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

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Chapter 5

*Flashes of Lightning: Shakespeare in the Early Nineteenth Century and Edmund Kean's *Richard II**

*The play'r's profession (tho' I hate the phrase,
'Tis so mechanic in these modern days)
Lies not in trick, or attitude, or start,
Nature's true knowledge is his only art.
The strong-felt passion bolts into the face,
The mind untouch'd, what is it but grimace?
To this one standard make your just appeal,
Here lies the golden secret; learn to FEEL.
Or fool, or monarch, happy, or distrest,
No actor pleases that is not possess'd.*

“The Actor”, ll. 39-48, Robert Lloyd (1733-1764)

After a gap of almost eighty years since John Rich's production of *Richard II* commissioned by the Shakespeare's Ladies Club in 1738, Edmund Kean (1787-1833) brought *Richard II* back to the stage in 1815. Kean's production is inserted within a tradition that reimagines the medieval past as a locus for feeling and emotion, a desire also expressed in the historical paintings of the time and in the zenith of Gothic literature in the 1790s. The first illustrated editions of Shakespeare's plays

in the first decades of the eighteenth century favoured depictions of a confident Bolingbroke in *Richard II*, clad in armour and demanding reverence from his new subjects. However, as the century unfolded, there was a shift in interest from the usurping Bolingbroke towards the victimised Richard, with the latter depicted in meditative poses while locked up at Pomfret castle. In these images, constraining medieval walls frame the deposed king's weakness. The critic William Hazlitt (1778-1830) identified Shakespeare's protagonist in *Richard II* as a character of *pathos*, that is, of feeling combined with weakness. This combination was key in both understanding and acting the role. Nevertheless, when Edmund Kean revived the play in 1815, he tackled the character in another way. He gave a performance full of energy and confidence, reassessing Shakespeare's Richard, turning him into a character of *passion* rather than *pathos*. His portrayal of the medieval king disappointed Hazlitt, an admirer of Kean's career. This clash between a heroic and a weak king is at the heart of my discussion concerning Kean's Middle Ages.

By this time, Shakespeare had achieved established notoriety, and was considered by most as a poetic genius. His intricate language and poetic imagery led some to believe his texts should be rather read than performed, somewhat setting his work apart from the common popular entertainment of the era. Hazlitt was an influential voice in this regard. In his account of Edmund Kean as Richard II in the premiere season at Drury Lane, Hazlitt wrote: "Representing the very finest of them [Shakespeare's plays] on the stage, even by the best actors, is, we apprehend, an abuse of the genius of the poet, and even in those of a second-rate class, the quantity of sentiment and imagery greatly outweighs the immediate impression of the situation and story" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 221). That is because the imagination is deeply connected to one's individual impressions and perceptions, and, therefore, superior to the more passive act of witnessing.

A re-evaluation of the imagination is central to the period's understanding of art. According to Hazlitt, Shakespeare's "more refined poetical beauties and minuter strokes of character" are lost on the audience in a theatre. The passages that appeal the most to our feelings and senses are "little else than an interruption and a drag to the business of the stage" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 222). This 'loss', in Hazlitt's view, was indefensible. For this reason, he warns his contemporaries: "we should never go to see them [the plays] acted, if we could help it" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 222). Hazlitt indeed could not help it; he was an avid theatregoer himself, writing theatrical reviews and essays from 1813 until his death in 1830. Although Hazlitt

was a passionate enthusiast of the theatrical sphere, he recommended the act of reading Shakespeare because it is a *personal* imaginative task.

In a piece for the *London Magazine* in April 1820, Hazlitt wrote that: “The age we live in is critical, didactic, paradoxical, romantic, but it is not dramatic” (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 432). Hazlitt himself embodies the paradoxical nature of his age, exemplified by his advocacy of the act of reading Shakespeare while being himself a constant visitor at the London theatres. Nevertheless, the critic believed that no good tragedy or comedy had been written in the last fifty years up to that moment in 1820. He attributed the lack of good drama at the time to the period’s preoccupation with universal issues rather than personal experiences.

Jonathan Mulrooney writes that Hazlitt’s criticism offers “an imagining of what it means to be a human being in an age when the most radical of idealisms has failed and in which the British response to that trauma has begun to elide individual and local identities” (154–55). Mulrooney refers to the French Revolution in 1789, which awakened spirits of change and freedom throughout Europe, but eventually resulted in another era of tyrannical government in France, under Napoleon Bonaparte’s dictatorship after the coup of 18/19 Brumaire in 1799, year VIII under the French Republican calendar. Hazlitt wrote about the consequences of the Revolution to the late-eighteenth-century individual: “That event has rivetted all eyes, and distracted all hearts; and, like people staring at a comet, in the panic and confusion in which we have been huddled together, we have not had time to laugh at one another’s defects, or to condole over one another’s misfortunes” (Hazlitt, *The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 433). The consequence is that national concerns overshadow individual experience. As Hazlitt puts it:

We have become a nation of politicians and newsmongers; our inquiries in the streets are no less than after the health of Europe; and in men’s faces, we may see strange matters written, – the rise of stocks, the loss of battles, the fall of kingdoms, and the death of kings. The Muse, meanwhile, droops on bye-corners of the mind, and is forced to take up with the refuse of our thoughts. (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 433)

In Hazlitt’s view, the focus of art had been directed towards the general nature of men, prompted by the revolutionary end of the eighteenth century, leaving no room for the appreciation of human caprices and passions – the core of tragedy and comedy.

Hazlitt disdains the rise of the “public man”, shaped by the universalising character of the commercial press. The critic borrows words from Edmund Burke’s anti-revolution pamphlet *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790): men have become public creatures, “embowelled of our natural entrails, and stuffed with paltry blurred sheets of paper about the rights of man” (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 433). The public man who concerns himself with the affairs of the world and the rights of men is, according to Hazlitt, not dramatic. In this context, the critic felt that the individuality of art had lost its prominence. As a consequence, drama failed to excite an emotional response from the spectators.

The critic associated the loss of drama of his lifetime with the dominance of the English press, particularly the commercial press: “the press has been the ruin of the stage, unless we are greatly deceived” (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 433). Newspapers were being created and printed daily, and, by the end of the eighteenth century, political and critical periodicals were established in addition to the ones that reported only news. Political ideas were thus circulating more broadly, available to the literate population.⁵⁵ According to James van Horn Melton, the developing of this burgeoning print culture provided a medium through which private individual members could make their opinions known, and therefore public (1). This exchange of public opinion was not restricted to print, but also encompassed theatres, salons, coffee houses and other entertainment venues. These places “heralded the arrival of ‘the public’ as a cultural and political arbiter, an entity to which contemporaries increasingly came to refer as a sovereign tribunal” (Melton 2). Following the debates inspired by the French Revolution to change the old order of things, the public sphere became increasingly invested with authority over political matters.

⁵⁵ William St Clair has investigated the growth of the London book production. For example, in the period 1700-1750 there was an estimated average output of 500 books by title. Between 1800 and 1810, the number had risen to 800, an increase of about 300 books annually within roughly one hundred years. By 1827, they were 1,000 and rising fast, which meant an increase of about 200 books annually within roughly two decades (455-456). The literacy rates also increased in this period, one of the contributing factors being that progressively more occupations required the ability to read and write. According to St Clair, the literacy rates differed greatly across the United Kingdom, depending on social class and geographical location. As the author explains, “by the middle of the romantic period more than half the adult population had the ability to read, some quite well, and in some areas such as London and lowland Scotland a higher proportion” (266).

The public individual is associated with the rise of the public sphere, as I have investigated in Chapter 1. As we have seen, political concerns that go beyond the feelings of one person find space for debate in the public sphere, and the theatre has been one such place. Drama can evoke laughter, tears, fear, or any other emotion Hazlitt could characterise as passion. However, the theatre also has a broader role, that of connecting the audience with the outside world via the stage. Hazlitt is not against the public power of theatre, but, rather, against a homogenising public sphere that would erase individuality. For Hazlitt, the theatre should highlight personal and individual experiences, which would in turn be talked about and shared in the public sphere, thus rejecting a homogenisation of identity. It is only by contrasting experiences with others that one is able to reflect on their own selfhood.

The theatrical public sphere is a place for bringing people together to discuss art and how art moves them personally. According to Mulrooney, “reading, writing, and talking about theatre take on [...] a humanizing rather than a dehumanizing tenor” (154), different from the universalising nature of the commercial press. Allowing “the coming together of men and women in theatre’s urban and unruly space”, the theatre grants “nothing less than an ongoing reconception of Britain’s public life along experiential rather than ‘abstracted’ lines” (Mulrooney 154). The experiential nature of theatre is accordingly at the core of Hazlitt’s conception of the theatrical public sphere. The theatre offers the playgoer the possibility to return to the local and individual, instead of the national and general. This notion of the social role of theatre at the beginning of the nineteenth century is crucial to understanding Edmund Kean’s contribution to it, as well as to placing his Shakespearean productions in context. In addition to arousing an emotional response from the audience, Kean reignites the attention to the political subtext in *Richard II*.

5.1 The Middle Ages and the Spirit of the Age

In an era that lacked ‘dramaticity’, returning to – or, rather, imagining – a more dramatic past was a way to reconceptualise the present, infusing it with sentiment. Artists thus created a mythical ‘Age of Chivalry’, bearing little resemblance to the actual medieval period, as a way to summon the emotions that the present supposedly lacked. Hence, the profusion of medieval imagery and subject-matter in literature, art and theatre at the turn of the nineteenth century. The idealism

of the real world had failed with the unsuccessful Revolution in France, but the fictional world allowed alternative scenarios, including an alternative Middle Ages.

As we have seen, Hazlitt believed that dramatic poetry was incompatible with the political and revolutionary spirit of his age. He illustrates his point referring to Sir Walter Scott's historical reconstruction in fiction. In Hazlitt's view, Scott excelled in the "grotesque and the romantic", offering "that which has been preserved of ancient manners and customs, and barbarous times and characters, and which strikes and staggers the mind the more, by the contrast it affords to the present artificial and effeminate state of society" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 436). Interestingly, Hazlitt counteracts the artificiality of his age with the ancient manners and customs of the "barbarous" medieval past. The critic sees his time as effeminate in contrast to a masculine medieval past, characterising his present age as passive and lacking individual heroic initiative.

As we have seen in Chapter 2, Scott was a prominent figure in the Medieval Revival, creating stories of medieval Britain and Scotland such as *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *The Monastery* (1820) that would infuse the minds of his contemporaries with romantic images of the Middle Ages. As Alice Chandler explains, Scott created such minutely detailed descriptions of the medieval world that many readers took his fiction for historical truth (12), intermingling fact and fiction, and reinforcing a perception of the medieval past as a place for heroic adventure. Chandler identifies Scott's medieval myth as appealing to the desires of his age: "its wish to make the individual life heroic and yet to unify and order society", it was also related "to the Romantic fear of time and to its converse, the desire for permanence and stasis" (51). The Middle Ages could materialise the period's desire for an ideal and stable society.

Ivanhoe was Scott's first novel about the English past. According to Hazlitt, despite "teeming with life and throbbing with interest", it was "a decided failure" when compared to his previous works. He claims that the variety of events and characters is distracting, there is too much historical detail, and, in short, "the body of the work is cold and colourless" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 438). Hazlitt's explanation of the limitations of Scott's writing illustrates the relevance he confers on emotions: instead of being passionate, *Ivanhoe* "is strictly national; [...] traditional; [...] relies on actual manners and external badges of character; [...] insists on costume and dialect" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 438). Hazlitt sees *Ivanhoe* as a representation of national history and concerns, which fails to affect the reader with instances of the passions that move human nature in general.

Hazlitt's comparison between the characters Rob Roy, from Scott's 1817 eponymous novel, and Robin Hood from *Ivanhoe*, is telling: "What rich Highland blood flows through the veins of the one; colours his hair, freckles his skin, bounds in his step, swells in his heart, kindles in his eye: what poor waterish puddle creeps through the soul of Locksley; and what a lay, listless figure he makes in his coat of Lincoln-green, like a figure to let, in the novel of Ivanhoe!" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 438). Scott's Rob Roy springs from the past with passion, whereas his Robin Hood fails to convey any emotion to his readers – he is merely the representation of a historical myth on the page. Hazlitt justifies this difference by speculating that Scott did not have the same interest in English history as he had in Scottish tradition, the setting of his previous novels. Whether or not that was the case, what Hazlitt's review demonstrates is that the past evoked in *Rob Roy* is more capable of inciting a passionate response than *Ivanhoe*.

Hazlitt exposes the borrowing of novel plots to be adapted to the stage as a lack of creativity, another endorsement of the artificiality of his era. For instance, Thomas Dibdin (1771-1841) staged a melodramatic adaptation of Scott's poem "The Lady of the Lake" at the Surrey Theatre in September 1810. The poem had been published four months previously and sold over 25,000 copies, promising a high attendance at the theatre (Tanitch 30). The period also witnessed theatrical adaptations of a number of fairy tales, including a revival of Michael Kelly's *Bluebeard or Female Curiosity* (1798) at Covent Garden in February 1811. This production included the appearance of sixteen white horses and a dog on stage, which caused a sensation in the audience (Tanitch 31). Characters from the sixteenth-century Italian *commedia dell'arte* were also seen on stage in productions such as Charles Farley's (1771-1859) *Harlequin Asmodeus and Cupid on Crutches* at Covent Garden in December 1810, Joseph Grimaldi's (1778-1837) *Harlequin and Padmanaba or, The Goldfish* at Surrey Theatre in December 1811 and Dibdin's *Harlequin Brilliant* at Sadler's Wells Theatre in July 1815. Reflecting on the adaptation of old stories, Hazlitt writes that "with all the craving which the public and the Managers feel for novelty in this respect, they can only procure it at second-hand by vamping up with new scenery, decorations, and dresses, what has been already rendered at once sacred and familiar to us in the closet" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 437). In his view, the written text is *sacred*, and should therefore be confined to the pleasure of individual reading. The way a novel is contrived, the critic says, is not fitting for the stage. That is why he believed that the theatrical adaptations of novels could rarely be successful.

Hazlitt refers to two specific adaptations of Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819) to demonstrate his point: one called *Ivanhoe* at Covent Garden, and the other called *The Hebrew*, at Drury Lane. Both were staged in the first months of the year 1820, speedily following the publication of the novel and profiting from its success and popularity. Hazlitt acknowledges the commercial advantages of adapting a successful novel: it "fills the coffers of the theatre for a time; gratifies public curiosity till another new novel appears" and, he adds sarcastically, "probably flatters the illustrious prose-writer, who must be fastidious indeed" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 437). He claims that theatrical adaptations offer only "a twentieth part of [the author's] genius", comparing it to "showing a brick for a house". Surprisingly, however, Hazlitt was pleased with the two aforementioned adaptations of Scott's *Ivanhoe*: the play at Covent Garden "seems to give all (or nearly so) that we remember distinctly in the novel", and the one at Drury Lane, "which constantly wanders from it [the novel], without any apparent object or meaning, yet does so without exciting much indignation or regret" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 439).

George Soane (1790-1860), a known author of melodramas, wrote *The Hebrew*. Hazlitt felt that, as a play, it "is ill-constructed, without proportion or connection", and as poetry, "it has its beauties, and those we think neither mean nor few". But the production's main achievement was the "individual touches of nature and passion" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 439). He found particularly moving "the turns and starts of passion in feeble and wronged old age", which were "delicate and striking", delivered mainly by Isaac, the Jew of York, played by Edmund Kean. Isaac's character combines feebleness and passion, a combination that Hazlitt understands as *pathos*. It indicates that Kean was able to perform such feelings on stage, but decided to take a different approach when acting Shakespeare's Richard II five years earlier, as I argue below.

If Hazlitt had to choose only one of the stage adaptations of *Ivanhoe*, he recommends his readers the following: "Of the two plays, [...] go to see *Ivanhoe* at Covent Garden: but for ourselves, we would rather see the *Hebrew* a second time" (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 440). The fact that Kean managed to offer the public expressive instances of feeling makes the experience at Drury Lane more meaningful than the superior textual adaptation of *Ivanhoe* at Covent Garden. Hazlitt puts the characters' *pathos* in prominence over the grandeur of the scenery or historical authenticity. He adds that the fact that Mr. Penley, the actor who played *Ivanhoe* at Drury Lane, was wearing an armour, "done after a bold and noble design", only hindered the scene, rendering it nearly ridiculous, since he had

to run from one side of the stage to the other in those heavy clothes, “as fast as his legs can carry him” (*The London Magazine*, Jan-June 1820, 439). In this instance, the accuracy of costume worked as an impediment for the actor, breaking the audience’s illusion of seeing the past.

The theatregoer’s experience is necessarily framed by the actor, who works as a threshold between the dramatic text and the audience – much as the prologue functions as a liminal space between the world within the theatre and the world outside, as we have seen in Chapter 1. Hazlitt argues that the actor’s business is “to imitate humanity in general”. However, it is a business “that perishes with him, and leaves no traces of itself, but in the faint descriptions of the pen or pencil” (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 173) – hence the importance of the theatrical critic to reconstruct on page the actor’s art. The actor should affect the critic, causing an impression that he would deem worthy of describing to his readers.

5.2 *The Sun’s Bright Child*: Edmund Kean

The previous section has described the state of the theatrical public sphere in the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Edmund Kean’s production was first staged. Despite Hazlitt’s deeper appreciation of Shakespeare on the page, he admits that there are certain aspects of the Shakespearean drama that are livelier on the wooden platform: “it is only the *pantomime* part of tragedy, the exhibition of immediate and physical distress, that which gives the greatest opportunity for ‘inexpressible dumb-show and noise’”, quoting from *Hamlet* (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 222). The wordless elements of the dramatic text, moments of action and expression of feelings, can better be presented by actors on stage.

Hazlitt’s appreciation of the embodiment of emotion on stage refers to a style of acting still reminiscent from the mid-eighteenth century, whose main exponent was the theatrical star David Garrick (1717-1779). The extract of the poem that opens this chapter, “The Actor” by Robert Lloyd (1733-1764), written in honour of Garrick, “thrice Happy Genius”, exemplifies the purpose of the actor: “learn to FEEL”, in capital letters. Hazlitt believed that only a few actors of his time had managed to achieve such expectation and to fill Garrick’s shoes, Edmund Kean being one of them. Given the period’s understanding of art as a means to awaken feelings, the perception of the medieval past as a trigger for emotion, and the ambiguous impression of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* (either as a tyrannical ruler or as

a weak and suffering king), it is significant to examine how Kean interpreted the play and the character in the 1815 season at Drury Lane.

1815 was a year of renewed political unrest – England was in the fourth year of the Regency, since King George III (1738-1820) had been deemed unfit to rule in 1811, and France witnessed the deposition and exile of the controversial Napoléon Bonaparte (1769-1821). In this context, Kean performs a heroic Richard II, distant from Hazlitt’s ideal of the Shakespearean character as one of weakness combined with feeling. It was not a result of Kean’s inability to convey such a combination, since he was praised for those precise elements in his acting of the Jew in the 1820 adaptation of Scott’s *Ivanhoe* at Drury Lane. Although Kean’s Richard II was performed five years previously to the Jew in *The Hebrew*, it can be assumed that Kean’s choice to perform a heroic Richard II instead of a feeble character was deliberate, which leads me to reflect on the possible reasons for this choice of approach.

Edmund Kean spent his childhood in proximity to the theatre. He was the illegitimate son of the actress and prostitute Ann Carey, who left him under the care of other women, especially of Charlotte Tidswell, or ‘Aunt Tid’, the mistress of his uncle, Moses Kean. Tidswell was a member of the Drury Lane company and encouraged Edmund to participate in the theatrical sphere. He made occasional appearances in minor roles as a child at Drury Lane, he became a part of John Richardson’s booth-stage troupe that toured from village to village, and secured roles in pantomimes and illegitimate playhouses in the provinces (Thomson 139–40).

When *Richard II* premiered in March 1815, Kean’s reputation was already established as the most promising actor of the age. He had made his debut in London only a year before with the role of Shylock in a revival of *The Merchant of Venice* on 26 January at Drury Lane. Hazlitt wrote about Kean’s first appearance in the royal theatre in *The Morning Chronicle* of 27 January: “For voice, eye, action, and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him” (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 179). Hazlitt understands Shylock to be the character of “a man brooding over one idea, that of its wrongs, and bent on one unalterable purpose, that of revenge” (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 179). Kean was not as successful in conveying this feeling, according to the critic, but he excelled in “giving effect to the conflict of passions arising out of the contrasts of situation, in varied vehemence of declamation, in keenness of sarcasm, in the rapidity of his transitions from one tone and feeling to another, in propriety and novelty of action, presenting a succession of striking pictures, and giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise” (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 179).

Hazlitt appreciated Kean's ability to make quick transitions – both physically and emotionally, depicting the inner conflict of the character.

Peter Thomson writes that Kean differed in style and approach from John Philip Kemble (1757-1823), the theatre manager of the Covent Garden of the previous generation, although still active on stage at the beginning of Kean's career but soon to retire in 1817. Kemble was a man of the ruling theatrical elite, son of the actor and theatre manager Roger Kemble (1721-1802) and brother of the great tragedian Sarah Siddons (1755-1831), whereas Kean "came to Shakespearean tragedy like an invader, not an adherent" (Thomson 145). In relation to style, Kemble relied on a scholarly pursuit to give a sense of order and unity to the Shakespearean canon, while Kean, "lacking the steadiness of purpose that distinguished Kemble at his best, sought only to exploit the emotional range" (Thomson 150). Kemble belonged to an earlier tradition of Shakespearean acting, focused on form and closer to the standards of eighteenth-century theatre, and Kean introduced a new manner of understanding the actor's role, one that Hazlitt shared: the embodiment of feeling.

Thomson adds that Kemble was confident of a successful season for the Covent Garden in 1814, having recovered from the damage to his reputation occasioned by the 1809 Old Price riots.⁵⁶ The fact that a new actor was to premiere during that season at the rival theatre did not worry Kemble. In January 1814 Kemble starred as Coriolanus at Covent Garden, while Kean performed Shylock at Drury Lane. Kean opted for a different approach to Shylock's character, different from what other actors, Kemble included, had previously done. The poet Bryan Waller Procter (1787-1874), one of the first biographers of Kean, wrote that Kean had only met the rest of the cast on the morning of the first performance. The other actors believed the new and still unknown performer was "sure to fail". As the rehearsal started and Kean spoke his first words, he was interrupted by the manager Raymond, who did not approve of Kean's changes to the established part. The actor supposedly replied: "it is an innovation, Sir; it is totally different from anything that has ever been done on these boards. [...] perhaps I may be wrong; but, if so, *the Public* will set me right" (Procter 31-32). Kean was not wrong, his impersonation of the wronged Jew drew applause from the public. Procter describes how Kean "went on, victorious, to the end [of the character's participation in the play]; gathering glory after glory,

⁵⁶ The Old Price Riots were protests by spectators who revolted against the raise in ticket prices and reorganization of the sitting map at Covent Garden. They interrupted performances and rioted for 67 consecutive days, claiming their right to participate in London's cultural scene (Voskuil 246).

shout after shout, till the curtain fell. Nothing like that acting, – nothing like that applause, had, for many previous years, resounded within the walls of the ancient or modern Drury. It was a new era” (Procter 39). Kemble was forced to admit the strength of Kean’s novelties in acting, which was confirmed by the new actor’s subsequent popularity in the London theatrical scene. Kemble was sixty years old when he retired from the stage in 1817, three years after Kean’s first appearance at Drury Lane. It was, perhaps, Kean’s newfound fame as well as Kemble’s old age that led him away from the spotlight.

In February of the same year, Kean played the role of Richard III. The play had been staged a year earlier at Covent Garden. On that occasion, the popular former child actor William Henry West Betty (1791-1874), now aged 22, played the title role, but it was not a success (Tanitch 37). On the other hand, Kean received a lot of attention for his performance at Drury Lane, mainly positive reviews for bringing innovation to the role. Hazlitt describes it as “entirely his own, without any traces of imitation of any other actor” (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 180). The critic pinpoints what it is about Shakespeare’s character that the actor should be able to perform: Shakespeare’s Richard is “towering and lofty, as well as aspiring; equally impetuous and commanding; haughty, violent, and subtle; bold and treacherous; confident in his strength, as well as in his cunning; raised high by his birth, and higher by his genius and his crimes; a royal usurper, a princely hypocrite, a tyrant, and a murderer of the House of Plantagenet” (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 181). This is a role that Kemble and also Thomas Cooke (1786-1864) had played before, but neither had managed to convey Richard’s passionately conflicted character. Although Hazlitt acknowledges that Kean did not succeed completely, he affirms that the actor managed to surpass his predecessors.

Thomson explains the political repercussions of performing *Richard III* in 1814: George III had been declared unfit to rule, the Prince Regent’s inclination to marry was as cynical as Richard III’s, and few of the king’s twelve surviving children were free from scandal (155). The representation of the bad use of power on stage would possibly lead the audience to draw parallels between the stage and the state of the monarchy. Moreover, it was a period in which continental Europe still felt the consequences of the French Revolution’s attack on ancient systems of hereditary government, and witnessed the rise and fall of Napoléon as both a challenger of such old power institutions but also as a man fallen prey to ambition and thirst for power. Peter Manning stresses that Kean acted Cibber’s adaptation of the Shakespearean text, which “replace[d] subtleties with crude effects, and reduce[d] Shake-

spere's Machiavellian figure to a boisterous monster" (193). The lawyer and diarist Crabb Robinson (1775-1867), for instance, described Kean's portrayal of the king as "unkingly" (Thomson 156) for accentuating the evils of abusing power and "royal misdemeanour", incompatible with an idealised perception of the monarch.

Lord Byron (1788-1824) was one of the spectators of Kean's Richard III. Byron was an early admirer of Kean, and Kean's performance fascinated the poet to such a degree that he attended the theatre every night during the first season; he sent Kean an elegant snuff-box from Italy, and wrote the following verses:

Thou art the sun's bright child!
The genius that irradiates thy mind
Caught all its purity and light from heaven
Thine is the task, with mastery most perfect,
To bind the passions captive in thy train
[...] I herald thee to Immortality! (Hackett 128)

The poet was enthralled by one of the "added points" that Kean introduced to the part, especially the one on the eve of the Battle of Bosworth. Both the critics Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt (1784-1859) (who saw the play in 1815 after his release from prison)⁵⁷ wrote about this specific moment. Hunt was disappointed overall with Kean's acting, deeming his style "too artificial to be a mere falling off from nature" (Rowell 52). However, despite Kean's artificiality, Hunt praises the particular moments of naturalness and authenticity that Kean brings to the character, "passages of truth and originality" (Rowell 52). One such moment is that on the night before the battle. According to Hunt,

it would be impossible to express in a deeper manner the intentness of Richard's mind upon the battle that was about to take place, or to quit the scene with an abruptness and self-recollecting, pithy and familiar, than by the reveries in which he [Kean] stands drawing lines upon the ground with

⁵⁷ Leigh Hunt was the co-founder of the radical journal *The Examiner*. He was sentenced to two years in prison for attacking the Prince Regent in print. He wrote for *The Examiner* on 26 February 1815: "The Editor for the first time since his imprisonment went to the Theatre on Monday last, when he saw Mr. Kean" (Rowell 51).

the point of his sword, and his sudden recovery of himself with a ‘Good night’. (Rowell 53)

It is one of Kean’s special moments, because he manages to convey feeling with naturalness, awakening the spectator’s sympathy. Kean’s creation of the king drawing on sand with the point of his sword became iconic, and Byron incorporated it in his conspicuous “Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte [*sic*]”, from April 1814, after the poet’s disappointment with the Emperor’s easy retreat to the island of Elba:

Then haste thee to thy sullen Isle,
And gaze upon the sea;
That element may meet thy smile—
It ne’er was ruled by thee!
Or trace with thine all idle hand
In loitering mood upon the sand
That Earth is now as free!
That Corinth’s pedagogue hath now
Transferred his by-word to thy brow. (ll. 118-126)

Byron connects Kean’s performance of a meditative moment that precedes the tragic battle at Bosworth with Napoléon’s isolation in the island. Byron’s biased poetical expression manifests his disillusionment with the former hero-figure in forsaking his ambitious projects. Byron is embittered at the failed attempt to retain a French Republic and its consequential drawbacks in initiating a republic state in England, more than he is concerned with the fall of the individual man. Byron’s poem expresses resentment for what Napoléon had represented for him, which was, in fact, but an illusion, a “fabricated” image of Napoléon that Byron constructed for himself.

5.2.1 *Kean and Napoléon Bonaparte*

The moment when Kean’s Richard draws meditatively on the sand with his sword incites sympathy from the beholder, who – even if temporarily – identifies with the calculating Richard. It is a complex and contradictory emotion to feel sympathy for the villain of the play, hence its powerfulness. By transferring this impas-

sioned moment to Napoléon, Byron awakens the same paradoxical reaction from his readers.

Byron also identified himself with the pre-exile heroic figure of Bonaparte. As Manning puts it, “it is not fortuitous that an echo of Kean should be found in *the Ode on Napoleon*, for Byron’s self-identification with Napoleon was recognized by their contemporaries in a commonplace linking of the two that often expanded to include Edmund Kean” (196). Byron’s poem thus connects himself, Napoléon, Kean and Richard III. The playgoer Leveson Gower writes in a letter after watching Kean as Richard III: “Kean gives me the idea of Buonaparte in a furor. I was frightened, alarmed” (Sprague 79). The Irish poet and diarist Melesina Trench (1768-1827), in her *Correspondence*, writes about her experience seeing the same production: “[Kean] reminded me constantly of Buonaparte that restless quickness, that Catiline inquietude, that fearful somewhat resembling the impatience of a lion in his cage. Though I am not a lover of the drama [...], I could willingly have heard him repeat his part that same evening” (Trench 283). The poet Keats also sees the connection; he categorises Byron and Napoléon, as well as Charmian from *Antony and Cleopatra*, as belonging to “the worldly, theatrical and pantomimical” in opposition to “the unearthly, spiritual and ethereal” (Keats 395). Finally, Thomson compares Kean’s impulse to exceed expectations with the character of “the heroes of 1814”: Byron and Napoléon (163).

These examples demonstrate that the images of Kean and Napoléon shared a common ground in the early-nineteenth-century cultural scene in London. In Frederick William Hawkins’ biography of the actor *The Life of Edmund Kean* (1869), he writes about Kean’s acceptance of the audience’s applause after his second time as Shylock during his debut season at Drury Lane. He writes: “The fact that, after he had made a graceful acknowledgment of the welcoming applause, he took about as much notice of those in front as Napoleon is said to have done of his Parisian audiences, at once impressed the spectators in his favour” (140). Hawkins’ comparison between Kean’s theatrical audience at Drury Lane with Napoléon’s Parisian audiences adds topicality to the connection.

Hawkins tells the story of how Kean returned to Portsmouth as a renowned actor and supposedly looked for the proprietor of a tavern who had been generous to him as a young itinerant actor. He wanted to return the kindness he had received, but learned that the old man had passed away. Kean found the servant who had worked for the man, who told the actor how the old man had died. When Kean asked for the time, he realised that the servant did not own a watch. He

then gave the man five pounds so that he could buy a watch and think of his old master every time he checked the time. Although this “magnanimous and almost extravagant generosity”, as Hawkins puts it, cannot be verified, the story serves as a way for Hawkins to compare the actor with Napoléon once again:

Edmund illustrated his natural goodness of heart, and exhibited a superiority to the silly vanity of wishing to bury his antecedents in oblivion. The spirit which prompted Napoleon to astonish the crowned heads at Dresden by adverting to something which happened “when he was a lieutenant in the regiment of La Fête,” and Goldsmith to startle a brilliant circle at Bennet Langton’s by referring to something which occurred “when he lived among the beggars in Axe-lane,” distinguished the great tragedian of fifty years ago in an eminent degree. (324-25)

For Hawkins, Edmund Kean, Napoléon and the writer Oliver Goldsmith⁵⁸ (1728-1774) were examples of men who achieved success but who did not hide their humble beginnings. It is interesting to note that Hawkins writes over thirty-five years after Kean’s death, but the association of the actor with Bonaparte still remained. Moreover, Hawkins’ recollection of the French military leader is by no means impartial: there was only mention of Napoléon’s humility and generosity, there is no mention of his tyrannical rule.

On 23 November 1813, one year before Kean’s debut at Drury Lane, Byron wrote in his diary about his discontent with Napoléon’s eminent fall after his failed conquest in Russia. For Byron, Napoléon was a symbol of republicanism against the old monarchical system that was still strong in England. He noted:

Past events have unnerved me; and all I can now do is to make life an amusement, and look on while others play. After all, even the highest game of crowns and sceptres, what is it? Vide Napoleon’s last twelvemonth. It has completely upset my system of fatalism. I thought, if crushed, he would have fallen, when *fractus illabatur orbis*, and not have been pared away to gradual insignificance; that all this was not a mere *jeu* of the gods, but a

⁵⁸ Goldsmith was part of The Club or Literary Club, a London dining club founded in February 1764 by Joshua Reynolds, Samuel Johnson, Bennet Langton, Edmund Burke, and others. The actor David Garrick and the Shakespearean editor George Steevens were also members.

prelude to greater changes and mightier events. But men never advance beyond a certain point; and here we are, retrograding, to the dull, stupid old system, – balance of Europe – poising straws upon kings' noses, instead of wringing them off! Give me a republic, or a despotism of one, rather than the mixed government of one, two, three. A republic! – look in the history of the Earth – Rome, Greece, Venice, France, Holland, America, our short (eheu!) Commonwealth, and compare it with what they did under masters. (Byron, Vol. II, 272-73)

Byron's diary entry makes it clear his belief that, even if Napoléon was a despotic ruler, he was still a change from the old hereditary monarchy. On 18 February 1814, Byron is afraid of the outcome of Napoléon's enterprise, fearing the end of the 'Republic': "Napoleon! – this week will decide his fate.⁵⁹ All seems against him; but I believe and hope he will win – at least, beat back the invaders. What right have we to prescribe sovereigns to France? Oh for a Republic! 'Brutus, thou sleepest.'"⁶⁰ (Byron, Vol. I, 393)

Byron even had a print of Napoléon, engraved by Raffaello Morghen (1758-1833), framed and hung on his bedroom wall: "It is framed; and the Emperor becomes his robes as if he had been hatched in them" (Byron, Vol. I, 396). Byron's attitude exemplifies the myth constructed around the figure of the French military leader. His image was used to advocate different – and, sometimes, opposing – ideas. In 1819, Richard Whately (1787-1863) published the pamphlet *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte*. In its introduction, the writer comments that the public's attention on "the extraordinary personage from whose ambition we are supposed to have so narrowly escaped" has not abated: "We are still occupied in recounting the exploits, discussing the character, enquiring into the present situation, and even conjecturing as to the future prospects of Napoleon Buonaparte" (Whately 9). The popular fascination with Bonaparte's history is based on a constructed image of the myth: "the extraordinary nature" of his exploits, "their greatness and extensive importance", as well as their "unexampled strangeness" and the "stimulant mysterious uncertainty that hangs over the character of the man" all

⁵⁹ Napoléon fought the battle of Mormant against Marshal Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher's army on 17 February, 1814, and that of Montereau against Prince Schwartzenberg on the 18th. The French were victorious in both.

⁶⁰ Byron quotes from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

contributed to a “fabricated” image of Napoléon (Whately 9–10). Descriptions of Napoléon varied from a man “of extraordinary talents and courage” to a man “of very moderate abilities, and a rank coward”; his expedition against Egypt was seen as “planned and conducted, according to some, with the most consummate skill”, and, to others, “with the utmost wildness and folly”. Whately does not deny the existence of Bonaparte but does refute the Bonaparte ‘created’ by newspapers. He adds, sarcastically: “whatever is *long adhered to* and often *repeated*, especially if it also appears in *several different* papers (and this, though they notoriously copy from one another,) is almost sure to be generally believed” (20). Repetition creates an illusion of truth.

The newspapers also had a pecuniary advantage for circulating extraordinary stories about Napoléon, since they would be more appealing to the public, who would in turn be incited to buy the paper. Finally, periodicals also normally followed a determined political stance, for which the articles would be adapted to enforce the view of the paper. In this case, Whately humorously adds:

Now it must be admitted, that Buonaparte is a political bugbear, most convenient to any administration: “if you do not adopt our measures and reject those of our opponents, Buonaparte will be sure to prevail over you; if you do not submit to the Government, at least under our administration, this formidable enemy will take advantage of your insubordination to conquer and enslave you: pay your taxes cheerfully, or the tremendous Buonaparte will take all from you”. (24)

Members and supporters of the Whig party, for instance, “the warm advocates for liberty, and opposers of the encroachments of monarchical power”, supported Napoléon’s campaign even though he had been represented as having been “if not a tyrant, at least an absolute despot” (Whately 32). Whately speculates as to why these contrasting images were circulating – and why people believed so easily in them – and the result is a satiric cautionary tale against the unreliability of the press and the propagandistic war of political parties. Additionally, Whately’s pamphlet sheds light on the ambiguity surrounding the representation of Napoléon in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Representing Bonaparte as either a threat or a victory, or as either a tyrant or a hero, affected the way art depicted power and monarchy at the time.

5.2.2 *Kean's Richard II*

In Kean's second season at Drury Lane, the actor performed an ambiguous representation of monarchical power. In comparison with *Richard III's* "noise and bustle", Hazlitt admits he prefers "the nature and feeling" of *Richard II*, where "the weakness of the king leaves us leisure to take a greater interest in the misfortunes of the man" (Hazlitt, Vol. IV, 272). After a demonstration of kingly authority and the arbitrariness of his behaviour in Act I, the spectator faces Richard II "staggering under the unlooked-for blows of fortune, bewailing his loss of kingly power, not preventing it, sinking under the aspiring genius of Bolingbroke, his authority trampled on, his hopes failing him, and his pride crushed and broken down under insults and injuries, which his own misconduct had provoked, but which he has not the courage or manliness to resent" (Hazlitt, Vol. IV, 272). Whereas the focus of interest in *Richard III* is the ascension to power, in *Richard II* it is the fall from power that takes centre stage. While Richard III is a cruel cold-blooded tyrant, Richard II is a weak effeminate victim of Bolingbroke's cunning.

The role of Richard II evokes a different type of emotion from the audience than that of Richard III. As Hazlitt explains: "we feel neither respect nor love for the deposed monarch; for he is as wanting in energy as in principle: but we pity him, for he pities himself" (Hazlitt, Vol. IV, 272). The pity incited by the Shakespearean character creates a bond with the audience, who sympathises with Richard not as a body politic but as a body natural: "The sufferings of the man make us forget that he ever was a king" (Hazlitt, Vol. IV, 273). His mortality, his weakness, his uncertainty is what renders Richard a powerful character, but one of *pathos* and not *passion*.

Hazlitt reviewed Kean's performance as the title role for *The Examiner* on 19 March 1815:

If his conception is not always just or profound, his execution is masterly; that where he is not the very character he assumes, he makes a most brilliant rehearsal of it; that he never wants energy, ingenuity, and animation, though he is often deficient in dignity, grace, and tenderness; that if he frequently disappoints us in those parts where we expect him to do the most, he as frequently surprises us by striking out unexpected beauties of his own; and that the objectionable parts of his acting arise chiefly from the physical impediments he has to overcome. (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 224)

This extract of Hazlitt's criticism illustrates the author's ambiguous perception of Kean's acting style. Although Kean may not have reached Hazlitt's standards to convey the Shakespearean genius, the critic grants that the actor conveys emotion, even surprising the audience by offering his own personal contribution to the Shakespearean character, his well-known innovative individual touches.

Hazlitt writes that it was a common assumption that Richard II was Kean's finest role until that point in his career in 1815, despite his success as Richard III the previous season. Nevertheless, Hazlitt found it "a total misrepresentation" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 223). In Kean's *Richard II*, Hazlitt perceived "only one or two electrical shocks", whereas in other roles the actor had offered many more. Hazlitt's main criticism on Kean's acting was that he was either energetic or nothing, he made Richard "a character of *passion*, that is, of feeling combined with energy; whereas it is a character of *pathos*, that is to say, of feeling combined with weakness" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 223). Hazlitt's distinction between 'passion' and 'pathos' is significant, the latter being a combination of feeling with weakness, the core of Richard's tragedy, and a challenging emotion for an actor to convey. Procter manifests a similar opinion concerning Kean's Richard II. Although an admirer of the actor's career, Procter thought Kean's "was not a true portrait of the weak and melancholy Richard" (126). Procter also identified the lack of what Hazlitt describes as pathos in Kean's role: "The grandson of Edward the Third was not fierce nor impetuous, but weak and irritable, and in his downfall utterly prostrate in spirit. We did not recognise these qualities in the acting of Mr. Kean, who was almost as fiery and energetic as he used to be in Richard the Third" (Procter 126). Both Procter's and Hazlitt's reviews indicate that Kean could not offer a combination of emotion and frailty to the spectator. Kean gave energy and passion, but no despair.

In Hazlitt's 1820 recollection of the state of drama in England during his lifetime, the critic declares Kean to be the greatest tragedian alive: "We do not think there has been in our remembrance any tragic performer equal to Mr. Kean" (Hazlitt, *The London Magazine*, Jan 1820, 68). The only exception for Hazlitt was the 'Tragic Muse', Sarah Siddons, who had retired from the stage in 1812. In relation to Kean's acting style, Hazlitt wrote that "Mr. Kean is all effort, all violence, all extreme passion: he is possessed with a fury, a demon that leaves him no repose, no time for thought, or room for imagination" (Hazlitt, *The London Magazine*, Jan 1820, 68). The words Hazlitt uses to describe Kean in acting highlight the tragedian's energetic style, which is valuable for embodying several Shakespearean characters, although not Richard II.

In 1817, Kean played the leading role in *Othello* at Drury Lane. In an entry dated 27 April, 1823, published in the second part of *Table Talk* (1836), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) recalls his experience watching Kean as Othello: "Kean is original; but he copies from himself. His rapid descents from the hyper-tragic to the infra-colloquial, though sometimes productive of great effect, are often unreasonable. To see him act, is like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning" (41). Coleridge draws attention to the abrupt alternations between highly energetic and ordinary instances in Kean's acting, his "inspired footnotes in action", as Thompson phrases it. The simile comparing Kean's dramatisation with reading Shakespeare "by flashes of lightning" illustrates the interweaving of darkness with moments of intense brightness.

The critic George Henry Lewes (1817-1878) compared Kean's acting with the art style of the Italian painter Caravaggio (1571-1610):

Although fond, far too fond, of abrupt transitions – passing from vehemence to familiarity, and mingling strong lights and shadows with Caravaggio's force of unreality – nevertheless his instinct taught him what few actors are taught – that a strong emotion, after discharging itself in one massive current, continues for a time expressing itself in feebler currents. The waves are not stilled when the storm has passed away. There remains the ground-swell troubling the deeps. In watching Kean's quivering muscles and altered tones you felt the subsidence of passion. The voice might be calm, but there was a tremor in it; the face might be quiet, but there were vanishing traces of the recent agitation. (8-9)

Lewes compares Kean's intertwining of intense and feeble moments on stage with Caravaggio's chiaroscuro painting technique. The fact that Lewes and his contemporaries referred to painters to understand theatre might suggest a static and pictorial understanding of the performing art. However, Caravaggio's paintings convey movement and feeling, the same objectives that Lewes and Hazlitt set for the theatre. Such moments that Hazlitt understands as of "extreme passion" distinguished Kean from other actors of his time, and started – as Procter would put it – a "new era". However, as Lewes explains, as important as starting a fit of passionate acting was the knowledge of how to subside from it, hence Kean's customary pauses or silences that worked for impact as well as for recomposing himself.

Forker explains Hazlitt's criticism of Kean's performance as mainly resulting from the alterations made by Richard Wroughton in his adaptation of the text – the one used by Kean for the production. Hazlitt considered the text as the best adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard II* so far, since "it consists entirely of omissions, except one or two scenes which are idly tacked on to the conclusion" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 224). However, that was not the case. Wroughton not only deleted parts of the original text, but also added a combination of other Shakespearean extracts, exposing Bolingbroke's explicit plan to seize the crown and dissipating the ambiguity that surrounds the character in Shakespeare's text. In the following section, I analyse Wroughton's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard II* as used for performance at Drury Lane in 1815 by Edmund Kean. For my analysis, I refer to the transcription of Kean's promptbook, corrected by the prompter George Charles Carr. This document is currently held at the Folger Library.

5.3 *How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown: Richard Wroughton's textual adaptation of Richard II*

In the same manner as eighteenth-century adaptations of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Wroughton's textual adaptation contains substantial changes: more than a third of the lines of the play were cut, and around two hundred were inserted, including extracts from other Shakespearean plays. For instance, when the queen finds her husband Richard dead on stage, she delivers King Lear's words spoken over the body of his daughter Cordelia: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, / And thou no breath at all?" (5.3.305–306). It is not clear whether the audience would have recognised these extracts from other plays. However, the fact that Wroughton borrowed excerpts from Shakespeare's texts instead of creating new ones himself indicates a preference for the Shakespearean authorial voice. Even though the words about Cordelia did not belong in *Richard II*, they were still genuinely Shakespeare's creation. The selection made by Wroughton demonstrates an inclination to borrow passages from other plays that would convey emotion. As Bate and Rasmussen assert, Wroughton's text was a "natural successor" of Theobald's adaptation, foregrounding spectacle over language or politics (129). The text favours words that allow the actor to perform passionately.

While re-working Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Wroughton introduced a pastiche Elizabethan song sung by Blanche (one of the queen's ladies) in the Garden Scene,

allowed more space to the role of the Queen, focused the plot more exclusively on the conflict between Bolingbroke and the king, and rendered Richard's character more heroic than in the Shakespearean original text. Forker sees the latter as a reason for Kean's energetic acting, which was criticised as lacking pathos by Hazlitt (Forker, *Richard II, 1780-1920* 106). Since Wroughton's text suggests a more decisive and less weak Richard, Kean acted it accordingly. Nevertheless, Wroughton's changes did not bother the audience. It was, in fact, a commercial success: it was staged 13 times in the first season, and continued to be part of the theatre repertory until 1828. It was also staged in America in 1820 and 1826 with Kean again in the leading role. According to Dawson and Yachnin, "Kean's 'passion' was contagious and audiences responded enthusiastically, despite (or perhaps because of) the depredations made to the final act of the play by its adapter" (83). Wroughton's version of the play ends with a repentant Bolingbroke confessing his crimes and with the Queen's death on stage. Wroughton thus creates events that would incite the audience's emotional reaction: instead of Bolingbroke's ambiguous regret at the sight of Richard's coffin, as in the Shakespearean original, Wroughton ends with the melodramatic death of a heartbroken queen and the confession of a penitent usurper, fearing God's punishment. As a result, the audience feels deeper the offence of Richard's murder.

In the advertisement to his adaptation of *Richard II*, published with the printed edition of the text, Wroughton laments that the play had been neglected by the London theatre managers for the past years. He allows that the text was "too heavy for representation" as it was originally conceived, although it is not clear what Wroughton means by 'heavy'. It could mean that the content of the play was too politically charged, since dealing with the forced deposition of a monarch. Or, that the poetic language was burdensome or lengthy, "bordering too much on the Mono-drama" (Wroughton 1). Indeed, Richard speaks a large percentage of the play's total text, over 27%. For a matter of comparison, Prince Hamlet, for instance, speaks 37% of the lines in the eponymous play.

Wroughton believes that disregarding so "exquisite a production" as *Richard II* could be considered "Theatrical Treason". For this reason, he proposes a new adaptation to rescue the play from its state of disregard. He admits having borrowed lines from *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus* and *King Lear*, although he has also borrowed from *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Richard III*. Wroughton justifies his decision to combine extracts of different plays by referring to Colley Cibber's adaptation of *Richard III*, which also altered Shakespeare's original text significantly.

Although Cibber's adaptation was partly censored at the time of its creation in 1699, it became very popular at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It was, as Wroughton points out, "now acted at both Theatres", Covent Garden and Drury Lane.⁶¹

It is interesting that Wroughton uses the term "theatrical treason". It can be interpreted in, at least, two ways. First, the fact that *Richard II* was not performed in the previous seven decades could be considered a 'crime', since it prevented spectators from enjoying the production of such an important play in the Shakespearean canon. However, it is possible to give it another interpretation, especially when considering the political situation of Europe in the year of Wroughton's publication. After the promises of freedom and change prompted by the French Revolution in 1789, a period of political unrest followed in France and Western Europe. The disillusionment derived from the failed revolution, the violence of the Reign of Terror and the eventual establishment of Napoléon Bonaparte as Emperor of France, creating a new oligarchy, affected the way monarchy was perceived in the United Kingdom as well. William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) autobiographical epic poem *The Prelude* (1805) illustrates the author's change of heart from a radical pro-revolutionary youth into a conservative older man after the disillusionment with the outcomes of the French Revolution. He describes his residence in France in Book 9. After encountering a starving girl on the streets of Paris, he is still hopeful of changes that would end poverty, recompense labour, and abolish "empty pomp" and the cruel power of the state (ll. 524-538). However, years later, he reconsiders his naïve confidence. He abhors those who changed "a wat of self-defence" for "one of conquest", becoming oppressors in their turn (ll. 796-799).

The examples from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* contrast the idealised radicalism of Romantic poets at the turn of the century with the pragmatic realism of the failure of the First French Republic. Although an early supporter of the revolution, Napoléon later proclaimed himself Emperor of the French in 1804, which resulted in differently shaped cultural images of the French leader, according to different political views: some saw him as a tyrant, while others, such as Byron, regarded him as a hero. After defeat in the Battle of Leipzig, Napoléon was forced to abdi-

⁶¹ *Richard III* was staged three times at Covent Garden in 1814: in January with John Philip Kemble in the title role; in March it was staged with Charles Young as the protagonist; and in November again with Kemble. At Drury Lane, it was staged twice with Edmund Kean: in February and October (Norwood 358; 371).

cate and sent to exile in the island of Elba in May 1814 (Lockhart 738). The French monarchy was restored with Louis XVIII, though this time it was to be a constitutional monarchy and not an absolutist government as it had been pre-Revolution.

Re-establishing the monarchy, however, was seen as a step backwards by radicals, including Byron. Four days after Napoléon's abdication, Byron writes in his diary that, being out of town for six days, he returns to London to find news of Bonaparte's fall: "On my return, found my poor little pagod, Napoleon, pushed off his pedestal; - the thieves are in Paris. It is his own fault" (Byron, Vol I, 403). Byron blames Napoléon himself for his own fall. The poet associates the Frenchman with the Ancient Greek Milo of Croton, a wrestler with a number of military victories, who, according to the legend, tried to tear a tree apart with a wedge, but the tree closed back while his hand was still inside, locking his arm until he was attacked to death by wolves. In Byron's words, "like Milo, he [Napoléon] would rend the oak; but it closed again, wedged his hands, and now the beasts - lion, bear, down to the dirtiest jackal - may all tear him. That Muscovite winter *wedged* his arms" (Byron, Vol I, 403). The allusion to Milo promotes the idea of the mighty who, unable to confront their own weakness and mortality, are inevitable doomed to fall. On April 9th, Byron adds that he was "utterly bewildered and confounded" with Napoléon's decision to "abdicate the throne of the world", quoting from Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*: "I see men's minds are but a parcel of their fortunes".⁶²

Napoléon escaped Elba in February 1815, just weeks before the inaugurating performance of Kean's *Richard II* on 9 March. Napoléon would be defeated by a British-led coalition commanded by the Duke of Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo in June of the same year. However, his escape in February may have reignited the spirit of some of his supporters, believing it possible that the heroic figure of Napoléon could return to power. Bearing this in mind, I think that Wroughton's reference to "theatrical treason" in regard to the absence of *Richard II* on the English stage can be understood within the overall context of apprehension following Napoléon's abdication. Such an ambiguous figure, oscillating between tyrant and hero, and, moreover, recently deposed, would no doubt be called to mind at the performance of a king's deposition on stage. That would be an even stronger case given Kean's prior association with Bonaparte. Staging Richard's de-coronation at a time of such political unrest in France and in England, and during a period when

⁶² "I see, men's judgements are a parcel of their fortunes." *Antony and Cleopatra* (3.2.32).

drama in London was controlled and heavily censored by the Lord Chamberlain under the Licensing Act, could be regarded as subversive.

The caricatures by James Gillray (1756-1815) and George Cruikshank (1792-1878) exemplify the controversial representations of Napoléon in the first decades of the nineteenth century in England. *Boney's meditations on the Island of St. Helena - or - The Devil addressing the Sun* (1815), for instance, satirically depicts Napoléon, or 'Boney', in exile at the island of Saint Helena after his second deposition, as Satan from *Paradise Lost* (see figure 41).



Figure 41 - *Boney's meditations on the Island of St. Helena - or - The Devil addressing the Sun* (1815), George Cruikshank

Napoléon was not the only prominent political figure of the time that could be evoked by the presence of Shakespeare's Richard II on stage. The portrayal of Richard's rambling thoughts and weak masculinity could be associated with George III's mental illness. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Man* (1790), Mary Wollstonecraft writes about the weakness of kings, referring to the "barbarous monarchy" of Edward III and Richard II's "total incapacity to manage the reins of power" (9-10). She heartily writes against Edmund Burke's royalist consternation with the way Louis XVI had been treated in France by the revolutionaries, being forced to submit to the National Assembly. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke writes in favour of monarchy's traditional hierarchical system, threatened by the revolutionary spirit of the age. However, Wollstonecraft exposes Burke's contradictory beliefs, recalling how he had reacted in favour of the first Bill of Regency in 1789, following the early signs of deterioration of George III's mental health. During a speech to the House of Commons on the 6th of February 1789, Burke ironically said: "Ought they to make a mockery of him [George III], putting a crown of thorns on his head, a reed in his hand, and dressing him in a raiment of purple, cry, Hail! King of the British!" (Wollstonecraft 25). Burke's choice of words evokes the symbols of Christ's crucifixion to mock the image of the king's martyrdom. While being sympathetic towards the French King's abuse by the radical mob, Burke had been eager to see George III stripped of his royal title and functions a decade earlier.

According to Janet Todd, Burke had supported the Prince of Wales in 1789 and advocated his nomination as the new monarch, for which he would have been offered the post of Paymaster-General. However, the Prime Minister William Pitt (1759-1806) introduced a Bill to restrict the Prince's powers in case the king were removed from office. Concerned with the outcome, Burke collected statistics from mental institutions in the country to demonstrate the improbability of the king's recovery at the age of 55, defending that the king's son should be appointed full monarch. According to Todd, "this undignified display of self-interest made him [Burke] a figure of ridicule in the press, and nearly ruined his career when, despite statistics, the King recovered before the bill was completed, not to suffer another attack until 1801" (376). Wollstonecraft, although vigorously against hereditary rule, felt sympathy for George III: "the loss of reason appears a monstrous flaw in the moral world, that eludes all investigation, and humbles without enlightening" (26). Madness, she states, "is only the absence of reason", when "the wild elements of passion clash, and all is horror and confusion" (Wollstonecraft 27). When the

loss of reason is out of human control, such as in the case of George III, it deserves sympathy rather than scorn.

When Richard is taken to the cell at Pomfret Castle in Shakespeare's play, his soliloquies convey a mixture of reason and madness. He talks to himself, explores the depths of his own mind, and reflects on the parts he played as one person – a king, a beggar and a fool. He speaks of himself in the first and third persons, transitioning from experiencing his tragedy to observing it as a bystander. Moreover, he hears music, even though it is unclear if the music exists *de facto*, or whether it is played only inside his own head. Although his mind seems to be delirious, this is the moment in the play in which he is portrayed as a suffering human being rather than as merely a monarch, and hence as worthy of sympathy. This instance of Richard's human vulnerability is what animates Fuseli's visual depiction of the scene in his contribution to Chalmers' illustrated edition of Shakespeare's works in 1805. In a similar manner that George III's mental state elicits pity from Wollstonecraft, Shakespeare manages to turn the spectator's sense of affinity in the play, exposing the stark contrast between the whimsical Richard from Act I and the suffering pitiful victim of Act V.

Richard II in performance at Drury Lane in 1815 can thus potentially conflate at least two prominent political persons: the deposed half-hero half-tyrant Napoléon and the weak and mentally unstable George III. These political associations enhance the topicality of the play, illustrating its potential as "theatrical treason". I will now turn to the text of Wroughton's adaptation of *Richard II* in order to investigate how Wroughton and Kean have reimagined the Shakespearean text for the early-nineteenth century audience within this context.

5.4 Edmund Kean's *Richard II*

It is clear from the promptbook's very first page that Kean had an antiquarian preoccupation with the historical plausibility of his production. He handwrote key information about the historical Richard: "Richard the 2nd, Son of Edward the Black Prince, succeeded his father Edward 3rd 1377, Assassinated 1399", to which he added the note: "reigned 22 years". This information contextualises Richard and places him within the chain of British kings. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that Kean uses the word 'assassinated', and not 'murdered' or 'killed'. The assassination of Richard in the play may have recalled the assassination of the Prime

Minister Spencer Perceval (1762-1812) by John Bellingham (1769-1812) at the lobby of the House of Commons on 11 May, 1812. *The Weekly Entertainer* from 22 June, 1812 reports the "Circumstantial Account of the Assassination of Mr. Perceval by John Bellingham, and of his Trial, Conviction, and Execution for that Crime" (482), and the issue of 27 July refers to Bellingham as the "assassin" (585), a term that carried dark undertones. Therefore, Kean's use of the word could potentially evoke the unlawful murder of the head of the British government by a discontented citizen three years earlier. Associating Richard with Perceval would convey the idea that the king had been illegitimately murdered, enhancing the immorality of Bolingbroke's actions.

The cast of actors that participated in this production of *Richard II* included Kean in the title role, the Irish actor Alexander Pope (1763-1835) as John of Gaunt, Mr. Holland was the Duke of York, Robert William Elliston (1774-1831) played Bolingbroke, Mr. Carr - most likely the prompter - played Sir Stephen Scroop, Mrs. Bartley was the queen, and Miss Poole played Blanche, a character added by Wroughton: she is Gaunt's wife and functions as the queen's companion. On the side page of the promptbook, Kean wrote by hand information about Richard's queens: the first, "Anne - sister of Wenceslaus King of Bohemia", and "2nd wife - Isabella. Daughter of Charles 6th of France, Affianced 9 years old". Although the historical Isabella was only nine years old when she married Richard II and became his second wife, Shakespeare's queen is not a child in his *Richard II*. Neither is she depicted as a child in Wroughton's text, but as a mature character, whose role was extended in conversations with the added character of Blanche, and who returns for a final and melodramatic appearance in the final scene.

The production was staged for the first time on March 9th. The correspondent for the *Morning Chronicle* wrote on the subsequent day about the absence of *Richard II* from the stage until that point:

The Tragedy of *Richard the Second* has certainly been placed peaceably on the shelf for upwards of a century and a half - not because it was wanting in striking and splendid beauties - not because it was defective in historical truth, or deficient in strong and well-drawn character - but because the innumerable beauties it possesses, and which bear so strongly the marks of the great master's hand, were scattered amongst a mass of less valuable material, and encumbered by the pressure of a large portion of heavy and uninteresting matter. (*Morning Chronicle*, 10 March, 1815)

The reviewer grants that there is beauty in the original Shakespearean text, but that it was barred by uninteresting parts. As he points out, the new production at Drury Lane promises to “sift the chaff from the grain”, confirming what Wroughton had proposed in the advertisement to the printed text. The result was enriched by Kean’s “impressive talents” and “successful representation”. Moreover, the newspaper writes that *Richard II* “will be considered as indebted for existence, and for future and lasting fame, to the extraordinary talents which have thus added another leaf to the never fading wreath which adorns the bust of our immortal Shakespeare” (*Morning Chronicle*, 10 March, 1815). In this sense, the critic agrees with Wroughton that the original Shakespearean text no longer appealed thoroughly to the early nineteenth-century audience. Wroughton’s changes illustrate the preferences of the time: a play focused on characterisation, plot development, a larger space for female roles and a taste for sentimentality. These characteristics play a part in how the Middle Ages were recreated for this audience and perceived by them.

Wroughton’s adaptation begins with the ceremonial dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray to be decided by the king. Kean’s production highlights the courtly atmosphere of the scene through set disposition. A handwritten drawing on the promptbook indicates that King Richard sat on his throne at the centre background of the stage. On either side of the king stood four soldiers with a banner, and on the farther left and right sides stood six lords each. A chair for John of Gaunt was set on the stage-right and a chair for the Duke of York was placed in the same level on the stage-left. The rigid and symmetrical *mise-en-scène* represents the austerity of courtly ceremonies and recalls Hayman’s engraving for Hanmer’s illustrated edition of Shakespeare’s works in 1744 (See figure 13). As we have seen, Hayman reworked Dugdale’s static print to convey movement and action, precisely that of the king interrupting the medieval combat. Kean uses the same imagery for a now three-dimensional display of medieval pageantry and kingly authority.

A print published by William West in 1825 shows Kean in his majestic costume for the part. Kean’s Richard wears medieval garments, according to the time the play is set, rejecting the portrayals of the characters in contemporary fashion as in the illustrations of the plays from the 1700s to late 1780s. Kean’s Richard II bears no resemblance to Gardiner’s grotesque and expressionless character nor to Fuseli’s contemplative king. Kean embodies a new version of Richard II, conscientious of historical authenticity and aware of his powerful position. He wears a rich dress, embroidered with a pattern of leaves, crowns and the letter ‘R’ (perhaps

reminiscent of Northcote's depiction of the throne occupied by Bolingbroke in his painting for the Boydell Gallery). The king displays signs of his royal authority: the crown, a livery collar and a sword (although, interestingly, he holds the sword by the blade, and the tip of the sword points to his stomach). The pomp of dress conveys Richard's power, divinely granted (See figure 42).



Figure 42 - Edmund Kean as Richard II. London: Published by W. West, 7 April, 1815. LUNA: Folger Digital Image Collection.

Kean wore a different costume, in full armour, for the third act of the play. The following quote accompanies the print: "Heaven for his Richard hath in heavenly pay

/ A glorious angel” (3.2.60-61) (See figure 43). It is an extract of Richard’s speech in defence of his divine rights as king, when he affirms that “not all the water in the rough rude sea / can wash the balm off from an anointed king” (3.2.55-56). Richard is confident of his victory against Bolingbroke because he believes in God’s undivided protection. This confidence is expressed by Kean’s second dress: a full coat of armour, sabatons, breastplate, ornamented gauntlets, chain mail, open visor and a helmet decorated with a crowned lion.



Figure 43 – The first and second dress of Mr. Kean in *Richard II*; Two full length theatrical portraits on one sheet, side by side; Print on paper; Published by William West, London, 1825. V&A Museum and a helmet decorated with a crowned lion.

The lion is evoked in the play in two moments of kingly authority. The first, during Bolingbroke and Mowbray’s contention, Richard uses his royal power to end the quarrel. He tells Mowbray to withdraw his provocation: “Rage must be withstood. / Give me his gage. Lions make leopards tame” (1.1.173-174). The lion is a symbolic part of the English coat of arms. As Richard puts himself in the position of the lion, he believes himself capable of taming the leopards, Mowbray and Bolingbroke. The second time the lion is evoked in the play takes place in the last act, when the Queen sees her husband for the last time – in the Shakespearean original. She tries

to infuse renewed energy into Richard's decaying body and mind. She evokes the lion within Richard: "Hath Bolingbroke / Deposed thine intellect? Hath he been in thy heart? / The lion dying thrusteth forth his paw / And wounds the earth, if nothing else, with rage / To be o'er-powered" (5.1.27-31). She urges Richard to fight back and not to let himself be passively carried away.

The lion in both instances is a symbol for Richard's strength and confidence, and it is a lion that embellishes Kean's helmet in his performance at Drury Lane. These examples demonstrate that Richard has received a new appraisal in Kean's production. As we saw in Chapter 4, the illustrated volumes of Shakespeare's work in the eighteenth century depicted Bolingbroke in a favourable light, or as a suffering victim of Richard's tyranny. It was Fuseli who offered a new look on Richard, focusing on the king's introspectiveness and shifting the balance of sympathy. Fuseli's emphasis is on the character's feelings and emotions. Kean's Richard, on the other hand, shows no signs of weakness. The two costumes for the actor emanate heroic confidence. The consequence is that Kean's embodiment of Richard overshadows what Hazlitt thought was most significant about Shakespeare's character: *pathos*, or "feeling combined with weakness" (Hazlitt, Vol V, 223).

Wroughton merged the first and third scenes of Act I into one longer scene, where the king hears the subjects' pleas and immediately professes his verdict. Kean's annotations on the promptbook show that he has crossed out the lines 115-123, in which King Richard swears to be impartial towards Mowbray and Bolingbroke. This is an empty promise of impartiality, a proof of Richard's fickleness, since he conveys different sentences to Mowbray and Bolingbroke. Richard's unpredictability confirms his belief on the divine right of kings, as well as his disregard for probity. As a representative of God on Earth, he had the power to decide the fate of other people's lives according to his caprices. The fact that Kean removed these lines – although they remained in Wroughton's adaptation – suggests that Kean purposely omitted an instance of the king's untrustworthiness. The result is the portrayal of a stronger – and, as Hazlitt puts it, "heroic" – monarch. Consequently, Kean's version depicts an unshaken demonstration of kingly authority, excluding the ambiguity of Shakespeare's character and compromising the role's potential for *pathos*. This example justifies Hazlitt's concern that the performed play could not achieve the same complexity as the play on the page.

Kean's Richard is more decisive and authoritative. Manning agrees that Wroughton's text offers "a worthier figure out of Richard", and that this transformation was reinforced by Kean's "acting Richard heroically" (199). When Bolingbroke and Mow-

bray refuse to return the gages thrown in defiance, Richard exclaims: “Rage must be withstood”, and, according to the handwritten stage directions, he “comes down from the throne and advances to the front – all the Lords rise”. The figure of the king incites respect from the court members, who stand when he stands. Although Wroughton’s text kept Richard’s plea to Bolingbroke: “Cousin, do you begin throw up your gage”, Kean crosses out this extract of the text. On the Drury Lane stage, the king directly states his command after standing from the throne: “We were not born to sue, but to command; / Which since we cannot do to make you friends, / Draw near, and list what, with our council, we have done”, and banishes Bolingbroke from England for “twice five summers” and Mowbray forever, “never to return”.

The first scene of Act 3 in Wroughton’s adaptation mirrors the scene at court analysed above. This time, however, it is Bolingbroke, recently returned to England and contravening his sentence of banishment who commands the improvised ceremony. He takes the role of the king, deciding the fate of Bushy and Green, who are condemned “to the hand of death”. Wroughton adds nineteen lines for Bolingbroke in a soliloquy at the close of the scene, exposing his treacherous plans:

Now, Henry, steel thy fearful thoughts,
And change misdoubt to resolution:
Be what thou hop’st to be: or what thou art
Resign to death; it is not worth enjoying:
Let pale-fac’d fear keep with the mean-born man,
And find no harbour in a royal heart.
Faster than spring-time showers, comes thought on thought,
And not a thought, but thinks on dignity.
My brain, more busy than a labouring spider,
Weaves tedious snares to trap mine enemies.
Now, whilst Richard safely is in Ireland,
I have stirr’d up in England this black storm,
By which I shall perceive the common’s minds:
And this fell tempest shall not cease to rage
Until the golden circuit on my head,
Like to the glorious sun’s transparent beams,
Do calm the fury of his mad-bred flaw:
Come, my lords, away,
Awhile to work, and, after, holiday. (Wroughton 36)

In this passage, Wroughton combines lines from *Henry VI – Part 1* (3.1.1-10) and *Henry VI – Part 2* (3.1.330-335), spoken by Richard, 3rd Duke of York. It is meaningful that Wroughton borrows York's conspiratorial words against his sovereign, Henry VI, to voice Bolingbroke's plans. In this manner, Bolingbroke's intentions become evident: he wishes "the golden circuit" on his head.

Bolingbroke's assertiveness towards his ultimate victory would undermine a heroic perception of Richard. In their confrontation, there can be but one winner and one victim. Interestingly, Kean has crossed out the entire scene for his production at the Drury Lane. As a result, the spectators would not witness the authoritarian side of Bolingbroke, who unofficially takes the role of the monarch in this scene, condemning Bushy and Green to death. Another consequence of this omission is that Kean maintains Richard's authority for longer than the Shakespearean original. The critic in the *New Monthly Magazine*, although praising Kean's excellence in acting, acknowledges that "Mr. Kean's Richard II is totally different from Shakespeare" ([June 1815], 459-460): "How we were surprised then to find, in the Richard II of Mr. Kean, a vigorous and elevated mind, struggling indeed against necessity, but struggling like a king; yielding to resistless force, but yielding like a philosopher; greater beyond comparison in his dungeon than Bolingbroke on his throne!" ([May 1 815], 360-361). The critic was aware of Kean's choice to prolong the image of an authoritative and "vigorous" king, abridging Bolingbroke's display of power.

Richard maintains his assertiveness in the first half of Wroughton's adaptation, but his grandeur is challenged when the king accepts Bolingbroke's request to meet him outside the castle. Richard turns to Aumerle and fears he has been too kind and weak, allowing Bolingbroke to have what he wanted. However, the stage directions handwritten by Kean emphasise the majesty that Richard still holds: "A long Flourish here as the gates of the Castle are opened, and Richard's officers, Banners & Soldiers come out and form down [...] opposite Bolingbroke's army - Richard follows with Aumerle, Carlisle, Scroop and Salisbury". In Kean's production, the king does not face Bolingbroke alone, but is followed by a small army and faithful lords. The display of pageantry in the scene sustains the appearance of Richard's authority longer than the original Shakespearean text. Furthermore, the king does not "descend" to meet Bolingbroke, which would signify Richard's descent in power, but Bolingbroke comes to meet him in front of the castle gates. The two noble men stand face to face in a more equalitarian confrontation. Bolingbroke's deference to his sovereign confirms Richard's superior rank: he kneels and demands the others to "show fair duty to his majesty". However, Richard is only clinging to an illusion

of power. Despite maintaining his position as the one to whom others should kneel, he knows his body politic is disintegrating.

The ceremonial mood and Richard's assertiveness in Kean's adaptation compromise the scene's *pathos*. Hazlitt writes about the way Kean embodied Richard, expressing "all the violence, the extravagance, and fierceness of the passions, but not their misgivings, their helplessness, and sinkings into despair" (Hazlitt, Vol V, 223). Hazlitt comments specifically on this scene of confrontation between Richard and Bolingbroke. He criticises Kean's Richard's manner of expostulating with Bolingbroke, "which was altogether fierce and heroic, instead of being sad, thoughtful and melancholy" (224). By insisting on a noble depiction of Richard, Kean fails to convey the character's essence of feeling combined with weakness.

Kean's performance as Richard II recalls how the actor had played Richard III a year previously. The critic in the *New Monthly Magazine* noted the similarity between the two: "Mr. Kean indulged rather too freely in what constitutes a predominant feature of his acting - a certain, sarcastic, epigrammatic turn, which gives peculiar force and meaning to particular passages" ([May 1 815], 360-361), which he had employed with Richard III, and which did not agree with the character of Richard II. Hazlitt adds that the key to understanding Shakespeare's Richard II is also a key to understanding human nature in general, how "feeling is connected with the sense of weakness as well as of strength, or the power of imbecility, and the force of passiveness" (224). That is why Richard's monologue while in prison in the last act is so illustrative of the character's pathos. It is then that Richard exposes his powerlessness, eliciting a deeper understanding of himself, just minutes before his death.

Richard's display of weakness in the deposition scene also provides a powerful expression of *pathos*. As we saw in Chapter 3, in a reversed ritual of coronation, Shakespeare's Richard compares himself to Christ, having been betrayed not only by one man but by "twelve thousand". It is at this moment that Richard's 'body natural' dissociates completely from the body politic. In Wroughton's text, Bolingbroke is already in a firm position to take the throne as he believes it constitutes his right. Wroughton borrows and adapts from Aaron's discourse in *Titus Andronicus*. Bolingbroke starts the scene with these words: "My countrymen, my loving followers, / Friends that have been thus forward in my right, / I thank you all; / And to the love and favour of my country, / Commit myself, my person, and my cause". Bolingbroke addresses his "countrymen" as a leader, who thanks the others present for supporting his claim. When Bolingbroke mentions his "cause", he could well

be referring to the misappropriation of his lands and title by Richard. However, Wroughton's adaptation makes Bolingbroke's treasonous plans explicit since the third act of the play, when he speaks of the wish to wear the "golden circuit" on his head. In this context, the "cause" can only mean his claim to the crown.

When Richard is brought to the stage to face Bolingbroke's accusations, Kean's production emphasises the symbolic importance of the royal regalia. After Richard "undoes" himself, washing away his balm and giving away his crown – acts which are performed by language –, two officers remove the crown and the sceptre on a cushion to the back of the stage, symbolising the disintegration of Richard's political body. It is significant that Wroughton excludes most of Shakespeare's text that accompanies the reversed royal ritual. For instance, Richard does not compare himself to the martyrdom of Christ, he does not say "God save the king, although I be not he", he does not refer to the golden crown as a deep well, he does not place himself as king of his own griefs, and he does not utter the paradoxical words: "Aye – no. No – aye, for I must nothing be, / Therefore no 'no', for I resign to thee" (4.1.200-201). The dissolution of the king's two bodies, the lifting off of the powerful body politic that leaves only a meagre body natural behind, is what adds *pathos* to the Shakespearean Richard. Without the words, the *pathos* of the scene would have to be fully expressed by the actor's body and voice.

After Richard is conveyed to the Tower as Bolingbroke's prisoner, Wroughton adds a collage of extracts from other Shakespearean plays to highlight Bolingbroke's satisfaction after succeeding in taking the crown: "How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown, / Within whose circuit is Elysium, / And all the poets feign of bliss and joy" (from *Henry VI – Part III*, 1.2.323-324), followed by: "Ah! Majesty! Who would not buy thee dear? / Let them obey, who know not how to rule" (from *Henry VI – Part 2*, 5.1.5-6). Bolingbroke rejoices in his victory over Richard. He is no longer the victim, but the winner, and his bucket is finally full while Richard's is empty. He boasts: "Now am I seated as my soul delights, / And all my labours have as perfect end / As I could wish – the crown, the crown is mine. / Fortune, I acquit thee – let come what may, / I'll ever thank thee for this glorious day". The end of the deposition scene in Wroughton's adaptation confirms Bolingbroke as a plotter, removing the ambiguity of Bolingbroke's motives in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. As Manning puts it, the Wroughton-Kean *Richard II* radically challenges the essence of the play: "Shakespeare's study of the political struggle between ambiguously presented claimants of the throne was changed into a tale of usurpation in which an apparently foolish monarch with a turn for epigram proves surprisingly noble

in adversity, though he is ultimately defeated” (200–01). This choice increases the audience’s sympathy for the deposed Richard. Manning, exploring Kean’s influence on Byron’s work, finds the same pattern in the poet’s play *Sardanapalus* (1821). In it, “Byron’s ironic, pacifist monarch, though overthrown by the scheming Beleses, unexpectedly emerges from his sensual indulgence to reveal himself as a stronger and more complex figure than he at first appeared” (Manning 201). Kean’s Richard also reveals himself to be stronger – though not necessarily more complex – than the Shakespearean character. Although the play begins with Richard as an authoritarian king who abuses his divine authority, Bolingbroke explicitly turns into a bold conspirator, moving the audience’s sympathy away from him and towards Richard.

In Shakespeare’s text, Aumerle is accused of treason against the new King Bolingbroke by his own father, the Duke of York, who calls him a “villain”, “traitor” and a “slave”, after reading the secret document hidden in Aumerle’s coat. The secret paper was most likely a reference to the Epiphany Rising, a failed plot to kill Henry Bolingbroke. Although this scene was recurrent in eighteenth-century illustrations of the play, such as in John Bell’s 1774 Acting edition and in his 1788 Literary edition, which emphasise Aumerle’s submission to the new king, Aumerle’s treasonous behaviour is completely omitted in Wroughton’s text. Both York and Aumerle appear to remain inwardly truthful to Richard, but the given circumstances allow them no choice. Aumerle exclaims: “[...] these days are dangerous! / Virtue is choak’d with foul ambition, / And charity chac’d hence by rancour’s hand. / For subordination is predominant, / And equity exil’d this once happy land”, an extract borrowed from *Henry VI – Part 2*. The Duke responds: “To Bolingbroke are we now sworn subjects, / Whose state and honour I for aye allow. / Therefore let’s hence;– what cannot be avoided / ‘Twere childish weakness to lament, or fear”. Father and son only change allegiance because it is inevitable. Once York and Aumerle step to Bolingbroke’s side, they remain loyal to the new king, although lamenting Richard’s fall. Wroughton’s *Richard II* makes no mention of a treasonous plot. We can only speculate on the reasons for deleting this particular part of the play. It could be argued that it is easily cut, since it does not affect the development of the play directly. It could also be that a plot against the new king could be censored by the Lord Chamberlain, but that argument fails since the whole play revolves around Bolingbroke’s usurpation of the crown. Perhaps what is at stake here is not the treasonous plot, but the subsequent display of submission to the new king. Showing the deference that was due to Richard being bestowed on another person would undermine the magnanimous depiction of Richard that Kean portrays.

Despite Bolingbroke's exultation at the victory over Richard, Wroughton's ending to the play disavows the new king's happiness and adds a melodramatic tone befitting the period's sentimental farces. Bolingbroke complies to the queen's moving request to see her husband one last time before leaving to France. What follows would surprise the spectator familiar with the Shakespearean text – curiously, it was not noticed by Hazlitt. Bolingbroke repents his actions after having seen the miserable young woman leave the stage in tears:

These miseries are more than may be borne—
Why, Richard, have I follow'd thee to this ?
Sated ambition! Nature's powerful voice
Arrests thy arm, and thou must now submit.
I'll follow to the Tower the wretched queen,
And there with joy, with pleasure, will resign
The rich advantage of my promis'd glory,
If by the deed I can alleviate
The bleeding sorrows of the royal pair,
And, by restoring them their crown and dignity,
Atone in small degree for all the horrors
Which, O shame! they have endur'd through me. (Wroughton 65-66)

At the very end of the play, Wroughton completely transforms the character of Bolingbroke from the evil plotter into the suffering repentant. The new king curses his royal pretensions – perhaps a reference to Napoléon's ill-fated ambition as well. Wroughton's Bolingbroke resolves to restore the crown and dignity to the former king and queen, wishing to do so “with joy” and “with pleasure”. His (until then) unshaken ambition yields to the young queen's demonstrations of feelings. However, the queen reaches Richard too late. In Wroughton's version, she enters the stage right after Exton kills Richard, intensifying the tragedy of her being just too late. Had she arrived a moment earlier, she might have acted to save her husband. Kean's production emphasises even more the tragedy. Kean's notes on the promptbook add that Richard was still alive when the queen asks offstage: “Where is my Richard?”. The former king replies: “Oh, my queen! My love!”, and, according to the stage directions, “makes a feeble effort to rise & meet her, but sinks and dies”. Kean thus adds a short last verbal exchange between Richard and his queen before she enters the stage to find his dead body and faints. The heightening of

romantic feelings and the queen's melodramatic reaction add to the production's sensationalism.

As the queen revives, she speaks King Lear's words when carrying his dead daughter's body: "Oh, you are men of stones. / Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so / That heaven's vault should crack. O, [S]he's gone forever". In the same way as Lear, the queen collapses on stage after speaking: "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, / And thou no breath at all? Oh, thou'lt come no more, / Never, never, never! / Pray you, undo my lace. - Thank you. / Do you see this, look on him, look on his lips, / Look there, look there!". Wroughton's original text directs that the queen "falls". Kean, however, adds: "Queen dies - and the Lords let her gently to the ground". Manning sees this addition from *King Lear* as a "transformation of Shakespeare's king into martyred saint" (198-99), associating Richard with the pious and innocent Cordelia. Furthermore, Kean highlights the tragic elements in the play with the death of the two lovers à la *Romeo and Juliet*. In reality, the historical queen returned to France and remarried years later.

Wroughton's version still contains a final speech of regret and grief by the repentant Bolingbroke, ending with a warning: "Thus instructed, / By this example, let princes henceforth learn, / Though kingdoms by just title prove our own, / The subjects' hearts do best secure a crown". Kean crossed out the new king's final words, ending his staging with the queen's death on stage, followed by "slow music as curtain descends", as his handwriting directs. The warning would have added a didactic tone to the performance, despised by Hazlitt and Keats, which Kean decided to avoid. A warning for rulers to prioritise their subjects' hearts as a way to secure their position in government is a way to understand the period's political ideals after the first fall of Napoléon. As Wollstonecraft wrote in 1790, "the succession of the King of Great Britain depends on the choice of the people, or that they have a power to cut it off" (19). The doctrine of hereditary rule was no longer regarded as "indefeasible", to quote Wollstonecraft once again. The 'spirit of the age' allowed for a new Bolingbroke that would break the hereditary chain of monarchy - as long as the current monarch was not fulfilling his duties, and as long as the monarch had their subjects' hearts in mind. Nevertheless, Kean's production presents a different version of Richard and of Bolingbroke, with the latter as the explicit villain who causes the fall of a king. Wroughton's warning exposes Richard's inability to perform his role as the king, hence Kean's deletion of the text as it would undermine his heroic conception of Richard II.

Conclusion

When Kean brings *Richard II* back to the stage in 1815, he recreates the character in consonance with the political debates of his time. Unlike the Shakespearean Richard II, Kean performs a heroic monarch, aided by Wroughton's textual adaptation which emphasise moments of the king's authority and omits instances of Richard's fickleness. Kean's heroic and energetic acting led Hazlitt to criticise his approach to the character. The critic believes that Shakespeare's Richard is an embodiment of *pathos*, that is, of feeling combined with weakness, whereas Kean delivered an acting of *passion*, of feeling combined with energy. For Hazlitt, the consequence of such portrayal of the king would hinder the conveyance of the play's emotions to the spectator

It is important to understand Wroughton's text and Kean's performance within the political context of their age. As we have seen, Wroughton considered the absence of *Richard II* from the theatres in the previous eight decades as *Theatrical Treason*. The term appears in italics and with capitalised letters, which suggests that Wroughton adds a particular significance to these words, magnifying their meaning. Wroughton hints that there is something potentially distinctive in *Richard II*. He proposes a new textual adaptation, suited to the spirit of his age, an age that had witnessed George III's mental collapse and the consequences of a weak authority in England, as well as the failure of the Revolutionary project in France and Napoléon's two depositions after the downfall of his larger-than-life political ambitions.

Bonaparte was a controversial figure as depicted in English print culture and visual representations, seen as a tyrant by some, but as a hero by others. For instance, Byron revered Napoléon's role in attacking the old system of hereditary monarchy. This example demonstrates that Napoléon became a myth, a fabricated image to advance republicanism. Kean's heroic and masculine portrayal of Richard II on stage, in combination with the actor's associations with the French military leader in contemporary print, connected Kean's Richard with Bonaparte. Furthermore, the deposition of a ruler on stage would recall the recent deposition of Napoléon before his exile to Elba in 1814 – a matter that regained topicality after his escape from the island in February 1815, weeks before Kean's production. At the same time, Kean's energetic acting weakened the parallel between Richard II and George III, avoiding the implications of connecting the theme of deposition with the monarch of his time.

In this context, Kean's staging of *Richard II* raises interesting possibilities of interpretation. Was Napoléon's deposition, mirrored on the Drury Lane stage, a victory or a disappointment? If Kean's Richard embodies Napoleonic radicalism, his deposition can be read as a disappointment, the moment when the hero yields (perhaps too easily, as Byron had it) the crown and is sent to exile – Napoléon to Elba and Richard to Pomfret Castle. Bonaparte would manage to escape and attempt to retake the power during the Hundred Days until the final defeat at Waterloo, whereas Richard's end at Pomfret was inescapable. Kean's personification of Napoléon and his deposition on stage can also be read as a victory of monarchy over radicalism. Despite Richard's heroic portrayal at the beginning of the play, he is easily manipulated by Bolingbroke, who steals the crown to become Henry IV, starting a new line of hereditary kingship. In a similar manner, after Napoléon's final deposition, King Louis XVIII (1755-1824), the brother of Louis XVI, is restored to the French throne, giving continuity to the Bourbon dynasty. Nevertheless, Bolingbroke's awareness of wrongdoing at the end of Wroughton's adaptation depicts him as repenting his actions, undermining the triumph of the crown. The possibility of drawing these political parallels enhance the topicality of the play as it was staged at Drury Lane in 1815.

Finally, after looking at the evidence of explicit or indirect references to the Middle Ages in Wroughton's text and Kean's productions, it is possible to conclude that the medieval setting functioned both as a mirror to contemporary political concerns and as a frame to provoke emotions in the spectator. The costumes used by Kean demonstrate a historical awareness of the medieval period, contextualising Kean's Richard as a medieval king. However, their main function is to emphasise the noble appearance of the protagonist on stage. Richard's authority is evidenced by the use of royal regalia, such as the crown, mantle and the livery collar in the beginning of the play; and the helmet adorned with a crowned lion when he returns from the Irish campaign, confident in the divine right of kings. Richard's loss to Bolingbroke is vindicated by the new king's open regret for his actions, curtailing his pride in victory. Therefore, Kean's production manifests an interesting combination of perceptions of the medieval past in the early-nineteenth century. Although Richard's power as a medieval king is enhanced by Kean's acting, Hazlitt's reviews demonstrate that such approach to the character was not ideal. Hazlitt understands the medieval past evoked by Kean's *Richard II*, as well as by Scott's *Ivanhoe* or Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, as a setting to accentuate the emotions felt by the characters and, in consequence, by the spectator or reader.

In a review of Kean's *Richard III* at *The Morning Chronicle*, Hazlitt complains about the introduction of ghosts through the trap-doors of the stage, which he wished would be altogether omitted. He affirms that "these sort of exhibitions are only proper for a superstitious age; and in an age not superstitious, excite ridicule instead of terror" (Hazlitt, Vol. V, 184). For the critic, the Middle Ages were but a superstitious age, distant both temporarily and intellectually from the 'enlightened' early nineteenth century. The concern when staging *Richard III* should not be in creating a medieval supernatural atmosphere, but in conveying the right emotion – that of terror, and not of ridicule.

In his *Character of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), Hazlitt returns to *Richard II*, a play "in which 'is hung armour of the invincible knights of old,' in which their hearts seem to strike against their coats of mail, where their blood tingles for the fight, and words are but the harbingers of blow" as a "state of accomplished barbarism" (Hazlitt, Vol. IV, 273). The critic looks back at this age as a time when words were used as an announcer for a blow, emphasising the crude physical violence of the 'Dark Ages'. However, he believed that words should not be used to evoke a physical but an *emotional* response. That is why Hazlitt sees beauty in Bolingbroke's speech about "the breath of kings" and in Mowbray's complaint of exile when meditating on foregoing his native English language. Hazlitt understands these moments as exceptions in the barbaric age of old, because they are "affecting", a word the critic uses to refer to the emotional capacity of an artistic object. In other words, Bolingbroke's and Mowbray's poetic imageries add *gusto* to the medieval combat scene.

As we have seen, Hazlitt despised the undramatic spirit of his age, which was concerned with national affairs in detriment of the personal and individual experience. Hazlitt's reviews demonstrate his stance in praising art that *affects* the beholder. However, despite the reviewer's reluctance to accept the political potentiality of the theatre or art in general, it is inevitable. In addition to being moved by passion or *pathos*, the audience is invited to reflect on the contemporary political discussions of the time, on the effects of power, weakness and ambition – issues that regained topicality with the deposition of Napoléon. Moreover, the play shows how these elements (power, weakness and ambition) are in turn occasions for passion and *pathos* themselves. Kean's *Richard II* is, therefore, also a demonstration of the theatre as place for the public exchange of political ideas, and as a public and social sphere. The actor is key in this process, functioning as a mediator, embodying history with flesh and bones, and conveying "strong-felt passion" that touches the mind, as the poet Robert Lloyd has put it.