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

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Chapter 3

The Well of History: Historicism and Shakespearean Historiography

For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.
How some have been deposed, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed,
Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping killed,
All murdered. For within the hollow crown
That rounds the mortal temples of a king
Keeps Death his court.

(*Richard II*, Act III, Scene 2)

In conversation with the antiquarian William Lambarde (1536-1601) in August 1601, queen Elizabeth supposedly said: "I am Richard II, know ye not that?" (Scott-Warren 208). The queen explicitly drew a parallel between herself and the Plantagenet king as both were childless monarchs who saw their positions on the throne threatened by a usurper: Richard by his cousin Bolingbroke, and Elizabeth by the Earl of Essex. The conversation between Elizabeth I and the antiquarian took place just months after the commission of a new staging of Shakespeare's *Richard II* by the Chamberlain's Men at the Globe and the execution of the Earl for treason. The record of this dialogue describes the day, just weeks before Lambarde's death, in which he presented the queen with a compendium assembled by himself of docu-

ments concerning the reigns of English monarchs from King John until Richard III, known as the *Pandecta Rotulorum*. Lambarde had been Keeper of the crown records stored in the Tower of London, which served as the basis for his collection. When Elizabeth was going over this gift, remembering the main events of English royal history, she made the famous remark that opens this section.

As the conversation continued, the queen added to Lambarde: "he that will forget God, will also forget his benefactors; this tragedy was played 40tie times in open streets and houses" (qtd. in Scott-Warren 208). The tragedy the queen refers to could be that of a subject challenging the royal authority of his sovereign, which has happened time and again throughout English history; or she could be referring to a specific theatrical tragedy brought to the stage months earlier: Shakespeare's *Richard II*. As Stephen Greenblatt points out in the seminal introduction to *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (1982), *Richard II* was performed only once in 1601, on the day prior to Essex's rising against Elizabeth. However, in the queen's mind, it had been played over forty times in open streets and houses. According to Greenblatt:

> For the Queen the repeatability of the tragedy, and hence the numbers of people who have been exposed to its infection, is part of the danger, along with the fact (or rather her conviction) that the play had broken out of the boundaries of the playhouse, where such stories are clearly marked as powerful illusions, and moved into the more volatile zone – the zone she calls "open" – of the streets. (3)

The "open streets and houses" in Elizabeth's time compose the Early Modern public sphere, where political debates would take place amongst ordinary people. The queen understood the danger of the repetition of the play – not in number of performances, but repeated in political discussions of the day and fermented by Shakespeare's play. This example illustrates how a dramatic piece can affect beyond the realm of theatrical illusion and induce political instability in the 'real' world.

The fact that drama and real-life politics became so intertwined, with the extraordinary production of *Richard II* inciting Essex's rebellion and endangering Elizabeth's hold on the throne, helps us to frame the power relationships between theatre and politics. As Greenblatt explains, this connection lays bare how literary (and theatrical) texts are "as fields of force, places of dissension and shifting interests, occasions for the jostling of orthodox and subversive impulses" (6), which are in constant movement. The result is that the interpretation of a text is not fixed

within an encapsulated set of contextual aspects from its moment of conception. Rather, the myriad possible interpretations changes as these are reshaped by readers, critics, spectators and artists, and their own contexts throughout the centuries.

When Shakespeare reimagined Richard II's fourteenth-century reign for dramatic purposes, he would not have understood this period of time as *medieval*. As we have seen, this word only came into usage in the nineteenth century. However, that does not mean that Shakespeare would not have reflected on how Richard's past differed from his own present time. The first part of this chapter explores the ways Shakespeare negotiated different layers of past in his history plays, especially *Richard II*. I argue that even though at the end of the sixteenth century there was not yet a clear understanding of the Middle Ages as a specific period of time, Shakespeare's history plays assisted in establishing conceptions of the medieval past that would reverberate in modern understandings of the Middle Ages. On the one hand, the past performed on stage in *Richard II* represented certain religious beliefs and ideas about kingship that were no longer familiar to a modern audience. On the other hand, Shakespeare's play stresses human feelings of longing, ambition, weakness, and powerlessness, which arguably transcend divisions of time, creating a sense of continuity with the past. I should emphasise that human emotions should also be historicised, and the meaning of words that describe such feelings changes through time. Ambition for a Richard's contemporary would not necessarily bear the same significance as for a nineteenth-century playgoer. However, the capability to rouse emotions remains present in Shakespeare's text throughout time. It is another example of the paradoxical juxtaposition of ruptures and continuities in representations of the past.

3.1 History and Politics in the Theatrical Public Sphere

When recreating the past for scenic purposes, Shakespeare deals with the process of history-making and history-writing in a very perceptive way. In the same manner that he refers to theatre and theatrical techniques by means of metatheatre in plays such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-6) or *The Taming of the Shrew* (1590-2), Shakespeare proposes a meta-historical reflection in his history plays, inviting the audience to think about history while watching history being acted on stage. In Act 2, Scene 3 in *Henry VI – Part 1*, for example, the Countess of Auvergne invites Lord Talbot, the feared English military commander, to her home with the plan of

imprisoning him. However, the man she meets is not what she had expected, based on the circulating reports of his military prowess. She questions:

> Is this the scourge of France?
> Is this the Talbot, so much feared abroad
> That with his name the mothers still their babes?
> I see report is fabulous and false.
> (2.3.15-18)

The Countess contrasts the image of Talbot created by war tales with the ordinary man standing in front of her, exposing the partiality of historiographical records, oral or written. Shakespeare extends this opposition by emphasising that the actor on stage is *not* Talbot either. Talbot responds to the lady's threats of imprisonment: "I laugh to see your Ladyship so fond / To think that you have aught but Talbot's shadow / Whereon to practice your severity." (2.3.46-48). The embodiments of historical figures on stage are but shadows of their real selves. In fact, the stage could never hold the *real* Talbot. This idea is reinforced by the fact that Shakespeare uses the word 'shadow' as a metaphor for stage craft. In her study *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (1962), Anne Righter discusses the uses of words that were part of the Early Modern theatrical lexicon and that expose the illusory essence of theatre, such as "counterfeit", "act", and "play". She writes that "shadows, dreams, a sense of enchantment and festivity surround the idea of the play" in the early comedies (104). In addition, Shakespeare also used the word 'shadow' as a metaphor for the Early Modern actor in the history plays, as the example above from *Henry VI – Part 1* demonstrates.

The word appears seven times in *Richard II*. Significantly, when Richard breaks a mirror after giving the crown and sceptre to Bolingbroke in Act 4, the new king exclaims: "The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed / The shadow of your face" (4.1.287-288). Although Richard responds that his sorrows are "very true", the actor can only perform a shadow of the feelings that the real Richard II suffered after his deposition in 1399. The seventh definition of the word 'shadow' in Samuel Johnson's 1755 dictionary reads: "an imperfect and faint representation; opposed to substance"; while the ninth definition reads: "type; mythical representation" (Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*). These two eighteenth-century definitions of the word emphasise its connection to the theatrical craft, especially that of the actor, of reproducing reality by means of inciting the imagination.

The key for Shakespearean historical reconstruction was imagination, the ascent to "the brightest heaven of invention" (as the Chorus in *Henry V* puts it), and reincarnating the dead through theatrical illusion. According to Hattaway, Shakespeare and his contemporaries "made no attempt to create a sense of geographical exactitude or historical authenticity by 'accurate' theatrical settings. Elizabethan playhouses were not designed for visual extravaganza, as nineteenth-century theatre: there was no question of constructing scenic likenesses of palace rooms or tavern 'ordinaries', formal gardens or fields for battle" (11–12). Rather, the characters refer to places in speech. It is up to the spectator to 'see' the illusion with their mind's eye. In the second scene in Act V in *Richard II*, for example, the Duke of York recounts to his wife how Bolingbroke and Richard were received in London after the king's downfall. While Richard was received with dust and rubbish, Bolingbroke: "Mounted upon a hot and fiery steed / Which his aspiring rider seem'd to know, / With slow but stately pace kept on his course, / Whilst all tongues cried 'God save thee, Bolingbroke!'" (5.2.8-11). Shakespeare chooses to *recount* the entrance of the two cousins in London instead of *showing* it on stage. The audience would have to, just like the Duchess, imagine the whole event based on York's words. Conversely, and famously, Charles Kean reconstructs the whole 'historical episode' on stage in his 1857 production at the Princess's Theatre, aided by a majestic set, actors in historically accurate costumes, hundreds of extras on stage (each performing their own rehearsed choreography), music as conducted in the times of Edward II, and real horses.

On the bare or adorned stage, it is Shakespeare's imagination that puts the historical pieces together, intermingling past and present. In order to narrow down my focus whilst analysing *Richard II* in parallel with the nineteenth-century productions that make up the corpus of this research, the second part of this chapter highlights three themes which are essential to the play and to its representation of the Middle Ages: pageantry, kingly authority, and nostalgia. This study sheds light on how the medieval past and medieval traditions were perceived by Shakespeare, as well as by his nineteenth-century adaptors.

3.1.1 Ritual and Pageantry

As Stephen Orgel explains, pageantry was one of the main attractions of Elizabethan popular culture in general and theatre in particular. It made possible the

reconstruction of "the spectacle of courts and aristocratic enterprises to an urban, predominantly middle-class audience" (19). Orgel adds that the power of pageantry was specifically attractive when it favoured a nostalgic medievalism, expressing the traditional principles of the chivalric code and an ordered hierarchy. As he puts it, "it was a mythology consciously designed to validate and legitimate an authority that must have seemed, to what was left of the old aristocracy, dangerously *arriviste*" (Orgel 19). The cultural image of a chivalric court along with its forms of public displays on and off the stage worked as a way to legitimate the hold of monarchs to the throne. For instance, Henry VII had no clear claim to the crown after defeating Richard III in the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, except for the fact that Henry's mother Margaret was a great-granddaughter of John of Gaunt, one of the sons of Edward III. In order to strengthen the image of royal power and to put forward an appearance of a noble and honourable court, Henry VI borrowed chivalric models from Burgundy (Orgel 19).

In addition to creating an illusion of royal legitimacy, the spectacle of courtly pageantry displays the significance of symbolic fictions within a society (Orgel 20). They are illustrative of society's needs and longings. In each period, rituals epitomise a rupture as well as a continuation with the past: they project the aspiration to break from old patterns but also manifest an idealisation of what only the past could afford, and the present lacks. *The Graphic* of 28 June 1887 includes a whole 93-page special illustrated edition in honour of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, a celebration of her 50th anniversary on the throne. It places Victoria within the tradition of British monarchy, explaining that only three other sovereigns had had Jubilees: Henry III, Edward III and George III. In this way, it celebrates the continuation of the long-lasting tradition. However, it also makes clear how Victoria's Jubilee differs from those that occurred before: Henry III's reign "was a period of civil war at home, of disastrous expeditions and futile enterprises abroad"; Edward III's was overcast "due to the Plague and long war, by the thraldom of the monarch to a woman of no reputation, while the promise of the future was bedimmed by the sure prospect of a long minority under the young son of the Black Prince, and by the ominous mutterings of discontent, which forecasted the coming peasants' revolt"; and, finally, George III "was not of sound mind, when the nation, despite its many anxieties and heavy war burdens, celebrated his Jubilee" (*The Graphic*, June 28, 1887, 4).Victoria's Jubilee, on the other hand, "sums up an era of rapid material, moral, and mental development, which has been without a break, and has no counterpart in the story of any state or dominion, in all the long centuries

of the past" (*The Graphic*, June 28, 1887, 4). Additionally, the paper expresses that "London has been [then] the centre of a Royal gathering well-nigh unique in her history, European and Eastern rulers alike joining in the rejoicings of Sovereign and People (*The Graphic*, June 28, 1887, 670). These guests, listed by *The Graphic*, emphasise the international reach of Victoria's Empire.

Victoria's Golden Jubilee was not just a celebration of the cultural, political, economic and military accomplishments of her reign; its ceremonious pageantry emphasises the connection with the past through tradition and, mainly, through the institution of monarchy. *The Graphic* traces the origin of Buckingham Palace back to the reign of King James I, "when that sovereign, with a view to stimulate the manufacture of silk in England, established a plantation of mulberry trees to supply food for the silkworms" (*The Graphic*, June 28, 1887, 677). This "Mulberry Garden" eventually turned into St. James's Park. *The Graphic* also describes the lavish decorations from Waterloo Place to Piccadilly Circus during the procession to Westminster Abbey. Two "triumphal arches" were placed at the two ends, and between these there was a series of 13 panels of about 60 to 70 feet suspended 40 feet in the air. The crowd gathered at the streets in anticipation to see the queen. As *The Graphic* describes it, "at length the time came when the longed-for spectacle presented itself. The great gates of Buckingham Palace turned upon their hinges for the exit of Her Majesty. Quick, loud voices of command are heard, the trumpets blare, the soldiery spring into rigid attitude of attention, and there issue forth scarlet outriders, then a band of officials of the Household, followed by the Headquarters Staff of the Army" (*The Graphic*, June 28, 1887, 29).

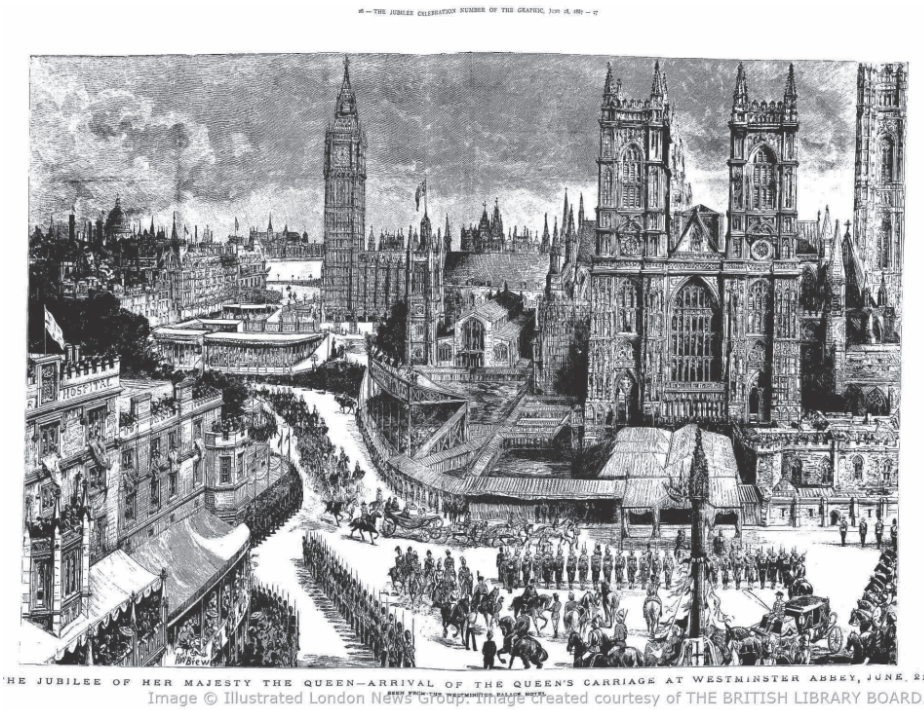

Figure 8 - The arrival of the Queen's carriage at Westminster Abbey, June 21 1887, *The Graphic*

The Abbey, a material vestige of the thirteenth century, adds legitimacy to the queen's role. *The Graphic* writes that the procession, "which moved up the ancient Abbey of Edward the Confessor was one calculated to fascinate the eye and stir the imagination. Such ordered pomp and State, so full of historic association, so fraught with reverent suggestions, is scarcely possible to any Court than that of St. James's on those occasions when it is associating in some solemnity of the State Church" (*The Graphic*, June 28, 1887, 32). The solemnity of the occasion is therefore enhanced by the historical environment, inciting the spectator's eyes and imagination to place Victoria as part of this tradition. Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee demonstrates that courtly pageantry is intrinsically connected to the idea of 'tradition'. As Hobsbawn explains, traditions refer to pasts – either factual or invented – which impose fixed and normally formalised practices, ratified by repetition (2). To clarify, Hobsbawn distinguishes tradition from mere convention or routine. The latter are also construed by means of repetition, but they do not

have a significant ritual or symbolic capacity (Hobsbawm and Ranger 3), which is in the essence of tradition. The repetition of returning to Westminster Abbey for royal celebrations and solemnities is thus symbolic, emphasising the idea of the immortality of the body politic.

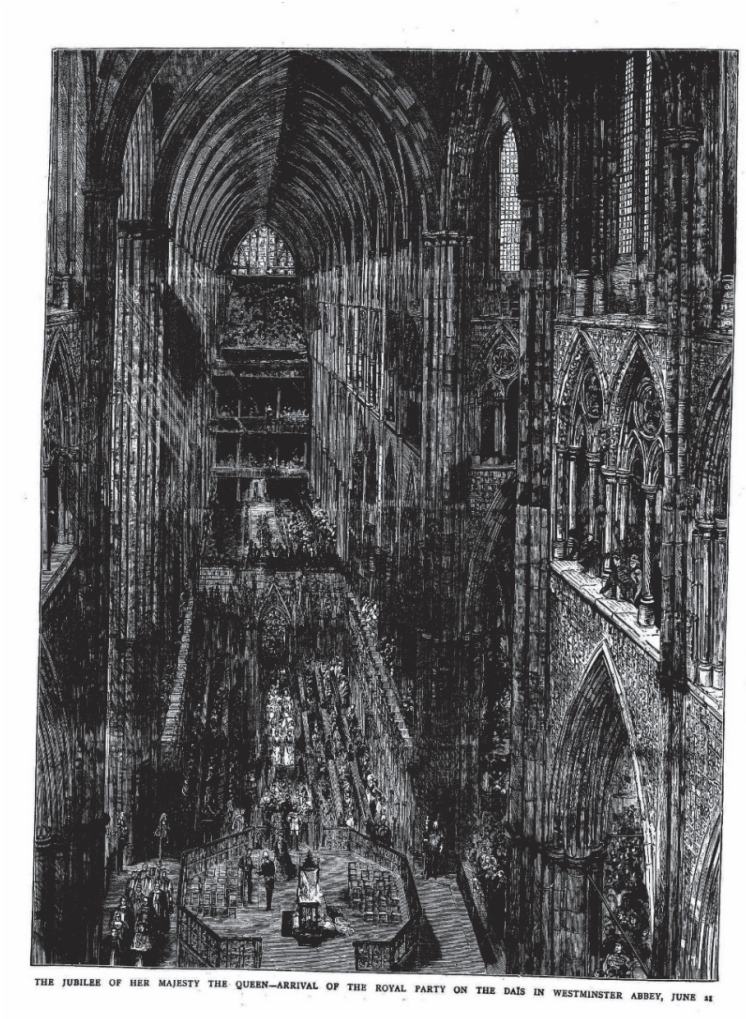

Figure 9 – Arrival of the royal party on the dais in Westminster Abbey, June 21, 1887, *The Graphic*

In the theatre, the courtly rituals receive a new lawyer of repetition with each production. When transferred to the stage, they become a double performance: an acting representation of what is already a theatrical performance. A ritual on stage is, therefore, *not* a ritual, but a performance of a ritual. Furthermore, staging royal pageantry involved performing and, consequently, *embodying* the monarch. According to Orgel, "theatrical pageantry, the miming of greatness, is highly charged because it employs precisely the same methods the crown was using to assert and validate its authority" (23), shedding light on the whole artificiality of the strategy. In his text, Orgel refers to the conversation between Queen Elizabeth and the antiquarian Lambarde mentioned above in this chapter, in which the queen's association with Richard II potentially transformed Shakespeare's play into an allegory of her own reign. Orgel writes that the intertwining of stage performance and politics converted Shakespeare's *Richard II* into "a piece of very dangerous civic pageantry" (23). The example exposes Elizabeth's concern in being associated with an heirless deposed monarch, whose person was embodied by an actor on stage, and who, indirectly, embodied her own.

Shakespeare's reincarnation of the historical Richard II first appears on stage at a demonstration of royal power and civic pageantry. In Act 1, Henry Bolingbroke formally accuses Thomas Mowbray of having murdered the Duke of Gloucester and of harbouring treacherous plans against the king. Gages are ceremoniously thrown on stage, and the two noblemen are expected to fight to the death at the lists in Coventry in the third scene of the act. This scene is symmetrically arranged with the king at the centre, entering the stage after the flourish, another symbolic element that adds to the pageantry of the scene. After the monarch's entrance, Bolingbroke comes in, followed by the challenging combatant, Mowbray, both clad in armour. As Minoru Fujita points out, the symmetrical setting of the scene mirrors the structure of the Elizabethan playhouse itself, where the throne would be set in the elevated centre, and the stage surrounded by spectators on the three sides (Fujita 23–24). In this manner, the scene would highlight the theatrical essence of the medieval tournament ritual.

The sequence of formal procedures accentuates the ceremonial characteristic of the event. The Lord Marshal mediates the exchange between the king and the contenders. Richard refers to the occasion in a quite matter-of-fact tone: "Marshal, demand of yonder champion / The cause of his arrival here in arms. / Ask him his name, and orderly proceed / To swear him in the justice of his cause" (1.3.7-10). When the marshal transmits the sovereign's words to the audience, he enhances

its pageantry, alluding to its chivalric tradition, changing "in arms" with "knightly clad in arms", and altering to swear "in the justice of his cause" for "speak truly on thy knighthood and thy oath". Shakespeare's Lord Marshal highlights the pomp of the circumstances. In this context, both Mowbray and Bolingbroke take the role of the medieval knight, fighting to prove their honour.

Mowbray affirms that he has come "engaged by my oath – / Which heaven defend a knight should violate!" (1.3.17-18), drawing attention to the chivalric oath of honour and loyalty to his lord. The true knight would win the joust with divine intervention, since God would protect the one with the just cause. This is what leads Bolingbroke to affirm he is ready to prove himself "by heaven's grace and [his] body's valour" (1.3.40-41) to God, the king, and himself. The concept of a trial by combat is associated with an ideal of knighthood and valour, which is potentially embodied by Bolingbroke himself. However, Bolingbroke never has the chance to prove that his cause is supported by divine authority. As soon as the signal to start the combat is issued, Richard drops his warder – a symbol that signifies that the battle must stop. In this manner, the king disrupts the ritual and passes his own arbitrary verdict to the contenders. When interrupting the ceremony, Richard places himself above divine authority, believing himself capable of judging the lives of the contenders in lieu of God.

Courtly ritual was not only part of the tournament described in the opening act of *Richard II*, but also in the interaction between sovereign and subjects. In Act 3, Bolingbroke, Northumberland, York and other lords arrive in Bristow Castle. This is where the king's favourites Bushy and Green have sought refuge after Bolingbroke has disrespected Richard's order of banishment and returned to English lands. The scene becomes an unofficial trial of the king's favourites, led by Bolingbroke, who appropriates the role of the sovereign, foreshadowing his official deposition of Richard II later in the play. Bolingbroke eloquently enumerates the accusation against the courtiers: "You have misled a prince, a royal king, / A happy gentleman in blood and lineaments, / By you unhappied and disfigured clean" (3.1.8-10). The two men are accused of corrupting the king's perception of Bolingbroke. Assuming a royal authority for himself, the Duke condemns both of them to death. This scene recalls the "Merciless Parliament" of 1388, in which the Lord Appellants (Gloucester, Arundel, Warwick, Bolingbroke and Mowbray) assembled to protest against the king's relationship with some of his courtiers, naming five of the king's protégés that should be tried for treason (Norwich 88–90). In Shakespeare, Bolingbroke synecdochally becomes the embodiment of the Lord Appellants, while Bushy and

Green represent the convicted five of the king's five favourites. Bolingbroke takes the power over the lives of these two men into his own hands, mirroring the ritualistic elements of 1.3, when Richard settled the fates for Bolingbroke and Mowbray. However, Bolingbroke does not have the official power to pass this sentence. In order to legitimise his verdict, Bolingbroke condemns Bushy and Green to die in the presence of other noblemen who could bear witness to the event.

The scene discussed above emphasises how Bolingbroke's behaviour becomes more ceremonious as he sees himself closer to the role of king, while Richard makes the inverse journey, going from the royal authority that interrupted the ritual of tournament to paying deference to the rising subject. When Richard becomes a prisoner at Flint Castle, the conversation between Bolingbroke and the captured king stresses how language and bodily submission play a significant role in royal ritual and pageantry, and epitomises the inverted roles of king and subject in the middle of the play. This is the very moment when the journeys of the two men meet halfway: Richard treads his descent into misery and death, while Bolingbroke rises to kingship.

Lord Northumberland, Bolingbroke's supporter, disrespectfully refers to the king at Flint Castle as merely "Richard", for which he is rebuked by York: "It would beseem the Lord Northumberland / To say King Richard. Alack the heavy day / When such a sacred king should hide his head" (3.3.7-9). The unceremonious way Northumberland refers to Richard demonstrates the lord's confidence in Bolingbroke's victory and in Richard's deposition. Answering the call from outside the castle, Richard and his supporters enter the scene. Shakespeare does not give indications to its *mise-en-scène*, but at this moment both Bolingbroke and the king appear on stage, one within the castle while the other is without, materialising the opposition between the two contending men. York still sees majesty in the king's countenance. Bolingbroke, however, sees a "blushing discontented sun" (3.3.63) – a direct contrast to Richard's previous comparison of his own throne to the rising east a scene earlier (3.2.45).

When facing Northumberland, Richard rebukes the nobleman for not kneeling in respect of his majesty – another sign of Northumberland's unceremonious treatment of Richard. Richard emphasises that God's protection sanctifies his royal position and that "no hand of blood and bone / Can gripe the sacred handle of our sceptre, / Unless he do profane, steal or usurp" (3.3.79-81). Not treating Richard with the proper deference that his royal person requires would signify challenging God's own prerogative. When Richard accepts Bolingbroke's request to have his

land and title reclaimed as well as his banishment discharged, the king fears he has debased himself in speaking too kindly. He feels his actions are not in accordance with his divine power of kingship. His feelings, however, do not change his actions, since he becomes more and more submissive to Bolingbroke. When answering Northumberland, Richard refers to his cousin: "What says King Bolingbroke? Will his majesty / Give Richard leave to live till Richard die?" (3.3.173-174). Tellingly, Richard refers (ironically) to Bolingbroke as 'King Bolingbroke' and alludes to his newly acquired power in deciding whether the real king, now merely 'Richard', should live or die. The actor playing Richard in a performance of the play may pronounce the sentences above in either a submissive or ironic manner, affecting how Richard positions himself in the scene: as a still strong monarch or as a despairing man.

Bolingbroke requests that Richard meets him in the base court, meaning that Richard would have to descend from the castle to meet the Duke outside. This request challenges Richard's royal prerogative, since a king should never move to meet his subject, only the other way around. Richard understands the defiance in Bolingbroke's petition: "Down, down I come [...] / In the base court? Base court where kings grow base / To come at traitors' calls and do them grace! / In the base court come down. Down court, down king" (3.3.178-182). The physical *up* and *down* in the stage setting parallels the political rise of Bolingbroke concomitant to Richard's downfall. When the king approaches, however, Bolingbroke respectfully kneels in his presence in a ceremonious act of deference. But Richard knows that Bolingbroke's heart is proudly "up" although his knees are "low", hinting at Bolingbroke's fake display of respect. Shakespeare's Richard willingly submits to Bolingbroke, assuming he must set out for the Tower in London even before Bolingbroke made this request: "What you will have I'll give, and willing too, / For do we must what force will have us do. / Set on towards London, cousin, is it so?" (3.3.205-207). Richard seals his own fate as he follows Bolingbroke to London, acting like a subject rather than the monarch. Richard's surrender eventually leads him to an official deposition, which takes place in 4.1, arguably the climax of the Shakespearean play. Richard then yields the crown to Bolingbroke, who prepares to be crowned Henry IV.

A royal coronation offers the ultimate demonstration of civic pageantry. It is an example of tradition based on symbolic repetition, creating a ritual that has been preserved for over a thousand years, functioning as legitimisation of the monarch's hold to the crown. Over a century and a half after Richard's deposition, Elizabeth I was anointed the representative of God on Earth in a grand theatrical

event. According to David Bergeron (1978), Elizabeth was aware of the importance of this civic pageant for her own benefit, leading her to participate actively in its preparation. Although the City of London and the trade companies provided the spectacle as a gift to the new sovereign, Elizabeth's attitude "seems to be that if the city needs assistance in making the entertainment more colourful, more spectacular, then let the citizens have what they need, even if the queen must provide it" (Bergeron 5). According to a contemporary record, Elizabeth "was of the People received marvellous entirely, as appeared by the assembly, prayers, wishes, welcomings, cries, tender words, and all other signs, which argue a wonderful earnest love of most obedient subjects towards their sovereign" (Arber 218). Even though Shakespeare would not have seen Queen Elizabeth's entrance into London (he was less than 5 years old at the time), this example demonstrates the social importance of the coronation ritual in asserting the subjects' love for the sovereign.

Shakespeare depicts the ritualistic royal pageant of coronation in reverse in *Richard II*: instead of being crowned king, Richard *de*-crowns himself. It is a physical representation of the lack of love and respect that Richard inspired as a monarch. Simultaneously, it is the moment in the play where he regains the sympathy of the audience. He is unsuccessful as a king but becomes the suffering victim of Bolingbroke's machinations in the eyes of the audience. Stripped of his crown, Richard can be seen as a man. Moreover, when the king is brought forward for public surrender, he has to learn a new political role, that of being submissive to another sovereign. He has to learn how to bow, bend the knee and flatter. At this point in the play, Richard is still king at the same time that he is no longer king, in the same paradoxical manner that Schrödinger's cat in quantum physics is simultaneously dead and alive. Richard is but a shadow of a king, and it is precisely such conundrum in identity that makes the play interesting for an audience at any given time, regardless of the political associations with contemporary state of affairs. Furthermore, following the understanding of the word 'shadow' as another term for 'actor' in the Early Modern period, Shakespeare's word choice also emphasises that the Richard on stage is merely an actor playing the part of the historical Richard II. In this sense, the Richard on stage is *not* a reality, but a liminal entity in-between reality and imagination.

In a metaphorical depiction of monarchy being pulled apart, Shakespeare's Richard holds one side of the golden crown and tells Henry to hold the other: "Now is this golden crown like a deep well / That owes two buckets, filling one another" (4.1.183-184). When the play began, Richard's bucket was high and empty, "dancing

in the air", while Bolingbroke's bucket was at the bottom, banished and stripped of his titles and money. Now the situation is reversed: Bolingbroke's bucket is empty and free, while Richard's is "down and full of tears" (4.2.185-186). Shakespeare repeats the dichotomy *up* versus *down*, which I have discussed above in the scene at Flint Castle. Walter Pater associates Richard's de-coronation with a 'degradation' in the Roman Pontifical liturgical book. A degradation is a canonical penalty "by which an offending priest or bishop may be deprived, if not of the essential quality of 'orders,' yet, one by one, of its outward dignities" (Pater 198). In this context, Richard performs his own rite of degradation, dismissing from his physical body all the supernatural power of the divine right of kings.

Margaret Loftus Ranald links Richard's de-coronation to the chivalric tradition of "unclothing the knight in the reverse order of his investiture" (176), depriving the former knight of his title for having abused the code of honour or for having betrayed his lord. Ranald recounts the case of Sir Andrew Harclay's treason against Edward III at the Battle of Beighland in 1322. Harclay had his sword broken over his head; he was stripped of his Tabard, his hood, his coat-of-arms and girdle; his armour was bruised, beaten and cast aside; and the king said he should no longer be considered a Knight, but a Knave (Ranald 177). Richard, however, does not *suffer* the degradation rite, but theatrically *performs* it *unto himself*, aching to see his kingly self disappear. Simultaneously, Richard reflects on the complexity of his own change of identity: he has no name, no title; he does not know how to call himself. Accordingly, Richard requires a mirror in order to find what face he has "since it is bankrupt of his majesty" (4.1.265-266). He is surprised to note that his face still looks the same: no more wrinkles, no deeper wounds. He smashes the mirror in a hundred pieces, only to find out that the substance – his soul, his grief – remains whole. It was only the shadow of himself that was destroyed with the mirror. His physical body remains while his political body no longer exists. As Fujita puts it, "Richard II was commonly understood to be the last genuine mediaeval king [in England], and the scene showing his tragic fall was, to an extent, accepted as a dramatic portrayal of mediaevalism in decline" (15). As we have seen, an Early Modern audience would not have understood Richard II as a *medieval* king, since the establishment of the Middle Ages as a distinct separate historical period dates to a later time. Nevertheless, Richard's death on stage could potentially raise the audience's awareness of the dramatic fall of a line of Plantagenet kings that ended with Richard II, giving way to the Lancaster dynasty. More broadly, Richard's death represents a rupture with tradition and hereditariness, as well as a challenge to

God's anointed representative on Earth, opening a precedence for political change on secular grounds.

Fujita uses the term 'medievalism' in the sentence above as referring to a broad representation of the medieval past as dissolving along with Richard's political body. It does not refer to a reception of the Middle Ages as a cultural construct, as I understand the term. Nonetheless, it is an interesting observation, since it brings to light the idea of a construction of the Middle Ages *within* Shakespeare's play as embodied by the waning figure of Richard, and replaced by the new dynasty started by Henry IV. The play, therefore, brings to the fore different Early Modern perceptions of the Middle Ages: an earlier past romanticised by Gaunt, and a corrupt past embodied by Richard.

The last instance of ritual pageantry to which I would like to call attention occurs in the very last scene of *Richard II*, when Richard's coffin is brought on stage. Henry IV is at Windsor Castle with the Duke of York when Exton enters the stage with the coffin: "Great king, within this coffin I present / Thy buried fear. Herein all breathless lies / The mightiest of thy greatest enemies, / Richard of Bordeaux, by me hither brought" (5.6.30-34). The king's reaction, however, is not what Exton expected. The king does not thank him for his act: "for thou hast wrought / A deed of slander with thy fatal hand / Upon my head and all this famous land" (5.6.34-36). Although Henry wished Richard dead, he curses the act of murder and the murderer, exiling Exton. He makes it explicit that the guilt of conscience should be entirely Exton's. Bolingbroke ends the play by promising a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to atone for the sins he committed to gain power. As history (and *Henry IV – Part 2*) tells us, that journey is never undertaken.

It is significant that Shakespeare chooses to end his play with the physical presence of Richard's coffin on stage. The death of a king in Shakespeare's lifetime would be honoured with an impressive public funeral. As Michael Neill explains, funeral ceremonies were "the pageant theatre of death and mourning", displaying the appropriate rank and status of the dead person. Although funerals had a religious background, public state funerals were mainly secular events presided by heralds instead of parsons, rather associated with "the rituals of antiquarian feudalism than those of Christianity" (Neill 154). It was a ritual that would follow an arrangement of organised pageants, ranging "from the display of knightly arms, banners, and heraldic devices to the arrangement of successive groups of paupers, yeomen, household servants, serving gentlemen, client gentry, and noble mourners with their followers" (Neill 154). In Shakespeare's play, however, Richard is denied

this honour. His coffin is brought on stage by his own murderer, Exton, and put in view of Bolingbroke, the man who is indirectly responsible for Richard's death. The positioning of both the usurper and the corpse of the usurped side by side emphasises that Richard's life was cut short by Bolingbroke's intervention. In addition to being an embodiment of Henry's guilt in display for himself and for the theatre audience, the coffin foreshadows the death and bloodshed that will characterise Henry's reign as Henry IV. In Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the pageantry of the royal funeral cortège is thus deliberately omitted (visually and verbally) in order to emphasise the political consequences of Bolingbroke's actions in disrupting the hereditary chain of kingship. Instead of the ceremonial pageantry, the audience gets only an empty promise from the new ruler to atone for his sins.

3.1.2 The Arbitrary Power of Kings

Shakespeare's reconstruction of the Middle Ages in *Richard II* is grounded on medieval political theology that regarded the king as having two bodies: the body natural, his own breathing human body, and the body politic, a personification of the state. According to Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen in the RSC edition of *Richard II*, "as body politic, the king was incarnation of the nation; as body natural, he was a mortal like anyone else. This was what made possible the paradoxical words 'The king is dead, long live the king'" (10), a traditional saying at the accession of a new monarch, meaning that the body natural of the previous king is gone, but the body politic lingers on in the body natural of the new king or queen. In this sense, monarchy – the body politic – is immortal.

The idea of a king's two bodies springs from the medieval belief in the divine right of kings – a belief that the monarch was an indisputable representative of God on earth. This is what leads Richard to disregard Bolingbroke's rebellious attacks in the faith that God would protect his hold to the throne: "Not all the water in the rough rude sea / Can wash the balm off from an anointed king. / The breath of worldly men cannot depose / The deputy elected by the Lord" (3.2.54-57). In Richard's mind, Bolingbroke's "worldly breath" could not compete with Richard's divine essence, granted him by the royal unction. Richard believes he was chosen by God to perform His will on earth. This belief is what Rebecca Lemon considers as the source of Richard II's tyranny in her political analysis of the play. According to Lemon, in depicting Richard's "errancy, Shakespeare not only stages the spectre

of tyrannical leadership before his audience, but he also locates the origin of this tyranny: it emerges from the king's faith in his own divine right" (247). Richard's abuse of power, his different penalties for Bolingbroke and Mowbray, and his indulgence of favourites are all rooted in the certainty of his unquestionable place as king.

As Lemon argues, Shakespeare does not depict Richard as a tyrannical king on stage as a direct reference to a specific monarch, namely Elizabeth I, but rather as an established criticism against tyranny altogether and possibly against a tyrannical successor for the ageing queen. The author affirms that "the play does not represent this political model of the divine right of kings neutrally. Shakespeare stages this doctrine as a prop for corrupt kingship, displaying a limit-case for divine right theory as subjects consent to rule by a murderous sovereign" (Lemon 256). The threat of a tyrannical rule was specially topical at the very end of the sixteenth century, when the old and unmarried Queen Elizabeth had no heirs to pass on the English crown, which might otherwise fall into the hands of the Catholic Philip II of Spain (1527-1598),[19] or in the hands of the Infanta Isabella Clara Eugenia, Philip's daughter with his third wife Elisabeth of Valois (1545-1568). Either outcome could result in a return to Catholicism after a period of stabilisation of Protestantism under Elizabeth I, or lead to a civil war.

Shakespeare endorses that a mortal being temporarily embodying the supernatural entity of monarchy is merely performing a role. The monarch, in this sense, is just like an actor on a stage, playing the role of a king from his coronation until his death or deposition. During this time, both bodies inhabit a single physical space. In the play's deposition scene, Richard emphasises the performative nature of a king's role, using his own authority to perform the split of his body natural from the body politic. Being left with only his natural body, bereft of divine power, he is but a shadow of himself.

The public persona of a ruler is invariably a role-play. As King James I wrote in his treatise *Basilikon Doron*[20] (c. 1599): "a King is as one set on a stage, whose smallest actions and gestures, all the people gazingly doe behold" (qtd. in McIlwain 43). Peter Holland acknowledges that the theatricality of the king's role has been underscored in some productions of the play, including Stephen Pimlott's staging for the RSC at The Other Place in 2000 with Samuel West (1966-) in the title role.

[19] Philip II of Spain had a claim to the throne by means of his marriage to Mary I (1516-1558).

[20] 'Royal gift' in Ancient Greek.

In the beginning of each session, West would sit on a coffin with the theatre lights off, holding a book, and he would read from a passage in the play, which could vary each night of performance. Only after calling attention to himself as an actor on a dark stage does he decide to perform. The lights of the stage then go on and he assumes his role as Richard II (Holland 221–22). In a similar manner, Ian Richardson (1934-2007) and Richard Pasco (1926-2014) called attention to Richard and Bolingbroke as performers by exchanging roles throughout the play in John Barton's RSC production in 1973. The main idea behind the decision of casting the two actors as both the king and the usurper "was that kings, like actors, are 'twin-natured', their personhood and their role intrinsically intertwined" (Dawson and Yachnin 90). These productions accentuated the public's awareness of the performative nature of the actor's job, as well as the theatricality of Shakespeare's character in the play, and Richard II's own role in performing kingship.

In Ernst Kantorowicz's seminal work on the study of medieval political theology, the author explains how the idea of a king's two bodies persevered in Shakespeare's lifetime. When James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth as king of England and Ireland as James I, uniting the three kingdoms under one crown, the philosopher and stateman Francis Bacon (1561-1626) suggested the name 'Great Britain' "as an expression of the 'perfect union of bodies, politic as well as natural'" (Kantorowicz 24). Shakespeare's understanding of the king as a performer, in fact of the human being as a player of different roles, is apparent in *Richard II*. Kantorowicz explains that although the image of the monarch's two bodies has arguably vanished from modern constitutional thought, it still has a significant appeal today mainly because of Shakespeare, who "has eternalized that metaphor" (26).

Kantorowicz identifies three moments in *Richard II* that endorse the performative nature of kingship. Richard plays three roles: King, Fool and God, "all one, and all simultaneously active" (Kantorowicz 27). In the scene on the coast of Wales, he plays the King. When Richard learns about Bolingbroke's betrayal, the Bishop of Carlisle calms him: "Fear not, my lord. That power that made you king / Hath power to keep you king in spite of all" (3.2.27-28). The power that anointed Richard king is divine; therefore, God will keep him protected from the attacks of worldly men. Richard deeply believes in this. However, as the king learns the bad tidings brought by Lord Salisbury of the desertion of his Welsh army and of his being "one day too late", Richard doubts his own divinity. At this moment of hesitancy, Richard remembers the mortality of his body natural. Death awaits all human beings, regardless if king or servant. Consequently, Richard realises how frail a

king's hold to the body politic is, susceptible to be ripped away, leaving him just as any other human fragile and mortal body.

Still clinging to his majesty, Richard takes refuge at Flint Castle in Act III, Scene 3. I have referred to this scene previously when discussing Northumberland's lack of ceremonious treatment to Richard and Bolingbroke's affected humility. Kantorowicz sees in this scene the continuation of the disintegration of Richard's "oneness of the body natural with the immortal body politic" (30). Richard puts himself at Bolingbroke's disposition: "What must the King do now? Must he submit? / The King shall do it. Must he be deposed? / The King shall be contented. Must he lose / The name of king? I' God's name, let it go" (3.3.148-151). Richard ridicules his own position as a king, acquiring a submissive status and referring to himself as a King with no royal authority. In this instance, he plays the role of the Fool, "who is two-in-one and whom the poet otherwise introduces so often as counter-type of lords and kings. Richard II plays now the roles of both: fool of his royal self and fool of kingship" (Kantorowicz 33). He debases his body natural, he becomes "a fool playing a king, and a king playing a fool" (Kantorowicz 33). This instance also highlights the theatricality of the situation, where Richard performs an exaggerated submission to Bolingbroke, calling his cousin "King Bolingbroke" and "his majesty", while referring to himself as simply "Richard".

Finally, Richard plays the role of God in the scene at Westminster. In the reversed coronation ritual, Richard compares himself to Christ, associating Bolingbroke's treason with Judas' betrayal. However, unlike Jesus, who had loyalty from his other eleven followers, Richard had none in twelve thousand. In *The Hollow Crown* series, the director of *Richard II* (2012) Rupert Goold (1972-) emphasises Richard's association with Christ by adding religious symbols. In the very first seconds of the episode, the camera moves from a crucifix to Richard's throne, stressing the link between royal power and divinity. And at the end of the film, Richard's corpse is brought to Henry IV inside a simple wooden coffin. The actor Ben Whishaw (1980-) is covered in a white shroud, in a position that resembles Christ's crucifixion, enhancing the comparison.

As Richard performs his de-crowning, he officially removes the body politic (and its sacredness) from himself. He performs the ceremony as "both priest and clerk", since he is the only one with the divine authority to un-king himself. Therefore, he uses the powers granted by God against himself: "God save the king, although I be not he" (4.1.174). As he is bereft of his body politic, he tries to render his human self kingly: "You may my glories and my state depose, / But not my griefs,

still am I king of those" (4.1.191-192). This "inner kingship", however, also dissolves as he realises himself to be a traitor: "For I have given here my soul's consent / T' undeck the pompous body of a king, / Made glory base and sovereignty a slave, / Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant" (4.1.248-251). As Kantorowicz puts it, "the king body natural becomes a traitor to the king body politic" (39). His complete dissolution happens as he looks at himself in the mirror, which Kantorowicz calls "the climax of that tragedy of dual personality" (39). His physical appearance does not portray his imagined inner kingship: "Is this the face which faced so many follies, / That was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke?" (4.1.284-285). As he smashes the mirror into pieces, Kantorowicz explains that Richard undermines any possibility of duality; what is left is merely a human miserable man (40).

As Holland explains, Kantorowicz's interpretation of *Richard II* "engages with the gap between body natural and body politic, between individual and social role, in a way that denies the play's status as a record of a time past" (222). For Holland, there was no gap between Early Modern politics and the performativity of Richard's and Bolingbroke's characters. This way, Shakespeare did not establish a divide between medieval thought and Early Modern humanism. In fact, Shakespeare created a world "which manifested strongly that which was also true about his own. The medieval was no longer discontinuous but a mark of continuity" (Holland 222). That was one of the characteristics of Shakespeare's medievalism: recreating the medieval past to reflect on his own time, emphasising the ruptures and continuities of history.

In addition to the belief that monarchs were God's chosen representatives on earth and, therefore, possessors of divine power, early historical chroniclers such as Edward Hall (1498-1547) and Raphael Holinshed (1525-1580) perceived history as developing under divine control, "events from the death of a king to the fall of a sparrow were demonstrations of God's providence" (Hattaway 16). In that way, humans had little agency. However, Shakespeare's plays, although having Hall and Holinshed as main sources, explore the power of ordinary men to create their own destiny. In *Richard II*, for instance, Bolingbroke questions Richard's position on the throne and forces the anointed monarch to give up the crown in favour of a nobleman who had not been chosen by God to perform that office. Bolingbroke criticises Richard's use of his authority to change sentences of banishment at his will: "How long a time lies in one little word! / Four lagging winters and four wanton springs / End in a word; such is the breath of kings" (1.3.212-214). Bolingbroke's rebellion indicates that secular political objectives can change the course of divine history.

Bolingbroke thus acts as representative of secular power challenging a medieval gullible ideal of divine kingship.

3.1.3 Nostalgia

As we have seen, Shakespeare reconstructs the medieval past in *Richard II* by performing medieval pageantry and ritual, by depicting and challenging the medieval political theology of the divine right of kings and the dual nature of the monarch's body; and, as I explain in this section, by means of a nostalgic longing for the past. Nostalgia is at the core of medievalism. In evoking a reframing of the Middle Ages, works of art turn to the past as an alternative reality for their own present: either to escape the present's frustrations, or to reinforce the improvements the present can offer and that the past could not. Interestingly, Matthews points out that the word *nostalgia* was originally a term to describe not the longing for the past, but a longing for a place: home. "In 1756 it was given as a synonym for [the German word] *Heimweh*, the pain felt for home" (Matthews 64). Only later did the word assume a more specific reference to feeling more at home in the *past*. As Matthews points out, 'time' and 'place' are two categories that are complex to distinguish, one being directly attached to the other. All corporeal entities occupy simultaneously a physical space at a specific period of time. In medievalist nostalgia, 'time' becomes a 'place', materialised by physical reconstructions of the Middle Ages. The past "is no longer so very distant, but one that can be visited" (Matthews 64) through literature, art, and the theatre. With Shakespeare's history plays the audience's feeling of being at home may be even greater since the place they witness on stage is the same in which they are in the present, only at a different time period. This idea is intrinsically connected to Chandler's explanation of the Medieval Revival in nineteenth-century Britain as a mainly idealised evocation of a mythical Middle Ages as a safe and familiar home in contrast to the rapid changes of modernisation, as I have explained in Chapter 2.

The idealisation of the past is embodied in the play by the character of John of Gaunt, who, in fact, differs a lot from the historical Gaunt (1340-1399). Gaunt was Richard's uncle and the oldest surviving son of the admired King Edward III, who had reigned for fifty long years, achieving great military victories and restoring royal authority after the forced abdication of his father, Edward II (1284-1327). Gaunt was a powerful man, "his lands were said to extend over one-third of the

entire country, while for many years he maintained at his own expense a personal retinue of no fewer than 125 knights and 132 esquires, effectively a sizeable private army" (Norwich 56). During the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 against the high taxes, the wealthy Gaunt could have paid the debt for half a dozen counties without even noticing it, but he preferred to make an arrogant display of his assets, exasperating the rebels (Norwich 61). Shakespeare's Gaunt, however, is not an arrogant exhibitionist. He is an old man who loves his son and suffers to see him banished; an uncle disturbed with the neglect with which his nephew has governed the kingdom and with the mysterious circumstances surrounding his brother's death; and, notably, someone dispirited with the condition of England.

In contrast to Gaunt's noble character, Richard is portrayed at first as a selfish man. When Bushy brings news of his uncle's imminent death, Richard rejoices, since "the lining of his coffers shall make coats / To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars" (1.4.59-61). At Gaunt's death, Richard seizes his property and adds it to the royal treasury to finance his expensive wars in Ireland. When Gaunt dies, the spectator feels that the last hope of redemption for Richard dies with him. Gaunt embodies an idealised alternative for England's future, what it could have been under the governance of the uncle instead of the nephew Richard.

Gaunt discerns in himself "a prophet new inspired", who compares the present England with an ideal past, predicting its imminent downfall: "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England, / [...] is now bound in with shame, / With inky blots and rotten parchment bonds: / That England, that was wont to conquer others, / Hath made a shameful conquest of itself" (2.1.50, 63-66). Gaunt's speech illustrates a type of medievalism in which he contrasts the majesty of the early Middle ages, the "teeming womb of royal kings", the age of the Crusades distinguished "for Christian service and true chivalry", of the knights who fought to recover Christ's "sepulchre in stubborn Jewry", with the collapsing present in the hands of Richard II.

Even though Gaunt lacked the terminology we are familiar with nowadays, the past he describes is certainly the period we now understand as the High Middle Ages: the age of the Crusades and "true chivalry", perhaps evoking the past personified by Richard's ancestor, Richard I (1157-1199), the "Lion Heart", the great warrior and military leader, and a commander in the Third Crusade (1189-1192). This idealised past in Gaunt's mind is dying with him. In contrast, the impression that Shakespeare's Richard presents is of a capricious and authoritarian king who uses his power tyrannically against the well-being of his people. Shakespeare's Bolingbroke, on the other hand, represents quite the contrary, at least in the first half of the play:

the abused hero who gathers strength in exile to avenge the death of his father and the wrongdoings to his family and lawful inheritance. After Gaunt's death, Bolingbroke embodies the hope to restore England to its former chivalrous glory.

Gaunt's nostalgia exemplifies an instance of double-voiced medievalism within the Shakespearean text. Shakespeare evokes two layers of medieval pasts: the earlier past of the Crusades, mourned by Gaunt; and the later Middle Ages as personified by Richard II, a weak and tyrannical leader who betrayed the sacred ideal of the body politic. The medieval world constructed by Shakespeare in *Richard II* is a combination of both medieval pasts, paradoxically idealised and grotesque. Therefore, there is medievalism *within* the text: as the medieval Gaunt looks back at a romanticised earlier Middle Ages. However, there is also medievalism within the *performance*, when the sixteenth-century audience would look back at both Gaunt's idealised British past as well as at Shakespeare's complex reconstruction of the late fourteenth century, the latter being contemporary to the historical Richard and Gaunt, but nonetheless a past for the actors and spectators in the theatre.

The famous "garden scene" provides insight into the play's contrast of the chaotic present under Richard's rule with an idealised past. The scene takes place at the Duke of York's garden, where the queen and her lady attendants are walking. Separated from her husband, the sad queen tries in vain to get comfort from her ladies. A gardener and two servants enter the stage, and the queen approaches to hear their conversation. The gardener points to an apricot tree, in which the fruits "like unruly children make their sire / Stoop with oppression of their prodigal weight" (3.4.30-31). The fruits of the apricot tree are so heavy that they burden the tree. It is the task of the gardener to "cut off the heads of too-fast-growing sprays / That look too lofty in our commonwealth" (3.4.34-35). All should be even in the garden, all the "noisome weeds" that absorb the soil's fertility should be plucked away. The servant replies to the man, comparing the garden to the state of England:

> Why should we in the compass of a pale
> Keep law and form and due proportion,
> Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,
> When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
> Is full of weeds, her fairest flowers choked up,
> Her fruit-trees all upturned, her hedges ruin'd,
> Her knots disorder'd and her wholesome herbs
> Swarming with caterpillars? (3.4.40-47).

The servant's speech recalls previous passages in the play, such as Bolingbroke's refence to Bushy, Bagot and their accomplices as "the Caterpillars of the commonwealth" (2.3.165); as well as Gaunt's prophetical vision of England leased out as "a tenement or pelting farm" (2.1.60) and of Richard as a landlord and not a king. As the servant's lines illustrate, Richard has not been a good landlord, neglecting the parasitical weeds that poisoned the English soil and the power of the heavy fruits that threatened the vigour of the tree. The gardener responds to his servant that the person responsible for the decay of the garden, namely King Richard, is withering like a leaf in autumn, and the weeds are being plucked out from the root by Bolingbroke.

The Queen overhears that Bolingbroke has seized Richard, and that he will undoubtedly be deposed. She is outraged by this conversation: "How dares thy harsh rude tongue sound this unpleasing news? / What Eve, what serpent, hath suggested thee / To make a second fall of cursed man? / Why dost thou say King Richard is deposed? / Darest thou, thou little better thing than earth, / Divine his downfall?" (3.4.77-79). The queen refers to another garden, that of Adam and Eve, from which they were expelled for committing the first sin of mankind. Just like Adam and Eve, Richard has sinned and for this reason he will be banned from his garden, England. Fearing for the life of her husband, the Queen leaves to London, and the gardener plants a rue, a "sour herb of grace", where her majesty's tear fell on the ground "in the remembrance of a weeping queen" (3.4.105-107).

The gardener and his servant evoke a past in which the fair flowers were not choked up, the fruit trees were not unpruned, the hedges were not ruined, and the herbs were not swarming with larvae. This past has been ruined by Richard. As Isabel Karremann explains, nostalgia is a "historical emotion", in the sense that it summons the past as a way to obliviate the present. "Nostalgic memories thus offer only a very selective version of the past, but they authorise and legitimise that version through addressing the emotions" (Karremann 34). The gardeners, therefore, summon the past epitomised by the pre-Fall Garden of Eden as a way to legitimate their frustration with the present. They engage with an imagined past, which is evoked by confronting the heavy peaches burdening the tree.

A question that may result after analysing the previous examples of nostalgia in *Richard II* is whether it consists of medievalism or merely a general longing for the past. Could Shakespeare's approach to the past be considered medievalist? Although the word *medieval* did not exist for Shakespeare's contemporaries, there was an idea of *difference* dividing the Renaissance from what came before.

Leslie Workman explains that "medievalism could only begin, not simply when the Middle Ages had ended, whenever that may have been, but when the Middle Ages were perceived to have been something in the past, something it was necessary to revive or desirable to imitate" (1). It does not matter, therefore, if Shakespeare understood the period in which Richard II lived as *medieval*, but what is important is that Shakespeare *perceived* that past to be different from his own lifetime. It was a period he thought significant for revival in order to shed light on the political situation of his own time. In the same manner, Gaunt and the gardeners in *Richard II* summon a past they perceived different from their own. The gardeners' metaphorical garden evokes a more broad 'pastness', an idealised imagination of what came before Richard. However, their reflection adds to Gaunt's speech reviving the splendour of the times of chivalric knights and Crusades, which is a clear reference to the period we now understand as the Middle Ages.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Shakespeare's historiography. Although not a historian, Shakespeare's history plays contributed to the circulation of ideas about the past during his lifetime and beyond. In Shakespeare's dramatisation of Richard II's reign, he condenses and alters the chronological order of several historical events in order to *create* his own medieval past. However, the reconstruction of the Middle Ages as prompted by Shakespeare's *Richard II* does not end with the play. The dramatic text is not a fixed entity; it is altered and adapted according to the necessities of each production, which in turn is staged in different times and places, and performed by different people.

This chapter has focused specifically on three aspects in *Richard II* that are essential to comprehending Shakespeare's reconstruction of the Middle Ages in this play: ritual and pageantry, the arbitrary power of kings, and nostalgia. These demonstrate that Shakespeare places the events in *Richard II* at a time that was different from his audience's present, but with which they could simultaneously identify.

I return to the title of this chapter, "the well of history", which is an expression taken from Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820), a nineteenth-century reconstruction of England during the reign of Richard I, the "Lion Heart". In a dedicatory epistle to the imaginary tedious Rev. Dr Dryasdust, Scott apologises for the "slight, unsatisfactory, and trivial manner" with which he has transformed antiquarian research

into the novel in question (Scott 5). He knows Dr Dryasdust believes that "the very office of an antiquary, employed in grave, and, as the vulgar will sometimes allege, in minute and trivial research, must be considered as incapacitating him from successfully compounding a tale of this sort" (Scott 8), meaning that serious historical research should not be used for popular romance purposes. Disputing the belief of the pedantic historian, Scott had had successful precedents in such an endeavour, including Horace Walpole's popular Gothic tale and George Ellis' *Specimens of Early English Metrical Romances* (1805). In his satirical apology to the reverend, Scott adds: "Still the severer antiquary may think that, by thus intermingling fiction with truth, I am polluting the well of history with modern inventions, and impressing upon the rising generation false ideas of the age which I describe" (8). In fact, Scott's *Ivanhoe* played a significant role in later popular perceptions of Richard I and England's medieval past. That is because all interpretations of the past are affected by other reconstructions of the past, be they in historical writing or popular culture.

Furthermore, a fiction writer does not claim complete accuracy. On the contrary, "it is necessary, for exciting interest of any kind, that the subject assumed should be, as it were, translated into the manners as well as the language of the age we live in", as Scott puts it in his defence against Dryasdust's censure (9). Scott advocates that, in order for a modern audience to enjoy a medievalist work, the author must search for "that extensive neutral ground, the proportion, that is, of manners and sentiments which are common to us and to our ancestors, which have been handed down unaltered from them to us, or which, arising out of the principles of our common nature, must have existed alike in either state of society" (Scott 9). Scott also suggests that the medievalist fiction writer should avoid unintelligible archaic language that would only drag the reader away instead of bringing them closer to the medieval past. Therefore, it is the similarities between past and present that connect the readers of the present with the people from the past, because that creates empathy.

Writing over two hundred years before Scott, Shakespeare recreated the reigns of English monarchs for theatrical purposes, intermingling fiction with truth. In this perspective, could Shakespeare be condemned for polluting the well of history? Shakespeare did not propose his history plays to be accurate pieces of historical work, filled with unintelligible archaisms and dealing with sentiments foreign to his Elizabethan audience. On the contrary, Shakespeare's history plays created a bridge between past and present, offering the spectators a chance to *see*, *hear*

and *live* the medieval past, re-connecting with their ancestries. Therefore, neither Shakespeare nor Scott were "polluting" the well of history. Alternatively, they were offering their contemporaries a bucket with which to reach the source.