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

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Chapter 6

A Nation Purer through their Art: The Actor-Gentleman, National Theatre and William Charles Macready's *Richard II*

Farewell, Macready, since to-night we part;
Full-handed thunders often have confessed
Thy power, well-used to move the public breast.
We thank thee with our voice, and from the heart.
Farewell, Macready, since this night we part,
Go, take thine honours home; rank with the best,
Garrick and statelier Kemble, and the rest
Who made a nation purer through their art.
Thine is it that our drama did not die,
Nor flicker down to brainless pantomime,
And those gilt gauds men-children swarm to see.
Farewell, Macready, moral, grave, sublime;
Our Shakespeare's bland and universal eye
Dwells pleased, through twice a hundred years, on thee.

"To W. C. Macready" (1851), Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892)

In December 1850, the actor-manager William Charles Macready (1793-1873), fifty-seven years old at the time, staged Shakespeare's *Richard II* for one night only,

the play that had been absent from the London theatrical scene since Edmund Kean's portrayal of the title role more than three decades earlier. The performance was part of Macready's farewell season to the stage at Haymarket Theatre, filled with Shakespearean revivals and which culminated with *Macbeth* on 26 February 1851 at Drury Lane. As we approach the middle of the nineteenth century, it becomes evident that there is a different approach to *Richard II* and its depiction of medieval royal power. The Romantic appreciation of the character's *pathos* gives way to a Victorian concern with Richard's flaws and immoral behaviour. It was also a moment of intense change in the theatrical milieu in London, especially after 1843 with the dissolution of the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737. Macready had been in favour of the royal monopoly of the patent theatres early in his career, when he believed that royal support would elevate the theatrical business and the profession of the actor. However, despite Queen Victoria being a constant visitor at Drury Lane when it hosted the lion tamer Isaac van Amburgh (1808-1865), the theatre did not receive the encouragement that Macready expected from the sovereign.[63]

Disillusioned with the state of the theatre during his lifetime, Macready dedicated his career to the establishment of a National Theatre, in the process repositioning the actor as a gentleman. For this purpose, Macready turned to Shakespeare, bringing the original Shakespearean text back and rejecting eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth-century textual adaptations of the plays. Shakespeare's plays formed the bastion of Macready's theatrical revolution. He wanted the Shakespearean text to be accessible to all, but also to be a means to authenticate the integrity and morality of the theatrical business. The question about whether theatre could be moral dates back to Shakespeare's own time and the anti-theatricals, who believed that the theatre was a corruptive art that appealed to the senses. In order to present an appropriate version of Shakespeare, one that could be seen by respectable families, Macready omitted religious allusions in the text, as well as any morally inappropriate content, such as references to sex or infidelity, or passages that incite violence – a project that recalls the Bowdlers' *The Family Shakespeare* (1807). Moreover, he excluded passages of comic relief, perhaps with the aim to render the text more serious.

[63] Queen Victoria's enthusiasm for van Amburgh was evident. The queen commissioned a painting to the artist Edwin Landseer (1802-1873), depicting van Amburgh in a fearless position with his animals in a cage, including lions and tigers. The piece forms a part of the Royal Collection Trust archive.

Richard Schoch compares Macready with Charles Kean, the theatrical heir of Edmund Kean. Schoch concludes: "if Charles Kean's goal was to use Shakespeare to represent history, then Macready's was to use history to represent Shakespeare" (*Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 3). While Kean's focus was on history represented on stage aided by Shakespeare's word, as I discuss in Chapter 7, Macready's centre of attention is the Shakespearean text, enriched by historical representation on stage. The medieval theatre set in *Richard II* is therefore a mere decoration to adorn Shakespeare's original text, whereas the poetic text should be the focus of attention. Although throughout his career Macready demonstrates a concern with historical accuracy in his productions of Shakespeare's history plays, this concern is rather a side-effect of his main purpose to render theatre a serious business. The visual depictions of medieval scenery and costume take advantage of the new possibilities that early-Victorian stagecraft permitted, but without falling into the trap of relying on extravagant pageantry at the expense of the dramatic text.

In contrast to William Hazlitt's understanding of Shakespeare's King Richard as a character that combines feeling with weakness, the mid-nineteenth century views the title role as a morally flawed character. Richard receives divine punishment for dishonouring the truth and reason demanded of a sovereign. The approach taken by the German critic, Hermann Ulrici, exemplifies this stance. Ulrici analyses Shakespeare's play to reflect on the *legal* right of kings. He affirms that the legal right of a monarch is established by man, and that it only has validity as long as the king's conduct is based upon morality. Viewed through a moralising Victorian perspective, Richard's state was a rotten garden because of the lawlessness of its sovereign.

Within this context, Macready presents *Richard II* as one of the touchstones in his farewell season, a restatement of his career-long project to elevate the national theatre. My argument in this chapter is that Macready appropriates Shakespeare's name to legitimise his project of a National Theatre, one that would add respect to the profession of the actor. In his adaptation of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Macready omits or softens the instances of immoral behaviour and accusations of the sovereign's ill conduct. Although alterations are few, the result is a version of *Richard II* that is more suitable to early-Victorian moral concerns. The theatre could be thus regarded as a safe and principled place, where entertainment is combined with instruction.

6.1 The London Theatrical Scene Pre-1843

In 1843, the theatrical monopoly of spoken drama held by the royal playhouses Drury Lane and Covent Garden was finally dissolved. Until then, the minor theatres outside the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction in London were forced to adapt their performances, adding musical accompaniments or turning them into burlettas,[64] in order to be permitted on stage. Macready was initially supportive of the theatrical monopoly. The *Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature, with the Minutes of Evidence*, a publication that resulted from the conference of twenty-four members of the British Parliament in the House of Commons in 1832, details in over 250 pages the evidence from thirty-nine witnesses on the state of the London theatrical sphere at the time. It includes "the minutiae of theatre management, playwriting, theatre finances, London audiences, and views on the regulation and legitimacy of the contemporary theatre industry" (Newey, 'The 1832 Select Committee' 141). The committee was established by a motion proposed by the novelist and playwright Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873), who wished to 'reform' the theatre. According to Newey, Bulwer-Lytton was then a radical MP "elected on the tide of reformist enthusiasm in 1831" (145). He believed theatre was in decline, hence his goal to improve the way drama was written and performed. Despite their effort, the House of Lords eventually rejected the Bill in the subsequent year.

Macready was one of the witnesses called to testify on the need for theatrical reform. He was asked to speak on the possibilities of acting well in a small theatre. He responded: "I feel it to be much easier to act in a small theatre than in a large one, and I should say that for merely domestic scenes and for simple dialogue, where there is nothing of the pomp or circumstance attending it, I should prefer a small theatre; but for Shakespeare's plays, I should think very few of them can be found which can have due effect given to them in a small theatre" (*Report* 132). In fact, Macready believed that it would be financially beneficial for the theatrical

[64] According to *The Methuen Drama Dictionary of the Theatre*, a burletta is "a type of comic opera or musical farce that provided a legal loophole for unlicensed theatres in the mid-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Under British law, any three-act play with a minimum of five songs was considered a burletta and could be performed in an unlicensed theatre. Playwrights thus took any drama, including Shakespeare's works, adapted the length and added enough songs and dances to meet the criteria. The burletta disappeared from the playbills when the minor theatres were freed from strict licensing laws by the 1843 Theatres Act" (Law 83).

business if legitimate drama were allowed to be staged in the minor theatres as well as in the patent playhouses. That would offer more business opportunities for those involved, especially for the actors. However, he believed it would be disadvantageous to the public. The actor-manager points out that the small theatres "would offer so many markets for talent, that they would take those [actors] as nightly auxiliaries that ought to be stationary actors in large theatres" (132). Macready felt that the consequence would be the existence of "a great many plays tolerably done", preventing the spectators from seeing good productions on stage.

Furthermore, the actor believed that the small theatres could not offer the spectator the necessary distance from the action on stage, especially for the tragedies. This highlights the difference between the modern and the Elizabethan theatres; while the latter required the engagement with the audience, the former created the separation of the 'fourth wall', adding to the illusion of a fantasy world on stage alternative to the real world outside the theatre. In the audience, the spectators would find themselves in-between these two worlds. The small theatre offers thus a paradox: while the audience is too close to the stage, they could see through the artificiality of the medium, causing the illusion to be broken; at the same time, the closeness to the performance could enhance the immersion of the spectator, rendering the action on stage more real and, therefore, more affective.

In 1832, Macready's solution for the theatrical crisis was "to define the rights of the minor theatres, and not to allow them to perform the legitimate drama". Macready follows the convention of "what has been considered as the rule hitherto", understanding legitimate drama as the traditional five-act play (*Report* 134).[65] All Shakespeare's plays would fall into this category, and these should therefore not be allowed to be staged in the minor theatres. The actor-manager's words demonstrate his conviction that Shakespeare belonged wholly to the large theatres, where the main actors of the day were supposed to perform. He declared: "if you retain Shakespeare as the property of the large theatres, the leading actors in general would prefer to be in the theatre where Shakespeare is played, and therefore it

[65] *The Methuen Drama Dictionary of the Theatre* describes 'legitimate drama' as "serious theatrical work as distinguished from other stage presentations or from the output of such mass media as the cinema and television. The distinction originated in the eighteenth century, when unlicensed playhouses grew up all over London to compete with the two patent theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden. These avoided the letter of the law by combining music, dancing, and other forms of entertainment with the drama they presented. The term 'legitimate drama' arose by contrast to describe the straight presentations of serious full-length plays offered by the patent theatres." (Law 286).

would prevent that competition for the actors, which I think would be a great injury to the large theatres, by dispersing their companies" (134). Restricting Shakespeare to the large theatres would ensure that the great actors remained in their acting companies, and would prevent the competition with the small playhouses. Moreover, the Shakespearean repertoire would guarantee a full house, asserting that the large capacity of the big theatres would be filled.

By 1843, Macready had changed his mind about the theatrical monopoly, understanding that it actually hindered the practice of Shakespearean performance. During his speech at the end of his management at Drury Lane in 1843, the actor-manager spoke about how theatrical laws gave exclusive control of the stage to "persons utterly unacquainted with the drama, and all appertaining to the dramatic arts" (*The Times*, June 15, 1843). This complaint no doubt recalls his earlier altercations with Alfred Bunn (1796-1860), the profit-driven lessee of Drury Lane from 1833 to 1835 (and later from 1843 to 1850). Macready claims that he had suffered previous abuses from the manager, but the feud that acquired national coverage and circulated in several periodicals of the time happened during Bunn's last year of his first management at Drury Lane. The fight originated when Bunn requested Macready to act as Richard III in a production of only the three first acts of the play (in fact, it was Cibber's adaptation of Shakespeare's text and not the original text), which would be followed by two small operas (Ziter 25–26). Macready was infuriated with the thought of mutilating Shakespeare's text in this way, and of having the play share the stage with a minor entertainment. The public was sympathetic with Macready's plight, resulting in a popular approval of the actor's beliefs and a consequent rebuke of Bunn's approach to the theatrical business.

While the minor theatres were prohibited to perform legitimate drama, the people working for the holders of the theatrical patents, such as Macready, struggled to offer quality Shakespeare for the London stage. Simultaneously, the audience was restricted to watch 'legitimate' Shakespeare only at Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Macready also felt that the state of decline of the theatre at the time was a consequence of the lack of funding, and of royal support. Macready was disappointed that Queen Victoria preferred lowbrow entertainment, being a frequent visitor at Drury Lane to watch van Amburgh's animal show, but not on Shakespearean nights (Ziter 45). In 1843, *The Times* published Macready's plea: "May I not ask for what public benefit such a law is framed? Or for what good purpose is persisted in?" (*The Times*, June 15, 1843). Whether or not influenced by Macready's appeal printed in the periodicals at the time, Parliament passed the

Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 two months later, abolishing the theatrical patents and opening up the theatrical scene. As a consequence, the Act allowed the possibility of a wider audience for Shakespeare's plays.

6.2 Victorian Pictorial Theatre

'Pictorial' is a key word in understanding Victorian Shakespeare. Charles Knight's *Pictorial Shakespeare* was crucial in the visual interpretation of Shakespeare's words. It also had a clear didactic purpose, that of combining entertainment with instruction, especially as regards history plays. As we saw in Chapter 4, the series was published in fifty-six monthly instalments from 1838 to 1843, and later reprinted in seven volumes with a supplementary eighth book on the life of Shakespeare. Knight, a member of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK), saw in his publications a way to circulate information to a wider public, in which the comprehension of the written text was aided by the addition of illustrations.

Knight's editorial projects are illustrative of the Victorian preoccupation with knowledge and self-improvement. The young protagonist Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861), for example, realises the importance of education in his path to leave his rural childhood behind to become a gentleman in London. According to Schoch, Victorian culture was devoted to popular education: museums, exhibitions, galleries, dioramas, panoramas, public gardens, amongst others, spread around the city, enlightening those who could not afford to buy books or travel (*Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 58). *The Illustrated London News*, founded in 1842, was the world's first illustrated weekly periodical, offering information about popular entertainment, literature reviews, politics, international affairs, and others, decorated with images.

The Victorian pictorial tradition was felt with greatest intensity in the theatre, since it offered a space for the audience to connect with the materiality of the three-dimensional image on stage. Schoch explains that "pictorial staging meant not only highly elaborate scenery, but also detailed costumes and properties, spectacular effects, and the frequent use of *tableaux vivants* – a static pose held by the acting ensemble at a climactic moment which made the stage look as if it were a painting" ("Pictorial Shakespeare" 58–59). The *tableaux vivants* transposed the two-dimensional image from the canvas to the stage, where the action acquired a third dimension – that of living bodies. Although *tableaux vivants* remain static poses, emphasising the artificiality of the illusion created on stage, they also give

the spectator time to read the image and absorb its details. This could engage the viewer into a temporary illusion of frozen time, detached from past *and* present.

Schoch connects the Victorian pictorial tradition mainly with the Shakespearean revivals, fostered after the Theatre Act of 1843, led by the dominant theatre-managers of the period: "Macready, Samuel Phelps, Charles Kean, Henry Irving and Herbert Beerbohm Tree", who "were all committed to a pictorial *mise-en-scène*" (Schoch, "Pictorial Shakespeare" 59). Shakespeare's historical plays particularly offered the stage managers an opportunity to create a visual representation of the past, aided by the use of props, costume and scenery appropriate to that specific time period. Schoch defines it as "antiquarian pictorialism", which emerges from the Romantic picturesque and is closely associated with theatrical historicism (*Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 18). The popular dioramas and *tableaux vivants* function as examples of the meaningful interweaving of the theatrical with the pictorial. Dioramas were scenic reconstructions of a painting or historical event without actors; these sets were usually in life-size proportions, with a canvas on the background. Special lighting and use of transparency gave the whole a three-dimensional effect. On the other hand, *tableaux vivants* were scenic representations of a static scene with motionless and silent actors dressed in costume. They would be arranged in specific poses to reconstruct a famous painting or historical event. Both dioramas and *tableaux vivants* made use of three-dimensional images and bodily corporeality (in the latter case). However, they lacked voice and movement. In this sense, the illusion to recreate the past on stage fails, because the audience cannot form an emotional connection with the action or event performed.

In a production of *Henry V* at Covent Garden in 1839, Macready engaged the painter Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867) to create a moving diorama to illustrate the Chorus' words at the beginning of the play. Alan Downer explains that "the muse of Stanfield ascended to heights of invention to convey the vasty fields of France within Covent Garden's great wooden O" (247). Macready explains his choice with a note in the playbill: "To impress more strongly on the auditor, and render more palpable these portions of the story which have not the advantage of action, and still are requisite to the Drama's completeness, the narrative and descriptive poetry spoken by the Chorus is accompanied with PICTORIAL ILLUSTRATIONS from the pencil of MR. STANFIELD" (Downer 247). The word *pictorial* features capitalised in Macready's note, a term no doubt associated with illustrations of Shakespeare since the publication of the first volume of Knight's *Pictorial Shakespeare* the year before. In fact, Knight would later dedicate the eighth volume of the series to Macready

in 1851, the year the actor retired from the stage (Ziter 56). Macready's insistence on materialising on stage what Shakespeare commands the audience to imagine illustrates the Victorian commitment to visual pleasure. Downer emphasises that Macready's innovation was greatly admired by the public; *Henry V* reached twenty-one performances between 10 June and 16 July of that year (248).

Pictorial scenography and *tableaux vivants* were, according to Schoch, "the dominant modes of illustration" of the Shakespearean text. The combination of costume, set and props "intended either to simulate a recognizable painting or, more frequently, to appear *as if* they were a painting" (*Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 98). As an example, Schoch writes that a reviewer from the *Critic* felt that the historical details of Charles Kean's production of *King John* in 1852 were so perfect that the author of *Engraved Illustrations of Antient Armour* could have been responsible for the costume (98–99). The critic legitimises Kean's success by comparing the costume design with the images from a nineteenth-century illustrated historical book. It indicates that the association with a print or painting was the highest praise for a theatrical production at the time.

Certainly, there was also a danger to an iconographical approach to Shakespeare in the mid-nineteenth century, which was an emphasis on the image at the expense of the spoken word. Schoch mentions that a critic from *The Literary Gazette* "dismissed Kean's *The Winter's Tale* 'as a series of striking dramatic tableaux strung upon' Shakespeare's text", and the *Leader* reviewer of Kean's *Henry VIII* saw it "as a 'diorama' of 'living figures in superb costumes' into which '[s]ome speaking of Shakespeare's poetry was introduced'" (qtd. in Schoch 99). Macready was aware of the danger of sacrificing Shakespeare's original text for the sake of pageantry. Downer adds that Macready read a review of Kean's revival of *The Winter's Tale* in 1856. It described "every detail of setting, decoration, costuming, grouping, and color [in Kean's production] [...] with almost no mention of any acting". Macready was taken aback by the fact that the reviewer only mentioned the visual features of Kean's *The Winter's Tale*, without referring to the quality of the text or acting. He "concluded with a sigh that [in Kean's production] the accessories had swallowed the poetry and action" (Downer 251):

> 'Do you know [...] why I take it so much to heart? It is because I feel myself in some measure responsible. I, in my endeavour to give Shakespeare all his attributes, to enrich his poetry with scenes worthy of its interpretation, to give to his tragedies their due magnificence, and to his comedies their

> entire brilliancy, have set an example which is accompanied with great peril, for the public is willing to have the magnificence without the tragedy, and the poet is swallowed up in display. When I read such a description as this of the production of a great drama, I am touched with a feeling something like remorse. Is it possible, I ask myself. Did I hold the torch? Did I point out the path?' (qtd. in Downer 251–2)

Macready chastises himself for calling attention to the need for historical accuracy and visual adornment to Shakespeare's words on stage. He was indeed a pioneer in this approach, but he had been careful to leave set and costume in the background, placing Shakespeare's language and poetry in the forefront. His successors in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially Charles Kean, approached historical theatre in a different manner, allocating greater importance to historical authenticity and pageantry, as I discuss in Chapter 7.

6.3 *The Last of the Romans*: Macready's Shakespeare and the Project of a National Theatre

The "last of the Romans", or the "Eminent tragedian", as he was commonly known at the time, Macready was responsible for a new wave of Shakespearean interest in the mid-nineteenth century. Unlike the critic Hazlitt a few decades before, Macready believed in the power of performing Shakespeare on stage, rescuing him from the pages of printed books. The actor-manager placed himself as "a sacrifice to the immortal Shakespeare" (13), as Ziter puts it, rejecting previous stage adaptations and restoring Shakespeare's original texts. For instance, Macready replaced Nahum Tate's *King Lear*, Thomas Shadwell's opera version of *The Tempest*, and John Philip Kemble's *Julius Caesar* with Shakespeare's original texts (Ziter 15).

In a speech to commemorate his management of the Covent Garden in 1839, Macready asserted: "I have only been the officiating priest at the shrine of our country's greatest genius", a declaration which was received with "immense cheers" from the listeners (*The Examiner*, 28 July, 1839). Macready was convinced of his role in re-establishing a 'fidelity' to the Shakespearean canon, a task Thomas Carlyle described as "Herculean" (Archer 118). In this way, Macready – and Carlyle, who had a similar approach to the Shakespearean text – "stand as extensions of Romantic era bardolatry even as they contradict the Romantic fascination with a personal-

ized Shakespeare whose works thwart public performance" (Ziter 16). At the same time that they maintain a reverential attitude towards Shakespeare's original text, the mid-Victorians exemplified by Macready and Carlyle challenge the Romantic assumption that Shakespeare was better experienced through individual reading.

When Macready was contracted to manage the rival Covent Garden for a period of two years in 1837, the drama critic in the *Examiner* – Macready's friend, John Forster (1812-1876) – announced it as "the only resource that can now save that theatre, and with it, for a time, the English drama itself from utter destruction" (*The Examiner,* 23 July 1837). *The Weekly True Sun* shares the new manager's views and commends his responsibilities in such an undertaking to improve "the actual circumstances of the National Stage":

> The decline of the Drama as a branch of English literature is a matter of public notoriety. The distressed state, and direct losses of those whose profession is the stage, if less generally known, are more severely felt. Under these circumstances he [Macready] has become the Lessee of Covent-garden Theatre, with the resolution to devote his utmost zeal, labour, and industry to improving the condition of that great National Theatre, and with the hope of interesting the public in his favour by his humble but strenuous endeavours to advance the Drama as a branch of national literature and art. It will be his study to accomplish this object by the fidelity, appropriateness, and superior execution of the several means of scenic illusion. ("Multiple Classified Advertisements". *The Weekly True Sun*, 24 September 1837)

The same message circulated in other periodicals throughout the week, showing Macready's intent in communicating his plan to a wider audience. Certain words from the text reveal Macready's preoccupations: 'improvement', 'fidelity', 'appropriateness' and 'execution', all in favour of the establishment of a National Theatre. The manager's project echoes the 1789 Preface to *The Pictures in the Shakespeare Gallery Pall-Mall*, in which Boydell explains the design to establish an English School of Historical Painting, as discussed in Chapter 4. While the late-eighteenth-century national historical project was manifested through paintings, the early-Victorian nationalistic project transposed it to the stage. It was no doubt an elitist venture, since the new manager at Covent Garden also proposed alterations in the theatre structure "with the view to consult the convenience and the respectability of the

audience". The change consisted of a new private lobby for the first circle of boxes, "so that parties who may choose to occupy that part of the house will not be exposed to intrusions hitherto justly complained of as offensive" (*The Weekly True Sun*, 24 September 1837), a clear allusion to the earlier presence of prostitutes in certain parts of the theatre. A change in admission price was also "found absolutely necessary", creating a wider social gap between the attendants at the Covent Garden and the minor theatres.[66]

Shakespeare was the legitimising authority of Macready's defence of a National Theatre. It was also a way to promote the prestige and respectability of the theatrical milieu in the 1830s. The opening production of his management was *The Winter's Tale*, followed by *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, and *As You Like It*. By the end of the last season, there had been 118 nights of Shakespeare's plays (Downer 185). The productions were applauded by the critics mainly for their "textual authenticity, respect for a disciplined ensemble that included lead actors, praise (sometimes begrudged) for accurate costuming and scene painting and enthusiasm for English music" (Ziter 34). The history plays were not initially prominent in Macready's repertoire. The only one acted during his management of Covent Garden was *Henry V*, for which he commissioned the moving dioramas mentioned above.

Macready's *Henry V* also illustrates the ambiguous early-Victorian desire both to restore the Shakespearean original text and to decorate it with pompous theatrical designs. The modern stage offered many more possibilities than the Elizabethan stage, and the managers were keen on awing the audience with the most recent technology. For example, Macready's *Coriolanus* at Covent Garden in 1838 brought a large number of supernumeraries on stage. It was praised by *The Spectator* as "a triumph of the art", as "the most perfect and impressive classic spectacle ever seen on the stage", because "the true uses and value of costume, scenery, and other aids of dramatic illusion, are demonstrated to the fullest in this instance" and "make palpable the life and spirit of the antique world". The critic thought that Coriola-

[66] For the sake of comparison, the *Morning Advertiser* of 27 January 1836 promoted a "grand performance of sacred music, on an unprecedented scale of magnitude and expense" for the following rates of admission: Boxes, 4s.; Pit, 2s.; Gallery, 1s.; and Upper Gallery, 6d. On 26 September 1837, after Macready's change in admission prices, the *Morning Post* advertised *The Winter's Tale* for the following rates: Boxes, 5s.; Pit, 2s. 6d.; Lower Gallery, 1s. 6d.; Upper Gallery, 1s. In contrast, the admission to the 'illegitimate' drama *Cyril Woodbine; or, The Old Elm Grove* was: 2s. in the Boxes; 1s. in the Pit; and 6d. in the Gallery (*Weekly True Sun*, 09 April 1837).

nus' victorious return and reception by the crowd was "the most imposing display of classic pageantry" (*The Spectator*, 17 March 1838). The *Evening Chronicle* praised not only the fact that Shakespeare's text was restored and that the scenery and costume were faithful to the period of Republican Rome, but that Macready "for the first time realizes the pictorial conceptions and imaginings of Shakespeare's mind" (*The Evening Chronicle*, 14 March 1838). Victorian theatre had now the possibility to materialise what during Shakespeare's time was only conceivable in the playwright's imagination. What the Elizabethan and Jacobean bare stage could only evoke, the Covent Garden stage could *show*.

There were also critics who disagreed with such graphic representations of Shakespeare's text. *John Bull*'s review of Macready's *Henry V* at Covent Garden in 1839 condemns that the actor-manager "has attempted to realise that which Shakespeare left to the imagination; and by the attempt, has not only destroyed the images conjured up by the poet, has not only made his gorgeous verse a blank letter, but has destroyed the scenic effects of which he might legitimately have availed himself" (*John Bull*, 16 June 1839). What the critic mainly rejects is Macready's illustration of the Chorus' words in-between the acts with dioramas, because such effect "shows the weakness of mimic skill when wrestling with a majestic thought". The mere mirroring of Shakespeare's words on stage results in a waste of the potential of scenic effect to move the audience and to pull them into history in action. For example, when the Chorus asks the spectators to imagine a siege, Macready adds an "actual representation on the stage by means of crowds of armed men, and the usual panoply of the scene on these occasions – which strikes the eye as tame, poor, and lifeless" (*John Bull*, 16 June 1839). By contrast, the critic suggests a different manner to materialise the Chorus' words, one that would give life to history:

> Suppose the breach in the embattled walls visible to the audience, but ramparted and filled up by men-at-arms, the files of the English stretching in long and well-grouped array, and so trained as to manifest the various and changing emotions producible by the trumpet sound of *Harry's* speech – the whole scene having burst on the view at once, at the rising of the green curtain. (*John Bull*, 16 June 1839)

The critic's suggestion would not evoke a hollow picture, legitimised by accurate costume or setting. Instead, the focus would be on expressing emotions and conveying *life*.

After Macready's management of Covent Garden ended in 1839, he signed a contract to manage the rival Drury Lane from 1841 to 1843. He continued his national and personal project to reinstate the original Shakespearean text and broadened the repertoire he had already covered at the Drury Lane, staging *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *King John*, *Cymbeline*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Winter's Tale*.[67]

Macready received positive criticism on his reconstruction of thirteenth-century England in *King John*. The *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* judged it a "most brilliant success", and "perfect" as a spectacle". The critic adds that "the gorgeousness of the dresses is only equalled by the fidelity of costume". In addition, the setting "produced an apparent reality exceeding in effect any thing we have before seen of the kind" (*Salisbury and Winchester Journal*, 29 October 1842). *The Illustrated London News* adds that "if Shakspere himself were to revisit us he could not but be pleased with the idolatry paid to his poetry at the present day, and applaud like a father, as he is, of the drama, the struggles of his legitimate sons in the cause of even new-framing his pictures of life!". The periodical includes an image of the last scene of the production, in which King John dies, surrounded by Hubert, Essex and Prince Henry, the heir to the throne and future Henry III (See figure 44). The critic notices the group of caparisoned figures in solemn distance in the background, and "the beautiful orchard of the picturesque abbey of Swinted beyond" (*The Illustrated London News*, 29 October 1842).

The pageantry of setting and pomposity of costume in this scene are not merely decorative or a mirror of Shakespeare's words, as with the Chorus in Macready's *Henry V*. Instead, they enhance the effect of the scene in arousing the spectator's feelings. As the critic puts it, Macready

> wisely sees that the glorious pageantry which interweaves itself among the fine depictments and imaginings of the immortal bard give true and beautiful aid to the living stream of poetry that rolls so lavishly along: that scenes of historic grandeur or natural magnificence or loveliness aid

[67] According to Janice Norwood's reference guide to performances of Shakespeare's plays in nineteenth-century London (Norwood 377—378).

> all the realities of the poet, when they are brought palpably before the eye; and that although illustration can never supply the place of acting, or compensate for its want of excellence, yet it may be made greatly to aid what *is* excellent, and makes beautifully perfect the grand illusions of the play. (*The Illustrated London News*, 29 October 1842)

It is thus a combination of pageantry with life, of historical authenticity with beauty, and of reality with imagination.

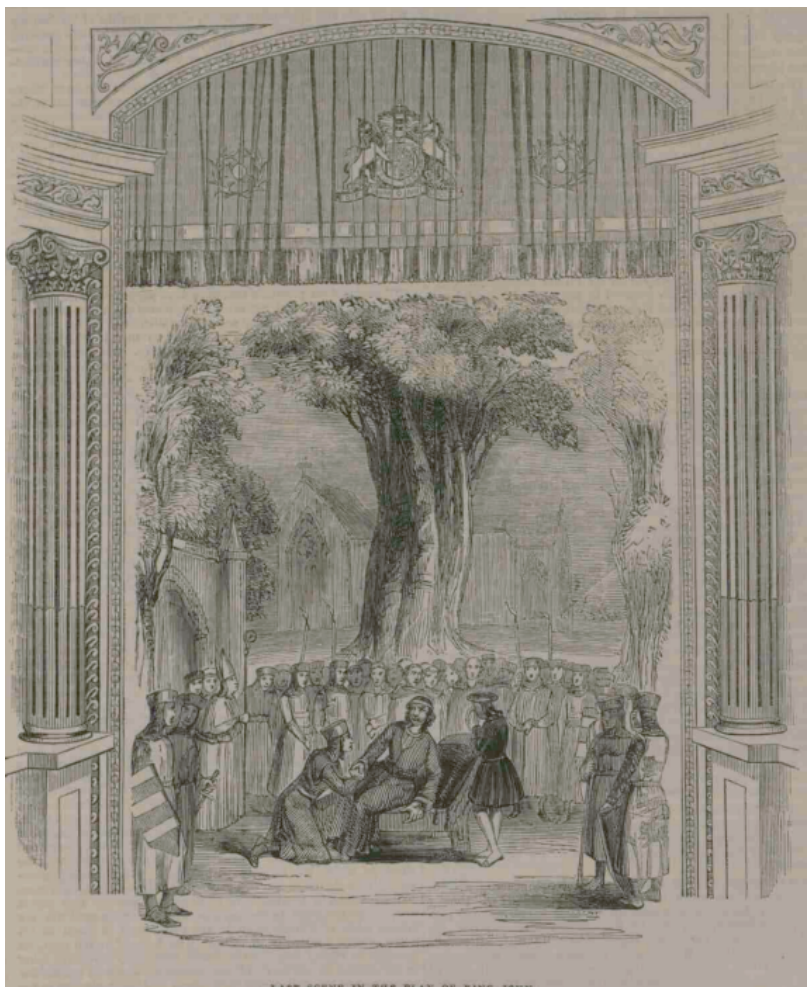

Figure 44 - Macready's *King John* at Drury Lane in 1842

After polemic tours in America,[68] Macready returned to England for a farewell season before retiring from the stage. He committed to two engagements at Haymarket in 1850 and 1851, where he acted mainly Shakespearean roles: Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, Henry IV, Wolsey, King John, Shylock, Brutus, Cassius, Benedick, and Richard II (Ziter 51).[69] It was the first time that Macready performed the role of Richard II in London, having done it before only during his provincial tours at the beginning of his career: first, in Newcastle in January 1813, a production that was reproduced in Glasgow in June of the same year; subsequently, three productions in Bath, Dublin and Bristol in 1815, the same year that Edmund Kean brought it to the Drury Lane stage; and, finally, one in Bristol in 1829 (Barker 95). As Kathleen Barker puts it, Macready was "certainly the most enthusiastic proponent of the play in the first half of the nineteenth century" (95). In fact, he revived this neglected Shakespearean play for the Newcastle audience two years prior to Edmund Kean in London.

Macready refers to his early productions of *Richard II* in his *Reminiscences*, published in conjunction with a selection from his personal letters and private journal entries in 1875, two years after his death. In this text, the actor looks back at the beginning of his career, retrospectively associating early events with later circumstances, when he was already an established artist. He wrote that *Richard II* was "a play of the performance of which there is no record since Shakespeare's time, with

[68] Macready developed a personal grudge with the American actor Edwin Forrest (1806-1872), apparently over who could perform Shakespeare better. Forrest blamed Macready for his bad reception on the English stages, and when the English actor crossed the ocean, he believed his American rival had taken the effort to discredit his reputation on American soil. It eventually became a broader clash between monarchist (Macready) and republican (Forrest) discourses, which circulated in print in both continents. The English press in its majority took Macready's side, while the American papers supported Forrest. The climax of the feud took place at the Astor Opera House in New York on 10 May 1849, when Macready was to perform a Shakespearean role. There was a riot in front of the theatre, where an organised mob had gathered to voice their protests. Over twenty rioters died. The occurrence marked negatively Macready's career and became known as the Astor Place Riot.

[69] Although Ziter mentions the roles Henry IV, King John, Shylock, Brutus *and* Cassius, and Benedick, Janice Norwood's compilation of the productions at Haymarket only include *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear* in October 1849, *Othello* in November 1849, and *Richard II* and *Henry VIII* in December 1850. There is no mention to productions of *Henry IV*, *King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Julius Caesar* or *Much Ado About Nothing* in this period of time. Norwood's reference guide indicates a production of *The Merchant of Venice* in January 1850, and a staging of *Julius Caesar* in February 1850, both at Drury Lane, but Macready was not part of the cast. However, *The Era* of 26 January 1851 reports Macready's final appearance as Cassius at Haymarket.

due omissions. I had prepared it for representation, and it was produced with all the scenic effects that the limits of the theatre would admit of" (Macready 48). The production in Newcastle was a success and "proved the attraction of the season". Despite the audience's applause and the appreciation of Shakespearean critics, Macready laments that the play "has not kept the stage" (48).

The actor acknowledges the poetic richness of the text, but he cannot appreciate its protagonist:

> Richard's acts are those of idle, almost childish, levity, wanton caprice, or unreflecting injustice. He is alternately confidently boastful and pusillanimously despondent. His extravagant persuasions of kingly inviolability, and of heavenly interposition in his behalf, meet with no response in the sympathies of an audience. His grief is that of a spoiled, passionate boy; but the language in which it is expressed is in the loftiest strain of poetry and passion. (Macready 48)

Macready does not share Hazlitt's opinion on the powerful pathos of Shakespeare's Richard. Instead, he finds him a capricious and childish character that elicits no sympathy from the audience. As I discuss in Chapter 5, Hazlitt criticised precisely the lack of pathos in Edmund Kean's performance of Richard in a review published in 1815, two years after Macready's premiere in Newcastle. The older Macready who writes the *Reminiscences* is familiar with Kean's approach to the role. He wrote that "in none of his personations did the late Edmund Kean[70] display more masterly elocution than in the third act of 'Richard II'; but the admiration he excited could not maintain a place for the work in the list of acting plays among the favorite dramas of Shakespeare" (Macready 48). The third act of the play brings Richard back from Ireland to the English shore. That is when the king learns about Bolingbroke's betrayal and the dispersal of his Welsh army, but still has faith in the divine power of his anointed kingship.

The main fault that Macready finds with Shakespeare's *Richard II* is the lack of purpose and will in the play, not only with regard to Richard, but also Bolingbroke and York. Unlike other Shakespearean characters, such as Macbeth, Othello, Iago, Hamlet and Richard III, whose plots are motivated by action, the cast of *Richard II*,

[70] Edmund Kean died in 1833, which confirms the fact that Macready wrote these thoughts on *Richard II* at a later stage in his career.

in Macready's view, "do little else than talk" (Macready 48). In this context, I wonder: if this is how the eminent tragedian felt about Shakespeare's *Richard II*, why would he choose this specific role to act, particularly when the play had not been staged for almost eighty years and could therefore not guarantee a full house?

Barker explains that Macready's *Richard II* in Newcastle "was well puffed for its novelty value and the 'new splendid Scenery, dresses, decoration, &c.'" (95). The contemporary newspapers praised the historical accuracy of Macready's dress as the title character, and the splendour of the scenery and decoration, although one critic reprehended "the display of a landscape clearly Asiatic in character", which was explained as a "mistake of the scene-shifters" (Barker 96). Based on the critic's comments on the dispensability of staging Aumerle's plot and the "burlesque" throwing down of gloves in 4.1, it is possible to infer that Macready attempted to maintain Shakespeare's original text. The result was likely a long production.

Barker studies the list of sceneries for the production at Glasgow in June, a re-staging of Newcastle, which conveys an interesting overview of how Macready chose to illustrate the play. There are seven in total: the court of King Richard for 1.1; the Lists at Gosforth Green for the combat between Bolingbroke and Norfolk in 1.3; a view of the sea with a vessel at anchor for 3.2; the return of King Richard from Ireland also for 3.2; the courtyard of Flint Castle for 3.3; Westminster Hall for the trial and deposition of Richard in 4.1; and the Tower of London with the procession of Richard to the prison in Pomfret Castle in 5.1 (Barker 96). The last one indicates that Macready chose to stage York's description of Richard's and Bolingbroke's entrance into London. It is hard to imagine that any one of these could display "a landscape clearly Asiatic in character", so the comment in the *Newcastle Advertiser* could indeed refer to a mistake by the scene-shifters, who perhaps inserted the backdrop of another play by accident. In any case, the backdrops for Macready's *Richard II* emphasise the medieval setting of the play, materialising to the audience the court, the lists for a medieval combat, and Pomfret Castle.[71]

Downer believes that one of the reasons why Shakespeare's Richard II appealed to Macready as an attractive role despite his personal dislike of the character was the possibilities it offered the actor to explore the powers of his voice. As Downer explains, "from the beginning, Macready's voice was his principal asset" (Downer

[71] In the early nineteenth century, the audience would only have access to the ruins of Pomfret Castle, which was partly destroyed after three sieges in the 1640s. However, on the stage the castle could be reconstructed to its former medieval grandeur.

31–32). George Henry Lewes describes it as "powerful, extensive in compass, capable of delicate modulation in quiet passages [...] and having tones that thrilled and tones that stirred tears" (Lewes 33). Lewes adds that Macready had "a tendency to scream in violent passages" (33). Hazlitt considered it a fine and heroical voice, but one that could also work to the actor's disadvantage if its "melodious declamation" were used in exaggeration (Downer 32).

A Newcastle critic pointed out that Macready's Richard II seldom "gets into the declamatory monotony, which at first usurped in his acting the place of pathos" (qtd. in Barker 97). The "passionate violence of his action and gestures", as Downer puts it, in combination with a declamatory heroic voice could result in an artificial acting style, undermining the powerful pathos of the Shakespearean character. However, the emotional reaction of the audience indicates that that was not the case. Barker writes that the audience was especially moved during "the actor's transitions between hope and despair in the same scene, which reduced his audience to tears" (97). One example was Macready's performance in the deposition scene, which combined both dignity and indignity. Despite Macready's personal negative evaluation of Shakespeare's Richard II in his journal, the reception of his performance in the role indicates that he managed to combine moments of feeling with moments of weakness, embodying the pathos of the Shakespearean character.

The clergyman and theatre historian John Genest (1764-1839) writes about the 1815 production in Bath in *Some Account of the English Stage* (1832). He states that the play had not been acted since 1735, but he adds an addendum with the correct information: "it should have been not since 1738" (491).[72] Genest compares Macready's adaptation with Richard Wroughton's, the one used by Edmund Kean in his staging at Drury Lane in the same year. According to the author, Macready made fewer alterations than Wroughton, except for "the lines about Bolingbroke's affectations of popularity" that "were improperly taken from the king, and given to Aumerle" (492). This is an interesting exchange that is not recorded in Macready's promptbook, a printed edition of 1825 annotated by the actor's own hand. This could suggest that the change made in Bath was not successful, and that Macready reconsidered it for his productions in 1829 in Bristol and in 1850 in London.

Genest also compares the scene at the Lists with the way it was staged at Drury Lane in February 1738, although he could not have seen it for himself since he was born twenty-six years after that. His conclusion is that both were "well managed".

[72] As we have seen, *Richard II* was last performed in London at Covent Garden in 1738.

The Bath production "produced a good effect in representation", it "was gotten up at some expense and was well acted – it was however performed but twice, and that to bad houses" (Genest 492). The *Bath Journal* of 30 January emphasises Macready's acting and the emotional response from the audience. The critic praises how the actor "delineated the sorrows and misfortunes of the unhappy King, with much powerful pathos and natural feeling, as to melt the audience into tears of sympathy" (Barker 98). The words in the *Bath Journal* anticipate Hazlitt's evaluation of Kean's acting over a month later. Macready, however, seems to have been able to perform the character's pathos in a manner different from Kean. Even though Macready condemned the passivity of Shakespeare's Richard II, his opinion on the lack of action in the play did not thwart his poignant embodiment of the role.

The playbill to the 1829 production in Bristol provides authoritative information about the use of scenery, sixteen years after Macready's premiere at Newcastle. The advertisement for 18 March promises new dresses and Classical Scenery (Bristol Archives). It also gives an overview of the sceneries, which are in total nine, elaborated by Mr. Henry: a new palace of the Corinthian order for 1.1; the Lists in the neighbourhood of the city of Coventry for 1.3; Berkeley Castle, which is "faithfully represented by A NEW SCENE of Mr. Henry's" for Act 2; "Mr. Henry's Picturesque Prospect of Conway Castle", followed by a strong encampment and a courtyard adjacent to Flint Castle, for Act 3; a "Grand Scene" for Richard's trial, resignation and deposition in Act 4; and, finally, Mr. Henry's "grand design" for Windsor Castle and the Prison at Pontefract for Act 5. The sets were therefore expanded since the 1813 production. Furthermore, the playbill adds that this play is "founded on Interesting and Historical Facts, about the end of the year 1400", which raises the spectator's awareness to watching history performed on stage (Bristol Archives).

It was over twenty years after his last performance of *Richard II* at Bristol that Macready had the opportunity to stage the play again, this time during his farewell season at the Haymarket. The season lasted from October 1849 to February 1851, and included *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Richard II* and *Henry VIII* (Norwood 383–84). Macready's very last appearance on stage was in *Macbeth* at Drury Lane on 26 February 1851, one year after his twenty-year old daughter Christina died (24 February 1850). Lewes writes about his own experience attending Macready's very last performance at a completely full theatre: "what a sight that was! How glorious, triumphant, affecting, to see every one starting up, waving hats and handkerchiefs, stamping, shouting, yelling their friendship at the great actor, who now made his

appearance on that stage where he was never more to reappear!" (Lewes 40). As the actor stepped on stage to receive the applause and bid farewell to his profession, Lewes notices his "crape hat-band and black studs" that symbolised the mourning for his late daughter. "It made me forget the paint and tinsel, the artifice and glare of an actor's life, to remember how thoroughly that actor was a man – one of us, sharer of sorrows we all have known or all must know", wrote Lewes (41). Standing on stage as himself and not as one of his characters broke the illusion of fantasy and distance that the fourth wall of the stage offers. Lewis was suddenly aware of the actor's own humanity and ephemerality, in a similar manner to the way in which Richard faces his mortality after the deposition scene in Shakespeare's play.

The *Theatrical Journal* reported Macready's speech given at the banquet organised to honour his career after the farewell season. 610 people attended, including Charles Kemble, John Forster, William Makepeace Thackeray, and Charles Dickens. In this speech, Macready reinforces his lifelong purpose for the advancement of the national theatre, and puts forth his hope for the future: "[I am] under the conviction that our drama is the noblest in the world, and that it can never lose its place from the stage while the English language shall last, I would venture to express a parting hope, that the rising actors would keep the loftiest look, and would hold the most elevated views of the duties of his calling" (*Theatrical Journal*, 12 March 1852, 78).

6.4 Macready's Middle Ages

Richard II was performed on the Haymarket stage on a single night on 2 December 1850, during Macready's farewell season to the stage. For my analysis of this specific production, I will refer to the promptbook held by the Victoria & Albert Museum. It is a printed edition of *The Plays and Poems of William Shakespeare*, edited in eleven volumes by William Pickering and printed in 1825. This is the acting copy owned by Macready and contains his handwritten annotations to the text. It is not clear when these annotations were made, but since the edition was published in 1825, it is possible that Macready wrote the notes for the 1829 productions in Bath, Dublin and Bristol, and reused it for the one-night revival in 1850.

Instead of using Wroughton's textual adaptation as Kean had done in 1815, Macready remained true to his project to reinstate the Shakespearean original text for performance, making few alterations. In Act 1, Scene 1, Macready eliminates

Mowbray's confession of having plotted against John of Gaunt's life.[73] Any allusion to Mowbray's murderous thoughts against Gaunt, which would compromise the Duke's case to the king, are thus eliminated in Macready's production. Another omission of lines that refer to cunning and deceiving is the symbolic exchange between the king and Mowbray about lions being able to tame leopards but not to change their spots. Macready's annotations also indicate that his production eliminates or softens expressions of vengeful thoughts. For example, during the conversation between Gaunt and the Duchess of Gloucester in 1.2, Macready deletes the Duchess' grievance over her husband's death "by envy's hand, and murder's bloody axe" (1.2.21), as well as her plea to Gaunt to revenge Gloucester's death. These examples demonstrate that Macready was conscious of the language being spoken on stage. He eliminates instances of Shakespeare's violent passages in order to render the whole acceptable by a moralising Victorian audience. This is an approach also taken by sanitised editions of Shakespeare's works, including *The Family Shakespeare* (1807).

Gaunt's iconic speech in Act 2 is considerably diminished. The extract about England as a "teeming womb of royal kings / Feared by their breed and famous by their birth, / Renownèd for their deeds as far from home / For Christian service and true chivalry / As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry / Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's son" (2.1.51-56) is removed. Gaunt's words could potentially revive an idealised image of a Roman Catholic past, which would conflict with the Protestantism of the Hanoverian dynasty. The references to Adam and Eve in the garden scene are likewise omitted, perhaps for similar reasons. Macready's edited version of Gaunt's speech diminishes the contrast between a nostalgic glorification of England's medieval past with the present. Significantly, the line stating that England "hath made a shameful conquest of itself" (2.1.66) is deleted, weakening Gaunt's powerful criticism of his age. In this manner, Macready protects his production from possible accusations of referring to his own present time in Victoria's reign. The removal of other instances of Gaunt's recrimination of Richard's role as king strengthens this hypothesis. For example, Gaunt's criticism to "sleeping England" and to Richard's role in shaming the land is excluded, as well as the old man's

[73] These are the lines that were cut: "For you, my noble lord of Lancaster, / The honourable father to my foe, / once did I lay an ambush for your life. / A trespass that doth vex my grievèd soul, / But ere I last received the sacrament / I did confess it, and exactly begged / Your grace's pardon, and I hope I had it" (1.1.135-140).

condemnation of Richard's guilt in Gloucester's death. In conclusion, Macready's version of Gaunt's speech loses its original political strength.

There is an interesting alteration at the turn of the second to the third acts. Macready crosses out Scene 4 in Act 2, and renames it Scene 1 of Act 3. He subsequently completely excludes Shakespeare's original first scene of Act 3. These pages of the promptbook have been sealed together. What follows is Shakespeare's scene 2 of Act 3, which takes place at the coast of Wales. Macready thus deliberately omits the scene in front of the castle in Bristol, when Bolingbroke accuses Bushy and Green and demand their execution. As we have seen, this is an instance in the play in which Bolingbroke takes over the sovereign's role, taking into his own hands the fate of the prisoners Bushy and Green, the king's favourites. In this manner, Macready palliates Bolingbroke's insubordination and cruelty. Moreover, Macready crosses out Bolingbroke's complaint of his "unthrifty son", the future Henry V, and his "unrestrainèd loose companions" in Act 5, Scene 3, avoiding the judgment of royal behaviour on stage.

The changes Macready made to the Shakespearean text are thus relatively few. There was certainly a concern with the total duration of the play, hence the cutting of lines to render it shorter. The scene of Aumerle's confession of treason in Act 5 was also significantly shortened. Perhaps Macready had learned the lesson after reading the critic's comment in the *Newcastle Advertiser* complaining about the irrelevance of the plot in the 1813 production. My conclusion is that the omissions in Macready's annotated text follow mainly five categories: first, religious allusions, such as the mention of Christ in the deposition scene or the reference to Adam and Eve in the garden scene; second, implications of death or cruelty, like the full removal of Act 3, Scene 1; third, allusions to immoral conduct, for instance, the Duchess of York's words condemning York's suspicion of her infidelity and accusing Aumerle of being a bastard; fourth, the reduction of comic relief in order to render the whole more serious, such as cutting the throwing of gages in 4.1 and York's incongruous search for his boots while he accuses his own son of treason; and, finally, a reduction of lines spoken by the female characters, especially the Queen and the Duchess, resulting in shorter scenes for the actresses. For example, the emotional parting between Richard and his former queen is significantly reduced, and their final kiss is omitted. These changes can be explained as part of Macready's bigger project of a serious National Theatre that would elevate the status of the theatrical business. For that purpose, the theatre should be regarded as a safe

cultural and edifying space for all, including women. Therefore, no indecorous or violent subject matter should be allowed on stage.

Lewes writes about Macready in his *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, comparing him to Edmund Kean. While he considered Kean a "genius", he saw Macready "only as a man of talent, but of talent so marked and individual that it approaches very near to genius" (32). While Kean was for Lewes "indisputable superior[...] in the highest reaches of his art", nonetheless he was "inferior to Macready in that general flexibility of talent and in that range of intellectual sympathy which are necessary to the personation of many and various parts" (Lewes 32). Lewes identifies Macready's strength in performing characters such as Werner, Richelieu, Iago and Virginius, while Kean was greater in representing "the great Shakespearean hero" (33). The reason for this, concludes Lewes, is the fact that Macready's characters "were domestic rather than ideal, and made but slight appeals to the larger passions which give strength to heroes" (Lewes 34). For example, in *Macbeth*, Macready offered a bodily depiction of a wavering conscience, but failed to represent a great criminal. Lewes writes that Macready's Macbeth "stole into the sleeping-chamber of Duncan like a man going to purloin a purse, not like a warrior going to snatch a crown" (35). In *Othello*, he acted the irritability of the character but not the grandeur of his agony; and his Hamlet was intelligent, but "lachrymose and fretful". Nevertheless, Lewes acknowledges that with Richard II "all his great qualities were displayed" (35).

The critic in *The Illustrated London News* (7 December, 1850) refers to Macready's *Richard II* as "the theatrical event of the week", despite the play being Shakespeare's "least dramatic" work. The critic shares with Macready a similar opinion of the play's lack of action": "Sentiment and diction are called in as substitutes for character and action. The scenes throughout want one element of tragedy – they are inspired with Pity, but not with Terror. The experiment is powerfully made, but serves only the more to establish the conclusion, that Pity alone is insufficient to support an effective drama" ("Haymarket", *The Illustrated London News*, 7 December 1850, 441). Interestingly, the critic assumes a complete opposite approach to the Shakespearean play than Hazlitt had over three decades earlier. For Hazlitt, the lack of action, the focus on sentiment and the character's weakness were the main attributes of *Richard II*, whereas the critic in 1850 sees those same elements as the play's pitfalls. It is noticeable here a change in mindset – the Romantic importance ascribed to feeling is set aside for a preference for action.

Despite "the delinquency of the hero" in Shakespeare's original, *The Illustrated London News* acknowledges that "the sudden fall of the King from power to dependence is an incident so skilfully managed by the poet, that it smites and pierces the heart strongly and deeply" (*The Illustrated London News*, 7 December 1850, 441). He analyses how Macready performs this affecting representation of fall from power in the iconic deposition scene. According to the critic, the scene "afflicted us with a distress so poignant to the utmost point of endurance. If in this scene the poet was marvellous, the actor was admirable" (441). The article is decorated with an illustration of Macready in the title role (See figure 45).

Figure 45 - Macready as Richard II at Haymarket, *The Illustrated London News*, 7 December 1850

He stands holding a mirror and looking at his own reflection. His head is bare, emphasising his figure as a mortal man, while the other characters in the scene wear either hats or helmets. The artist captures the look on Macready's eyes and

the wrinkled forehead as he faces his own reflection, bereft of majesty. The drawing gives an idea of how the actor may have conveyed the pathos of this scene. On his right side, Northumberland clad in armour holds the document with the formal accusations against Richard that he refuses to read in the scene, and next to him Henry Bolingbroke looks at Richard with impatience. On Macready's left side, the old Bishop of Carlisle looks with disgust at Bolingbroke and Northumberland, who were bold enough to challenge the divine right of kingship.

The Illustrated London News thanks Macready for the opportunity of seeing *Richard II* staged, given that it had not been done in London since Edmund Kean's production. Although "wanting in interest as the drama itself", the reviewer praised Macready's acting as "one remarkably well suited to his genius and style" (*The Illustrated London News*, 7 December 1850, 441). He hopes that the actor's success in the role should be enough to "command the town for many representations". However, that was not the case; *Richard II* was performed but once during Macready's farewell season. The critic praises, specifically, how Macready represented all the phases of character "with wonderful force and precision":

> The recklessness and arrogance of the spendthrift and unscrupulous Monarch – his boundless confidence in the divine prerogative – his right royal method of thinking on all occasions, even when acting wrongfully – his filial love and reverence for his native soil – his exultation on returning to it – his pride, his dejection, his humiliation – his grief, and wrath, and utter destitution. (*The Illustrated London News*, 7 December 1850, 441)

The critic's words reveal how the character was perceived negatively by Victorian moral standards. Richard was not the model of a monarch that should be followed, quite the contrary. Nevertheless, Macready's acting *was* a model to be followed, especially for his engagement with the Shakespearean text: "Clear it was that he [Macready] had given to the character the most profound study, and exhausted on it all the resources of his histrionic talent" (*The Illustrated London News*, 7 December 1850, 441). By intensive study and commitment to the Shakespearean original, Macready attempted at elevating the status of the professional actor and the theatrical business. It was an activity that demanded dedication, effort and study.

Although there is no mention of historical accuracy in *The Illustrated London News*, Macready's care in materialising a credible medieval past is noticeable in the visual records of the production. The figure mentioned above shows Northumber-

land in medieval armour, holding a triangular shield, giving the ensemble a distinctive medieval atmosphere. Furthermore, the attention given to the actors' haircuts and beard styles is noteworthy. For instance, Bolingbroke has chin-length hair and a pointy beard. The aforementioned engraving held at the National Portrait Gallery shows Macready as Richard II in the final prison scene, when the former king is reflecting on his own mortality just moments before his own death (See figure 39). Macready wears black and sits on a chair next to a wooden table in an otherwise empty room. The immense columns and high arches emphasise the grandeur of the place, contrasted with the darkness in the background. The chain attached to the column in the forefront symbolises Richard's captivity, as well as the bars in the small halfmoon window. Richard's prison is a dark medieval cell, impregnated with ominous violence and death. The extract from Act 5 quoted below the image raises the possibility of comparing this medieval cell to the world – either Richard's own fourteenth-century world, Shakespeare's world in the late sixteenth century, or also the contemporary world of Macready and his spectators.

The German literary scholar Hermann Ulrici (1806-1884) published a book on Shakespeare in 1839, which was translated and published in English in 1846. It was later expanded into a two-volume new English edition published in 1876 as *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art. History and Character of Shakespeare's Plays*. Ulrici's ideas on Shakespeare's *Richard II* were therefore circulating in England even before Macready's last production of the play. The German critic proposes interesting ideas regarding the right to kingship, which may shed light on how the character Richard was perceived in the mid-nineteenth century, and how it differed from understandings of the play in the century's opening decades. Ulrici writes that "the fixed formula of external legal *right* established by man, it regards as nothing but a formula; it values a right which is truly just only in so far as it is founded upon *morality*" (223). Therefore, although Richard has a born right to the throne, he forfeits this right the moment he disrespects it. As Ulrici puts it: "even the right of majesty *by the grace of God* loses its title as soon as it breaks away from its foundation, the grace of God, whose justice acknowledges no legal claims, no hereditary or family right in contradiction to the sole right of truth and reason" (223). After abusing his royal prerogative, interrupting the medieval combat between Mowbray and Bolingbroke, spending state money to gratify his favourites, confiscating the Duke of Lancaster's property to finance his Irish wars, and being inconsistent when proclaiming sentences, King Richard renounces the power invested in him via a contract that requires justice and honesty in return. Ulrici even concludes that "small as is the

truly moral spirit exhibited by the man afterwards King Henry IV, he seems a hero of virtue compared with the unworthy, most unkingly Richard" (223).

After being sent to prison and facing his own sins and fears, Shakespeare's Richard changes. Ulrici believes that "the resignation with which he [Richard] bears his fate, his contrite repentance of his transgressions, his in general dignified conduct, and the courage which he maintains even in his last moments, atone for his faults, and compel us to feel sincere pity for him" (226). Despite his transgressive youth, Richard becomes a true repentant after being stripped of his royal self and forced to contemplate his own humanity. Ulrici thus sees in the Shakespearean play a moral lesson, a cautionary narrative against the presumption of a man who believed himself above God's preached virtues of truth and reason. According to Ulrici, Shakespeare understood the importance of showing the audience a glimpse of Richard's immoral conduct in the beginning of the play, even though his dethronement was the main historical event in the monarch's life. That is precisely to justify God's own punishment of Richard's misbehaviour, since if a monarch "acts contrary to his calling, its divine nature will not protect him" (Ulrici 226). One example is Richard's return from Ireland just one day too late, which Ulrici explains as "God's guidance and dispensation of things" deciding against Richard (224).

It is possible to draw parallels between Ulrici's understanding of Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Macready's representations of the play on stage. Mid-nineteenth-century England is a period preoccupied with instruction and morality. Different from the Romantic appreciation of Richard's pathos and the poetic tragedy of his fall, Victorian responses to the character focused on criticising the king's flaws as a monarch. As Ulrici points out, Richard forfeits his divine right to rule the moment he rejects the morality and honesty attached to the role of monarch. Richard is punished by God for having betrayed God's trust. In this context, Macready offers a version of Shakespeare's text that softens immoral expressions of deceit, unfaithfulness, revenge and blasphemy. In this manner, Macready's Richard is more acceptable to the Victorian audience. At the same time, a more principled version of *Richard II* aids Macready in his broader project of elevating the theatre as a legitimate art.

Conclusion

After producing *Richard II* in the provinces in the beginning of his career, Macready returns to the play during his farewell season to the stage in 1851 in his first and only performance of the play in London. The actor-manager, "the last of the Romans", devoted his career to promote the theatre as high art and as a respectful profession. *The Era* of 26 January 1851 reports on Macready's final appearance on the stage. As the advertisements to *Julius Caesar* emphatically noted, the actor-manager played Cassius "for the last time". According to *The Era*, "the play was loudly cheered, and Mr. Macready, when called for at the close, bowed his farewell as 'the last of the Romans'" (*The Era*, 26 January 1851). In Shakespeare's play, Brutus refers to Cassius and Titinius as "the last of the Romans", since they were the last remaining noblemen true to the principles of the Roman Republic. In the theatrical sphere, Macready was – according to the periodicals of the time – the "last of the tragedians" to remain true to Shakespeare's principles. That was not necessarily the case. Charles Kean, for instance, continued Macready's plight to bring respectability to the theatrical milieu, as we will see in the following chapter.

In order to create a National Theatre that would go against the profit-driven choices of the patent theatres, Macready engaged in rescuing the original Shakespearean text, rejecting earlier textual alterations from the previous century. In contrast to the Romantic Hazlitt, who advocated Shakespeare as an individual reading experience, Macready believed in the power of *performing* Shakespeare, of bringing Shakespeare's poetry to a wide audience. However, both Macready and Hazlitt shared a reverential attitude towards the playwright, locating the Shakespearean genius in his poetic language. In Macready's case, he believed in the use of pictorial illustration as a means to *enhance* the power of Shakespeare's poetry, not as a substitute for it. As we have seen, the attempt was not thoroughly successful in his production of *Henry V* at Covent Garden in 1839 with the illustration of the Chorus' words on stage, but he managed to harmoniously combine text and image in his *King John* at Drury Lane in 1842 and *Richard II* at the Haymarket in 1850. In a way, Macready simultaneously expands and rejects the Romantic devotion to Shakespeare's text, re-placing the playwright's genius on the stage, embodied by the actors and not in the reader's imagination.

Macready's nationalistic project reinforces the early-Victorian commitment to visual pleasure. Whereas the late-eighteenth-century Boydell Gallery had visually represented Shakespeare in paintings, Macready transposes to the stage the cam-

paign for a national culture. The theatre was thus a place where the Victorian pictorial tradition was intensely manifested. Following Knight's *Pictorial Shakespeare*, the actor-manager materialised the past as reimagined by Shakespeare's history plays on the nineteenth-century stage. The visual potential of performing Shakespeare's history plays and providing a sense of living history to the audience is what Schoch calls "Antiquarian pictorialism" (*Shakespeare's Victorian Stage* 18), epitomised by the popular dioramas and *tableaux vivants* that filled the English stage in the mid-century. Macready understood the power of such theatrical realisations, as his 1839 *Henry V* illustrates, but only as long as the spectacle of the scene did not distract the listener's attention from the poetic genius of Shakespeare. Furthermore, Macready moves beyond the static artificiality of the dioramas and *tableaux vivants*, exploring voice and action to enhance the illusionistic capability of the stage.

Macready's *Richard II* and his return to the Middle Ages are therefore part of a bigger project, one that is not mainly concerned with materialising the past on stage, but, especially, with using Shakespeare as a means to elevate the national theatrical scene pre- and post-1843. The lack of action in the play bothers Macready, who does not consider *Richard II* an example of Shakespeare's best writing abilities. However, reviving a play that was not usually part of the London repertoire demonstrates Macready's industrious engagement with the whole Shakespearean tradition. His effort in omitting from the original all extracts that could be considered inappropriate for a highly moralised Victorian audience exemplifies his care in offering respectable and serious content for the English playgoers. This pursuit of respectability encompassed the actor, the theatre, and Shakespeare as a national symbol, all advancing the idea of a national English identity rooted in history and culture. As Schoch points out, Macready used history as an asset to represent Shakespeare. Charles Kean would reverse the tables as the nineteenth century progresses, turning to Shakespeare as a medium to materialise the past on stage.