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Review

Looking for Richard III in Romantic Times: Thomas Bridgman's and William Charles Macready's Abortive Stage Adaptations

Abstract:

This article will examine two neglected texts that were produced in the Romantic period and place themselves at the margins of theatre history: the “ill-fated” stage adaptations of *King Richard III* by Thomas Bridgman and William Charles Macready. Bridgman's endeavour was never produced: after being rejected by both Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatre, it was privately printed in 1820; whereas Macready's play was brought to the stage just for two nights in March 1821. Both experiments were born of a growing dissatisfaction with Colley Cibber's version of the play, which alone could be seen at the theatre at the time. However, their unsuccessful stage history and intrinsic ambiguities bear witness to the sway that Cibber's Richard still held over actors and audiences alike. Also, they show how in a bardolatrous century a sort of anti-Shakespearean bias nonetheless existed with regard to *King Richard III* and the age was still unwilling to relinquish its “inherited Cibberism” in spite of its flaunted admiration for Shakespeare.

The article will show how Bridgman's and Macready's versions did not offer a viable alternative to Cibber, not only as far as the fidelity to the Shakespearian original was concerned, but also with regard to the ever-felt need to make the Bard “our contemporary”. The early nineteenth century was an age of virtuoso performance, and the star actor was the undisputed monarch of the theatre and was acknowledged as a creator in his own right. If the theatrical adaptations produced in the period were no more than abortive attempts, it was left to actors to accomplish the task of adapting the play to the “spirit of the age”, and the fact that they acted in Cibber's version did not seem to represent an obstacle.

In his commendatory poem from the First Folio, Ben Jonson asserted that Shakespeare “was not of an Age, but for all time”. This has proved true, and Shakespeare has been able to speak to an endless number of succeeding generations of readers and theatregoers. This, however, not because essential, unchangeable and universal truths about human nature, the world and experience lay hidden in his plays or his characters,¹ but, quite the opposite, because succeeding generations, in the course of the centuries, have been able to appropriate, exploit and re-use Shakespeare to make sense of their world and their lives. Shakespeare is for all time precisely because he has relentlessly changed over time. The author and his texts have been unceasingly re-invented and a virtually infinite series of “alternative Shakespeares” have come to embody specific contemporary issues and conflicts.² As Jean Marsden put it in 1991, Shakespeare is the object of “an ongoing process of literary and cultural appropriation in which each new generation attempts to redefine Shakespeare's

genius in contemporary terms, projecting its desires and anxieties onto his work”.³ This is true for both the “dramatic” Shakespeare and the “theatrical” Shakespeare: Shakespeare’s plays have tirelessly been reinterpreted on the page by scholars (and not only) as they have been reinvented on the stage by actors and directors. The fate of *King Richard III*, however, is peculiar from this point of view, insofar as an often denigrated Restoration revision of Shakespeare’s play totally replaced the “original” one in the theatre, and held the stage for nearly two hundred years. This peculiarity acquires interesting overtones when we look at the treatment the staged play received by the Romantics who, in spite of the bardolatry prevailing at the time and of their often vented disesteem for the adapted version, apparently missed their opportunity to make Shakespeare’s original play speak for their own time.

This seems really odd if we just think about the fact that Richard III was a character who appealed enormously to early nineteenth century audiences, seduced by his “mental superiority” and, as Hazlitt put it, “his power to make others the playthings of his will”.⁴ Richard’s unwavering and unstoppable progress in blood caused awe and astonishment in the public, and generated that chain of sensations that Edmund Burke had related to the “sublime”.⁵ The Romantics were attracted by exceptional, but also ambiguous and contradictory personalities, and Shakespeare’s arch-villain, who “held on his way, unquestioned, ‘hedged in the divinity of kings’, amenable to no tribunal, and abusing his power in contempt of mankind”⁶ acquired almost superhuman connotations to their eyes, and was associated with other Romantic myths - like Napoleon, Milton’s Satan and the Byronic hero – in both literary and theatrical criticism. Like them, he was no common being, and his major interpreter on the stage, Edmund Kean, with his “preternatural and terrific”⁷ acting, also seemed to be in some way supernatural.

The roots of the Romantics’ almost morbid fascination with the character of Richard III are to be found in the second half of the eighteenth century. Firstly in the emergence of medievalism as both an antiquarian endeavour and a popular cultural phenomenon (the Gothic Revival in art, architecture and literature), which afforded the possibility of recreating an attractive if distant past,

and secondly in the unprecedented success of David Garrick in the role. Richard III was one of Garrick's favourite parts and it spanned his whole career, from his London debut on 19 October 1741 to his retirement in June 1776.⁸ Garrick, however, like most actors up to the late nineteenth century, acted in Colley Cibber's adaptation of Shakespeare's play, which had been composed at the end of 1699. Cibber at the time was a quite established London actor who was specialised in comic and fop parts. In total, he authored twenty-five plays, mainly comedies, either original, or adapted. Later in his career, he also became the manager of Drury Lane and was appointed Poet Laureate. Yet, for all his life, Cibber was obsessed by a desire to shine in tragic roles, and his alteration of Shakespeare's *Richard III* was designed precisely for this purpose. However, his plan to change his public image from comedian to tragedian was thwarted, as audiences decreed him unfit to portray the character of Richard, and his tragic efforts were pitilessly ridiculed.⁹ Even if Cibber's adaptation fell short of its immediate goal, it nonetheless proved the most lasting of the many revisions of Shakespeare's plays that were produced during the Restoration.

When Cibber's *Tragical History of King Richard III* saw the light of day, the great age of adaptation was at an end.¹⁰ Indeed, as Sandra Clark notes, "of all the adaptations, this is the most faithful".¹¹ Cibber's adaptation followed Shakespeare's plot-line. Unlike other revisers, Cibber did not change the ending, as Nahum Tate, for instance, had done with *King Lear*. No visual spectacle or special effects (like those in William Davenant's *Macbeth*) were added. Neither did Cibber introduce new characters (as John Dryden and William Davenant had done in *The Tempest*) or entirely new episodes, apart from the murder of Henry VI in the Tower (from *Henry VI, Part 3*), an exchange between Richard and Lady Anne (Ann in Cibber) in which Richard cruelly communicates his detestation to his tearful wife to incite her to suicide, and an heartbreaking farewell between Queen Elizabeth and the Princes.¹²

Nevertheless, Cibber substantially modified the character of Richard and, more importantly as far as its stage history is concerned, made the play into the perfect vehicle to stardom. Although the part of Richard III was already a very big one in Shakespeare, since for number of words it is

second only to Hamlet's, Cibber's version was even more centred than Shakespeare's on its title-role.¹³ Besides, since the number of the *dramatis personae* was considerably reduced by Cibber (the characters of Edward IV, Margaret, Clarence, Hastings, to name the most notable, were omitted), the focus was even more exclusively on Richard. Just as the part was magnified, so were Richard's iniquity (in the first three acts) and heroism (in Acts IV and V). In addition, Cibber's Richard is simplified and conventionalized. Cibber's hero is far less complex and less ambiguous than Shakespeare's. His duplicity is played down, and he has become less subtle and more direct. Following the Restoration urge to rationalize motivation, several monologues in which Richard's intentions are expressed and clarified were added. As usual with adaptations of the time, Cibber also introduced a love motif: Richard openly declares that he is in love with Lady Ann and, later on, he confesses his infatuation with Lady Elizabeth. Pathos was also exploited whenever possible.

Cibber's play, which was designed to feed its compiler's vanity, was perfect for a star-actor. As George Bernard Shaw put it, Cibber's version was a "one man show",¹⁴ or, in the words of a modern editor, "an egomaniac's delight".¹⁵ Obviously enough, the hypertrophy of the central character that is found in Cibber's text made it a favourite with actors and decreed its unparalleled success not only at Garrick's time, but also in a period like that of Romanticism, one in which the theatre *was* the actor and authorship was subservient to acting.¹⁶ Romantic actors loved Cibber's adaptation and capitalized on its title-role, choosing it to launch their London careers.¹⁷ Until 1820, the play had been performed practically unaltered, and only very slight changes had been introduced by David Garrick, George Frederick Cooke and John Philip Kemble.¹⁸ Critics, however, had become increasingly dissatisfied with Cibber's version, and seemed anxious to dismiss it altogether. William Hazlitt, for instance, asserted that "the manner in which Shakespeare's plays have been generally altered or rather mangled by modern mechanists is a disgrace to the English stage",¹⁹ and variously called Cibber's play a "patch-work",²⁰ a "miserable medley"²¹ and a "vile jumble".²² Whereas Charles Lamb defined Cibber's "improvements" as "ribald trash".²³ Nonetheless, Cibber's Richard pertinaciously stood firm against detractors.

Up to this point there is little new. The Romantics' penchant for the Middle Ages, the central role of the actor in the Romantic theatre and the popularity of *Richard III* at the time are well known. Neither is it a mystery that the *Richard III* of the study and the *Richard III* of the theatre were quite different in the Romantic period, and that audiences up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century never saw the Richard "that Shakespeare drew" on the stage, but were thrilled by the powerful embodiments that Cibber's version of the character found on the boards. Much less known, however, are the pseudo-attempts that were made in these years to restore Shakespeare's "original" Richard III to the stage. The purpose of this study is, precisely, to examine two texts that were produced in the Romantic age and place themselves at the margins of theatre history: the ill-fated stage adaptations of *King Richard III* by Thomas Bridgman and William Charles Macready. These were born of a growing dissatisfaction with Cibber's version, but their spurious form and their failure to gain or hold the stage testify to the sway Cibber's Richard still held over actors and audiences alike. In addition, they show how, "at a period when Shakespeare [was] regarded almost with idolatry",²⁴ a sort of anti-Shakespearian bias nonetheless existed with regard to *King Richard III*, and also how the age was unwilling to relinquish its "inherited Cibberism" in spite of its flaunted admiration for Shakespeare. The phenomenon that Marvin Carlson calls "ghosting" (i.e. performance memory)²⁵ can, in part, account for this paradox, but, as we shall see, there is more to it than just the theatrical *déjà vu*.

1. Thomas Bridgman's Adaptation

Thomas Bridgman's play was never produced: after being rejected by both Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatre, it was privately printed in 1820. In his preface, Bridgman complains about the different fate Shakespeare's plays have undergone on the page (where editorial purism has been increasingly pursued) and on the stage (where they have been relentlessly bastardized). However, he admits that his experiment is no mere restoration, since many of Cibber's alterations have been made "with the greatest discrimination and effect", and his aim is simply to remove "faults, not

beauties". This declaration of intent blithely contradicts his previous claim that he intends "to make 'Richard himself again'" (the words are Cibber's!) - namely, "to restore [Shakespeare's] beauties to the public eye" and "to omit that which has spuriously been inserted in their stead".²⁶ The alterations by Cibber that Bridgman (and contemporary audiences) were unable to relinquish are those found in the last two acts, which greatly enhanced Richard's heroism and offered wonderful opportunities for his interpreters to display their talents to the fullest. In an age in which the star actor was the unquestioned sovereign of the theatre, the respect for Shakespeare's poetry could in no way get the better of the actor's need to shine when the two were in conflict. Bridgman unabashedly subordinates the flaunted admiration for the Shakespearian original to a supposed superior playability of Cibber's text, since, as he declares: "Throughout the fourth and fifth acts [Cibber's] general alterations certainly have served greatly to enhance the merits of the play".²⁷ He even defends Cibber's alterations on aesthetical grounds: "It has been remarked of the plays of Shakespeare, that the three first acts, in general, are the best; the two last, especially the fifth, towards the conclusion, gradually fall off, owing to his eagerness to get them ready for performance as speedily as possible".²⁸ He does not give the source of this remark, but takes its authority as beyond dispute.

The preface includes an analysis of the character of Shakespeare's Richard that is also vitiated by being influenced by Cibber's alterations. Bridgman freely mingles Shakespearian traits with features deriving from Richard's theatrical embodiment. As was usual with eighteenth-century character criticism, the point of departure is the moral paradox that a character "fully deserving of our bitterest hate" is not rendered "an object of disgust". After stressing the complexity of Richard who is, at the same time, a "treacherous friend", a "designing hypocrite", a "dignified king", a "base assassin" and a "manly hero" (this is obviously truer of Cibber's Richard), Bridgman concludes his assessment with a remark that Shakespeare's character could hardly have provoked and that, conversely, seems inspired by the protracted heroic exertions of Cibber's character in his final moments, and by the sympathetic involvement based on pathos he has elicited throughout the play:

“at last, when he is overpowered and killed by Richmond, after we have anxiously anticipated, and are most delighted with his defeat, yet are we, even then, almost inclined to pity”. After all, Richard was an (almost) legitimate sovereign: how could he be rendered thoroughly detestable without offending the monarchy? The extraordinary bravery of Cibber’s Richard helped in reconciling the character with a honourable image of kingship, insofar as, to some extent, it made up for his devilish wickedness.

In the prologue to the adaptation, the outspoken advocacy of Shakespeare similarly appears contradictory in view of the actual retention of so much spurious material in the play itself. The opening is straightforwardly bardolatrous with its quotation of the first stanza of the prologue Samuel Johnson wrote for David Garrick to be read at the opening of Drury Lane Theatre in 1747:

When Learning's triumph o'er her barb'rous foes
 First rear'd the stage, immortal Shakespeare rose:
 Each change of many-colour'd life he drew,
 Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new;
 Existence saw him spurn her bounded reign,
 And panting Time toil'd after him in vain;
 His powerful strokes presiding Truth impress'd,
 And unresisted Passion storm'd the breast.²⁹

Johnson’s quotation and Bridgman’s equally high-flown praise of Shakespeare are then followed by an invitation to “discard all foreign Melo-Drames and stuff” and go back to “the glorious founder of the English School”. Accordingly, in the *captatio benevolentiae* that concludes the piece, Bridgman confidently proposes himself as a paladin of the Bard who is ready to sacrifice himself for his sake:

To-night, we beg your patience and applause,
 Who greatly venture to support his cause;

Though timid, undismay'd in his defence,
 To gain your favour is our sole pretence;
 Here to restore those beauties to your sight,
 Which long have been consigned to gloomy night:
 Secure, if due, to gain the praise of all, -
 While e'en 'twere glorious in his cause to fall!³⁰

The condemnation of the foreign influence on the English stage is carried on in the epilogue, where the English theatrical tradition, embodied by Shakespeare, is emphatically defended in another exhortation to “Strive to expel from [the stage] the vicious rules / Of both the German and the Gallic schools”, since it is “shameful on that stage to bring, / Where Shakespeare’s ever acted, a Gnome-King”.³¹ Bridgman’s complaint vaunts a long tradition, since the poisonous influence of German drama (and of August von Kotzebue in particular) on British morality had become a leitmotif in the Tory press after the French Revolution. As a correspondent in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* argued:

The flimsy nonsense (to, say the least of it) of most of our own play writers has been succeeded by a deluge of German errors, German inconsistencies, German politics, and German blasphemies: no trifling evils have been done to this country by this importation and acting of German plays; and the applause bestowed upon the repeated performances of these miserable productions, is at once a lamentable proof of our depravity in taste, sense, and virtue; and when it is considered, that one of these German productions (I mean *Pizzarro*) has employed so many translators, has been so often performed with the greatest applause, has exercised the talents of a British Senator, and has run through so many editions in the press, what can be thought of our progress in taste, sense, or virtue?

That the immortal bard of Britain should give place, on our Theatres, to the mad effusions of such distempered heads as Kotzebue, Schiller, &c &c. is a most mortifying reflection to every Briton, capable of appreciating the merits of literary productions.³²

Strangely enough, in Bridgman's prologue the ardent defence of Shakespeare remains generic. Neither there nor in the epilogue is the (partial) attempt at restoration the author is proposing defended, or even motivated. In the prologue, the attacks are nationalistically circumscribed to trends coming from abroad, whereas the epilogue censures the contemporary playwrights' arrogant pretensions to reform society and their neglect of the stage, which is badly in need of reform (once again owing to foreign influence). Thus, after having condemned the "marked indifference" towards the form in which Shakespeare's plays "have been suffered to come before the public" in the preface, Bridgman himself falls victim to the same error, and in the two spaces statutorily assigned to the dramatist for the presentation and the promotion of his work he does not devote a word to the defence of his experiment or to exposing the faults in Cibber's "mélange". This is surprising in view of the fact that the opening lines of the epilogue prove that he is obviously aware of its role in the economy of the play, and also that contemporary dramatists are criticized for neglecting to talk of their plays in the epilogues:

Pray, friends, what means the Epilogue? Is't not to say

A word or two in favour of the Play?

Good faith, I hardly know; such modern rhymes

Scarce think about the Play – they mind the times,

Expose the fashions, and revile the age,

Nor care to mend the errors of the stage.³³

As far as the adaptation itself is concerned, Bridgman eliminates the spurious first act of Cibber's tragedy, in which, mainly drawing from the Third Part of *King Henry VI*, the murder of the old king in the Tower was portrayed, in obedience to the Restoration preoccupation with symmetry, which required a good ruler as a counterpoint to the villainous Richard.³⁴ Bridgman also reintroduces some central characters Cibber had omitted, namely Clarence, King Edward IV and Hastings. He does not restore the character of Margaret, even if some references to her curses are

carelessly reintroduced. Connected to the restoration of the characters is, obviously, the reintroduction of whole scenes Cibber had left out: the arrest of Clarence (but not his dream and murder), the (pseudo-)reconciliation scene that takes place in the presence of the sick Edward IV, and both the exchange between Hastings and Catesby and the Council scene, in which Hastings is accused and then arrested.³⁵ On the other hand, the spurious, cruel confrontation in which Cibber's Richard brutally communicates his hatred to his wife in order to induce her to commit suicide is retained.³⁶ What Bridgman totally eliminates is Cibber's heartrending farewell in the Tower between Queen Elizabeth and the young Princes (in the presence of the Duchess of York and of Lady Ann "in tears"), which was Cibber's most extended pathetic interpolation,³⁷ and Richmond's deferential epitaph over Richard's corpse, which in Cibber had replaced Shakespeare's ruthless comment: "The bloody dog is dead".³⁸

Although Bridgman sometimes prefers Shakespeare's wording in places where Cibber had given "[Shakespeare's] thoughts in the best dress [he] could afford 'em",³⁹ many of the speeches added by the actor are retained. When including a speech Cibber had borrowed from *Henry VI, Part 3*, Bridgman even inserts a footnote to justify this:

Although this speech, together with the lines which immediately precede the entrance of the two Murderers, is not to be found in the original, yet, as I consider it rather contributes to improve the piece, than otherwise, I have retained it; which I have not scrupled to do in many instances, where I thought the interpolations conducive to improvement.⁴⁰

The restoration of Shakespeare's text is, again, acknowledged as partial, and only rarely is the fidelity to Cibber merely functional, as when glosses are needed to compensate for omissions. For instance, five of the seven substantial soliloquies Cibber had provided for Richard are retained.⁴¹ In Act II (Cibber 2.2.128-140) Richard exultantly and self-confidently "counts his gains" and assures the audience that young prince Edward will never be crowned king. In Act III, two of Cibber's

soliloquies are combined, as the lines in which Richard triumphantly descants on his success in getting the crown (Cibber 3.2.270-280) are conflated with a soliloquy in which he argues against conscience (Cibber 3.1.157-178), as was appropriate to the conventional eighteenth-century villain. In Act IV, the second speech on conscience (“the busy something, here”), which takes place while the princes are being murdered, is likewise retained (Cibber 4.3.19-38), even if the direct reference to the murder that concludes the speech in Cibber is omitted (“Hark! The Murder’s doing; Princes farewell, / To me there’s Musick in your Passing-Bell”). Finally, the tent scene, which is entirely Cibber’s, opens with the last, poetical soliloquy the first adapter had inserted (5.5.1-25), which is based on the Chorus’s speech in *Henry V* at the beginning of Act IV.

On other occasions, the retention of Cibber’s additions is more restricted, but equally significant, as happens with the simile in Act IV comparing the young Princes to “two spiders, / Crawling upon [Richard’s] startled hopes” (Cibber 4.2.14-18), with Queen Elizabeth’s aside clearing up the Shakespearian ambiguity concerning her apparent consent to her daughter’s marriage with Richard (Cibber 4.4.111-117), and with Richard’s gruesome order regarding the burial of the Princes that replaces Shakespeare’s vagueness on the subject. Here, instead of Tyrrel’s elusive answer to Richard’s enquiries:

K. Rich. And buried, gentle Tyrrel?

Tyr. The chaplain of the Tower hath buried them;
 But where, to say the truth, I do not know.⁴²

we find the bloodcurdling exchange:

Glo. And buried, my good Tyrrel?

Tyr. In that I thought to ask your grace’s pleasure.

Glo. I have it – I’ll have them sure – get me a coffin
 Full of holes – let them be both cramm’d into it:

And, hark thee, in the night-tide throw them down

The Thames – once in, they'll find the way to the bottom.⁴³

In the conversation between the King and Catesby that (in Bridgman) concludes Act IV, it is one of Richard's heroic speeches that is retained. As has already been noted, actors built greatly on Cibber's Richard's increased bravery, and audiences were so accustomed to this aspect of the character that it was still deemed unthinkable to go back to the Shakespearian original:

Come forth my honest sword, which here I vow,
By my soul's hope, shall ne'er again be sheath'd,
Ne'er shall these watching eyes have needful rest,
Till death has closed 'em in a glorious grave,
Or fortune given me measure of revenge.⁴⁴

Similarly, in the last scene of his adaptation, Bridgman maintains the non-Shakespearian exchange between Richmond and Richard that precedes their fight (and that opens with a line from *Henry VI, Part 2*), and the defiant dying speech of Richard, which, with its invocation to "the first-born Cain", perfectly suited the Cibberian arch-villain and which is, in part, taken from Northumberland's speech in *Henry IV, Part 2* (1.1.155-60):

Perdition catch thy Arm. The chance is thine:
But oh! the vast renown thou hast acquir'd
In conquering Richard, doth afflict him more
Than even doth his body's parting with its soul:
Now, let the world no longer be a stage
To feed contention to a lingering act,
But let one spirit of the first-born Cain
Reign in all bosoms; that each heart being set

On bloody actions, the rude scene may end,
 And darkness be the burier of the dead.⁴⁵

Lastly, Cibber's introduction of a romantic motive in the conclusion of the play, which was intended as an anticipation of a happy ending promising more than a mere dynastic arrangement, is safeguarded:

Blunt. My lord, the queen and fair Elizabeth,
 Her beauteous daughter, some few miles off
 Are on their way to 'gratulate your victory.

Rich. Ay, there indeed my toil is rewarded.⁴⁶

Thus, Bridgman's flaunted restoration of Shakespeare's text appears, at best, to be a tentative experiment. It is full of contradictions and it is both ambiguously presented and only half-heartedly pursued. Despite its defence of the superiority of Shakespeare's original, it is a compromise between Shakespeare and Cibber. All this is symptomatic of an ambivalent attitude on the part of the author: Bridgman could hardly recognize in Cibber's adaptation the Richard "that Shakespeare drew", but, nonetheless, he was reluctant to abandon it. As we shall see, a similar ambivalence may also be noticed in contemporary public opinion.

2. William Charles Macready's Adaptation

William Charles Macready's experiment⁴⁷ was much more self-conscious, but again the outcome is a compromise between the theatrical effectiveness of Cibber, which still insured overflowing houses whenever it was performed, and an acknowledged aesthetic superiority of Shakespeare. Differently from Bridgman's text, Macready's play was brought to the stage, but just

for two nights: on 12 and 19 March 1821.⁴⁸ An assessment published in the *Morning Chronicle* on the day after the first performance of the play contrasts *action* and *poetry*, showing how, in a bardolatrous century, a sort of anti-Shakespearian bias nonetheless existed with regard to *King Richard III*, and how the public was not really willing to surrender its “inherited Cibberism”:⁴⁹ “as some interpolations are still retained, we cannot give our unqualified praise to an attempt which has fallen short of its professed object, and which, even if it had been executed with strict precision, might possibly have injured the action as much as it must have benefited the poetry of the drama”.⁵⁰ Of course, the prejudice regarding the supposed unplayability of Shakespeare’s text was limited to those among the theatrical public who were aware of the fact that what was put on stage at the time was not Shakespeare’s play, and they were probably not many, since the name of the adapter was seldom mentioned in the playbills. Thus, the playbill for the 1821 Macready’s performance announcing that “Of the Tragedy hitherto acted under the Title of King Richard III. more than half [was] the exclusive composition of CIBBER” came as quite a shock to theatregoers. The surprise the notice caused is recorded in the review of the performance *The British Stage and Literary Cabinet* published: “It was curious to hear the expressions of surprise which the announcement of this experiment in the Bills, drew from many persons who would fain be thought intimately acquainted with Shakespeare’s plays, but who, previously, entertained not the slightest suspicion that the one usually performed was not entirely his production”.⁵¹

The authorship of the adaptation has sometimes been disputed. The name of the adapter was mentioned neither in the playbill nor on the title page of the edition that was published in the same year, and the text was not immediately recognized as Macready’s. *The Champion* talked vaguely of “the compiler, whoever he may be”.⁵² On March 17, Bridgman himself wrote a heated letter to *The Morning Post* in which he accused Macready of plagiarism.⁵³ Then, in January 1844, in a letter to the Editor of *The Times*, Edmund Lewis Lenthal Swift presented himself as “the partial restorer of *Richard III* as produced in March 1821 at Covent Garden”, complaining that “justice was not done to him on the publication of the piece, for his name was not so much as mentioned”.⁵⁴ He returned

to the subject almost a quarter of a century later, in another letter to the Editor of *The Times* in which he invariably referred to the play as “my adaptation” and only acknowledged the aid of his friend Macready’s “taste, judgement and theatrical experience” in the enterprise.⁵⁵ The mystery was apparently solved in the actor’s *Reminiscences*, which were published two years after his death, in 1875. There, Macready explained that Mr Swift had sent him an alteration of Cibber’s adaptation of *King Richard III*, “but varying so little from the work it professed to reform, that [he] was obliged to extend the restoration of Shakespeare’s text”.⁵⁶ Still, this account fails to lay the mystery to rest because in his 1844 letter Swift had said the exact opposite, namely that “more of Cibber was retained in the production than he had designed”.⁵⁷ Tradition, however, has always ascribed the adaptation to Macready.

The adapter makes his intentions very clear in the Preface: “To restore *the Character of Richard and the Language of Shakespeare* to the Stage has been the sole object of this re-arrangement”.⁵⁸ As was usual in contemporary dramatic criticism, the emphasis is on Richard, as the adapter is in no doubt that “Shakespeare’s Richard is a *play of character*”.⁵⁹ Cibber’s fault was to have lost sight of this. Because Cibber’s Richard is neither the historian’s (Thomas More’s) nor Shakespeare’s, Macready wants “to bring back the *original character* of Richard in all its bearings – his original language and the fidelity of the action to history”.⁶⁰ So Macready revised the theatrical version of the play with a purpose, and what he had in mind was already evident from his first interpretation of the role on 25 October 1819, when he had performed in Cibber’s text while endeavouring to infuse it with the spirit of Shakespeare. Richard was Macready’s first great Shakespearian success, and he had been forced into it by the Covent Garden manager, Henry Harris, who, having decided that it was time for Macready to challenge Kean on his own ground, advertised the performance without even consulting the actor.⁶¹ Thus, Macready was obliged to use Cibber’s script. However, as he wrote in his *Reminiscences*, for this first portrait of the character he went “direct to the true source of inspiration, the great original, endeavouring to carry its spirit through the sententious and stagy lines of Cibber”.⁶²

Macready's conception of Richard was also based on the sources, which he had studied, again, when preparing for the role in 1819. As he wrote in the Preface to his adaptation, his aim was to restore "that 'alacritie and mirth of mind' instanced by More, which is prominent throughout Shakespeare, [but] is hardly anywhere discernible in Cibber". Both More's and Shakespeare's creations had evident connections with the theatrical Vice,⁶³ the allegorical character who had developed in a popular context, and in Tudor interludes, besides devising plots to make the human character fall into sin and be damned, was the source of mirth and provided the audience with comic relief. The usual composite structure of Shakespeare's plays, in which almost unvaryingly a plebeian subplot appears, was substituted by the composite nature of the main character in *King Richard III*. However, the Vice's popular laughter, his desecrating language and his debunking spirit could hardly find a place on the Restoration stage, which felt evident discomfort in front of Shakespeare's tragicomic approach.⁶⁴ Thus, Richard's jocularitry was played down. In Cibber's *Tragical History of King Richard III*, the hero's roots in the merry-making Vice are no longer discernible. He becomes "stern Richard" (Cibber 1.1.216). Macready borrowed the words of Charles Lamb, "one of the best critics that ever loved, and taught others to love the beauties of Shakespeare", to complain that "in Cibber's alteration we seek in vain for 'the rich intellect which Richard displays; for his wit, his resources, his buoyant spirits, his vast knowledge and insight into characters'".⁶⁵ In his review of the 1819 performance, Leigh Hunt bore witness to Macready's success in conveying this idea of the character: Kean's Richard was "the more sombre and perhaps deeper part of him", whereas Macready's was "the livelier and more animal part":

The one has more of the seriousness of conscious evil in it, the other of the gaiety of meditated success. [...] Mr Macready's is more sustained in his troubled waters by constitutional vigour and buoyancy. [...] We certainly never saw the gayer part of Richard to such advantage. His very step, in the most sanguine scenes, had a princely gaiety of meditated success.⁶⁶

Thus, the "quality of unrestrained mirth", an acute embarrassment to eighteenth-century moral

critics,⁶⁷ but the pillar on which Charles Lamb had built his portrayal of Richard (in antithesis to George Frederick Cooke's "butcher-like" conception of the character), was finally brought to light in Macready's playing of the role. What Macready objected to in Cibber's Richard were his moral scruples and constant self-questioning: in other words, that heightened emphasis on conscience that eighteenth-century critics and audiences greatly appreciated, but which had begun to sound outdated since the turn of the century. In Macready's opinion, Cibber had impoverished Richard's character, and, in rejecting his "bold originality of thought and expression", he had reduced him to a stock figure.

In spite of this, Macready was rather ambiguous about Cibber's interventions. Having paid Cibber "the just praise of having formed a very clever Play from his great materials",⁶⁸ he declared that his effort was made "under [the] impression of Cibber's causeless innovations on the character, but with a full and perfect sense of his great skill in retrenching and reducing the play to a representable form".⁶⁹ Macready was far less cautious in his *Reminiscences*, where he attacked "the coarse jests and *ad captandum* speeches of Cibber", and dismissed the popular passages he himself had retained "in deference to the taste of the times" as "claptraps" and "bombast".⁷⁰ The ambivalence towards Cibber is even more obvious in the playbill. The desire not to offend the sensibility of theatrical audiences by attacking their favourite becomes obsequiousness: Cibber's alteration is here defined as "ingenious".⁷¹ This wavering attitude towards Cibber undeniably contributed to dooming the experiment. As did the manager's short-sighted decision not to provide new scenery and costumes: "not one farthing was expended upon either the one or the other" *The British Stage and Literary Cabinet* complained.⁷² This, perhaps, would prove a fruitful lesson to the young Macready who, when manager of Covent Garden (1837-39) and Drury Lane (1841-43), decided to pay great attention to these two aspects of performance and, as Richard Schoch notes, became "committed to pictorial *mise en scène*", a mode of production that was especially identified with Shakespeare revivals and "entailed not only highly elaborate scenery, but also detailed

costumes and properties, spectacular scenic and lighting effects, and the frequent use of *tableaux vivants*".⁷³

As Macready sadly admitted in his *Reminiscences*, "the experiment was partially successful – only partially".⁷⁴ The triumphal statement announcing the second performance of the play proclaimed that "The Life and Death of King Richard the Third, in its altered state, was received with very great applause – and MR MACREADY never more successful than in the character of Richard".⁷⁵ But this sounds like puffery. In fact, the adaptation was silently shelved after only two performances. The press was divided. The *London Literary Gazette* exultantly announced that "Richard [was] himself again".⁷⁶ The *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* called the performance as "an experiment of happy audacity", spoke of a "regenerated Richard" and claimed that its author had "removed much of the dross cast on Richard [by Cibber], and almost brought him back to his original brightness".⁷⁷ Other newspapers were far more cautious, not to say hostile. *The Times*, even as it acknowledged the advisability of rescuing "the original text of [Shakespeare's] plays, from the omissions and interpolations which successive ages [had] accumulated", labelled the experiment as "merely another arrangement, and certainly inferior, in dramatic effect, to that of Cibber".⁷⁸ The reviewer of *The Champion*, though an advocate of "the dismissal of Colley Cibber's trashy and incongruous melange, and the restoration of the original *Richard the Third*", was dissatisfied with what he called a "pretended revival of Shakespeare's *Richard III*" that omitted and interpolated materials, "injudiciously" transposed scenes and curtailed speeches.⁷⁹ Macready seems to have lost his battle both with the public and with the critics. If the attempt was received rather coldly by the audience it was probably because of "the influence of habit, and the erroneous idea generally entertained of the character of the hero".⁸⁰ *The Champion* review helps explain the often unfavourable reception the experiment had in the press:

In short, in whatever light we regard this new arrangement, as it is called, - whether as an abridged revival, or as a compilation from Shakespeare's tragedy and Cibber's melange, it is equally open to

censure, as having done at once too little and too much; and, we confess, that we lament so much the more the want of taste and judgement in the present experiment, because we very much fear that the imperfect result may rather check than encourage those other restorations of original text [sic] of our immortal bard, by every true admirer of the old English drama “so devoutly to be wished”.⁸¹

Reviewers too, however, were far from unanimous in wishing for a return to the original script. An anonymous reviewer who seemed more worried about the philological spuriousness of Shakespeare’s texts than about the vogue for “adapting them better to representation” went so far as to candidly declare:

It is true that Cibber, in adapting *King Richard III* to the modern stage, has suppressed many striking beauties of the original; and that the transposition and abridgment which he thought it advisable to make, have perhaps compelled him, for the sake of connexion, to incorporate somewhat too much of his own composition with the dialogue of Shakespeare. But how sacrilegious soever these liberties may be deemed by bigoted and idolatrous critics, experience has shown that the popularity and dramatic effect of the Tragedy have not been diminished by the alterations of Cibber.⁸²

In his *Reminiscences* Macready himself admitted that “to receive full justice, Shakespeare’s *Life and Death of King Richard III* should [have been] given in its perfect integrity, whereby alone scope could [have been] afforded to the active play of Richard’s versatility and unscrupulous persistency”.⁸³ However, he did not have the courage to go that far. As George Vandenhoff, a player who acted with him later in his career, sarcastically remarked, he was not ready to pass up the many opportunities a version like Cibber’s offered a star-actor to amaze his public:

The truth is, Mr Macready valued an author as far as the author served *him*; and he respected the text, as far as it answered his purpose; so that his Shaksperian (*sic*) Revivals, which were got up with great care

and attention, might have been designated, as far as integrity of text went, “Restorations of so much of Shakspeare (*sic*) as suits Mr Macready”.⁸⁴

In obedience to his declared intention “to restore *the Character of Richard* [...] to the Stage”, Macready endeavoured to omit “no incident whatsoever, bearing upon [his] character”.⁸⁵ He thus preserved the hypertrophy of Cibber’s Richard, and even if he restored Clarence, Hastings and the character of Margaret,⁸⁶ these were not reintroduced for their intrinsic significance. Margaret, for example, only appeared in one (much curtailed) scene, Macready justifying the reduction of her role (which *The Champion* defined as “a palpable absurdity”)⁸⁷ by claiming that it was “reluctantly made, under the apprehension that the cause of her grief, being so very remote, would prevent the audience from commiserating or sympathising with its expression”.⁸⁸ Thus, although Macready rescued some Shakespearian characters, the emphasis of the play did not result greatly redistributed. With respect to Cibber, however, Macready adopted a different strategy to give more prominence to the leading character: whereas Cibber had dropped characters who could compete with his protagonist and transformed the play into a drama of a single personality, Macready understood that more characters were needed to counterpoint Richard and set him off to greatest advantage. This was precisely the same approach he would employ in 1838, when he famously reintroduced the Fool to *King Lear*, which he had already partially restored in 1834. On that occasion too, as John Forster noted, Macready’s *Lear* was “heightened by his introduction of the Fool to a surprising degree”.⁸⁹

Some scenes Macready restored to *King Richard III* were very effective. This was the case with Clarence’s dream (which Bridgman had not restored) and especially the council scene, which Macready also retained in later performances, after he had returned to Cibber’s text. As for Cibber’s interpolated scenes, Macready cut the assassination of Henry VI in the Tower and the second confrontation between Richard and Lady Ann, which Bridgman had kept. He did not have the courage to leave out the pathos-loaded encounter between Queen Elizabeth and her sons in the

Tower (4.3), even if he did manage to introduce some of Shakespeare's language. Five of the seven new soliloquies introduced by Cibber survived,⁹⁰ as did the gory instructions for the burial of the princes in 4.3 (Cibber 4.4.11-117) and the heroic speech that concludes Act IV. Moreover, Macready was quite incapable of renouncing the heightened heroism of Cibber's Richard. Again, the reverence for Shakespeare's poetry yielded to the actor's need to display his powers to the utmost. Thus in Act V he kept both Richard's defiant challenge to Richmond and a portion of the exchange between the two antagonists that Cibber had adapted in part from *Henry IV, Part 2* and *Henry VI, Part 2*:

K.Rich. What, ho! young Richmond, ho! 'tis Richard calls:
 I hate thee, Harry, for thy blood of Lancaster:
 Now, - if thou didst not hide thee from my sword;
 Now, while the angry Trumpet sounds alarms,
 And dying groans transpierce the wounded air,
 Richmond, I say, come forth, and single face me:
 Richard is hoarse with daring thee to arms!⁹¹

K.Rich. Of one, or both of us the time is come.

Richm. Kind heaven, I thank thee; for my cause is thine;
 If Richard's fit to live, let Richmond fall.

K.Rich. Thy gallant bearing, Harry, I could plaud
 But that the spotted rebel stains the soldier.

Richm. Nor should thy prowess, Richard, want my praise,
 But that thy cruel deeds, have stamp'd thee tyrant:
 So thrive my sword, as heaven's high vengeance draws it!

K.Rich. My soul and body on the Action both.

(*Alarums*)

Richm. A dreadful lay! here's to decide it.⁹²

What Macready did cut was the dying speech of Richard: his hero died in silence.

In the Preface, Macready claimed that of the 1960 lines of his text no more than 200 were Cibber's. Yet, the impression one has while reading the play is not one of fidelity to the Shakespearian original. In fact he took a great many liberties: he included many lines from other plays; he freely transposed speeches and scattered fragments of soliloquies throughout the text; he even changed the order of entire scenes or portions of scenes – for example transferring the courtship of Lady Anne to the second act of the play, after the death of Clarence. The outcome is that, at times, the text appears as a collage in which lines are freely assembled from various Shakespearian plays and from Cibber's adaptation. The soliloquy preceding the appearance of Lady Anne with King Henry's corpse will give an idea of the patchwork nature of the enterprise:

Glos. 'Twas her excuse, to avoid me. Alas! [Cibber 2.1.31-35]
 She keeps no bed; --
 She has health enough to progress far as Chertsey,
 Though not to bear the sight of me.
 I cannot blame her:
 Why Love forswore me in my mother's womb; [3HVI 3.2.153-160 (already in Cibber)]
 And, for I should not deal in his soft laws,
 He did corrupt frail Nature with a bribe,
 To shrink my arm up, like a wither'd shrub;
 To make an envious mountain on my back,
 Where sits deformity to mock my body;
 To shape my legs of an unequal size;
 To disproportion me in every part: -
 And am I then a man to be belov'd? [Cibber 2.1.45-46]
 O monstrous thought! more vain than my ambition! -
 Then, since the heavens have shaped my body so, [3HVI 5.6.78-79]

Let hell make crook'd my mind to answer it!

And since it seems I cannot prove a lover,

[*RIII* 1.1.28 (altered) and 30]

I am determined to prove a villain!-

Bell tolls.

But see, my Love appears.-

[Cibber 2.1.54 and 60-61]

'Tis true, my form perhaps, will little move her,

But I've a tongue shall wheedle with the devil.

Why, I can smile, and murder while I smile,

[*3HVI* 3.2.182-185 (183 and 184 inverted)]

And wet my cheeks with artificial tears,

And cry, content, to that which grieves my heart,

And frame my face to all occasions. (*Bell tolls.*

Enters Lady Anne, Stanley, Brandon, Officers,

Guards, Friars, Ladies, and Pallbearers,

With King Henry's body.

Yet, hold; she mourns the man that I have killed:

[Cibber 2.1.62-66]

First let her sorrows take some vent: Stand here:

I'll take her passion in its wane, and turn

This storm of grief to gentle drops of pity

For his repentant murderer.

(*Retires.*⁹³

So much for Macready's idea of "restor[ring] *the Character of Richard and the Language of Shakespeare to the Stage*".⁹⁴ Despite his open advocacy of the superiority of Shakespeare's text and the poor opinion he had of Cibber's revision, Macready's adaptation, like Bridgman's play, was no more than a medley.

Bridgman's and Macready's versions did not offer a viable alternative to Cibber, not only as far as the fidelity to the Shakespearian original was concerned, but also with regard to the ever-felt need to make the Bard "our contemporary". The early nineteenth century was an age of virtuoso performance, and the star actor was the undisputed monarch of the theatre. As has already been

observed, the Romantic era witnessed what Jane Moody has termed “the tyrannical usurpation of authorship by stage celebrity”.⁹⁵ The persistence of Cibber’s revision in the period can be related to the fact that, at a time when the actor was acknowledged as a creator in his own right,⁹⁶ the actual script was, to a degree, marginalized, and it was the player who, with his so-called “new readings” and “points”, created his own performance text and, quite autonomously, managed to make it fit to his times. If the theatrical adaptations produced in the period were no more than abortive attempts, it was left to actors to accomplish the task of adapting the play to the “spirit of the age”, and the fact that they acted in Cibber’s version did not seem to represent an obstacle. Unlike his great predecessors in the role, for example, Edmund Kean did not even change a line to the version that tradition had handed down to him (he only retained Garrick’s and Cooke’s additions, and some of Kemble’s cuts), but it was his innovative style of acting that made the difference. With him, “the actor as original creator” was born and, like the Romantic genius, he was deemed almost godlike in his unrestrained creative freedom.⁹⁷ He truly seemed to embody the artist as a supremely individual creator. He was not simply a vehicle for the author’s text, but he recreated it, adding his own poetry to the role. In 1821, for instance, Richard Dana wrote: “When [Mr. Kean] plays out of Shakespeare, he fills up where his author is wanting. [...] he seems at the time to have possessed himself of Shakespeare’s imagination, and to have given it body and form”.⁹⁸ *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, on its part, went so far as to positively compare him to Shakespeare, asserting that his performance of Othello was “The noblest exhibition of human genius [they] ever witnessed. It evinced a kind and a degree of talent [...] only, and not much inferior to that which was required to write the character”.⁹⁹

One aspect of Kean’s interpretation of Richard that reflected “the spirit of the age”, and which was quite independent from the script in which he was acting, can be detected in the final duel with Richmond who, as John Genest testified, was forced to play the fool by Richard’s extraordinary vehemence:

Richard was Kean's best part - but he overdid his death - he came up close to Richmond, after he had lost his sword, as if he would have attacked him with his fists - Richmond, to please Kean, was obliged to stand like a fool, with a drawn sword in his hand, and without daring to use it.¹⁰⁰

Reducing Richmond, who was militarily supported by the French, to imbecility, obviously acquired patriotic overtones at a time when France was still considered as the public enemy. Indeed, Richard's increased heroism in Cibber's version was even of aid in making him the scourge of the French. Cooke had paved the way in adding nationalistic hints to his performance of Richard when, in 1804 (four years after his debut in the role), he had "bestowed some new study" and "judiciously introduced some lines from Richard's address to his army on the approach of Richmond's forces" that the reviewer of the *Monthly Mirror* found "extremely apposite to the patriotic sensations of the present moment":

"Let's whip these stragglers o'er the seas again ;

Lash hence these overweening rags of France;

These famish'd beggars, weary of their lives," &c.¹⁰¹

While Cooke's and Kean's actorial choices ingeniously appealed to the national feeling, Bridgman and Macready had unwisely eliminated from their adaptations another variation that Cibber had introduced and that could prove appropriate to the new political climate: Richmond's reverent obituary for Richard:

Farewel, Richard , and from thy dreadful end

May future Kings from Tyranny be warn'd;

Had thy aspiring Soul but stir'd in Vertue

With half the Spirit it has dar'd in Evil,

How might thy Fame have grac'd our English Annals:

But as thou art, how fair a Page thou'st blotted.¹⁰²

Aggrandizing Richard at the expense of Richmond (as Cibber, and even more Kean, did) undeniably entailed undermining the Tudor myth and overturning the political import of Shakespeare's play, but it nevertheless was, like Cooke's restoration, "extremely apposite to the patriotic sensations of the [...] moment".

Cibber's "improved" text outlived all other Restoration adaptations, and Richard III had to wait nearly the end of the nineteenth century before he could be properly allowed "to be himself again". In February 1845, Samuel Phelps experimented with a severely cut and partially re-arranged Shakespearian version at Sadler Wells that ran for twenty-four nights, but he went back to Cibber for his final production of the play in 1861. Charles Kean invariably used Cibber's script, even for his magnificent production at the Princess Theatre in February 1854. Cibber's adaptation pursued on its way virtually unchallenged until Henry Irving, first in 1877 and then in 1896, produced his own version of the play at the Lyceum Theatre. This was a heavily cut, but otherwise almost "pure" Shakespeare. Cibber's version, however, could still be seen in the twentieth century, and probably, as Hazelton Spencer declared in 1967, "has never been quite driven off the stage".¹⁰³ In spirit, at least. In 1909 Alice Wood asserted that "Cibber's form" was "still holding the stage",¹⁰⁴ and as late as 1930 Arthur Colby Sprague witnessed a performance of Cibber's *Richard III* in Boston, obviously advertised as Shakespeare's.¹⁰⁵ It is also notorious that Cibber's two most famous claptraps – "Off with his head! So much for Buckingham" and "Conscience avant; Richard's himself again" – even found their way into Laurence Olivier's 1955 film version. But what are the reasons behind the extraordinary longevity of Cibber's adaptation of Shakespeare's play, which defied all nineteenth-century attempts at restoration?

In 1992, Terence Hawkes asserted that "Shakespeare doesn't mean: *we* mean *by* Shakespeare", that is "Shakespeare's plays have no essential meanings, but functions as resources which we use to generate meaning for our own purposes".¹⁰⁶ To the fluidity of the meaning of

Shakespeare's plays we could connect what Margaret Jane Kidnie has called the elasticity of their ontological boundaries.¹⁰⁷ As the meaning of Shakespeare's plays is negotiated and re-negotiated over time, so are the boundaries between plays and adaptations. This would help explain the exceptional resilience of Cibber's Richard. As Kidnie argues, the yardstick we use to judge the authenticity (or the lack of it) of Shakespeare's creations is always changing and at any given moment "Shakespeare's play is whatever a dominant consensus of voices agrees to recognise as Shakespeare's play".¹⁰⁸ That is why in the Romantic period Cibber's Richard could still be accepted, and a return to Shakespeare's "original" was not deemed essential. Quite the opposite, Cibber's text constituted a good base for operating actorial variations, the sole that really seem to have mattered at the time. In spite of the poor opinion Hazlitt had of Cibber's "mangled text", in which more than half the lines were Cibber's invention,¹⁰⁹ he could still recognize Shakespeare's Richard in the Richard of Kean, who acted in Cibber's version. In the same way, Macready could assert that "Kean's conception [of Richard] was decidedly more Shakespearean" than Cooke's, although the two acted in the same text.¹¹⁰ Similarly, in 1819 that same actor was able to infuse Cibber's script with Shakespeare's spirit and satisfy an exigent critic like Leigh Hunt. Precisely because the boundaries of what we deem "Shakespeare" shrink and extend over time as much as public opinion and critical estimation will consent.

¹ On the ideological implications lying behind the contention that Shakespeare is "the bearer of universal truths" and "depicts a universal and unchanging human nature", see Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced. The Text in History and Ideology* (New York and London: Routledge, 1987), 1-5.

² The term "alternative Shakespeares" was obviously coined by John Drakakis in 1985. For a discussion of the terminology associated with the re-use of Shakespeare, see Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier, eds., *Adaptations of*

Shakespeare. A Critical Anthology of Plays from the Seventeenth Century to the Present (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-20. On the “re-invention” of Shakespeare over time see Gary Taylor, *Re-inventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989). On the appropriation of Shakespeare in the period 1730-1830, see also Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730-1830* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). On the previous period, see Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). The first full-length study of adaptations was Frederick W. Kilbourne, *Alterations and Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Boston: The Poet Lore Company, 1906). On the adaptation of Shakespeare’s history plays, see Ton Hoenselaars, ed., *Shakespeare’s History Plays. Performance, Translation and Adaptation in Britain and Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

³ Jean I. Marsden, ed., *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 1. More recently, Margaret Jane Kidnie has argued that “a play, for all that it carries the rhetorical and ideological force of an enduring stability, is not an object at all, but rather a dynamic *process* that evolves over time in response to the needs and sensibilities of its users” (Margaret Jane Kidnie, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 2. Author’s italics).

⁴ William Hazlitt, “A View of the English Stage”, in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*. Ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1903), 8: 182.

⁵ Cfr. Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1759) (Menston: Scolar Press, 1970), 58-59.

⁶ Hazlitt, “A View of the English Stage”, 212.

⁷ Ibid., 182.

⁸ Garrick played Richard 83 times. For an analysis of Garrick’s interpretation of the character, see my “Performing the Passions: David Garrick and Edmund Kean in *King Richard the Third*”, *Assaph. Studies in the Theatre* 24 (2010). For general biographical information on Garrick, see George Winchester Stone Jr. and George M. Kahrl, *David Garrick. A Critical Biography* (Carbondale & Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979).

⁹ For attacks on Cibber as Richard, cfr. the *Grub Street Journal*, October 31, 1734; *The Prompter*, November 19, 1734, in Aaron Hill and William Popple, *The Prompter. A Theatrical Paper (1734-1736)*, eds. William Appleton and Kalman A. Burnim (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), 6, and the anonymous *The Laureat: or, The Right side of Colley Cibber, esq...* (London: J. Roberts, 1740), 34-35.

- ¹⁰ On the flourishing of adaptation during the Restoration and its subsequent decline in the early eighteenth century, as a consequence of the gradual loss of fluidity of Shakespeare's text, which made radical change progressively unthinkable, see Jean I. Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text. Shakespeare, Adaptation, & Eighteenth-Century Literary Theory* (Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995). On the adapters' techniques, see also Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- ¹¹ Sandra Clark, ed., *Shakespeare Made Fit. Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (London: J.M. Dent, 1997), lxxvi.
- ¹² Suffering women were another leitmotif in Restoration "improvements" of Shakespeare, which developed out of the popularity of pathetic plays in the late seventeenth century (cfr. Marsden, *The Re-Imagined Text*, 30-46).
- ¹³ In Cibber, Richard appears in fifteen out of twenty scenes and speaks 40 per cent of the lines in the play, while in Shakespeare he appears in fifteen out of twenty-five scenes and speaks a little over 31 per cent of the total lines. (cfr. Christopher Spencer, ed., *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 27).
- ¹⁴ George Bernard Shaw, "Richard Himself Again", *Saturday Review*, December 26, 1896. Reprinted in George Bernard Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable & co., 1932), 2: 287.
- ¹⁵ William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. Antony Hammond (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 69.
- ¹⁶ On this subject, see Timothy Webb, "The Romantic Poet and the Stage: A Short, Sad History", in Richard Allen Cave, ed., *The Romantic Theatre: An International Symposium* (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1986), 37-38.
- ¹⁷ This was true for George Frederick Cooke (on 31 October 1800) and for Junius Brutus Booth (on 12 February 1817). As far as Edmund Kean is concerned, he first appeared in London as Richard III on 12 February 1814: it was his second role after his debut as Shylock on January 26, but it was Richard who decreed his triumph, and he almost invariably chose this role to open his seasons both in London and on tour.
- ¹⁸ Garrick reintroduced l. 6 and, sometime between 1756 and 1774, another four lines (ll. 15-17 and 19) in the soliloquy that in Shakespeare (but not in Cibber) opens the play. In the lines Garrick added later, Richard's sense of uneasiness at his own deformity is stressed, a trait that the actor emphasised in his interpretation of the character. Cooke reintroduced the first four lines of the Shakespearian opening soliloquy (cfr. William Dunlap, *Memoirs of the Life of George Frederick Cooke* (New York: D. Longworth, 1818), 2: 181) and some lines from Richard's address to his army before the battle. Kemble shortened the play, but on the whole the changes to Cibber's adaptation were very limited in the revision he published in 1810. He modified a couple of names and, as Albert Kalson notes, "frequently altered the order of the phrases within Cibber's lines, mainly in Act I, so that the

audience might be aware of a slight difference in the play from the start”(John Philip Kemble, *King Richard III* (London: Cornmarket Press, 1972), 1).

¹⁹ Hazlitt, “Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays”, in *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*. Ed. A. R. Waller and Arnold Glover (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1902), 1: 300.

²⁰ Ibid..

²¹ Hazlitt, “A View of the English Stage”, 182.

²² William Hazlitt, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*. Ed. P.P. Howe (London & Toronto, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1934), 18: 255.

²³ Charles Lamb, “On the Tragedies of Shakespeare”, in E.V. Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London: Methuen, 1903), 1: 105.

²⁴ *The Times*, March 13, 1821.

²⁵ Cfr. Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage. The Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

²⁶ Thomas Bridgman, *The Historical Play of King Richard the Third: Newly altered and adapted for representation from the original of Shakespeare by T. Bridgman* (London: Thomas Cope, 1820), viii and vi. This attempt at restoration has been utterly neglected by criticism: if we exclude Albert Kalson’s very brief introduction to the facsimile edition (Cornmarket Press, 1971), a study of Bridgman’s adaptation does not exist. The only editor of *Richard III* who mentions in passing the experiment is John Jowett (Oxford Shakespeare, 2000), 90).

²⁷ Ibid., vii.

²⁸ Ibid., viii.

²⁹ Ibid., xv.

³⁰ Ibid., xvi.

³¹ Ibid., 76.

³² *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, volume 7 (December 1800), 516-517. *Pizzaro* was “a tragic play in five acts” by Kotzebue, which had been adapted to the English stage by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. The correspondent, then, proceeded to call for the intervention of the Government to prohibit German plays from being performed.

³³ Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 75.

³⁴ In the preface, Bridgman defines the scene as: “the dull unmeaning whine of Henry the Sixth” (vi). Restoration adapters usually balanced portrayals of evil with representatives of good, as in William Davenant’s *Macbeth*, where the virtuosity of the Macduff couple is contrasted to the wickedness of the Macbeths, or in Nahum Tate’s

King Lear, where the vicious triangular intrigue between Edmund, Goneril and Regan is juxtaposed to the pure love between Cordelia and Edgar.

³⁵ However, even if the council scene no longer found a place in *Richard III*, eighteenth and nineteenth-century audiences could still see a revised version of it in Nicholas Rowe's *Tragedy of Jane Shore*.

³⁶ After having explicitly mentioned suicide ("Now, wert thou not afraid of self-destruction, / Thou hast a fair excuse for't"), Richard concludes the exchange with the following exclamations:

With all my heart, I hate thee! -

If this have no effect, she is immortal! [aside]

Cfr. Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 34-35 (Colley Cibber, *The Tragical History of King Richard III*, in Spencer, ed., *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, 3.2.1-67).

³⁷ Cfr. Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 4.1.

³⁸ Cfr. Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 5.9.21-26.

³⁹ Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 279.

⁴⁰ Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 17.

⁴¹ For a list of Cibber's new soliloquies and their position in the play, see Spencer, ed., *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, 27-28.

⁴² William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, ed. A. Hammond (London and New York: Methuen, 1981), 4.3.27-30.

⁴³ Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 53-54 (Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 4.3.47-52). Cibber had found this account, which obviously increased Richard's brutality, in Shakespeare's sources. The adapter had chosen, however, the worst version of the story; a version that Thomas More, who had reported the episode, had not given for certain:

Whereupon a priest of sir Robert Brakenburies toke them up & buried them in such a place secretly as by the occasion of his death (which was very shortly after) whiche onely knewe it the very trueth could never yet be very wel and perfightly knowen. For some saye that kynge Richard caused the priest to take them up and close them in lead and to put them in a coffyne full of holes hoked at the endes with .ii. hokes of yron, and so to cast them into a place called the Blacke depes at the Themes mouth, so that they should never rise up nor be sene agayn. This was the very trueth unknowen by reason that the sayd priest died so shortly & disclosed it never to any person that would utter it.

(Thomas More, *The History of King Richard III*, in Richard S. Sylvester, ed., *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963), 2: 86).

On Cibber's reliance on Shakespeare's sources, see Albert E. Kalson, "The Chronicles in Cibber's *Richard III*", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 3, no. 2 (1963): 253-267, and my "'I can add colours to the chameleon':

King Richard III's Metamorphic History", in Carla Dente, George Ferzoco, Miriam Gill and Marina Spunta, eds., *Proteus. The (Meta)language of Metamorphosis* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 243-254.

⁴⁴ Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 61 (Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 4.4.204-208).

⁴⁵ Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 73 (Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 5.9.11-20).

⁴⁶ Bridgman, *The Historical Play*, 74 (Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 5.9.44-47).

⁴⁷ Although editors and stage historians have usually acknowledged the existence of Macready's adaptation, its real nature has often been misunderstood. In 1975, Bernard Grebanier stated that Macready "discarded Cibber's version of Richard III [...] and gave the play Shakespeare wrote" (Bernard Grebanier, *Then Came Each Actor. Shakespearean Actors, Great and Otherwise* (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), 212). In 2006, Don-John Dugas still declared that "Shakespeare's original [...] was briefly revived in 1821" (Don-John Dugas, *Marketing the Bard: Shakespeare in Performance and Print, 1660-1740* (University of Missouri Press, 2006), 56).

⁴⁸ In his otherwise careful and reliable stage history of the play, Scott Colley is wrong when he asserts that Macready's experiment was abandoned "after several performances" (Scott Colley, *Richard's Himself Again. A stage History of Richard III* (New York, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 86. On the stage history of *Richard III*, see also Alice I. Perry Wood, *The Stage History of Shakespeare's King Richard III* (New York: The Columbia University Press, 1909) and the "Plays in Performance" edition of *Richard III*, edited by Julie Hankey (London: Junction Books, 1981).

⁴⁹ E.L.S. (Edmund Lewis Lenthal Swift), *The Times*, September 24, 1868.

⁵⁰ *The Morning Chronicle*, March 13, 1821.

⁵¹ *The British Stage and Literary Cabinet* 5, no. 52 (1821), 114.

⁵² "The Pretended Revival of Shakespeare's *Richard III*", *The Champion* 428, March 18, 1821, 164.

⁵³ For a comparison between the two versions (and a refutation of the accusation), see Albert E. Kalson's "Introduction" to the facsimile of Bridgman's adaptation, published by Cornmarket Press in 1971.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, January 29, 1844.

⁵⁵ Cfr. E.L.S. (Edmund Lewis Lenthal Swift), *The Times*, September 24, 1868. My italics. I have never found any mention of Swift's letters in discussions of Macready's adaptation.

⁵⁶ William Charles Macready, *Macready's Reminiscences and Selections from His Diaries and Letters*, Frederick Pollock, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875), 161-162.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, January 29, 1844.

- ⁵⁸ (William Charles Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III. A Tragedy: restored and re-arranged from the text of Shakespeare, as performed at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden* (London: R. and M. Stodart, 1821), iii. Author's italics.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., v. Author's italics.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., vii. Author's italics.
- ⁶¹ In the previous year, he had performed Hotspur in one act of *Henry IV* and Posthumus in *The Winter's Tale* on two benefit nights, and another two major Shakespearian roles – Henry V and Othello – with modest success. The best biography of the actor is Alan S. Downer's *The Eminent Tragedian William Charles Macready* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966).
- ⁶² Macready, *Reminiscences*, 141.
- ⁶³ On the Vice heritage of Richard III, see Bernard Spivack, *Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil. The History of a Metaphor in Relation to His Major Villains* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 386-407; and, by Robert Weimann: *Shakespeare and the Popular Tradition* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) and 'Performance-Game and Representation in *Richard III*', in Edward Pechter, ed., *Textual and Theatrical Shakespeare. Questions of Evidence* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 66-85 (reprinted in Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster, eds, *Shakespeare and the Power of Performance. Stage and Page in the Elizabethan Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 42-56).
- ⁶⁴ Classicists deemed the mingling of the tragic and the comic and the introduction of low characters, clowning and buffoonery into tragedy reprehensible. As Charles Gildon asserted: "there is no place in tragedy for anything but grave and serious actions" (in Frederick W. Kilbourne, *Alterations and Adaptations of Shakespeare* (Boston: The Poet Lore Company, 1906), 14). Accordingly, the Fool was omitted from Nahum Tate's *King Lear*, whereas the porter scene and the gravediggers were left out of William Davenant's *Macbeth* and David Garrick's *Hamlet* respectively. Similarly, Cibber's Richard is more of a villain, but much less of an ironist and a humorist.
- ⁶⁵ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, vi. Lamb's comment is taken from his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, Considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage Representation" (1811), in E.V. Lucas, ed., *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* (London: Methuen, 1903), 1: 105- 106.
- ⁶⁶ Leigh Hunt, "Theatrical Examiner", *The Examiner* 379, October 31, 1819, 699-700, in Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn, eds., *Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism 1808-1831* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1949), 219-221. An extensive description of Kean's and Macready's respective portrayals of Richard III was also offered in the forty-page anonymous pamphlet entitled *A Critical Examination of the Respective Performances of Mr Kean & Mr Macready, in Cibber's Alteration of Shakespeare's Historical Play of King Richard III* (London:

Simpkin & Marshall, 1819). For a modern assessment of Macready's interpretation, see London Green, "'The Gaiety of Meditated Success': The Richard III of William Charles Macready", *Theatre Research International* 10, no.2 (1985): 107-128.

⁶⁷ See, for instance, Elizabeth Griffith's *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775), a highly successful treatise that set out to show, as was typical in the period, that Shakespeare had fulfilled the moral duties of drama and respected the principle of poetic justice. Here, the critic peremptorily asserts, "no designing or determined villain was ever chearful, ... or could possibly be able to assume even the semblance of carelessness or ease, upon any occasion whatsoever" (Elizabeth Griffith, *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (London: T. Cadell, 1775), 317). Behind Mrs Griffith's criticism lay the sentimentalist imperative that a villain must exhibit remorse for his crimes, together with the requirement, voiced by Henry Home, Lord Kames, in his *Elements of Criticism* (1762), that tragedy respond to a principle of verisimilitude.

⁶⁸ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, v.

⁶⁹ Ibid., vii.

⁷⁰ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 162. Even more caustic was the comment in his 1838 diary, where, years after the failure of his attempted restoration, he observed: "Astonished at the base venality of the disgusting newspaper writers - the wretches - who dare to laud the fustian of Cibber, and tried to keep the many in ignorance by praising his trash called *Richard III*" (William Toynbee, *The Diaries of William Charles Macready 1833-1851* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1912), 1: 470).

⁷¹ Playbill for the first performance of *The Life and Death of King Richard the Third* (Monday, March 12, 1821), Folger Shakespeare Library, Bill Box G2 C85 1820-21. Furthermore, while presenting the experiment as "an attempt to restore ... the *original character and language* of Shakespeare", the play-bill also awkwardly admitted that the new adaptation still included some "extraneous matter" and that omissions had still been deemed necessary "for the purposes of representation". As John Genest noted a decade after Macready's endeavour, there were two reasons for the new adaptation's lukewarm reception: firstly, people generally do not like "to acknowledge that they have been applauding, or at least tolerating, wretched stuff for ten, twenty, or thirty years"; secondly (and more importantly), the revival was managed in "a bungling manner", because the performance was not preceded "by some observations in the newspapers, in which the faults of Cibber's execrable alterations" were pointed out; instead, the Stage Manager absurdly declared that "Cibber's alteration was *ingenious*" (cfr. John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830* (Bath: H.E. Carrington, 1832), 9: 108. Author's italics).

⁷² *The British Stage and Literary Cabinet* 5, no. 52 (1821), 116.

- ⁷³ Richard W. Schoch, "Shakespeare the Victorian", in Barbara Hodgdon and W.B. Worthen, eds., *A Companion to Shakespeare and Performance* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 233.
- ⁷⁴ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 162.
- ⁷⁵ Playbill, Tuesday, March 13, 1821, Folger Shakespeare Library, Bill Box G2 C85 1820-21.
- ⁷⁶ *London Literary Gazette*, March 17, 1821.
- ⁷⁷ "The Drama", *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, April 1, 1821, 166-167. The reviewer seemed to echo Leigh Hunt's observations on Macready's 1819 performance when he stated that the adapter had "vindicated to the gay aspirant his own regality of soul, restored to him his vein of kingly wit, and given back to him "the sovereign sway and masterdom of spirit".
- ⁷⁸ *The Times*, March 13, 1821. The review is quoted almost in full in George C.D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 2: 153-54.
- ⁷⁹ *The Champion* 428, March 18, 1821, 164-165. The analysis is continued in the following number: *The Champion*, 429, March 24, 1821, 183-184.
- ⁸⁰ *The British Stage and Literary Cabinet* 5, no. 52 (1821), 115.
- ⁸¹ *The Champion* 428, March 18, 1821. Author's italics.
- ⁸² The clipping, dated March 18, 1821, is contained in an oversize Folger Shakespeare Library scrapbook labelled "Dramatic Cuttings 1807-1838"
- ⁸³ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 162.
- ⁸⁴ George Vandenhoff, *An Actor's Note-book; or, the Green Room and Stage* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1865), 216. Author's italics.
- ⁸⁵ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, iv.
- ⁸⁶ The character of Margaret was not present in Bridgman's adaptation, which, on the other hand, had reintroduced Edward IV.
- ⁸⁷ *The Champion* 428, March 18, 1821, 164.
- ⁸⁸ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, iv.
- ⁸⁹ *The Examiner*, February 14, 1838. Reprinted as "John Forster on Macready as *King Lear*", in Stanley Wells, ed., *Shakespeare in the Theatre. An Anthology of Criticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 72-77.
- ⁹⁰ Namely, eight of the thirteen lines Cibber's Richard pronounced on the appearance of Lady Anne (beginning "But see, my Love appears"!; Cibber 2.1.54-66), plus verbatim four of the five speeches that have already been mentioned with regard to Bridgman's adaptation, i.e. Cibber 2.2.128-40; 3.2.270-82; 4.3.19-38, and 5.5.1-25.
- ⁹¹ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, 68 (Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 5.8.1-8).

- ⁹² (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, 69-70 (Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 5.9.1-10).
- ⁹³ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, 22-23.
- ⁹⁴ (Macready), *The Life and Death of King Richard III*, iii. Author's italics.
- ⁹⁵ Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 241.
- ⁹⁶ Cfr. Webb, "The Romantic Poet", 37.
- ⁹⁷ On Kean's "Romanticism" and its contradictions, see my "Edmund Kean or 'the Romantic Actor'", in Cecilia Pietropoli and Lilla Maria Crisafulli, eds. *The Languages of Performance in British Romanticism* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2008), 127-139.
- ⁹⁸ Richard H. Dana, *The Idle Man* (New York: Wiley & Halstead, 1821), 1: 42.
- ⁹⁹ *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 3 (April 1818), 80.
- ¹⁰⁰ John Genest, *Some Account of the English Stage* (Bath: H.E. Carrington, 1830), 8: 495.
- ¹⁰¹ *The Monthly Mirror* 18 (November 1804), 351. The fact that the reviewer's quotation ends with "&c." suggests that the anti-French tirade continued, perhaps to the end of the original oration (another eight lines). In their stage histories of the play, neither Wood, nor Hankey nor Colley seem to be aware of Cooke's restoration of these lines.
- ¹⁰² Cibber, *The Tragical History*, 5.9.21-26.
- ¹⁰³ Hazelton Spencer, *Shakespeare Improved. The Restoration Versions in Quarto and on the Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 122.
- ¹⁰⁴ Wood, *Stage History*, 133.
- ¹⁰⁵ Arthur Colby Sprague, *Shakespearian Players and Performances* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1954), 151.
- ¹⁰⁶ Terence Hawkes, *Meaning by Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1992), 3.
- ¹⁰⁷ Cfr. Margaret Jane Kidnie, "Where is Hamlet? Text, Performance and Adaptation", in Hodgdon and Worthen, eds. *Shakespeare and Performance*, 115.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.
- ¹⁰⁹ According to Christopher Spencer's count, of a total of 2156 lines, 1066 are Cibber's (cfr. Spencer, ed., *Five Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare*, 451-53). The figure does not include the lines that, according to Cibber, are "generally [Shakespeare's] thoughts, in the best dress [he] could afford them", which appeared in single quotes in the first edition of the play.
- ¹¹⁰ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 69.