industrial life" (1). The theatrical essence of the time was thus intrinsically connected to the city life and the growing middle class.


THEATRE ROYAL, DRURY LANE.
MADLLE C. GRISI and M. PETIPA
Having been received with perfect enthusiasm in the new Ballet of
THE PERI,
It will be repeated EVERY EVENING of their performance.
This Evening, SATURDAY, October 21, 1843,
Will be presented the Grand Comic Opera, in Three Acts, of
CINDERELLA!
Or, The FAIRY SLIPPER.
THE MUSIC COMPOSED BY ROSSINI.
Conductor, Mr. BENEDICT. Leader, Mr. R. HUGHES.
Felix, (Prince of Salerno) Mr. W. HARRISON.
Baron Pumpolino, (of Montefiesco) Mr. LEFFLER.
Alidoro, (the Prince's Tutor) Mr. G. HORNCASTLE.
Dandini, (the Prince's Valet) Mr. STRETTON.
Pedro, (Servant to the Baron) Mr. MEADOWS, Page, Miss NEWCOMBE,
Cinderella, (first time) Mrs. ALFRED SHAW.
(Her first appearance this Season)
Clorinda, Miss BETTS, Thisbe, Miss COLLETT,
Fairy Queen, Mademoiselle ALBERTAZZI.
(Her second appearance on the Stage)
First Fairy, Miss BARNETT, Second Fairy, Miss GILMER,
In the Ball-Room Scene, will be introduced
A PAS DE CARACTERE,
By Mademoiselle CLARA WEBSTER and Madame GIUBILEI.
A PAS DE SOLDATS, from the Opera of 'GUILLAUME TELL,'
By the Corps de Ballet.
To conclude with an entirely New and Original Absurdity, or Fairy Extravaganza, in Two Acts, called
FORTUNIO
AND HIS SEVEN GIFTED SERVANTS.
Baron Dunover, (a Nobleman in difficulties) Mr. G. HORNCASTLE,
Hon. Miss Fortina, (his eldest daughter) Miss COLLETT, Hon. Miss Flirtina, (his second daughter) Mrs. A. WIGAN,
Hon. Miss Myrtina, Miss CHARLES,
The Fairy Favorable, (Elfin Queen and Lady Patroness,) Miss NEWCOMBE,
Strongback, Mr HODGES, Lightfoot, Mr. W. H. PAYNE, Marksman, Mr. CHAPINO,
Fine-Ear, Mr. HANCE, Boisterer, Mr. MORGAN, Gormand, Mr. BURT, Tippler, Mr. BECKETT,
King Alfourite, Mr. HUDSON,
Princess Vindicta, Mrs. TAYLEURE,
Prime Minister, Mr. CONNELL, Lord in Waiting, Mr. GENGE, Herald, Mr. SIMMONDS,
Florida, (Lady in Waiting) Miss SOMERVILLE, Page, Miss KENDALL,
The Dragon, Mr. T. RIDGWAY, Citizen, Mr. HEALEY,
The Emperor Matapa, Mr. SELBY,
The Princess Volante, (his Daughter, a high-mettled Racer) Mademoiselle CLARA WEBSTER,
Grand Chamberlain Mr. BINGE. Captain of the Guard. Mr. LAKE.
Donizetti's Opera of The FAVORITE
Will be played three times a week, with the Ballet of The PERI.
Morton's New Farce of MY WIFE'S COME,
Will be played on Tuesday next and THREE TIMES EVERY WEEK.
On Monday, DONIZETTI'S Grand Opera of THE FAVORITE, and THE PERI.
On Tuesday, AN OPERA, in which Mrs. ALFRED SHAW will appear.
On Wednesday, DONIZETTI'S Grand Opera of THE FAVORITE, with the Ballet of THE PERI
On Thursday, AN OPERA, in which Mrs. ALFRED SHAW will appear.
On Friday, DONIZETTI'S Opera of THE FAVORITE, and the Ballet of THE PERI.
The Box-Office is open under the direction of Mr. WHITLOW.
The Doors will open at Half-past Six, and the Performances will commence at Seven precisely.
Dress Boxes, 7s. Second Price, 3s. 6d. Upper Circles of Boxes, 5s. Second Price, 3s.
Pit, 3s. Second Price, 2s. Middle Gal. 2s. Second Price, 1s. Upper Gal. 1s.
W. S. Johnson, "Nassau Steam Press," Soho.

Figure 2 - Playbill Drury Lane October 21, 1843

The theatre offered a public space where the audience could experience a common response to the action portrayed on stage. Voskuil writes that "in their shared, somatic response to sensation plays, Victorians envisioned a kind of affective adhesive that massed them to each other in an inchoate but tenacious nineteenth-century incarnation of the English public sphere" (245). Although Voskuil writes about the emergence of this public theatrical sphere in relation to sensation drama, it also applies to the performance of history in the theatre. It evoked in the spectators a consciousness of being part of a communal history, sharing the same past and reliving it momentarily on stage.

Voskuil refers to the Victorian taste for authenticity and sensationalism as "a paradoxical way of imagining the public sphere in Victorian England" (245). Although illustrated editions of Shakespeare's history plays at the turn of the nineteenth century depicted historical characters in contemporary dress, as I argue in Chapter 4, the stagings of *Richard II* in 1815, 1850 and 1857 distanced the dramatic action from the nineteenth-century present, recreating a supposedly authentic historical past in terms of costume, setting and music. The techniques of sensation drama, which included exciting plots and special stage effects, were adapted to offer an illusion of the past as alive. In this sense, the nineteenth-century historical theatre functions as a sort of magic spell, in similitude bringing the dead back to life and transforming history into a spectacular pageant.

Spectacle was an intrinsic part of nineteenth-century society. The innovations made possible by new technology added excitement to everyday life. In London and Paris, the great cultural capitals of Europe at the time, a person would read about such novelties in the newspapers and see them in the streets. Sennett writes about the experiences that an old woman born in the *ancien régime* and living in Paris in the 1880s may have had during her lifetime:

> The contrasts between the city of her youth and the city of her old age might appear to her as the feverish growth of public life in the 19th century. Spectacle was rampant on the city's streets: she might think of Nadar's[13] ascents in a balloon which brought hundreds of thousands to the Champ de Mars; of the appearance of a giraffe in the Jardin des Plantes which drew such large crowds that several people were crushed to death; of a

[13] Nadar was the pseudonym of the photographer and balloonist Gaspard-Félix Tournachon (1820-1910). He is known for capturing the first aerial photographs in 1858, hovering Paris from a tethered balloon.

> dog named Munito, who supposedly talked, attracting a vast throng at the Jardin Turc, waiting in vain day after day for Munito to hold forth. (Sennett 125)

Sennett's speculation illustrates well the sensationalistic characteristic of nineteenth-century entertainment in Paris. The situation in London was very similar, as the examples displayed at the aforementioned exhibition *There Will Be Fun* demonstrate. Yet, as Sennett points out, these spectacles were ephemeral: they would attract the public's undying attention for a moment until the audience quickly turned to the next novelty. The spectacle, in the manner of a theatrical production, vanishes after its last act. The ephemerality of spectacle draws a halt in the illusion it creates. Once the curtain in the theatre falls, the spectators are dragged back to the reality of the present. Similarly, when Nadar and the balloon leave the park, or when the Jardin des Plantes closes for the night, the illusion is over. It is no wonder that artists looked for means to hold the illusion longer, which would be achieved with photography in the first decades of the century, and cinema at its very end. History is likewise ephemeral. Once moments are lived, they cannot be retrieved, only *reconstructed* by means of language, images, sounds or even smells.

In addition to being a public space for political discussion, the theatre developed as a place for embodying the transience of history, reconstructing the past in productions that could be staged again and again. Schoch calls the nineteenth century "the golden age of history" (Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 1). He affirms that it "was a time when the desire to know and possess the past rivalled science as the dominant system of cognition and history as a practice seemed to overtake the whole scope of representational activities: literature, architecture, handicrafts, painting, photography, sculpture, spectacle, and theatre" (Schoch, *Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 1). The number of publications that covered the history of England at the time are indicative of the thriving of the discipline and the readership's interest. For example, John Lingard (1771-1851) published *The History of England, From the First Invasion by the Romans to the Accession of Henry VIII* in 1819; Sharon Turner (1768-1847) published *History of the Anglo-Saxons* between 1799 and 1805 and *The History of England* in 1839; Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859) published *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second* in 1848. These books sought to investigate England's past, its culture and traditions, and its connections to their present time.

In discussing the construction of British traditions throughout history, Eric Hobsbawm affirms that "nothing appears more ancient, and linked to an immemorial past, than the pageantry which surrounds British monarchy in its public ceremonial manifestations", especially as they were performed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1). As the author claims, some of these manifestations were not old "traditions" at all, but invented at that period for specific, albeit not always explicit purposes. The invention of tradition involves an attempt to connect present and past, implying a cultural continuum. A classic example mentioned by Hobsbawm is the rebuilding of the House of Parliament after the 1834 London fire in a neo-Gothic style, connecting the contemporary political space with a medieval heritage. Hobsbawm points to the fact that ancient materials, such as folksongs, physical contests and marksmanship, were re-used to institutionalise traditions for new purposes (Hobsbawm and Ranger 6). The same ritualisation of ancient material for contemporary political purposes occurs in the theatrical sphere, where old history is recycled, transformed and performed in order to raise the audience's awareness in contemporary political issues.

David Cannadine argues that the beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed a change of public response towards the pageantry of the monarchy. As Cannadine puts it, "as the population was becoming better educated, royal ritual would soon be exposed as nothing more than primitive magic, a hollow sham" (102). Furthermore, the outside grandeur hid the concealed monarchical ineptitude. During Edmund Kean's season of *Richard II* at the Drury Lane in 1815, for instance, the United Kingdom was going through the period of Regency (1811-1820) under Prince George, later George IV (1820-1830), whose immoral behaviour and exaggerated expenditure rendered him an unpopular monarch. The staging of a weak king challenged by a fierce contender to the throne under these circumstances would undoubtedly add new topicality to the play.

The invented tradition of a ritual, although bearing an idea of constancy and fixity, fluctuates in meaning according to its context of occurrence. As Cannadine exemplifies, "under certain circumstances, a coronation might be seen by participants and contemporaries as a symbolic reaffirmation of national greatness. But in a different context, the same ceremony might assume the characteristics of collective longing for past glories" (105). The staging of a deposition, as in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, will inevitably be interpreted differently depending on the political atmosphere in and outside the theatre. It is an even more complex phenomenon,

since it consists of the performance of a performed ritual: a theatrical adaptation of a ceremonial act performed by Richard II.

Monarchy was part of both society and politics, a connection between the power and the people, and between the past and present. The productions analysed in this dissertation were staged in a period in which revolutionary memories were still potent, and "there remained hostility to the further aggrandizement of royal influence by re-opening of the theatre of power which had been happily closed down by the end of the seventeenth century" (Cannadine 108). In this context, theatre functioned as a place where royal actions could be judged, and faults committed by kings from the past could have a repercussion, raising awareness on current political affairs. The theatre drew from the monarchy invented traditions, re-enacting them on stage, and calling the spectatorship's attention to the theatricality of royalty. Concomitantly, the monarchs there portrayed, such as Richard II, belonged to a long-gone historical past, mythicised, from which the spectators were separated by time, freeing them to operate a more open judgement.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the manifestations on stage of "the brightest heaven of invention" in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Recalling Shakespeare's Chorus in *Henry V*, I discussed the prologue as a liminal space between the audience and the action performed on stage, inviting the spectators to actively engage with it. Moreover, I have examined the theatrical space as a locus for historical reconstruction and for fostering the audience's awareness in the historical reconstruction process.

This chapter has also investigated the nineteenth-century theatrical public sphere, characterised by its post-industrialisation commercial role. Sennett explains how the number of public social places increased at the time, especially in the capitals, changing the sense of the public at the turn of the nineteenth century. This change allowed the individual to take control of the part they played in the public sphere, where big cities resemble big stages, and the men and women living in them actors and actresses. Urbanisation and population growth altered the theatrical landscape in London, expanding beyond the fashionable West End. Minor theatres developed as a social place for informal political discussions, which took place on stage and in theatrical neighbourhoods. With the Licensing Act of 1737, spoken drama became exclusive to the patent houses Drury Lane and Covent

Garden, broadening the gap between "low" and "high" drama. In this context, Shakespeare assumed simultaneously a divisive as well as a key bridging role, being claimed by both the legitimate and illegitimate theatres. Minor theatres had to be creative, adding musical or dance intermissions, or other forms of popular entertainment, to Shakespearean texts in order to be permitted to stage them.

Finally, Chapter 1 has also explored the expansion of History as an academic discipline in the nineteenth century, and its effect on theatrical reconstructions of the past. In order to understand the performance of rituals and royal ceremonies on stage, I have turned to Hobsbawm and Ranger's discussion on the construction of British traditions and their role in connecting past and present. In the history of British monarchy, old rituals were re-used for new purposes, in a similar manner with which the theatre performs old stories to prompt new interpretations for a new audience. As the corpus of this research demonstrates, *Richard II* has been reinterpreted by Edmund Kean in 1815, Charles Macready in 1850 and Charles Kean in 1857, offering new possibilities for understanding Shakespeare's play, which are inevitably shaped by the conditions of the theatrical public sphere at the time.