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The Future/History of England:
Richard II, Reproductive Futurity, Literature, and History

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Katherine Jane Hardun

December 2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Future/History of England:
Richard II, Reproductive Futurity, Literature, and History

by

Katherine Jane Hardun
Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, December 2023
Dr. Andrea Denny-Brown, Chairperson

Working at the intersection of literature and history that is fundamental to medieval studies, this dissertation joins the ongoing reevaluation of Richard II's reign by putting his reign into conversation with its literary intertexts and literary afterlives. I argue that viewing Richard II's reign through a queer lens that is informed by Lee Edelman's idea of reproductive futurity better contextualizes the critical tensions which have long existed around Richard II's sexual orientation as well as the ongoing affinity queer subjects have had for the king in twentieth- and twenty-first century literature and performance.

Overall, I assert that while Richard II can be understood as queer, his queerness comes from a lack of engagement with the logic of reproductive futurity rather than any particular sexual or romantic object choice. I first look at Richard II's literary contexts and intertexts as I discuss the cultural norm of royal fecundity evident in insular romance, including *Octavian*, *Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Havelok the Dane*, and *The*

Marriage of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle. This context reveals the obviously missing children in *Troilus and Criseyde* and the documents and chronicles of Richard II's reign, allowing us to see that Richard II's heirlessness was tied to perceptions of his lack of manhood in a way that can be seen as queer. His queerness was, in my assessment, a fundamental part of why he struggled to maintain his power and assert his majority, and a fundamental part of why Richard II's history has often been viewed as fated. Because of his queerness and the normalizing forces of history, Richard II's literary intertexts, as seen in my examination of Richard Maidstone's *Concordia* create queer experiences of temporal asynchrony for readers. Further, it is through an affinity for the struggles he endured because of his sexuality that there has been a queer affinity for the subject of Richard II across time, as facilitated by productions of *Richard II*, and as seen in texts such as *Richard of Bordeaux* and *Plague Over England*.

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Introduction: Futurity, History, and Richard II

The project contained within these pages examines Richard II and his literary contexts and inter-texts through a queer theoretical lens, but, like most projects, it did not start there. It started with *Troilus and Criseyde*, and a curiosity about how Geoffrey Chaucer translated Boccaccio's version of the story. As I researched Chaucer's translation of Boccaccio's text, I asked myself one of the questions central to literary criticism: why did the author choose this and not that? In particular, I asked myself: why is Boccaccio's Cressida fortunately infertile and Chaucer's Criseyde ambiguously (in)fertile? My exploration of the possible answers to this question led me to further explore Chaucer's cultural and political context, the reign of Richard II, and, ultimately, the question of Richard II's sexuality. When I set out to research Richard II, I thought I knew what I was going to find. I had an impression, gleaned from a variety of fourteenth-century literature classes over a number of years, that Richard II was insufficiently masculine because of how he came across—that his often-cited love of fashion and courtliness was tied to a non-traditional sexual orientation and gender identity, and that that was the source of much of his trouble as king. More than anything, I had an oversimplified sense that Richard II's reign was troubled, and that that trouble was because of who he was and how he chose to live, something that this was historical fact rather than historical framing or interpretation.

In history, Richard II's reign *was* troubled, or at least far from peaceful, and it has been narrated as troubled by historians who study him. Nigel Saul, in his biography of the king, describes the events of Richard II's life by saying that he was continually

accompanied by “the darker side” of things which “encompass[] all the elements of a tragedy.”¹ Saul’s words have truth in them, but viewing the life of Richard II as a “tragedy” is an attempt to relegate him to the realm of the unfortunate or the pitiable and makes Richard himself part of the “darker side” that accompanied him. Saul uses “tragedy” in both the emotional and literary sense here. Richard’s story is one that ought to inspire sorrow—he seems doomed from the outset, and Saul’s purpose in exploring his life seems to be to discover his tragic flaws as if he were always-already a character in an Elizabethan drama. The tragedy of Richard’s reign, for Saul, is linked to Richard II’s “slightly epicene” nature and his “narcissistic” personality.² Viewing Richard II as such has a long tradition, going far beyond Saul’s biography. Christopher Fletcher notes in *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99*, that post-deposition views of Richard II have been deeply influenced by Thomas Arundel’s sermon at his deposition, where Richard II was repeatedly referred to as “puer” [boy] and his cousin Henry Bolingbroke was referred to as “vir” [man], in spite of the two being “of the same chronological age.”³ From this sermon onwards, through a number of Lancastrian narratives and the chronicles they influenced, as G.O. Sayles documents, Richard II acquired the reputation of being, in stereotypical language, less than a “true man” and this

¹ Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), x.

² Saul, *Richard II*, 452, 459.

³ Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

unmanliness was sometimes interpreted as effeminacy when the story of Richard II was told and retold, as in Saul's description of him as "slightly epicene."⁴

My own vague impression of Richard II at the outset of this project was inaccurate, or at least a vast oversimplification of Richard II's reign and the impact his sexuality and gender identity had on it, but it is itself a reflection of the long tradition Fletcher documents in which "historical interpretations of the reign of Richard II have for centuries been more or less consciously influenced by the king's unmanly reputation."⁵ Fletcher's book aptly documents how Richard II did, in fact, correspond to historical definitions of manliness and manhood throughout his life and reign, suggesting ultimately that Richard II emerges from a more properly understood context of fourteenth-century culture "not as a champion of an alternative masculinity but as an unimaginative if vehement adept of certain conventional qualities of being a 'man.'"⁶ It is interesting, as Fletcher points out, that Richard II's "unmanly" reputation persists in spite of many previous attempts at correction, and Fletcher's book aims to correct that reputation at long last. Fletcher points out how Richard was, if anything, too determined to be his own man, and too consistent in his exercise of kingly and manly authority. Importantly to my project, however, Fletcher does not discuss the king's sexuality or lack of issue in regard to perceptions of his "unmanly" reputation.

⁴ "The Deposition of Richard II: Three Lancastrian Narratives." *Historical Research*. Vol. 54, Issue 130. 135-272.; "King Richard II of England: A Fresh Look." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 115, No. 1. 28-31.; Fletcher, *Richard II*, 5-7.

⁵ Fletcher, *Richard II*, 7.

⁶ Fletcher, *Richard II*, 279.

I argue, in this dissertation, that scholars need to look at Richard II's "unmanly" reputation in light of not only his martial and political skills, but also in light of his lack of issue and therefore in light of his sexuality, and that applying a queer theoretical lens to Richard II's sexuality allows us to more deeply understand why his "unmanly" reputation has persisted and been resistant to correction. While it may not be historically accurate in context, the Richard II that so many readers find interesting is and was, at least in part, appealing in part because his troubled, unmanly reputation seems queer, and we are curious about and possibly identify with that queerness. Viewing Richard II as "tragic" on the one hand, or gravely under-historicized on the other, are not the only ways Richard II is viewed or is viewable. Richard II can also be viewed as queer. My view of Richard II as queer is a capacious one, but I contend that it represents something of a missing piece, and makes both the history and context of his reign, and the interest of writers, actors, and scholars in certain aspects of his reign and character make more sense.

As I will show in the subsequent chapters, Richard II's sexuality was one characterized primarily, in historical and literary context, by his lack of heirs—even if that lack was not explicitly articulated at his own time. This perspective on Richard II's sexuality connects with a broad view, shared by Tison Pugh and Carolyn Dinshaw, that medieval studies, and medieval objects of study, are queer in some senses of the word, and that, because of this present-day cultural dynamic, it is more than possible to make

queer readings of medieval texts.⁷ Beyond this, the foundation of my argument rests on Lee Edelman's ideas of the Child, reproductive futurity, and futurism, detailed in *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, and which themselves draw on Leo Bersani's ideas about non and/or anti-communitarian modes of connectedness articulated first in *Homos*, and also in some of his later work.⁸ Following these ideas, in historical context, Richard II was queer because of his non-engagement with the reproductive-futurist power structure that he, as king of England, the very embodiment of hereditary power, ought to have upheld.

Ought to have, but could not. It was, I contend, at least partially because he did not succeed in producing an heir of his body, giving England, quite literally, "no future," that all of his other troubles became, increasingly as he aged, impossible to navigate successfully. His struggle shows how, while most kings have what looks like limitless power, because they are sexually capable of upholding the structure of hereditary monarchy, not all kings do because not all ways of being in the world align with the overarching forces of social power governing sexuality to which we are all subject.

⁷ Tison Pugh. *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in Middle English Literature*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). 145.; Carolyn Dinshaw. *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999). 183-191.; Carolyn Dinshaw. *How Soon is Now? Medieval Texts, Amateur Readers, and the Queerness of Time*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). 1-41.

⁸ Lee Edelman. *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). 3, 11, 13, 31, 66.; Leo Bersani. "The Gay Outlaw." *Homos*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). 113-181.; Leo Bersani. *Thoughts and Things*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). 25. Here, Bersani explicitly connects his earlier work, his new work, and *No Future*, writing, "my negativizing impulse, somewhat dormant, or equivocated, since the Genet chapter of my book *Homos* has been reinvigorated—if that can ever be said about such impulses—by Lee Edelman's compelling case for 'no future.'"

Richard II was queer, and that is a powerful thing to realize in a world where many people continue to be marginalized, discriminated against, harmed, and killed because of their queerness. Looking at the history of Richard II and how that history has been constructed and narrated across time, it is clear that Richard II's sexuality and its social performance were always in question. Richard II's queerness was a social and political problem for him because of who he loved, the friends he kept, the women he married, the children he did not have, the cousins he did and did not name as heir, and the way he tried to train the power structures of his society to enable his way of being in the world. A king, after all, is supposed to be a father, participating as the next link in the never ending line of "fathers and great Grandfathers of old," as Edmund Spenser memorably terms it in Book II, Canto X of *The Faerie Queene*.⁹ While Richard II is not the only fourteenth-century Angevin king to have lost control of his kingdom, and not even the only fourteenth-century Angevin king to have lost that control because of issues related to his sexuality—there he stands in good company with *his own great-grandfather*, Edward II—he is arguably the most (in)famous. To understand the queer history of Richard II, I propose that we, as scholar-readers, place him in a literary and historical context, to see how he functions as both an historical man and king and as a literary-historical figure.

In furthering the project of revising a collective critical understanding of Richard II, this dissertation incorporates the idea of sexuality into that revision, while broadly aligning with Fletcher's conclusions about other areas of Richard II's life. Richard II's

⁹ Edmund Spenser. *The Faerie Queene*. A.C. Hamilton, Ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2001). II.X.4.

life and death, while perhaps not all that unusual if one considers Edward II as a corollary, fell at a critical moment for the formation of literary studies and certain, sometimes termed Whig, narratives of British history. Richard II just so happened to be king of England at the time that the “father of English literature,” Geoffrey Chaucer, wrote, and he just so happened to be overthrown by his cousin whose line started the War of the Roses which would ultimately result in the Tudor dynasty, which just so happened to coincide with the life and work of William Shakespeare. His story would be taken up by Shakespeare and then later authors, and the fall of Richard II would come to form the starting point of Shakespeare’s incredibly popular set of dramas that interwove family disputes with military spectacle. Shakespeare would become *Shakespeare*, and the plays of the Henriad would become much more well-known than Christopher Marlowe’s *Edward II*. We know Richard’s stories today because of how the historical events that followed his reign unfolded, and especially because of how English history and English literature have been narrated to us. One version of history and historical narrative would render these happenings as inevitable, even Providential, so that Richard II was overthrown for the greater good and ultimately in the name of some kind of progress. That sense of progress towards the “good” dominates how many have viewed Richard II over time, and it is that sweeping rhythm that makes Richard II a problematic subject of his own kingdom. It is my contention, in this project, that the enduring power of Richard II’s story, and the queer affinity he holds across time, is because of his “failure” to be a good king and how that failure is tied to reproduction, sexual orientation, and gender identity because of the hereditary structure of the English monarchy. The story of Richard

II, in its broad strokes, evokes a transhistorical affinity for Richard II in the ways he struggled to enact absolute power and in his suffering at the end of his life because it holds resonance with the ways that people throughout history have faced difficult consequences because of how their sexuality did and did not fit into the norms of the day. To understand the story and its appeal, one has to, at least in part, view Richard II in a sympathetic, even magnanimous light, because even the king was, for a moment, one of us who struggles to comply, struggles to fit in, struggles to live in the world as it is.

Inside the stories that readers, audiences, and critics tell about Richard II, the king becomes a man and the royal family a family. Like other ordinary men and families, Richard II's life is restricted by the powers that be because of his failures—his personal, familial, and sexual failures. This is what makes the subject matter of the *Henriad* so compelling: even the royal family is, at least for a period of time, a family and subject to all of the trials and misfortunes that beset us all. Richard II's failure to produce an heir comes to define him although it is never said out loud, and in this way Richard becomes what Michel Foucault would call a "bad subject." In *Disorderly Families*, Michel Foucault and Arlette Farge write about *lettres de cachet* where ordinary citizens petitioned the king of France to intervene in what Foucault terms "some obscure family trouble" and were thereby directly touched by the forces of governmental power.¹⁰ Richard II's "family trouble" is the subject of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, and, in many ways is the reason so many literary critics and historians remain fascinated with his reign

¹⁰ Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault. *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*. Trans. Thomas Scott-Railton, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 77.

and its problems. Richard II's story, in its ordinariness, in its having the same problems as ordinary families, can "accede to discourse" only as it is "traversed and transfigured by the legendary," and the literary where his life is allowed "to function as lesson and example."¹¹

I want to be emphatically clear, however, that I am not saying that Richard II was flawless, or some kind of medieval queer ally, or even a particularly sage king. He was a relatively absolutist monarch, orthodoxly Christian, and, at the end of his reign, tyrannical. What I am saying is that, when we, as critics and readers, over-emphasize his life as a "tragedy," and when we view him as simply under-historicized and therefore misunderstood, we miss the potential of his queer story for understanding his moment in time, the process of history, and our moment now, and we ignore the transhistorical queer affinity that exists for Richard II among queer people and their allies in his future-history. There are good reasons Richard II continues to inspire transhistorical affinity rooted in what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would term a "reparative" reading of his life, because the twists and turns, triumphs and tragedies of Richard II's life are everywhere asking us to "entertain" "that the past ... could have happened differently than the way it actually did."¹² An openness to alternative pasts, and therefore alternative futures, enhances readings of Richard II's reign which follow more "paranoid" trajectories, and it is through a combination of the reparative and paranoid impulses in our reading that critics can see how Richard II's life, and his literary connections and narrative afterlives, make

¹¹ Farge and Foucault, *Disorderly Families*, 82.

¹² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling, Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 146.

clear that the forces of social power which queer theory interrogates are forces to which we are all, to greater and lesser extents, subject, and with which we might all find ourselves in tension. Even when a person is the crowned king, he cannot necessarily be himself and forge his own ways of being in the world. This is both a tragedy to mourn and an invitation to hope that, because the past could have been different, our collective future still could be. In reading with the grain of his life, we join his affinity—the band of fellows journeying alongside him—but we do so across time in a way that is itself queer.

Through the chapters of this dissertation, I argue that Richard II offers a site of inquiry where the crucial intersection of sexuality, power, and reproductive futurity come into stark contrast with each other. Richard’s position in history, and the historical and literary narratives about this positioning, are particularly inflected by sexuality and reproduction, and it is this sexuality-inflected power struggle that creates what I term his “transhistorical affinity” for readers today. Through the course of each chapter, I examine a variety of primary texts with a lens informed by a range of queer theoretical perspectives that all have something to say about making the past, envisioning the future, and how the dominant rational in our socio-political structure favors futurist, often teleological, ways of being. As stated earlier, all of this analysis is predicated on a definition of queer which is founded in Lee Edelman’s notion of reproductive futurity, and which incorporates Carolyn Dinshaw and Tison Pugh’s views of the medieval. Through the chapters, I also variously draw theoretical perspectives from Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure*, Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward*, *Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, and bell hooks’ formulation of “queer as being about the self

that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.”¹³ I do not claim that one, or any combination, of the theories I use throughout this dissertation provides a complete explanation for any text, or for the world in general. I am aware that the theorists whom I reference in this work often do not agree with each other, nor do they argue for the same underlying motivations of power in society in a consistent way, but I suggest that all of them have something to say that helps us understand how we—as scholars, writers, readers, and audiences—have come to understand the subject of Richard II and the stories surrounding him.

In my first chapter, “Our ‘kynde ’of story: Assured Futures and English Cultural Norms in Popular Romance,” I discuss how a selection of insular romances reveal how men and women in power in medieval England were understood through their sexual bodies, and how this context can illuminate our reading of Richard II and plausible historical interpretations of his sexual-reproductive lack. These texts either antedate Richard II’s reign or are roughly contemporaneous with it, which is important because I argue they provide a crucial aspect of cultural context. These stories about kings contribute to both how a particular king was understandable in his own time, and also how we can understand him now. The first two romances I examine, *Octavian* and *Sir Tryamour*, illustrate how the calumniated queen story type exemplifies a futurist logic of reproduction and interrogates the social and political dangers of infertility under an

¹³ Jack Halberstam. *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Heather Love. *Feeling Backward, Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).; from a panel entitled “Are you Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body,” Eugene Lange College The New School for Liberal Arts, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJk0hNROvzs>

hereditary monarchy. In these stories, reproduction, as figured through the calumniated queens as birthing parents of future kings, is a point of weakness in the system of power in a hereditary monarch. The queens in question are only good queens, only recuperable, when their babies grow into men like their fathers—in other words, when the political future of their kingdoms is assured. Similarly, I argue that the bodies and sexuality of men in positions of power were foundational to their ability to attain and remain in power, as seen in *Havelok the Dane* and *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, as well as in *Sir Tryamour*. Hereditary power is conveyed through sexual acts, and these stories make it clear that, for good kings, those sex acts ideally took place in loving marital relationships, and produced children who grow up to resemble their parents. Richard II, then, confounds the narrative expectations which circulated in his culture for fictional and real monarchs because, while he had a loving union, he failed to produce children, and his later attempts at queer family formation, when he married Isabella of France and treated her like his child, were socially untenable.

My second chapter, “Missing Children and Forced Futurity: Reproductive Lack and Queer Potentiality in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* and Richard II’s Reign,” looks at the tension between love and reproduction that exists in both Chaucer’s poem and Richard II’s reign through a lens that focuses on the queerness of those who do not participate in logics of reproductive futurity. I argue that the lack of children in *Troilus and Criseyde* and Richard II’s reign would have been contemporaneously remarkable and that it is possible to see that remarkable deviance from norms as “queer” in Lee Edelman’s terms. Both stories illustrate the possibility of “no future” in a world where

heredity is the primary conduit of power transfer. Chaucer positions Criseyde as a maybe-mother, which is a significant departure from Chaucer's source in Boccaccio, where Criseyde is explicitly identified as unable to have children, and he thereby introduces the tensions of hereditary power and reproductive futurity into the story as he does so. This tension in Chaucer's poem is parallel to the same tension in Richard II's reign. By looking at his reign through the narrative scope of kingship established in the previous chapter, and the broader discourse of manhood and how manhood was deeply connected to parenthood in Richard's England, I reevaluate the narrative about Richard II's reign as I reread the discourse around Richard II's deposition, concluding that Richard II's lack of heirs mark him as queer, and that this queerness, in his inability to participate in a reproductive-futurist power structure, resulted in his overthrow. Further, I assert that the narratives of *Troilus and Criseyde* and Richard II's reign allow us to see clearly how the forces of narrative and history, which Edelman identifies as undergirding futurist power structures, enact a kind of normalization on how readers view both the poem and the king.

The following chapter, "Ricardian Historiography: The Temporal Asynchrony of Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*," brings a reevaluation of Richard II and his reign to a specific, understudied text from Richard II's reign and its relation to specific events in that reign. This chapter reads the *Concordia*, against the grain of some scholarship of it, as emphatically, and perhaps counterintuitively pro-Ricardian. I do so in an attempt to consider what happens to Richard II's reign when we allow ourselves to sympathetically view an artifact on the losing side of history. I argue that viewing the poem this way

creates an experience of what Carolyn Dinshaw has called “temporal asynchrony,” by revealing the multiple queer and normalized versions of Richard II and his story that all exist at once. I examine the anti-Ricardian editorial history of the poem and show how this history rubs against our reading experience of the poem and its contents to produce temporal asynchrony and to enhance the ways in which we might view Richard II and his reign as queer. This examination illuminates, moreover, how an awareness of mainstream and alternative pasts forces us to confront the editorial process of history as a normalizing force, which is a perspective readers and critics might use to better understand our present moment.

In the final full chapter, “Richard II, Dramatic Representation, and the Making of (Queer) History in William Shakespeare’s *Richard II*, Gordon Daviot’s *Richard of Bordeaux*, and Nicholas de Jongh’s *A Plague Over England*,” I examine the transhistorical queer affinity which has accrued around Richard II, and which was part of the initial motivation for this project. By looking at a variety of post-Ricardian texts, I suggest newly contextualized ways to understand Richard II’s queer identity and the stories that surround it, while employing queer theoretical ideas from Heather Love, Jack Halberstam, and bell hooks about how not fitting in, and experiencing failure and loss have particularly queer qualities in certain contexts. Through my examination of the titular works, I argue that Richard II’s queer reputation is part of why Gordon Daviot, John Gielgud, Nicholas de Jongh and readers such as myself identify with the subject of Richard II and *Richard II* in the ways we do. Regardless of his sexual orientation, Richard II was understood as queer in his present moment and has continued to open up

queer ways of thinking both inside and outside of historical and literary narrative. As later audiences seem to perceive, Richard II, both in *Richard II* and in history, struggled in ways intimately recognizable to queer communities in later iterations of reproductive futurist regimes of power, and this shared struggle is one source of modern readers' queer transhistorical identification with the king.

Finally, I share a transcription of the one surviving letter from Richard II to Anne of Bohemia as an Appendix. While this letter has been subject to mis-citation due to its residing in Cotton MS Tiberius BIX rather than Cotton MS Tiberius B XI, and was therefore hard to track down, it has also been seen as a key piece of how Richard and Anne's relationship is understood as close and companionate, a topic I discuss in my second chapter; making it available via transcription is therefore worthwhile. I note that, while the letter does reflect their companionate relationship, that kind of marital relationship was not particularly unusual in Richard II's family, adding another layer of context to how one can view the king as both unusual and not unusual in regard to his sexuality and relationships.

Overall, this project identifies a missing part of the existing critical discourse about Richard II. In agreeing with more recent historical assessments of Richard II that he was "not as a champion of an alternative masculinity," I also argue that it is important to understand why and how the queer transhistorical affinity for Richard II exists.¹⁴ To fully re-contextualize Richard II and his reign, however, it is necessary to think through why Richard II was seen as queer throughout time, from the original chronicle sources

¹⁴ Fletcher. *Richard II*. 279.

and literary texts written within his lifetime to recent adaptations of Shakespeare. By understanding Richard II as a queer king, I bring to light not only a fuller picture of his reign and its struggles, but also illuminate why there is a transhistorical queer affinity for Richard II. The transhistorical affinity that exists around Richard II is not due to a simple misunderstanding of his sexual orientation or a lack of historical context; rather, it is based in a sense of the king's queerness, which was an historical reality. The queer understanding of Richard II I present here furthers our understandings of not only history, sexuality, and the intersection of the two, but also what queerness can look like in history and how queer community can form across time around queer subjects. My study of Richard II reflects a broader understanding of historical queerness and opens itself to a broader understanding of what counts as queer, and how queer liberations continue. I suggest that, when even the king is queer it becomes easier to see how queer liberation is for everyone.

Chapter 1: Our 'kynde' of story: Assured Futures and English Cultural Norms in Popular Romance

Medieval romance, existing on the border of the historical and the fictitious, presents to us a rich nexus of improbable events in probable settings; it portrays, simultaneously, detailed features of real medieval life, while also showcasing the limits of what its audiences could imagine. In one of today's the most well-known late-medieval romances, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the reader is confronted, in the opening scene, with a richly detailed, realistic Christmas feast that is punctuated by a decapitated man continuing to carry on a conversation. This, in a nutshell, is real-life experience confronting the horizons of the thinkable in narrative form. As Nicola McDonald writes in "A Polemical Introduction" to *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England, Essays in Popular Romance*, "popular romance provides us with a unique opportunity to explore the complex workings of the medieval imaginary and the world outside the text that feeds and supports it."¹⁵ It is this idea of the thinkable alongside the experienced that I will focus on in this chapter as I explore the field of narratological imaginary possessed by their audience that tied monarchy, sexuality, parenthood, and good governance together into plausible and possible stories. This chapter will argue that the late-medieval English narratological imaginary included a fecund, bodily concept of nobility and leadership, where the qualities of good kings and queens were directly tied to and evinced by their successful children, as shown in *Octavian* (northern version), *Sir Tryamour*, *Sir*

¹⁵ Nicola McDonald, "A Polemical Introduction," *Pulp Fictions of Medieval England, Essays in Popular Romance*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1.

Eglamour of Artois, *Havelok the Dane*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. These romances, through their portrayal of fecund leadership, will provide an important cultural context for my readings of Richard II, his reign and his literary inter-texts in the chapters that follow.

These texts sample not only from the category of “family romance,” as it is most often called, but also include both Arthurian and English-historical tales, as well as the “calumniated mother” or “accused queen” story pattern wherein a woman is falsely accused of adultery, and her reputation is restored by her child(ren) proving their paternity. Bridging these categories reveals that generic differentiation in literary studies has obscured the concern with reproductive futurity that they all share, to varying degrees. The narratological landscape of England contained not only “high literature,” but also many of these kinds of romances; the way people understood stories and themselves involved these types of tales, and the story-telling expectations they create. Here, I provide a portrait of possible cultural and social expectations by looking at a group of texts which I see as participating in a shared articulation of futurist logic, which informs my reading of Richard II’s life in the remainder of this dissertation. The selection I examine herein is not meant to cover all possible aspects of the medieval and early modern cultural understanding of nobility, kingship, and narrative (and their intersections); rather, it is meant to explore a provocative range of narrative potentials in the period. In these romances, we can see a wide variety of evidence for practices and cultural norms related to parenting, alloparenting, marriage, remarriage, sex, childbirth,

child death, child abandonment, spousal death/loss, family, generationality, and kinship.¹⁶ Norms surrounding all of these concepts and their violation are explored in the safe space of narrative, where the potential for failure of kings, queens, their offspring, and their communities, had no real world consequences. These romances are also, at least in part, love stories and thereby reflect a cultural understanding of sexual relationships, love relationships, and their social networks. Each narrative explores a site of tension related to paternity, reproduction, societal exclusion/recuperation, and/or marital stress in particular relation to monarchy or lordship, while each finds its way to a recuperative, happy ending by way of extreme fertility, successful children, validated parentage, and successful reproduction, which are again linked to a collective understanding of those in power and those in love. This chapter aims at a similar intellectual territory to Laura D. Barefield's *Gender and History in Medieval English Romance and Chronicle* where she explores how Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, Nicholas Trevet's *Les Cronicles*, Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* "embody crises of heritability: they face the difficulties of... how sex and gender can regulate an economy, its politics, and its culture."¹⁷ I propose that popular romances also reflect this anxiety which Barefield identifies, and further argue that this crisis is not only about gender but also about reproductive futurity and sexuality, in the personal sphere of

¹⁶ "Alloparenting" is a term borrowed from zoology and sociology and refers to "the parent-like care" of an individual for a child which is not the offspring of the alloparent (*Oxford English Dictionary*). This concept includes fosterage, wardship, certain types of adoption, and inter-species parenting practices.

¹⁷ Laura D. Barefield, *Gender and History in Medieval English Romance and Chronicle*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2003), 7.

marriage and the family and in the public sphere of government. In a society where heredity is the foundation of power, we need to stop overlooking the significance of the sexual bodies of those in power, who, by way of enacting their sexual desires, become mothers and fathers. The inseparability of these three things, while often taken for granted, is essential to understanding how late-fourteenth-century people likely understood the power structures under which they lived and can help inform the background of the usurpation of Richard II, as well as his literary and cultural afterlives.

Imagining the Past and Future: Textual History and the Popularity of Romance

In arguing for the value of romances for understanding this anxiety-ridden cultural link between sex, love, and government, I am advocating for the value of these romances as literary and historical objects simultaneously: they tell us how stories likely worked in a reader's mind and provide evidence for how readers understood their own world and their own literature. Due to their similar plots and shared themes, these texts give us a window into the kinds of stories people knew and enjoyed, and provide a place where we can think about what people may have expected any kind of story to do. While a "high literary" object like Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* is hard to compare directly to other insular texts in terms of plot, an insular romance such as *Havelok the Dane* invites such comparison because it shares story elements with other texts from similar genres. In asserting that these texts offer us insight into the narratological imaginary of a potential audience in late medieval and early modern England, I am advancing the stance that

people were probably most familiar with the kinds of texts we have the most examples of, and that this means we should take romance seriously as literary text. Based on extant manuscript evidence, romance was the most widely copied kind of secular text in medieval England.¹⁸ While we must bear in mind that medieval people were deeply religious, and likely more familiar with religious texts such as *The Prick of Conscience* or Book of Hours, or even the Wycliffe Bible, the enduring popularity of romance texts and their relatively strong attestation indicates that these stories formed an important part of late medieval culture.¹⁹

The five romances I will discuss in this chapter—*Octavian*, *Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Havelok the Dane*, and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*—are well-attested in manuscript witnesses and have a variety of analogues, evidence which points toward both shared origins and widespread appeal. It is worth describing their circulation in some detail, as their histories tell, simultaneously, about what people likely enjoyed as entertainment, and how the culture understood loving heterosexual unions between powerful people, and linked actual sexual reproduction to kingship, lordship, and good governance. While my reading of these romances is not

¹⁸ McDonald, “A Polemical Introduction.”

¹⁹ I believe it is worth noting here, although this argument will not be part of this chapter, that the medieval manuscripts which survived into the present day did not come down to us only or entirely by random chance. The manuscripts which have survived into our era are themselves a reflection of the politics and social priorities of every interceding culture and every interceding individual owner. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the preponderance of religious texts which are preserved may be tied to the values of subsequent cultures as well as originating ones. To put it another way, what has come down to us must have, to some extent, met our ancestors’ standards of being “worth saving” along its entire journey to the present moment, not just at one fixed point in time.

queering them in any meaningful sense, it does focus on sexuality, and it relates to my queer readings in my other chapters about Richard II texts, because it shows how powerfully articulated the logic of reproductive futurity was in the medieval period, and how much cultural anxiety existed around it. The six romances are found in a total of twelve manuscripts, with *Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, and *Octavian* being the most widely attested. All were composed between 1300 and 1400, based on dialectical evidence, but some were not written down until the fifteenth or even sixteenth centuries.²⁰ *Havelok the Dane*, perhaps the most familiar out of all these texts, is attested in two relatively early manuscripts: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 108 (c. 1300-25, complete text) and Cambridge University Library MS Add. 4407 (late C14th, only fragments).²¹ *Havelok's* familiarity to modern day medievalists is the result of both its relatively early date of composition and concomitant dialectical interest, and its narrative similarities to *King Horn*. *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* appears in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS 11951 (C16th), and also shares deep similarities in terms of plot structure with another text, namely *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* (which

²⁰Graham Drake, and Eve Salisbury, Eds. *Four Romances of England*, Ronald B. Herzman, (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1999), 79-80.

Hariet Hudson, Ed. *Four Middle English Romances*, (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2006), 1.

John Simmons, "Northern *Octavian* and the question of class," *Romance in Medieval England*, Jennifer Fellows, Carol Meale, and Maldwyn Mills, Eds., (London: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 105.

Jonathan Burke Severs, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences: 1967), 65.

²¹ Drake et al., *Four Romances of England*, 81.

survives in the Percy Folio, British Library Additional MS 278779), while also featuring Gawain, one of the most well-known of Arthur's knights, and the central character of many other English and French romances.²² Featuring less well-known heroes, but similar kinds of stories, *Sir Tryamour*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, and *Octavian* are found in many of the same manuscripts: all three appear in the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript and Cambridge Manuscript Ff.2.38, while *Eglamour* and *Octavian* appear together in MS Cotton Caligula A.II, and *Tryamour* and *Eglamour* are both found in the Percy Folio. Additionally, *Eglamour* appears in MS Douce 261.²³ Furthermore, all three of these romances are found in early print editions. The Northern version of *Octavian* survives in a 1504-06 Wynken de Worde imprint, while *Eglamour* is found in seven early modern print editions, from a c.1500 Wynken de Worde through to a 1570 John Walley print, and *Tryamour* was printed four times in the sixteenth century, ranging from a 1503 Richard Pynson to a 1561 William Copland.

The most well-attested constellation of these romances are also the ones which survive in early modern prints. This likely shows evidence of what Jordi Sánchez-Martí documents in "The Printed History of the Middle English Verse Romances," where he concludes that "The bibliographical evidence suggests that approximately one-half of the verse romances that appear in three or more medieval manuscripts were transferred into print" and that "The truth of the matter seems to be that the chance of a romance

²² Thomas Hahn, Ed. *Sir Gawain Eleven Romances and Tales*, (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 1995), 360.

²³ Hudson, Ed., *Four Middle English Romances*, 3.

appearing in print was determined not so much by the text's canonical status as by the number and London distribution of the manuscripts in which it was copied."²⁴ What Sánchez-Martí discerns from the documentary evidence available related to early modern imprints and print licenses for romances is, I believe, important to consider when we are discussing medieval romance and its afterlives because he shows that romance was not marginalized from print culture; rather, the geographic distribution of manuscripts was determinant of whether or not something was printed. As he writes, "Although the evidence available is obviously imperfect... a significant group of the metrical romances that had manuscript circulation in London appeared in print"; this group involved "more than thirteen different printers who issued multiple editions of most of these titles, some of which had wide earlier manuscript circulation and some of which did not," reflecting the market demand for romance in early modern London, and therefore the popularity of these types of stories.²⁵ Based on this evidence, the corollary idea that if more romances had been available to London printers in the early modern period, more would have been printed becomes evident; in all likelihood, the genre remained immensely popular from the medieval period forward, and while we do not have print or manuscript records of it all, stories such as these were likely very well known and well circulated in manuscript and oral forms. As such, I argue that while it is very convenient that *Eglamour*, *Tryamour*, and *Octavian* all circulated in both manuscript and print, it is likely that

²⁴ Jordi Sánchez-Martí, "The Printed History of the Middle English Verse Romances," *Modern Philology*, Vol. 107, No. 1, August 2009, 24, 26.

²⁵ Sánchez-Martí, "The Printed History of the Middle English Verse Romances," 31.

almost anything we have access to would have been known and/or popular, at least in its local area throughout the medieval and into the early modern period and possibly beyond.

Further, surviving only in manuscript should not limit the idea that a romance or other stories like it may have survived as part of culture into the early modern period. The manuscript context for *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* tells us how it likely circulated, and its continued post-medieval life as a story. Its attestation in Bodleian Library MS 11951 reveals, if nothing else, that it was most likely copied down in the mid-sixteenth-century, although its language puts its composition about 100 years earlier. This fact, combined with the same story type being recorded in the Percy Folio as *The Marriage of Sir Gawain*, indicates that the story was likely well-known in an oral traditional form, and later possibly in other manuscripts, which means that even though it is not particularly well attested in extant materials, and does not survive in early modern print, it was probably well-known throughout the period in at least some parts of England. This is because the two manuscript copies we have, and their late dates, combined with the linguistic evidence that points to firmly medieval composition, is indicative of recording the oral tradition phenomenon. The evident popularity of this story, and its likely part of folk or popular culture throughout the period, makes it worth considering here as part of the constellation of notions about marriage, behaviors surrounding it, and nobility that I outline in the other romances even though Gawain is not himself the king in any of his stories.

Similarly, *Havelok* does not have extensive manuscript evidence and is not found in any early modern imprints, making it different from the three family romances I will

examine. It is also traditionally classed as being part of the “Matter of England,” meaning a romance about English history that likely survived the Norman Conquest as part of an oral tradition.²⁶ I incorporate it into my selection of romances here, however, not only because it is more well-known in the canon of medieval studies, but also because it is of an earlier date and is found in a manuscript containing a variety of texts in hands ranging from the early-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries, including Saints’ Lives and scientific texts, as well as an approximate analogue of *Havelok* in the story of *King Horn*.²⁷ This establishes a longer trajectory for the cultural ideas of monarchy and fecundity I identify, and further shows that the cultural concerns I identify here crossed genres somewhat, and are not only the subject of family romance. *Havelok*’s dialect offers a possible justification for its lack of later circulation, being that of the Northeast Midlands, and therefore making it somewhat less likely to have travelled far enough south to be part of the corpus readily accessible to early modern London printers (conversely, this area is also not especially near the big Scottish cities and their early modern print shops).

The evidence for medieval and early modern popularity of these tales’ contrasts rather sharply with a persistent-though-lessening scholarly dislike of them. Most often, these sorts of popular romances have found their strongest supporters with scholars interested in oral tradition, dialectology or the history of English, and with social and cultural historians who find in them ample evidence for the attitudes and expectations of

²⁶ Drake et al., *Four Romances of England*, 11.

²⁷ Drake et al., *Four Romances of England*, 79-80.

medieval people. Early work by literary critics dismissed their worth by using modern value systems for evaluation, as explained by Wim Tigges in his article about *Sir Eglamour*. I align myself with Tigges' perspective that "One ought to take into consideration...the *training* of an audience, and one might compare [this training to] the modern audience of a Blues concert" so that by allowing ourselves to be trained to the artistic values of popular romance, we learn to read it in a literary way on its own terms (108). The Blues, in particular, is instructive as a genre for understanding how medieval romance likely worked because it relies on an audience aware of set forms and their variations. Like the Blues, medieval romance values improvisation within a range of possible forms, and so to become "trained" in medieval romance is to come to appreciate improvisations on the details of stories which are quite similar and which play with a known landscape of form and plausible events (and likely a fairly known set of common characters or character types, like other oratures). This allows us to appreciate romance and the ways in which it explores and challenges everyday ideas, themes, and values from medieval life in fictitious contexts that were themselves familiar to their intended audience. The similarities and repetitions within romance are a grounding feature of the genre, and it is the subtle changes within these known forms that can be most revealing for a particular story and its potential reception.

By reading these romances with this value system of improvisation and repetition in mind, the shared plot structure and story type becomes the essence of their literariness in a way that allowed a contemporary audience to explore and think about topics related to their everyday lives in a fictionalized setting where issues related to love, marriage,

children, kingship, and succession would not have life or death consequences. All of these stories, stemming from different sub-genres of romance as it is often schematized, formed part of a vibrant and popular culture of stories that incorporated ideas about everyday life and its institutions into fictitious and often fanciful forms of entertainment.

Recuperating Queens: Successful Reproduction and Social Legitimation

Most medievalists are familiar with the idea of the calumniated woman from “The Man of Law’s Tale,” in *The Canterbury Tales*, and/or “The Tale of Constance” in the *Confessio Amantis*; scholarly consensus indicates that Gower may have written first, and possibly influenced Chaucer’s telling, but that both men drew on Nicholas Trivet’s Anglo-Norman *Chronique* as a source. As far as English literature is concerned, the story of Constance or Eustace appears in a fairly large number of texts beyond these canonical ones. Among them are *Emaré*, *Sir Degaré*, *The King of Tars*, *The Erle of Toulous*, *Florence of Rome*, *Sir Torrent of Portengale*, *Chevalier Assigne*, *Robert of Sicily*, *Sir Gowther*, *Sir Isumbras*, *Sir Eglamour of Artois* and the two romances which will be the focus of this section *Octavian*, and *Sir Tryamour*. As Harriet Hudson writes, “fourteenth and fifteenth-century audiences must have found the story compelling” because we have so many extant versions of it.²⁸ Its compelling-ness, and this large number of versions, makes it particularly interesting as part of a late medieval narratological landscapes and audience expectations. The core story being told in these texts is that of the calumniated

²⁸ Hudson, *Four Middle English Romances*, 1.

queen, where a trusted family member or advisor accuses the queen of sexual infidelity, leading to her exile by the king, followed by some kind of trial for the king or queen or both, and an eventual scene of familial reunification. In all likelihood, everyone knew this story; if not one particular version then another, and they would have recognized the story type when encountering a new story using it. When it comes to my broader concerns about kingship/queenship and reproduction, I will argue that the shared plot structure of *Octavian* and *Sir Tryamour* is hinged on the success and disastrous potential pitfalls of heterosexual reproduction, and therefore on the sexual bodies of their main characters. The recuperation of the slandered queens is only possible because they had sex with their kingly husbands and had babies who grew up to resemble their fathers. The conflict which begins the adventures the characters go on could not exist in a society which did not pin its power structures and idea of a heterosexually produced future where children grow up to further the socio-political goals of the present. For the slandered queens in these stories having a baby is a double-problem: not having one would lead to a catastrophic failure of the royal couple as leaders, and a probable loss of the structures governing the society in which they live, yet having one produces an indeterminate person, who cannot avow their paternity until adulthood, and therefore can lead to the queens losing their social status, at least temporarily. While ultimately happily-ended, these stories point to how reproductive futurity presents an inescapable bind for those living within it. By being temporally/logistically damned if they do reproduce, and existentially damned if they do not, the queens in these stories show us, through their

vexed motherhood, how focusing on the future and the children who live in it often causes real harm in the now.

The fundamental sexuality of motherhood, and to a lesser extent of fatherhood, is the impetus for the plot in this story type, because the accusation of infidelity towards the queens provides a direct link between the queen's pregnancy and children and a sexual act. The idea that these romances can tell us something about motherhood and fatherhood in the later Middle Ages is not mine alone; for example David Salter's 2002 essay, "Born to thralldom and penance': wives and mothers in middle English romance" argues for their value in understanding medieval gender expectations, and Rachel Moss's 2013 book *Fatherhood and Its Representations in Middle English Texts* uses popular romances to help define exactly what fatherhood meant in medieval life. My examination of these stories intends to broaden the discussion of motherhood and fatherhood in them to include the necessarily sexual acts that underlie those roles, and discuss how reproductive possibilities formed part of a medieval audience's narrative expectations—simultaneously creating the reassuring happy-ends of each story, and the potential for disaster and peril throughout each.

Before delving into a detailed analysis of these two romances, it is worth recapping their plots, because while the general arch is familiar to most medievalists, both stories have their own particularities which will become important as I work through this section. Firstly, in the northern version of *Octavian*, we hear how:

Emperor Octavian, and his wife the Empress, have struggled to conceive an heir over the course of their seven year marriage. Both of them are very worried about this, and so, the Empress suggests that they have a new abbey constructed in an attempt to win God's favor. The Empress's plan works, and she falls pregnant

with twins after the abbey is built. The calumny plot begins at the birth of the boys, when Emperor Octavian's mother tells her son, Emperor Octavian, that the babies belong to the cook's assistant. Upon hearing this, Octavian goes to investigate, and discovers the assistant in his wife's bed, where his mother had bribed him to be. Octavian murders the assistant on sight, and later sentences the bewildered Empress and her children to be burned (a punishment which was, unwittingly, suggested by the Empress's father). The Empress asks that her children be baptized before their deaths, and her supplication softens Emperor Octavian's heart on the matter, resulting in him ordering the three exiled rather than burned. While wandering through a forest in exile, one of the babies is kidnapped by an ape who flees quickly. The other baby is kidnapped by a lioness, but the Empress, the lioness, and the baby end up traveling to Jerusalem together. In Jerusalem, the Empress and her baby are taken in by the King of Jerusalem, who enables the baby to be christened Octavian. Meanwhile, the other baby is rescued from the ape and then sold to a freeman named Clement, who lives in Paris. Clement tells his wife the baby is his, and they christen him Florent and raise him to be a tradesman like his (foster) father. Florent never fits in well with his family. He displeases Clement, in particular by trading oxen for a falcon and buying a horse; these events cause his (foster) mother to realize he is of noble blood. The story then skips ahead in time to a time when France is invaded by the Saracens. Emperor Octavian and other Christian rulers, rush to the side of King Dagobert and to France's aid. The Sultan has his giant challenge King Dagobert, and Florent ends up fighting and killing the giant. Florent and the Sultan's daughter, Marsabelle, then fall in clandestine love. King Dagobert, Florent, Emperor Octavian, and Clement all return to Paris to celebrate their victory over the Saracens. Florent is knighted, and then Emperor Octavian recognizes that Florent is his son. While the Christians won this first battle, they have not driven the Saracens from France, and in the next battle they do not fare so well: Florent, King Dagobert, and Emperor Octavian are imprisoned by the Saracens. News of their failure travels to Jerusalem, and young Octavian is determined to aid his father in France and plead his mother's case to him. Young Octavian, the Empress, and the lioness travel to France, where young Octavian overcomes the Saracens and frees his father and the other prisoners. The family is reunited, Emperor Octavian realizes he misjudged the Empress, and Marsabelle and Florent are wed. After these events, Emperor Octavian and his whole family return to Rome.

The story of *Sir Tryamour* tells us about how:

King Arthus, of Aragon, decides to go on a crusade in an attempt to cure his and Queen Margaret's infertility. King Arthus' promised crusade has the intended effect, and Queen Margaret falls pregnant before he leaves on crusade. However, things do not go well in Arthus' absence; his steward, Marrok, tries to seduce Queen Margaret, who sternly rejects his advances. When King Arthus returns,

Marrok tells the King that Queen Margaret became pregnant through an affair, because he is mad at the Queen for rejecting him. King Ardu believes Marrok, and exiles Queen Margaret, sending her out of the kingdom accompanied by an old knight, Roger, and his faithful dog, Truelove. Marrok secretly follows the exiled group, attacks them, and attempts to rape Queen Margaret. Roger and Truelove fight off Marrok and prevent the Queen from being raped, but Roger is killed during the fight. Truelove buries his master, and refuses to leave the gravesite. Margaret journeys on alone, eventually ending up in the woods of Hungary, where she gives birth. Another knight, Sir Barnard, finds her and the infant in the woods, and takes them in, serving as a foster father to the baby (Tryamour). Meanwhile, we hear how, after seven years, Truelove returned to King Ardu's court to seek revenge for his master's death. Truelove attacks and kills Marrok. These actions by Truelove cause King Ardu to realize that Marrok must have betrayed him, and he sets off to find Queen Margaret. Back in Hungary, the King dies, leaving his kingdom in a precarious political state, because his only daughter, Helen is heir to the kingdom. Hungary falls into a state of war, and Helen is told by her advisors that she must find a husband to rule alongside her and stabilize things. To find a husband, Helen plans a tournament. Tryamour hears of the tournament and decides to participate. Sir Barnard goes with him. It so happens that King Ardu is also fighting in the tournament. Tryamour catches Helen's eye when he defeats King Ardu. Eventually, Tryamour wins the whole tournament, by defeating James, prince of Germany. James, however, does not abide by the rules of the tournament or support its outcome, and goes on to attack Tryamour when he is unarmed. King Ardu and Sir Barnard fight James alongside Tryamour. Tryamour kills James during the attack but is injured in the process. Tryamour returns home because of his injuries, leaving Helen without a victor/husband. The lords of Hungary tell Helen that she can have two years to find a husband, since she did not find one through the tournament. Meanwhile, the German Emperor is upset at the death of his son, and sends his giant, Moradas, to challenge King Ardu (the German Emperor does not seem to know who killed his son, and assumes it is King Ardu). Nearly at the same time, Tryamour sets out to find Helen, having healed from his injuries. As he travels through the woods of Aragon, he is arrested for poaching, and brought before King Ardu for his crime. Recognizing him from the tournament, King Ardu asks Tryamour to fight Moradas as his champion, to which he agrees. The night before he is to fight the giant, King Ardu makes Tryamour a knight of his realm and his heir. Tryamour kills the giant, and then goes back to trying to find Helen. On his journey to find Helen, Tryamour runs in to two of Moradas's brothers, who are seeking to avenge his death. Tryamour defeats them and continues on his journey where he finds a fourth giant brother attempting to lay claim to Helen. Tryamour fights and defeats this giant as well, after which he can finally marry Helen. Queen Margaret comes to Hungary for the wedding celebration, as does King Ardu, and Queen Margaret tells Tryamour that King Ardu is his father. King Ardu then recognizes Queen Margaret as his queen, and

Tryamour is crowned King of Hungary. King Tryamour and Queen Helen go on to have two children, and at the death of King Arduus, one of them is made King of Aragon.

What has, to my knowledge, hitherto gone unremarked about these tales is that the reunification of the married couple is dependent on the existence of male children who grow up to resemble their fathers enough to prove paternity. At first blush, this may seem like something that has gone unexamined because, within the patriarchal system we still inhabit, it is so, for want of a better word, obvious. Of course, paternity matters. Of course, children resemble their fathers. Of course, inheritance/genetics is linked to personal qualities. Of course, this is extra significant when someone is king. Yet, when we pause, and interrogate these “obvious” events, this story type has much to tell us, not only about how women threw a proverbial wrench into the neat logic of father-son relations, but also about the tenuousness and innate risk of this seemingly obvious set of facts. The slandered queens are recuperated into society at the end of these narratives, and reunited with their husbands, but that occurrence is structurally dependent on their reproductive successes: that is, on the offspring of socially legitimate sex acts evidenced through living male offspring who resemble their fathers strongly enough to reaffirm the legitimacy of their parents’ marriage and their own paternity. The women are only in peril because of the indeterminacy of paternity and are recuperable only when evidence of their exemplarily normative sex lives is undeniable to their social worlds. From an audience’s perspective, the women are always-already good, yet also always-already at risk of extreme peril because the paternity of their babies is unknowable until those children grow into men who can enact the male-coded values of their societies. The

happy ending of each romance is provided by this male-coded goodness, exemplified by military prowess and courtesy, but the peril the women are flung into for having had children whose paternity is indeterminable until adulthood confronts the audience with the dark side of hereditary-patriarchal power systems. To see these links, I will look at three key moments found in each romance. The first of these is the initial scenes of vexed reproduction, the second is the son's reunion with the father, and the third is the reunion of the king and queen.

At the beginning of *Octavian*, we find that the Emperor and Empress have struggled to conceive. Here, the Emperor laments

Now hafe we seven yere sammen bene
And hafe no chylde us bytwene
For fay we sall hythen fownde,
And I ne wote how this land sall fare
Bot lyfe in werre and in kare
When we are broghte to grownde
[Now we have been together for seven years
And have no child between us
And I do not know how this land shall/should fair
For as we are fated to die and shall hence go
But for it to exist (go on) in war and sorrow
When we are brought to ground (i.e. buried)].²⁹

Here, Emperor Octavian articulates his concern for his own lineage and the fate of his kingdom in very clear terms. His words show his awareness of the precarity of patrilineal rule, and its dependence on sexual reproduction. His worry is about how the “land sall fare” [land shall/should fair] in the future and he explains that, because they have no heir,

²⁹ Harriet Hudson, Ed.. *Octavian*, in *Four Middle English Romances*. (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University). 64-69. This, and subsequent translations, mine.

their land will live on “in werre and in kare” [war and sorrow]. The Emperor also articulates the infertility that he and the Empress have experienced; they have been “sammen” [together] (in the sexual and marital sense) “seven yere” [seven years] yet “hafe no chylde” [have no child], which is syntactically linked to the Emperor’s concern with “how this land sall fare” [how this land shall/should fair] when they are buried (“brought to ground”). Their own, inevitable, fated deaths tie their lack of children to the future of the country in these lines, and the emperor seems to see this as an issue because of his own understanding of his obligations as a ruler to ensure the good continuation of his Empire. Not having an heir means that the fate of his lands is tied to his own fate and inevitable demise; his own sexual/biological failings could prevent him from fulfilling the role of a good Emperor. After these lines, which explain Emperor Octavian’s problem, which is the motivating problem of the plot of the romance as a whole, the Empress comes up with a solution: they will build an abbey so as to curry God’s favor. She explains, by way of advising her husband, that

A ryche abbaye schall ye do make
For oure swete lady sake,
And landis gyffe theretill,
And scho will pray hir Son so fayre
That we may samen gete an ayere,
This land to welde with skyl
[You shall build a rich abbey
Dedicated to our sweet Lady,
And make a gift of the land on which it is built,
And she will intercede to her Son so fair
So that we may together produce an heir,
Who will rule this land with skill].³⁰

³⁰ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 76-81.

Fulfilling her role as Empress (or queen) by giving advice, the Empress proposes a plan which relies on divine intercession. Building the abbey is a religious offering, and making a gift of the land makes it a valuable one. The Empress's concern that their "ayere [heir]" will "welde [rule]" "this land" "with skyl" shows her awareness of the Emperor's concern about their empire's future, and adds to the layers of intergenerational goodness, skill, and power that these lines hint at. Her, and their, lack of reproductive success, in spite of what is implicitly a sexually active relationship, puts the entire power structure of the realm at risk because an heir who is not "gete [produced]" by the couple would, her words imply, be unskillful as Emperor. Fortunately, it would seem, for all involved, the Empress's plan for the abbey as divine intervention works, as we read that: "sone [after the building of the abbey] he gatt knave childre two [soon (after the building of the abbey) he begat two male children]"³¹ and soon after that the Empress gives birth to them.

Sir Tryamour begins with a similar situation, where the experience of infertility by the queen and king is a source of narrative inception. The narrator tells us that

The kyng lovyd well the quene,
For scho was semely on to sene
And trewe as stele on tree.
Ofte tyme togedur can they meene,
For no chylde come them betwene,
Sore syghed both sche and hee
[The king loved the queen well,
For she was beautiful to sight
And faithful as the trunk of a tree.
Often times they could moan (have sexual intercourse) together,

³¹ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 83.

For no child came between them,
They both, she and he, sighed sorely (at that fact)].³²

From these lines we can tell that this couple also struggles with infertility because there “no chylde come them betwene” in spite of the fact that the king loved the queen well. From this statement, we can infer that loving someone well was generally understood to result in children, and that, because of how children are made, the kind of love discussed in this passage included sexual love. While there is no temporal description of their infertility, as in the “seven yere” we get in *Octavian*, the word “ofte” implies a somewhat extended period of time at minimum. There is also a play on words with the word “meene” in these lines, invoking both the meaning of moaning and lamentation to imply sexual intercourse.³³ There are then two ways to read these lines, indicating that they “can” “ofte tyme” “meene” “For no chylde come them betwene” in a literal sense because no prohibitions surrounding childbirth would interfere with their sex lives, but also that they mutually lamented their lack of children. The words “Sore syghed both sche and hee,” can have a double valence in this sense as well, indicating either a painful lament or perhaps the intensified sighs of sexual satisfaction. Both interpretations of these lines indicate that their childlessness has been established for a while. Their mutual

³² Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, in *Four Middle English Romances*, (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Middle English Texts Series, Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University), 25-30.

³³ “menen v. (2) 1. (a) To complain about (sth.) 3. (a) To lament (sth.),” and “mene n. (1) 1. (a) Sexual intercourse” in the *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds., (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001), in online edition *Middle English Compendium*, Ed. Frances McSparran, et al., Eds., (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018).

distress at their situation, and its potential second meaning, as communicated by the “sore sighs” of “both” of them reads differently to *Octavian* by registering infertility as a personal, intimate problem rather than an explicit question of kingship.

This time, it is not the female partner who comes up with a potential solution to their infertility, but rather King Arthus, whose solution for divine favor, as the narrator tells us, is to go on crusade: he “made a vowe to go in to the Holy Londe / To fyght and not to flee.”³⁴ Again, the possible solution for infertility involves petitioning for divine intervention. Going to the Holy Land is similar to building a monastery in terms of good works. Like building the monastery in *Octavian*, King Arthus’s plan to travel to the Holy Land is intended to please God and thereby earn his favor; as the narrator explains, King Arthus makes his vow, “That God alyghty schulde helpe them so / A chylde to gete betwene them two / That ther heyre myght bee [So that God almighty might help them so / They could conceive a child between them / Who might be their heir].”³⁵ This God would intervene to allow them to produce a child “betwene” them who “ther heyre myght bee [their heir might be],” indicating, again like in *Octavian*, with the mutuality of producing children and with the need or desire for an heir. The word “myght” introduces the idea of the future here by indicating that any child they have only *might* be their heir; survival is not assured, but without any child, there could not even be a maybe-heir. While *Sir Tryamour*’s text’s concern with the future is angled differently than *Octavian*’s, there is a similar logic of marital reproduction at work here: husbands and

³⁴ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 33-34.

³⁵ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 34-36.

wives make babies together in order to have heirs. Much like how the building of the monastery leads to successful reproduction, King Ardu's "vowe" turns out to be enough to bring about conception in his story, as we read that the night before the King left to go on his crusade/pilgrimage, "As God wolde, he gate a chylde [As God willed (it), he produced a child]."³⁶

Of note in both texts is that infertility presents enough of a crisis to lead to an entire romance, and to potentially make significant impacts on the lives of the people within the stories beyond the infertile couple. The building of a monastery would have affected and/or created an entire community, and a crusade would have altered the life experiences of those who went on it and those who stayed at home. At the same time, infertility is also the thing that opens up the possibility of sexual slander for the women in these narratives because paternity is indeterminable. The biological side of this makes intuitive sense: a sudden end to infertility could easily be brought about through infidelity for any couple then, as now. In a pre-modern world, without access to the advanced reproductive technologies of today, cheating-as-explanation would seem a likely reason for that sudden end to infertility; while we, as the audience, know that what changed was the will of God rather than anyone's sexual partner, the accusation of slander is inherently reasonable because of the sexual mechanics of reproduction. Further, *Octavian* explicitly ties a lack of children to another potential situation of uncertainty because not having children would mean no continuity for the kingdom—a lack of reproductive futurity would lead to an unstable government. The link between infertility and a concern over

³⁶ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 41.

the nature of reproductive futurity is more somewhat more implicit, and also more personal, in *Sir Tryamour*, where, immediately before the King and Queen's sadness over their infertility is described, Queen Margaret is described as "trewe as stele on tree." While Harriet Hudson notes that this line is "a proverbial expression meaning 'as true as the steel spear point is to the wooden shaft,'" ³⁷ the words have a literal meaning which enriches the salience of this "proverbial expression." "Stele" also means a branch or a trunk. ³⁸ Margaret's "trewe"ness applies in both a martial and a natural context. She is simultaneously as reliable as the point of a spear, meaning she is a faithful weapon, and she is as straight as the trunk of a tree or as firmly attached and loyal as a branch growing off of it. Moreover, the idea of truth, meaning "loyalty, steadfastness, allegiance, or faithfulness," ³⁹ is a quality that innately has a future. While it is possible to be loyal or faithful in a moment, it is only the endurance of that state which makes one true. To be momentarily loyal would, generally speaking, be considered to be false. If one is going to be true, steadfast, faithful, loyal, or have an allegiance, one must continue into the future. The spear must strike or the tree must grow to prove its truth. Similarly, Queen Margaret must go on in her way of being. To describe King Ardu's Queen as "trewe as stele on tree" is to, in this sense, say that she has a past and future that link together in a consistent way, like the trunk of a tree or the point to a spear. Infertility, and the inability to produce an heir it causes, calls into question the "trewe"ness of the queen in at least a hypothetical sense. If the King and Queen have no heir, there is no future to their kingdom and its

³⁷ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, Note 27.

³⁸ *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

³⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

culture; if the Queen and King are infertile, and have no heir, their eternal body cannot be true. Additionally, the fact that the King's "vowe" to do something in the future tense (go to the Holy Land tomorrow) again links infertility or fertility with the question of future existence. King Arthus promises a good action in the future, and the text explicitly links this to pregnancy. His promise of a future action results in the Queen's pregnancy. The explicit link between his promise of future action and her resulting pregnancy reinforces the ties between infertility, truth, and the possibility of the future.

Moving on to the second and third type-scenes within these stories, we can see how recognition of the children happens through knightly deeds in these stories once the children are old enough to show that they are like their kingly fathers. Familial reunification and the king recognizing the queen occurs toward the end of each romance, after the son or sons have been recuperated by the king. Because of differences in the exact narrative timing of each text, I will first look at *Octavian*, then at *Sir Tryamour*, before drawing some conclusions about reunification and offspring identification in the two together.

Florent, one of Emperor Octavian's twins, exhibits his knightly "kynde" in contrast to his merchant-class foster father, Clement, and that upbringing towards the end of the tale. Florent proves himself in battle, and explains that his father, Clement, is in reality his foster father. Upon hearing this, "[Emperor Octavian] felle on knes als swythe / And kyssede the childe full fele sythe, / Thoughe he ne wiste whate he highte, / For full wele he trowed, withowtten lese, / His owen sone that he was [The Emperor fell forcefully to his knees / And he kissed the child many times to his satisfaction, / Even

though he did not know what he was called, / For fully well he trusted, without doubt, /
That he was his own son.]”⁴⁰ Emperor Octavian is overcome as he identifies Florent as
“his own son,” as he falls to his knees and kisses him. Interestingly, this identification
relies only on his impression of Florent’s actions, because he realizes their relationship
without even knowing what “he might.” Later on, after Emperor Octavian and Florent are
imprisoned trying to push back a Saracen invasion of France, the younger Octavian
stages a military campaign from Jerusalem to rescue them.⁴¹ At freeing them, Octavian
the younger tells of how he and his mother came to be in Jerusalem, thereby revealing
identifying information, and “The Emperoure was never so blythe, / Als for to kysse the
childe full swythe, / And for his sone hym chese [The Emperor was never so happy, / To
kiss the child full earnestly, / And to recognize him as his son].”⁴² Crucially, both
Octavian and Florent show their prowess in battle before their father acknowledges them.
In Octavian’s case, Emperor Octavian has bibliographic details to reaffirm his
recognition, but it also takes his noble actions for the recognition to occur. The twins’
martial skill serves as proof of their being related to Emperor Octavian; fighting well tips
Emperor Octavian off to the fact that Florent is not a merchant, a suspicion which leads
to the almost magical revelation of identity in that scene, while kingly prowess leads
Octavian to find his father by way of rescuing him in a military situation.

⁴⁰ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1283-1287.

⁴¹ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1678-1710.

⁴² Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1774-1776. Hudson glosses “chese” as “chose,” but I believe, because of the context of this passage, that “chese” operates more in the sense of “chesen v. 9. (a) to perceive (sth., sb.); also, recognize; (b) to distinguish (one thing from another),” and my translation reflects this meaning.

In *Octavian*, Emperor Octavian recognizes the Empress as his wife almost immediately after identifying his second son. The narrator tells us that, four lines after recognizing Octavian the younger, “For joye that he his wiefe gan se, / Seven sythes swonede he [Because of his joy as he did see his wife / Seven times he swooned].”⁴³ Emperor Octavian’s swooning here, much like his falling to his knees at recognizing Florent, and the “swythe” aspect of his recognizing his sons, indicates that he is overcome with emotion at what is going on. The scene then moves to broader familial reunification as Florent realizes that his and Octavian’s mother are one and the same. Effectively, he is meeting his biological mother for the first time when he hears Octavian’s revelations and when “His modir for to see [Saw his mother]” he is “fullythe [very joyfully]” as well.⁴⁴ Family identity is clearly an emotionally moving thing for Emperor Octavian and his two sons, although when we hear the Empress speak, her concern is more with filling in the details of her and her children’s story: “‘Lorde,’ scho said, ‘for alle the noye that me was wroghte, / Thyn on childe I hafe the broghte / And yemedde hym evir with me’ [‘Lord,’ she said, ‘in spite of all the trouble that has been done to me, / I have brought you your own child / And have always protected him’].”⁴⁵ Here, the Empress is articulating herself as the keeper and bringer of the Emperor’s sons and, while Emperor Octavian refers to her as his wife, this comment by the Empress makes it clear that “wiefe” alone is not enough for her full recuperation—being a mother, a maker

⁴³ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1780-1781.

⁴⁴ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1783-1785.

⁴⁵ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1786-1788.

and keeper of children who survive into adulthood, is necessary too. After she finishes her speech, the narrator explains“

Than was thore full mekill gamen,
With halsynge and with kyssyngez samen
Into the chambir thay yode.
And full grete joye there was also
At the metyng of the brethir two,
That doghety weren of dede
[Then there was much rejoicing,
With hugging and with kissing between all of them
As they walked into the chamber.
And there was also great joy
At the meeting of the two brothers,
Who were valiant in deeds of war].⁴⁶

Again, the words used to describe the reunification emphasize emotion, as we read about their “full mekill gamen” and “grete joye.” Beyond being joyful at knowing each other, the brothers are further described as being “doghety... of dede,” which emphasizes their martial prowess and their similarity to their father the Emperor. The romance comes to a close with a formulaic prayer, but right before that we see a last image of our characters in the words “To Rome than wente the Emperoure, / His lady by his syde / And his two sonnes also / And with tham many one mo, / Home than gan thay ryde [Then the Emperor returned to Rome, / With his lady by his side, / And also his two sons / And with them many others, / They were riding home].”⁴⁷ The now-reunited family returns home together, accompanied by “many one mo” who include Florent's new wife, Marsabele.⁴⁸ This, in a sense, puts generational time and, therefore, history back on their

⁴⁶ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1795-1800.

⁴⁷ Hudson, Ed., *Octavian*, 1839-1842

⁴⁸ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 1807-1818.

right path by returning the Emperor to his lands with heirs in tow. Implicitly, good governance of his empire is assured by the existence of his “doghety” sons, who will rule after him and, potentially at least, Marsabele and Florent’s future children. The crisis of the romance has been resolved by successful procreation and proven paternity.

The identification of the son by the father happens more slowly in *Sir Tryamour* because the battles they fight together mostly happen before the reunion, rather than mostly after as in *Octavian*. During this rather lengthy part of the romance, we see King Ardu identify Tryamour as knightly, worthy, and good before he knows him to be his kin; the narrator tells us that “Kyng Ardu... trysted on Tryamowre [King Ardu trusted Tryamour]” after fighting with him and hearing his reputation as a knight.⁴⁹ King Ardu “made [Tryamour] a knyght [make Tryamour a knight]” before their last campaign together, and then makes him his heir by saying “all that ys myne, / When thou wylt, hyt schall be thyn, / My londe lesse and more [all that is mine / when you are willing, it shall be yours, / All of my land, greater and lesser].”⁵⁰ Making Tryamour a knight integrated him into King Ardu’s society independently of family relations, while the choice to make him his heir shows that the King identifies a high degree of worthiness in Tryamour and, possibly, a kingly commonality between Tryamour and himself. In these details lies the tantalizing possibility of meritocracy and non-genealogical succession in this monarchical world; Tryamour is good enough to be King without being Ardu’s son or known kin. The moment when King Ardu finally learns of Tryamour’s paternity comes

⁴⁹ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 1026.

⁵⁰ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 1191, 1285-1287.

later still in the story, even though at this point Tryamour, in some sense, is functionally his son because he is King Arduſ's heir. Tryamour's mother tells him "King Arduſ of Arragone, / He ys thy fadur [King Arduſ of Aragon, / He is your father]" at line 1600, while Arduſ does not learn that Tryamour is his biological ſon until he is at Tryamour's wedding, a moment which also ſerves as the ſcene of familial reunification.

The reunification ſcene in *Sir Tryamour* happens very quickly, and is linked to Tryamour's marriage. At the wedding feaſt, where Queen Margaret tells King Arduſ "Here ys yowre ſone [Here is your ſon]."⁵¹ After hearing the Queen tell her whole ſtory, "Kyng Arduſ was nevyr ſo blythe, / He kyſſed Tryamowre twenty ſwythe, / And for hys ſone he hym cheſe [King Arduſ was never ſo joyful, / He kiſſed Tryamour twenty times, / And he accepted him as his ſon]."⁵² This reſembles, quite ſtrongly, ſome of the language from *Octavian*, and conveys the ſame ſenſe of powerful, emotional experience at reunification. In a way that is, again, ſimilar to *Octavian*, the narrative wraps up with ſome final information about what the characters do as they exit the ſtory before closing out with a formulaic prayer. The narrator tells us, "Kyng Arduſ and hys wyfe, / Wyth joye and blys they ladd ther lyfe [King Arduſ and his wife, / Led lives full of joy and bliſs]," and that "Kyng Tryamowre and hys qwene, / Mekyll joye was them betwene; Man chylder had they twoo [King Tryamour and his queen, / Much joy was there between them; / They had two male children]" and both of thoſe children will go on to be kings, the older after Tryamour but the younger even ſooner, after Arduſ in his

⁵¹ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 1655.

⁵² Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 1684-1686. Interestingly, the gloſſ provided by Hudson for this uſe of "choſe" is "accepted."

grandfather's kingdom.⁵³ The language of Octavian's reunion with the Emperor and Tryamour's reunion with King Arduis is very similar; both men are described as "blythe" at the realization, and the respective texts say that each "for his son him chese," where "chese" means something closer to acknowledged than chose. The final stanza of *Tryamour* even says that he "was doghty in every stowre [valiant at every place]," which while similar to *Octavian*'s emphasis on the doughtiness of his sons, also reemphasizes Tryamour's martial prowess at the end of his story. Both narratives also end with the weddings of sons, which presents the potential for continued generational succession in *Octavian*, and the confirmed success of inheritance-based monarchical rule in *Tryamour*.

Taken together, the resolutions of these two romances show that the separated families can only be reunited by their successful children. This success is conceived of mainly in knightly terms, but is also described by the simple fact of the infants who were banished becoming fully grown men who are recognizably of the same quality as their fathers. The high level of similarity between the two stories when it comes to these things indicates that they formed part of the story type, and a late medieval audience likely would have understood inheritance based kingship, and genealogy, as tied up in these ideas of children resembling their fathers in goodness, but that fact only being provable in adults. This presents a tense sort of paradox for situations in which a minor might inherit a kingdom, or where a son is not as good as his father; in the first situation the child-king would be impossibly unproven as good, while in the later the bad king's paternity would be called into question through his lack of goodness. Ideas such as these, that children are

⁵³ Hudson, Ed., *Sir Tryamour*, 1702-1703, 1705-1707, 1708-1713.

inherently unproven, that only men can prove themselves, and that it is a problem when a child does not strongly resemble his father were all issues that haunted Richard II's reign. Their presence in these romances suggests that these issues were not particular to Richard II's person, per se, but rather reflected a bigger socio-political constellation, as I will discuss in Chapter 2.

The expectations of kings' children additionally puts their wives into positions of high pressure in the calumniated queen storyline, because heirs must be produced and they can only be legitimate if they turn out to be good kings. The outline of the story makes clear why the accusations of infidelity are believable in the first place, since babies cannot prove their paternity in this understanding, only men can. While the recuperation of the queens by their kings seems to come easily, as indicated "joye" that Emperor Octavian exhibits at his recognition of his wife and "joye" and "blysse" with which we hear King Arthus and Queen Margaret enjoying the rest of their lives together, it is not the good woman alone who merits reintegration. In fact, the woman alone can never be enough to prove paternity or merit reintegration into her society in these stories because her troth can only be found in her children-as-adults. Proof that the queens have in fact been faithful is implicitly given by their kingly sons, a fact we can see when the Empress insists that she kept Octavian the younger "evir with [her]" and Queen Margaret's declaration that "Here ys yowre sone." The structure of the narrative means that, without a bank of knightly deeds, and a pre-existing positive evaluation of the children by the kings, the queens could not be believed and their reaffirmed goodness could not bring about familial reunification. The concerns from the beginning of the narratives over a

lack of reproductive success and the problem of infertility carry through to these endings because it takes the children growing up to enact reunification. Simple successful birth is not enough to ensure the future of Octavian's empire or Arduus's kingdom; instead, the continuity of kingship and the future of good governance must be insured by grown knightly men. Only then can their sexually suspect mothers be brought into the fold and futuristic, familial logic set right. While these are only stories, and would have been understood as clearly fictitious or fantastical in nature during the late medieval period in some respects, the nearly impossible set of expectations for the goodness of a king's children, and the concern over the fidelity of his wife reflects a broader cultural anxiety about the potential pitfalls of generational monarchy that an audience would have understood at least in a general sense, and which also seem to be sites of tension in Richard II's reign. We might wonder: would Anne of Bohemia been better liked by the chroniclers if she had been a mother? Would Richard II have had a surer grip on his throne had he more obviously resembled his father in terms of knightly prowess? The set of values communicated through the calumniated queen plot, as I have examined here, would indicate that the answer to these questions is yes, and therefore presents an important part of the background of my reading of Richard II's reign. Furthermore, these stories, through their fantastical elements, and their ability to tell the story through to its happy end, assuage cultural fears over illegitimate children, illegitimate kings, and the possibility of the failure of generational monarchy through infertility or illegitimacy, yet they also underscore that these fears have merit, and that the whole system could quickly unravel.

Noble Fathers? Intimacy, Fertility, and Power

It is not only recuperated wives and their grown male children who are made to take part in this larger romance discourse of sex, sexual reproduction, infertility and futurity; these issues inform and deeply complicate the role of knightly fathers, and their relationships with their spouses as well. About fifty lines before the end of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, the narrator informs us that “Syr Gawen gatt on her Gyngolyn / That was a good knyght of strengthe and kynn / And of the Table Round [Sir Gawain begat with her Gunglain / Who, being of his blood, was a good, strong knight / And was of the Round Table],”⁵⁴ and “Gawen lovyd that Lady, Dame Ragnelle; / In alle his lyfe he lovyd none so well, / I telle you withoute lesyng [Gawain loved that Lady, Dame Ragnelle; / In the rest of his life, he loved no other so well, / I tell you it is no lie].”⁵⁵ In between this description of Gawain and Dame Ragnelle’s offspring and Gawain’s love of Dame Ragnelle, the narrator adds “Att every greatt fest that Lady shold be. / Of fayrnesse she bare away the bewtye, / Wher she yed on the ground [That Lady should be at every great feast. / She was the fairest of them all, / Wherever she went in the world].”⁵⁶ This brief passage highlights several important things: the successful production of good offspring in Gawain and Ragnelle’s marriage, Gawain’s profound love for Ragnelle, and the social world that Dame Ragnelle, Gawain, and their son fit into. Gunglain, apparently an only child, has survived long enough from his birth for the poet to know that he has become a “knyght” “of the Table Round,” who possesses

⁵⁴ Hahn, Ed., *Sir Gawain Eleven Romances and Tales*, 799-801.

⁵⁵ Hahn, Ed., *Sir Gawain Eleven Romances and Tales*, 805-807.

⁵⁶ Hahn, Ed., *Sir Gawain Eleven Romances and Tales*, 802-804.

“strengthe and kynn” [strength and kin-ness]. In other words, these lines tell us how Gawain, the model knight of Arthur’s Round Table, loved his wife and how their marriage produced a “good” child, of the right kind and right kin, who grew up. Their son grew up to be just like his father, Gawain, as emphasized by the word “kynn.” In *Ragnelle*, the narrator makes it clear that Gunglain’s being a “good knyghte of strengthe” of the Round Table is not only because of his personal talents and prowess, but also to his “kynn,” or parentage.⁵⁷

Gunglain serves to underscore for the audience that Gawain and Ragnelle are good members of their society, and that Gawain in particular is an ideal example of a member of the Round Table. This shades the lines which follow to render them more significant; Ragnelle “shold be” “every greatt fest,” because she is the kind of woman to have children such as Gunglain, and her being (essentially) the fairest of them all again links her success as mother to her place of value in society. Further, Gawain’s “lov” for Ragnelle is described in profound terms, but only after the statements describing how he is a successful father and how his wife holds a place of social importance. The narrator tells us that he is not “lesyng,” or lying, when they write that “In alle [Gawain’s] lyfe he lovyd none so welle” [In all Gawain’s life, he loved none (other) as well], which, in the context of these lines, links Gawain’s deep love for Ragnelle to Gunglain’s existence. Gawain loved no other woman as well as he loved the mother of his son, a knight of the round table and member of his “kynn.” The narrator further develops the idea that Gawain loved Ragnelle in a noteworthy way, by stating that “mervaylyd Artoure the

⁵⁷ “s.v. “kynn,”” *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

Kyng” [Arthur the King marvelled], at Gawain’s change in behavior during his relationship with Ragnelle: “As a coward he lay by her bothe day and nyghte, / Nevere wold he haunt justyng argyghte” [Submissively, he stayed by her both day and night, / He never would go jousting like normal].⁵⁸ Arthur does not condemn Gawain’s lack of participation in jousts, rather he marvels at it, meaning that he is “filled with wonder, surprise, admiration, or puzzlement” at their relationship and its effects on Gawain’s behavior.⁵⁹ The idea of wonder recalls the earlier scene where Arthur, perplexed at Gawain’s failure to rouse himself from bed the day after his wedding to Ragnelle, is shocked to see her in her beautiful form, yet it also contains the idea that Gawain’s behavior and love for his wife are commendable and perplexing simultaneously. Each idea in this section of the poem, while grammatically distinct, links to the others, and ties Gawain and Ragnelle together with their immediate social circle by way of their successful reproduction. Ragnelle’s rare beauty, and place at feasts, along with Gawain’s submissive, defining love for her are predicated on Guinglain, and it is perhaps this set of links which inspires Arthur’s marvel—reproductive success on the part of his most courteous knight will perpetuate the power structure they live within. Reproductive capabilities are, in a foundational way, tied to love and goodliness. From the narrator’s perspective, where they always already know tales of Gawain’s son Guinglain, the circular logic of this passage, and its wonders, wants to be definitive. Yet, without Gawain’s reproductive success, the text whispers, the Round Table might fall.

⁵⁸ Hahn, Ed., *Sir Gawain Eleven Romances and Tales*, 810, 808-809.

⁵⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

As seen here, both narrative, and reproductively-based life as we experience it under futurist socio-political structures, present a quandary which is inextricable from their very nature: the possibility of un-doing, un-being, and death are the subtext to any temporal forward movement, vision of the future, happy ending, or even family. As I will argue in this section, these romances attempt to paper over this dark underside of the stories they tell through the presentation of powerful men who both love their wives succeed in reproductive terms. These romances forge a clear link between romantic love and reproductive success, which adds to and complicates my observations about love and reproduction in the calumniated queen plot. The above moment, near the end of *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, provides one instance of a noble man's successful offspring being clearly linked to his love for a woman and his place and power within society. Gawain's union with Ragnelle is successful in terms of love and of children, and although he only has one child and his wife only lives for five years past their wedding date,⁶⁰ this romance shows a pattern of linked thinking between reproductive success, heredity, and the proper functioning of society, which I argue is also evident in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, *Sir Tryamour*, and *Havelok the Dane*.

Before continuing my analysis, it is worth, once again, taking the time to summarize each story which is new to this section, in brief. *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle* is a loathly lady story with an Arthurian setting:

King Arthur out hunting in Ingleswood, and when he is retrieving his kill, a knight named Sir Gromer approaches him claiming to have been wronged by the King. Arthur agrees to Sir Gromer's demand that he spend the next year seeking out the answer to the question of "what do women love the most?" in recompense

⁶⁰ Hahn, Ed., *Sir Gawain Eleven Romances and Tales*, 820-822.

for this wrong, and returns to Carlisle with his other knights. At Carlisle, Arthur explains the encounter to Sir Gawain, who proceeds to spend the next year recording various answers to the question in a book. After eleven months, Sir Gawain meets a monstrous-looking woman in Ingleswood, named Dame Ragnelle, and she swears that she will give King Arthur the correct answer to Sir Gromer's question if Sir Gawain marries her. Sir Gawain agrees and marries Dame Ragnelle; she then tells King Arthur that what women want the most is sovereignty. A month later, when the year is up, Arthur returns to see Sir Gromer and tells him the answer provided by Ragnelle. Sir Gromer concedes this is the correct answer and is very mad at Dame Ragnelle, who turns out to be his sister, for helping King Arthur. At Gawain and Ragnelle's wedding banquet, the guests are astounded at her ugliness. After the banquet, Gawain and Ragnelle go to their wedding chamber, and Ragnelle admonishes him for not being enthusiastic about having sex with her; when Gawain turns around at the end of her speech, she has transformed into an astonishingly beautiful woman. Ragnelle then offers Gawain a choice: she can be beautiful during the day in front of the court, or at night for only him. Gawain cannot make a choice and tells Ragnelle to decide for herself. His non-choice breaks a spell which was placed on Ragnelle by her stepmother, and she is now beautiful all the time. In the morning, Arthur comes to check on Sir Gawain because they have stayed in bed too long, and he learns that Dame Ragnelle is now a beautiful woman and that she and Sir Gawain are enjoying their marriage. Ragnelle vows to obey Sir Gawain as his wife, and at Ragnelle's request, King Arthur makes amends with Sir Gromer. The narrator informs us that Dame Ragnelle was considered the most beautiful lady in Arthur's court, and that she and Gawain would go on to have a son named Gyngolyn. Further, we are foretold that Dame Ragnelle will die in five years, and that Sir Gawain will go on to marry many more times, but will never love another woman as he did Ragnelle.

In *Havelok the Dane*, we hear tell of a double set of failures of regency in England and Denmark:

In England, after the death of King Athelwold, the treacherous Goodrich, Earl of Cornwall fails to fulfill his duty as regent entirely. He throws Athelwold's daughter, Goldeboru, into prison, and takes over the kingdom for himself. Meanwhile, in Denmark, the king dies and entrusts his kingdom to the Earl Godard. He also fails to act as a good regent, and proceeds to murder the king's two daughters and give his son, Havelok, away to a fisherman, in order to claim power for himself. The fisherman, named Grim, takes baby Havelok, instead of drowning him as Godard requested; he sees the king's mark on his body and the light which glows from his mouth at night, and realizes the baby is heir to Denmark. Grim determines to save Havelok, and so he and his family flee Denmark in his fishing boat, and move to Lincolnshire. Havelok works in the kitchens of Goodrich's castle and makes a good reputation for himself. When

Goodrich hosts a sports competition at his castle, Havelok wins the games, leading Goodrich to decide that Havelok should marry Goldeboru. Goldeboru is upset at the thought of marrying a commoner, but has no choice under Goodrich's command. On their wedding night, she sees the glowing light which emits from Havelok's mouth when he sleeps and observes the king's mark on his body. As she sees these things, an angel prophesies to her that Havelok will be King of both England and Denmark. With this divine knowledge, Goldeboru suggests that they go to Denmark, taking Grim's biological sons with them as fighters. When they arrive in Denmark, they meet and befriend the Earl Ubbe, who houses them with one of his knights where they are attacked. Havelok and his foster-brothers fight against these thieves through the whole night; in the morning, Ubbe moves Havelok and Goldeboru into the room next to his own bedroom for safety. This allows Ubbe to observe the glowing light and king's mark on Havelok's body, which leads him to pledge his fealty to Havelok as the rightful heir to Denmark. Ubbe helps Havelok united Denmark against Godard and behind himself. The people recognize Havelok as their king, Godard's men abandon him, and a judge sentences Godard to be flayed, drawn, and hung. Havelok and Goldeboru now return to England, where Goodrich has convinced the English people that the Danes are invading. Havelok and Ubbe succeed in defeating Goodrich, although Ubbe is wounded and many men are killed in the battle. The English people recognized Goldeboru as their rightful Queen, and then swear fealty to Havelok. Havelok assigns Ubbe to govern Denmark in his stead. Havelok and Goldeboru rule England for sixty years, and go on to have fifteen children, all of whom become kings and queens themselves.

Finally, in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, we encounter elements of several common plots fused into a whole where:

A Knight named Eglamour falls in love with his Lord's, the Earl of Artois', only daughter, Cristabel. Eglamour becomes lovesick because he believes his social rank is too low to marry Cristabel. However, when the Earl of Artois finds out his daughter reciprocates Eglamour's feelings, he allows them to become betrothed on condition that Eglamour completes three feats of arms (which he has designed to be impossible to complete). The first of these feats requires him to capture a deer from a giant named Arrook, which he does with relative ease, killing Arrook in the process. The second challenge requires him to rescue Sydon from a wild boar, which he does after four whole days of battle. He further rescues the city from the source of the boar, Arrook's brother Marras, who was attempting to kidnap Princess Organata of Sydon. Grateful for his help, the King of Sydon offers both his crown and Princess Organata's hand to Eglamour; the princess gives Eglamour a ring and promises to wait fifteen years for him. Upon Eglamour's return to Artois, having accomplished this second task, the Earl of Artois is furious that his challenges have not defeated him, while Cristabel is delighted by

his success. Cristabel and Eglamour publicly profess their love and sleep together. A few months later, the Earl of Artois finally assigns Eglamour his third challenge: to travel to Rome and slay a dragon. Eglamour easily slays the dragon, but is wounded, leading him to spend a year in the care of the Emperor's daughter. Meanwhile, in Artois, Cristabel gives birth to Eglamour's son; her father exiles them and sets them to sea in a rudderless boat. When the boat reaches land, the baby, Degrabel, is kidnapped by a griffin. Cristabel, grieving the loss of her baby and her exile, travels to Egypt. Degrabel is found by the King of Israel and taken in by him. Degrabel grows up to become a Knight and uses a griffin carrying a baby as his arms. The Kings of Egypt hold a tournament with Cristabel as a prize; Degrabel, at the King of Israel's suggestion, goes to Egypt to participate in the tournament. Degrabel wins the tournament and Cristabel as his prize. On their wedding night, Cristabel sees Degrabel's arms, and realizes he is her son. Their marriage, which was never consummated, is dissolved the next day, and the Egyptian kings set a new challenge for Cristabel's suitors: they must beat Degrabel in combat in a new tournament. Eglamour travels to Egypt for this second tournament, bearing arms which feature a ship, a child, and a drowning woman. Eglamour readily defeats Degrabel and is declared the winner of the tournament. Cristabel realizes who he must be because of his arms, and explains to Degrabel that Eglamour is his father. The King of Sydon betroths Princess Organata to Degrabel. The two couples return to Artois, where the Earl falls to his death from a tower, and Cristabel and Eglamour celebrate their marriage along with Organata and Degrabel.

Havelok the Dane presents a well-known vision of hereditary kingship, grounded in Havelok's king's mark and the glowing light which emits from his mouth when he sleeps. These are not, however, the only places where the story focuses on the bodily, and inherently sexual aspects of hereditary monarchy. Notably, and to me memorably, Havelok and Goldeboru are described as shockingly fertile at the end of their story, where "He geten children hem bitwene / Sones and doughtres rith fivetene" [They had between them / Fifteen sons and daughters, truly].⁶¹ Further, these children were known to the narrator to be immensely successful because "the sones were kinges alle" [the sons

⁶¹ Drake et al., "Havelock," *Four Romances of England*, 2978-2979.

were all kings], and “the dougtres alle quenes” [the daughters all queens].⁶² Immediately after describing these facts, the narrator of the poem links Havelok’s own reputation to his remarkable number of surviving children and to their goodness with the line “Him stondes wel that god child strenes!” [He who begets good children has good standing].⁶³ With its characteristic brevity, the poet communicates that Havelok’s good standing, as a king himself, but also implicitly as a romance hero, is linked to the existence and success of his and Goldeboru’s children. All fifteen children becoming kings and queens themselves seems implausible; as Gary Lim has argued this result is only realistic within the bounds of romance narrative where “the fantasy of romance enables all his sons and daughters to become kings and queens, suggesting an empire connected by bonds of kinship that extends far beyond England and Denmark.”⁶⁴ As Lim points out, this obfuscates the necessities of inheritance under the rubric of primogeniture, making it only possible within the realm of “fantasy,” but it is this possibility of boundless reproductive and political success, enabled by unproblematic fecundity, which I think is key to how this romance functions in terms of defining noble power and its inherent link to sexual reproduction.

The boundless reproductive and political success which Havelok and Goldeboru find at the end of their story comes to them only after a long period of political unrest—due to failures of governance and inheritance—in England and Denmark, during which

⁶² Drake et al., “Havelock,” *Four Romances of England*, 2980, 2982.

⁶³ Drake et al., “Havelock,” *Four Romances of England*, 2983.

⁶⁴ Gary Lim. “In the Name of the (Dead) Father: Reading Fathers and Sons in Havelok the Dane, King Horn, and Bevis of Hampton.” *JEGP*. Vol. 110, No. 1, January 2011, 50.

they meet.⁶⁵ Because of the treachery of the usurper Godard, Havelok was not brought up as a nobleman, and so Goldeboru is highly skeptical when her malevolent foster father, Godrich, forces her to marry him. She articulates a deep concern for the genealogy of her potential spouse, saying “hire sholde noman wedde / Ne noman bringen here to bedde / But he were king or kinges eyr, / Were he nevere man so fayr” [She should/would we no man / Nor bring any man to her bed / Unless he were a king or king’s heir, / No matter how handsome/fair he may be] in response to Godrich’s assertion that he is providing her with “The fayreste man that mithe live” [The fairest/most handsome man that lives].⁶⁶ Goldeboru cares more about her potential future husband and future bedmate being “king” or “kinges eyr,” than about how “fayr” he may or may not be. Her concern reflects a set of values related to love and marriage, but moreover to sex acts; her worry appears to be about the “bedde” part of the marriage. For Goldeboru the “bedde” or sex part of a marriage is tied to the political and social part very clearly, while concerns about physical attraction are secondary or, at least, having a lot of social capital is just as attractive to Goldeboru as physical beauty. Her words show a link between the marriage bed and the status of the people in it, because, implicitly, of the children who would likely result from the sex acts committed in it. Here, we can infer that Goldeboru is concerned not with her own visual pleasure, because she states that she does not care about this man’s fairness, but with the potential offspring which may result from their union, because she cares

⁶⁵ See Noël James Menuge, *Medieval English Wardship in Romance and Law*, (D.S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2001), for an examination of some of these failures with regards to the institution of wardship.

⁶⁶ Drake et al., “*Havelock*,” *Four Romances of England*, 1110-1117.

about his noble status in relation to his potential place in her bed. There is also a tension between desire and social status in her insistence that the man's fairness is not her main concern, which indicates that, for other women perhaps, fairness and sexual desire could overcome dynastic concerns. Her words outline the inherent risk of an hereditary monarchy, that love and/or sexual desire or lack of either could impugn the ability of one good king to (re)produce an heir who will rule his kingdom well, as is explored in the calumniated queen stories.

The story does not let its audience meditate on the possible negative implications of her words for long; this is not a calumniated queen story, but instead one of prototypical kingly success. Her initial crisis gives way to the divine revelation Goldeboru receives about Havelok's identity on their wedding night. Havelok's body proves itself, through a king's mark and other-worldly glow, to be of noble descent, and therefore worthy under Goldeboru's schema of sexual morality.⁶⁷ Gary Lim's assessment that, "Havelok's right to rule is ultimately secured not by physical prowess but because his body is identifiable as coming from his father's"⁶⁸ is correct, and it is that kingly body which allows him to secure not only his own place on the throne, but also his place in Goldeboru's bed. Unlike the calumniated women, whom I discussed in the previous section, Havelok cannot prove himself as a good, noble king through his children because having those children, in some sense, depends on being able to prove he was a king. Therefore, his own body the evidence of his kingly inheritance, and no less than an angel

⁶⁷ Drake et al., "*Havelock*," *Four Romances of England*, 1248-1271.

⁶⁸ 27. See Lim, 27-28 for a close reading of this resemblance and its significance to his understanding of kingly body's.

steps in to read the meaning of this sign for Goldeboru. The mark of the cross on Havelok's "shuldre" [shoulder] is glossed for Goldeboru in a repetition of her own words by the angel who appears to her when they say that "Havelok, that haveth spuset thee, / He kinges sone and kinges eyr" [Havelok, who has married you, / He is a king's son and king's heir].⁶⁹ In a way reminiscent of, although fundamentally different to, the divine will which ends periods of infertility in the calumniated queen stories I examined in the earlier part of this chapter, the angel's divine knowledge makes paternity a non-mystery for this text. This allays Goldeboru's earlier terror over having been "yeven unkyndelike" [given (in marriage) out of kind/rank] by her foster father while also indicating the divine nature of kingship.⁷⁰

Divinely ordained kingship and the set of social-political-sexual values which outline hereditary monarchy in the story come to define the purpose of Havelok and Goldeboru's relationship for the narrator of the poem. Havelok reigns "In Engelond and was ther-inne / Sixti winter king with winne, / And Goldeboru Quen, that I wene [In England and was there / Sixty winters as a joyful king, / And Goldeboru the Queen, that I am pleased to say]."⁷¹ Havelok's "sixti winter" long reign indicates, in one way, that he was a successful king simply due to its longevity, yet the narrator tells us that he ruled "with winne" [joy], to emphasize the success of his long rule. Not only was Havelok long-lived and able to remain in power, but he ruled joyfully or with a goodly nature as well. Structurally, this long, happy (in both senses) reign, is linked by the narrator of the

⁶⁹ Drake et al., "Havelock," *Four Romances of England*, 1263, 1267-1268.

⁷⁰ Drake et al., "Havelock," *Four Romances of England*, 1251.

⁷¹ Drake et al., "Havelock," *Four Romances of England*, 2964-2966.

poem to Havelok's love for Goldboru, adding another critical element to the poem's construction of kingly goodness. The next lines read:

So mikel love was hem bitwene
That al the werd spak of hem two;
He lovede hir and she him so
That neyther owe mithe be
Fro other, ne no joye se
But if he were togidere bothe.
Nevere yete no weren he wrothe
For here love was ay newe—
Nevere yete wordes ne grewe
Bitwene hem hwar of ne lathe
Mithe rise ne no wrathe.
[There was so much love between them
That all the world spoke of those two;
He loved her and she loved him so
That never might go the one
From the other, nor have any joy
Unless they were both together.⁷²
To this day they have not been angry at each other
For their love is always new —
To this day anger has not grown
Between them nor did hostilities
Rise between them nor wrath.]⁷³

This passage, which besides following the description of Havelok's long reign, immediately precedes the one I discussed earlier in which we learn of their fifteen children. In it, the narrator offers a description of royal love so strong or good that "al the werd spak of hem two," presumably in terms of their love, but also possibly in terms of their king/queenship. The narrator further explains that Havelok "...lovede hir and [Goldboru] him so" that they had "no joye" unless they "were togidere bothe." In a

⁷²The translation provided above is literal. From the semi-colon, these lines might more artfully be rendered as "He loved her and she him so well that if they were ever separated, they felt no joy until they were together again."

⁷³ Herzman et al., "Havelock," *Four Romances of England*, 2967-2977.

similar way to Gawain and Ragnelle, Goldeboru and Havelok are extremely close and find joy in each other. Additionally, the narrator tells us that Havelok and Goldeboru have never been wrathful or angry toward each other; over the many years they have experienced a love that was “ay newe” [always new/renewed], while never having words that were “grewe” [onerous/troublesome] or “lathe” [hateful/harmful] with each other, nor experiencing “wrathe” [anger].⁷⁴ This description, of a very successful king and queen, has what may seem at first to have an unusually close focus on their personal relationship. But the text makes it quite clear that Havelok and Goldeboru’s personal qualities and relationship with each other are what makes them so good at being king and queen. It is that continually renewed kind of love, free from hostility and wrath, which any king ought to have for his people and his country; their relationship is not only an exemplar for husbands and wives, but also for kings and queens in their roles as monarchs. The strength of their romantic bonds reflects and creates the strength of their kingdom, and the fifteen children their union produces underscore this strength and goodness at both an earthly, political level because “him stondes wel that god child strenes!” [He who begets good children has good standing], and a divine level, because they all became kings and queens as “wolde God it sholde bifalle” [God willed it should occur].⁷⁵ Political success, romantic success, and reproductive success do not just happen to go together in this romance, they are part and parcel of the same futurist logic of what

⁷⁴ Drake et al., “Havelock,” *Four Romances of England*, 2975-2977.

The original grammar is structured as double negatives, which makes little sense in a modern English sentence, so I have quoted single words here.

⁷⁵ Drake et al., “Havelock,” *Four Romances of England*, 2983, 2981.

it means to be a good man, a good husband, and a good king. Without Havelok and Goldeboru being in love, it would seem, their success as monarchial couple could not be as profound. The story tells us that loving each other well is what leads Havelok and Goldeboru to have fifteen successful children, a statement which so forcefully naturalizes the links between goodness, love, sexuality, and reproduction that it almost reveals the tenuousness of this system. The narrator wants to make so sure we understand the point here that the door cracks open to the possibility of failure and undoing—not all kings have fifteen children after all, and not all children can be kings, even when kings and queens love each other well.

Sir Tryamour furthers the idea that noble couples shared a deep sense of intimacy with each other, and it is clear in this text that their enjoyment of each other is, at least before the calumination plot starts, linked to their ability to have children together and succeed as rulers. Much like Havelok and Goldeboru, King Arduus and Queen Margaret (the parents of the titular character) experienced “grete sorowe and mornynge, / When they schulde parte in twoo” [great sorrow and morning, / When they should/had to part themselves from each other].⁷⁶ These lines indicate their care for each other, with their “sorowe” being “grete” to the level of “mornynge,” a word which brings with it the idea both of grief and love-longing. The cause of this grief, that they “schulde parte in twoo” further implies a oneness of being between the couple when they are together. While this does, perhaps obviously, play into some of the tropes related to love and its general portrayal in romance, it is still important to think about. Arduus and Margaret’s love, is the

⁷⁶ Hudson, Ed., “Sir Tryamour,” *Four Middle English Romances* 59-60.

kind of love that provokes grief at the idea of being parted, an idea which, I think, is significant when taken non-cynically; their love ends up transcending many perils and misadventures, ultimately allowing them to rule successfully at the end of the story.

When Arduus returns from his crusade, the narrator tells us about their joy at reuniting, using a lexicon which is quite similar to how Havelok and Goldboru's relationship is discussed in that text. In the similar descriptions of marital-monarchical love in each text, we can find both a shared poetic idiom and a continued cultural understanding, which communicates a particular vision of an exemplary and normative romantic monarchical relationship. The narrator of *Tryamour* recounts how, when Margaret and Arduus are reunited,

...at laste they come home
To hys owne lande
When the kyng and the quene were togedur agayne
They made mekyll joye, gle and game,
Then tolde the kyng hur tythande.
The kyng behelde the quene mylde
And sawe that sche was wyth chylde,
Then made he glad semland.
Twenty tymys he dud hur kysse,
Then made they game and blysse
And he toke hur be the hande. (151-162)
[... at last they came home
To his own land
Once the king and queen were together again
They experienced much joy, mirth, and pleasure,
Then [she] told the king her tidings.
The king beheld the merciful queen
And saw that she was with child,
Then he showed gladness on his face.
He kissed her twenty times
Then they rejoiced and delighted

And he took her by the hand.]⁷⁷

Instead of talking about double-negative separation, as the narrator of *Havelok* does, this narrator tells us of Ardus and Margaret's affirmative reunion, and that their coming "togedur agayne," resulted in "mekyll joye, gle and game." Beyond the obvious differences in dialect, the narrator of *Tryamour* is communicating a similar understanding of love, which is grounded in joy and togetherness, to the narrator of *Havelok*. Like *Havelok*, the plot of *Tryamour* also ends with multigenerational success; after the calumny plot is resolved, Tryamour is married, and we learn that now-King Tryamour has two children, and that he names his youngest son as heir to King Ardus's throne after his father's death.⁷⁸ For *Havelok*, Ardus, and Tryamour, being able to be a successful king is directly linked to their romantic relationships and the successful sexual reproduction which takes place through them. The happy-end again assuages the concerns the calumny plot brings up; the tenuousness of the hereditary-monarchy is at

⁷⁷ I have translated "made" in this passage in two different ways. The phrase "make <emotion>" in Middle English is tricky to translate into Modern English, because we do not often think of emotions as something we make, with the partial exception of the phrase "to make love." The first time I translate the word "made" here, I substitute the word "experience" for "make," to preserve the ability to list several ideas after it. In a way that is both like and unlike the modern phrase "make love" the idea here of "make much joy, mirth, and pleasure," carries with it the idea of experiencing the emotional state and engaging in it in an active way. The narrator is implying not only a passive or reflective experience of emotion, but likely a physical one as well. Ardus and Margaret's reunion likely involves embracing of some kind, although it is not stated explicitly. The second time I translate "made" in this passage, I elide the word all together, instead replacing "made they game and blysse," with "they rejoiced and delighted." Again, the original words encompass the experiential and active senses of this emotional experience. While we have no details about how they rejoiced and delighted, it likely involved more physical action of some kind.

⁷⁸ Hudson, Ed., "Sir Eglamour of Artois," in *Four Middle English Romances*, 1705-1712.

least temporally rendered a non-problem, although we may all wonder about what happens after Tryamour.

These thematic similarities, where successful romantic relationships and successful sexual reproduction ultimately lead to what the narrator's describe as good ends are also reflected in *Sir Eglamour of Artois*, although Eglamour it is Eglamour's son, Degrabel, who attains access to real power through the story, rather than Eglamour who maintains his own power. We meet Eglamour before he and his beloved are married, unlike Gawain, Havelok, Arthus, Octavian, or Tryamour, making the story different in structure and focus. In fact, the story of *Eglamour* is driven by Eglamour's attempts to access a licit marriage with his love, Cristabel, in spite of his having lower social status than her—he is merely a Knight, while her father is Earl. Eglamour experiences lovesickness when he falls in love with Cristabel, and Eglamour's words about his feelings for Cristabel during this period give us a first sense of how their relationship will eventually develop, “The Erles doughtur, that swete thyng, / She myght be myn at myn endyng, / On her ys all my thought. / That I myght wedde her to my wyfe / And Sythen kepe her all my lyfe; / Owt of care then were I browgth” [The Earl's daughter, that sweet thing, / She might be at my end {death}, / All of my thoughts are on her. / If I could wed her as my wife / And ever-forth keep her for all my life; / I would be brought out of my [current] grief]⁷⁹ (103-108). His words here are somewhat stereotypical of a medieval lover character, but they also tell us how deep Eglamour's infatuation with Cristabel is, and clearly emphasize that his goal in his pursuit is marriage, through his desire to

⁷⁹ Hudson, Ed., “Sir Eglamour of Artois,” in *Four Middle English Romances*, 103-108.

“wedde” and “kepe” her. His desire to marry Cristabel drives the plot forward, as we later learn that Cristabel is also interested in Eglamour when she tells him that, “thou art a nobyll knyghte / And comen of gentyll blode, / And evur trewe undur thy shcyld” [you are a noble knight / And come from gentle blood, / And [are] ever true under your shield].⁸⁰ Cristabel’s words here reflect some themes of love I identified in *Havelok* and *Tryamour*: she understands her desire for him as being at least partially grounded in his being a “nobyll knyghte,” who “comen of gentyll blode,” indicating a similar concern with hereditary goodness to Goldeboru, and her identification of Eglamour as “evur trewe” is further reminiscent of how love is described in *Octavian* and *Tryamour*. Interestingly, the word “frere,” meaning “mate,” is used twice in the early part of the romance where their relationship is just beginning to develop. This word, used by Cristabel when she bids Eglamour goodbye, and by Eglamour when he is broaching the topic of marriage with the Earl of Artois, introduces the idea of sameness or belongingness to their pursuit of love and marriage. “Fere,” can mean “a companion...; friend, helper, advocate,” as well as “an equal, a peer,” or a “spouse or mate,” which expands upon the ideas of kin and together we have seen used to describe relationships in the other romances.⁸¹ Through this word choice, Cristabel and Eglamour are being described as spouses or mates, as each others peers, as well as friends, which indicates that their desire to marry reflects an intimate personal relationship and goes beyond a surface-level sexual attraction.

⁸⁰ Hudson, Ed., “Sir Eglamour of Artois,” in *Four Middle English Romances*, 152-154.

⁸¹ *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

Eglamour, unique among the romances I discuss here, presents its readers with a scene of trothplight and clandestine marriage, which brings up another aspect of the evident cultural anxiety related to children and their paternity, and one which I explore further in my reading of *Troilus and Criseyde* in Chapter 2. After Eglamour completes his first two tests, but before he completes the third, we learn that Eglamour and Cristabel, “Thereto here trowthes they pyght” [There they plight their troth], before they sleep together.⁸² Later, Eglamour gives Cristabel a ring, telling her “Kepe hyt well, my lady fre, / Yyf God send the a chyldre” [Keep it well, my lady, / If God sends you a child].⁸³ These two moments, taken together, form a clandestine marriage, and also reveal Eglamour’s expectation that their having sex would/could lead to children. Their clandestine union stands in contrast to the attempts the King of Sydon made to give his daughter to Eglamour as a prize for rescuing his city from a boar; by having Eglamour reject this prize (not explicitly, but simply by not saying yes), immediately before the scene where he plights his troth to Cristabel, the text is valorizing a version of marriage predicated on mutual consent rather than on social status.⁸⁴ This adds another layer to our understanding of mutuality and intimacy in romantic relationships in the romances. Further, Eglamour’s expectation that sex would or could lead to children proves true in history, as we learn that, “A knave chyld has Crystabelle, / As whyte as whalys bone” [Cristabel had a male child, / Who was as white as a whale's bone] while Eglamour is

⁸² Hudson, Ed., “Sir Eglamour of Artois,” in *Four Middle English Romances*, 669, 661-672.

⁸³ Hudson, Ed., “Sir Eglamour of Artois,” in *Four Middle English Romances*, 704-705.

⁸⁴ Hudson, Ed., “Sir Eglamour of Artois,” in *Four Middle English Romances*, 592-636.

away on his third quest to kill a dragon in Rome. Cristabel's child, Degrabel, introduces another interesting foil to our understanding of paternity and romantic relationships. He is described here as "As whyte as whalys bone," which means that he looks like his mother, whom we hear described as "as whyte as fom" [as white as foam], in the text.⁸⁵

Degrabel's body shows who his mother is, but not his father, which leads to Cristabel's father banishing her and "that bastard" in much the same way the potentially-wronged Kings do in the calumniated queen plots.⁸⁶ While only Degrabel, and not Eglamour, will become a king at the end of this story, it shares a resonance with *Havelok*, *Tryamour*, and *Dame Ragnelle* in terms of how it depicts love between its central couple, and emphasizes the survival of the next generation as a key element of love in its narrative.

These romances reflect how kingly-type men were, at least partially, thought of in their society. Of note, they all loved their wives, all (eventually) had children, and all succeeded in ways that were at least partially martial (either as a knight like Eglamour, or a king). These stories reflect cultural anxieties related to paternity, through moments like Goldeboru's fear of debasing her line by marrying a commoner and Cristabel's concern with Eglamour's gentleness as what makes him a worthy mate. Further, Havelok engages directly with the grave potential peril for a kingdom of having a child-heir and a regent where a king should be, and with the idea that only grown children can prove their parentage which I identified in the previous section. Because only grown children can prove their bloodlines and serve as true kings/heirs, the need for Havelok and Goldeboru

⁸⁵ Hudson, Ed., "Sir Eglamour of Artois," in *Four Middle English Romances*, 26, 674.

⁸⁶ Hudson, Ed., "Sir Eglamour of Artois," in *Four Middle English Romances*, 787.

to jointly prove themselves as capable political and martial leaders to regain their rightful thrones makes sense, and further shows a cultural awareness of the tenuousness of that reality. These realities, in combination with the intimate love each couple is shown to have for each other, show us how men in positions of power were tied to their bodies and their sexuality, a fact which both enabled the socio-political system in which they lived, and imperiled it.

As I have shown through the two sections of this chapter, insular romance offers us insight into the cultural anxieties which existed in relation to kings, queens, reproduction, and political power in the late Middle Ages. Through my readings which emphasize the idea of sexual desire and embodied heredity in these texts, I argue that the sex part of an hereditary monarchy really mattered, and was the site of great anxiety related to the viability of that system. The threat of infertility, as seen in *Octavian* and *Tryamour*, alongside the pitfalls of regency in *Havelok* provides an informative backdrop to understanding the political tensions of Richard II's reign, because, as I will illuminate in the subsequent chapters, Richard's minority at his ascension and his apparent inability to produce an heir of his body lie, together, underneath all of the political tensions and power squabbles which occurred. Simultaneously, the ways that the men and women in these stories loved each other well, and the way the link between sex and reproduction is taken for granted until it is a problem, offers important cultural information which undergirds my readings of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia's relationship, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Missing Children and Forced Futurity: Reproductive Lack and Queer Potentiality in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Richard II's Reign

The previous chapter outlined the broader cultural context in which we can place Richard II and his reign through by showing how, in the insular romances I examined, good leadership is strongly tied to fecundity. This chapter will, while bearing that context in mind, look closely at Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as an intertext to Richard II's reign, while also examining the details of that reign, in particular Richard II's relationships with his wives and the discourse surrounding his deposition.

Troilus and Criseyde contains the same conspicuous absence as Richard II's reign—the absence of children. Chaucer's translation of Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* creates that absence as it expands the potential meanings for Boccaccio's cautionary tale about the evils of women and the perils of dating as he breaks new narrative ground through a variety of omissions, alterations, and additions to the text. I shall begin by dwelling on the moment of translation where Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* changes the reproductive trajectory of Boccaccio's text, because I believe it has important consequences in relation to the poem in particular, and our of understanding Richard II's reign more broadly. As Chaucer's narrator introduces Criseyde to his readers, he explains that he is uncertain whether or not Criseyde had children from her first marriage, as he writes “weither that she children hadde or noon / I rede it naught, therefore I late it goon.”⁸⁷ The lie the narrator tells in these words is clear to anyone who has read Boccaccio. In *Il Filostrato*, Boccaccio is quite certain about Cressida's reproductive

⁸⁷ Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, Larry D. Benson, Ed., (New York: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1986), I.132-33.

abilities: he writes, “nè calere / Le bisognava di figlio o di figlia, / Come a colei che mai nessuno avere / N’avea potuto [nor did she need to care for any son or daughter as she had never been able to have any].”⁸⁸ To be translating this text at all, Chaucer’s narrator must have “rede” that Criseyde was not a mother, yet he chooses to leave the category of reproductive status ambiguous for his female protagonist. In Boccaccio the fact that Cressida “had never been able to have any [children]” is a positive trait, because a lack of children frees her from certain kinds of care. Eliminating this concern about “care,” and leaving open the possibility that Criseyde is a maybe-mother, rather than a not-mother, shifts the focus of the story and the meaning of sexuality within it.⁸⁹ Chaucer’s narrator most certainly does not “late [the subject of reproduction] goon” in the rest of the poem, because the themes of marriage and reproductive futurity haunt the rest of the story. Criseyde becomes much less of a seductress than Cressida, and the story would seem to now be open to another set of narrative possibilities, where Troilus and Criseyde could produce children through their love affair. Provocatively, Chaucer’s narrator puts the question of reproduction, and the future that could mean for Troilus, Criseyde, and Troy within the imaginative scope of his readership in these lines. As I will show, this reorientation is key to understanding how Chaucer’s narrator retells the story of the

⁸⁸ Boccaccio, Giovanni, *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio, A Translation with Parallel Text by Nathaniel Edward Griffin and Arthur Beckwith Myrick*, Nathaniel Edward Griffin and Arthur Beckwith Myrick, Eds., (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1967), 1.15.4-7.

⁸⁹ For a different interpretation of Criseyde’s ambiguous maternal status, see Tison Pugh, “Necrotic Erotics in Chaucerian Romance: Loving Women, Loving Death, and Destroying Civilization in the *Knight’s Tale* and *Troilus and Criseyde*,” in *Chaucer’s (Anti-)Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages*.

Trojan lovers, and the way in which Chaucer's text can be seen to fit in to the real-life political landscape of Richard II's reign.

Chaucer's art may not have consciously imitated Richard II's life in regard to presenting a childless couple in a world of political tumult, yet the anxieties present in both examples related to sexuality, reproduction, futurity and the making of history are compellingly similar. I propose that Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* and Richard's reign are sites of queer resistance to the logic of reproductive futurism. The term reproductive futurism is taken from Lee Edelman's *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, in which he articulates that the queer is that which resists the forces of the Child, reproductive futurity, and politics. By showing how these texts present conspicuous childlessness in seemingly passionate straight relationships, I argue that these texts link together not only because of time and place, but because they demonstrate how the force of reproductive futurism was displayed in late fourteenth-century culture.

In the first section of my essay, I present a method for historicizing Edelman's idea of the queer, and mitigate the temporal gulf between Edelman's writing and my chosen texts. In the second section, I analyze Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* to show how Chaucer altered Boccaccio to make the story English and to present queer alternative futures for Troilus and Criseyde against a backdrop of reproductive futurist societal norms. These queer alternative futures are, however, foreclosed by the ending of the poem because Chaucer ultimately joins his Trojan story to received histories, thereby creating normative culture, reinforcing normative history, and rejecting the queer. In the third section of my argument, I turn toward the real-life political world surrounding

Chaucer as I read Richard II's reign by outlining the reproductive futurist burdens inherent to the monarchy and how Richard II's personal life, in particular his childlessness, resisted the dominant discourse of reproductive futurity. Richard's attempts to create a queer alternative to traditional kingship, show this resistance and contribute to the context in which he was overthrown to save England for the future.

Edelman's Queer in the Late Fourteenth-Century

While Lee Edelman writes about 19th and 20th century texts, and from a perspective of the 21st century, his theory is not temporally bound per se. Bridging the gap between Edelman's context and late medieval England must, necessarily, involve a high degree of historio-cultural specificity, alongside an acknowledgement that my interest in this topic in the past is informed by the concerns of my present world.⁹⁰ The link between reproductive futurism and history is one that Edelman himself identifies in *No Future*. Reproductive futurism forms the foundation of political and social systems. Key to this foundation is the figure of the Child who, as someone who will likely live further into the future than the adults governing and writing history, is the embodiment of the future of those systems.⁹¹ Political systems work to re-inscribe and re-enforce social structures and social order by using the figure of the Child and the promise of the future;

⁹⁰ For recent examples of medieval history and medieval literary studies working on similar topics and in a similar vein, see Ruth Mazo Karras' *Sexuality in Medieval Europe, Doing Unto Others*, Shannon McSheffrey's *Love, Marriage, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, Tison Pugh's *Sexuality and Its Queer Discontents in the Middle Ages*, and Cathy Hume's *Chaucer and the Cultures of Love and Marriage*.

⁹¹ Lee Edelman, *No Future, Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 3.

this makes those systems conservative in that they preserve and continue to produce a world which privileges the Child and the hypothetical future over the now.⁹² The dominance of this discourse can only exist in relation to resistance to it, which Edelman labels the queer.⁹³ Queerness exposes the normalizing force of the Child and of reproductive futurism which, in turn, reveals the ways in which society's structures, in particular those which make narrative and history, are haunted by the potential for destructive excess in the now.⁹⁴ This dynamic is constraining for everyone living under it, and so Edelman calls for more resistance, for more queerness, and for “us” to stand up and say “Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we’re collectively terrorized” in order to expose the oppressive mechanisms of futurist politics.⁹⁵

Importantly for my essay, the category of queerness Edelman describes is not identical with categories of gay or lesbian identity. As unintuitive as it may at first seem, it is possible to resist reproductive futurism from a position of heterosexuality, and to cooperate with reproductive futurist logic from a position of homosexuality. Edelman explains how, in early 21st century America, parts of the gay rights movement and the Christian right were on the same side of reproductive futurism. Both were/are, “inviting us to kneel at the shrine of the sacred Child,” by campaigning for the right to marry whoever they wish, adopt children, raise families, uphold traditional marriage, and protect unborn children respectively.⁹⁶ This underscores how foundational the logic of

⁹² Edelman, *No Future*, 11.

⁹³ Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

⁹⁴ Edelman, *No Future*, 153-54.

⁹⁵ Edelman, *No Future*, 29.

⁹⁶ Edelman, *No Future*, 19.

reproductive futurism is to politics. By understanding this point, we can see how a straight couple who decides not to reproduce or cannot reproduce presents its own kind of embodiment of Edelman's specific idea of the queer. It is this embodiment of Edelman's queer in non-reproductive heterosexual situations which I find, in historical context, in this essay.

What I present below is a particular instance of literary/historical overlap, and argues that reframing Chaucer and Richard II together, through a queer theoretical lens, will lead us to new ways of thinking about medieval sexuality and politics while opening up the barrier between story and history as categories.⁹⁷ In light of the social, literary, and theological realities of late fourteenth-century England, the two narratives I examine in this essay show us a world in which reproductive futurity mattered, and where the absence of offspring would have been highly visible, though whether this lack was a commendable or condemnable thing was also contentious. Richard II's reign and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* provide sites of potential for queer intimacy in heterosexual situations because of their "missing children"—a potentiality which is ultimately foreclosed by the normalizing forces, respectively, of political power and historical-narrative expectation.

⁹⁷ My method here is not new new; Paul Strohm explains, in *England's Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422*, that his objective is "not so much to announce new information, as to offer alternative ways of viewing and entertaining information already considered to be possessed" and my analysis works in the same vein (xii).

Falling in Love in a Futureless Place: Troilus and Criseyde, Intimacy, and History

Chaucer's narrative takes place on foreign soil and in an historic time and place, yet the details of Chaucer's story and some of the ways in which he adapts it from Boccaccio make it as much an artifact of late fourteenth-century London as it is evidence for how late medieval English people conceptualized their own past.⁹⁸ By reflecting fourteenth-century London culture, and especially by highlighting the prospect of marriage and emphasizing familial relationships, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* asks the audience to think about reproductive futurity, while simultaneously opening up the possibility of queer alternatives to it. In Chaucer's London, the technicalities of marriage-making ran up against and alongside the intensification of city and family life which occurred during this period. For couples, marriage and family-making patterns developed to create a situation where sex and marriage formed an integral part of everyday community life.⁹⁹ This did not leave couples isolated, but rather imbedded them, and their sex lives, in a network of "family, friends, employers, neighbors, matchmakers, and civic officials," all of whom had a stake in successful marriages.¹⁰⁰ Falling in love presents for Chaucer's characters, as it did for their real-life London counterparts, the potential for

⁹⁸ Chaucer's relationship to Trecento-Florentine Italy has provided literary scholars and philologists alike with a vast and rich field of study. See (among others) C.S. Lewis's "What Chaucer Really Did to *Il Filostrato*," for an early look at how Chaucer "medievalized" the story through translation; B.A. Windeatt's *Geoffrey Chaucer Troilus & Criseyde, A New Edition of "The Book of Troilus,"* for a side-by-side comparison of the Middle English and Italian; and Karen Elizabeth Gross's recent article "Chaucer's Silent Italy," for a look at the influence of Italian sources on Chaucer.

⁹⁹ Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁰⁰ McSheffrey, *Marriage*, 13.

conflict between individual consent and the pressure of marrying for familial advantage while following community norms. Troilus is, after all, a prince of Troy, and his choice of partner has dynastic ramifications for the city; Criseyde, as a widow of sufficient status to know the Trojan royal family, is also in a place to make an advantageous marriage when the story begins. Both Troilus and Criseyde have families, and these family members are involved in making their sexual relationship possible. While one could argue that the siege of the city removes some familial pressure to marry, the lack of in-story dynastic pressure does not mean that Chaucer's audience would not have noticed it, or that we cannot think about it today.

As part of the shared social network within which Troilus and Criseyde live, Pandarus acts as the matchmaker. Because of this function, making Pandarus Criseyde's "uncle" is one of the most significant changes Chaucer made to Boccaccio in his translation. Shifting from "cousin" a word which could indicate a variety of blood and non-blood ties in late medieval England, to "uncle," Chaucer inscribes Pandarus in a stronger familial structure than is present in Boccaccio, and this link alters how we see Pandarus's matchmaking.¹⁰¹ Additionally, Chaucer points out that Criseyde has a sister, Tarbe, and a niece, Antigone, in the city.¹⁰² By providing a clear family for her, Chaucer leaves Criseyde less alone. In the absence of a father, it would have been appropriate for

¹⁰¹ In Italian: "cujin."

See *Oxford English Dictionary*, "uncle," and *Middle English Dictionary*, "uncle." The word "uncle" meant "a brother of one's father or mother," and it does not acquire any kind of extra-familial meanings until the sixteenth or seventeenth century. This means that Pandarus can be assumed to have been Criseyde's mother or father's brother. *OED Online*, and *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

¹⁰² Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1563.

an uncle to take care of his widowed niece's marriage prospects in fourteenth-century London.¹⁰³ Through his choice to make Pandarus an uncle instead of a cousin, Chaucer encourages his audience to think of the relationship between Troilus and Criseyde as at least having the potential to be more than a pleasure filled affair because it is part of this network.

Further, Criseyde's ambiguous reproductive status, as I mentioned in the opening of this essay, and her social status as upper-class widow in Troy, combine with this network to encourage the audience to entertain the idea that she may remarry. Approximately half of all widows in late medieval England remarried, and there is evidence that for elite widows, the pressure from their families to remarry intensified "in times of crisis," such as, perhaps, living in a city under siege.¹⁰⁴ The full extent of the social fabric in which Troilus and Criseyde are wrapped is indicated during the dinner party scene toward the end of Book II and consists of both familial and friendship ties. Through the arrangement of the dinner party, we are reminded that Criseyde, Antigone, Tarbe and Pandarus all have enough social status within Troy to have dinner with the royal family. While the explicit purpose of this dinner is not, as far as anyone except Pandarus and Troilus knows, matchmaking, the way in which they are capable of moving

¹⁰³ See Shannon McSheffrey's *Marriage, Sex, And Civic Culture in Late Medieval London*, and Cathy Hume's *Chaucer and the Cultures of Love and Marriage*, for detailed examples of non-father male relatives involvement in marriage and courtship practices.

¹⁰⁴ Joel T. Rosenthal, "Fifteenth-Century Widows and Widowhood: Bereavement, Reintegration, and Life Choices," in *Wife and Widow in Medieval England*, ed. Sue Sheridan Walker (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1993), 36-37.; Roda L. Friedrichs, "The Remarriage of Elite Widows in the Later Middle Ages," in *Florilegium* (Vol. 23. No. 1 69-83), 81.

in the same social circles renders matchmaking thinkable. From the beginning of Pandarus's work to arrange this dinner, their existing social network is articulated through the epithets associated with the people at the dinner. Pandarus asks Troilus to identify which of his brothers him "lovest best," and works from there to persuade "his lord and grete frend" Deiphebus to host the group and enable Troilus and Criseyde to see each other.¹⁰⁵ The idea that Pandarus already knew Deiphebus, not only as "lord," but as a "friend," creates a context for plausible courtship; this plausible context is again indicated by the fact that Deiphebus refers to "Criseda, my frend" when he realizes who Pandarus is talking about.¹⁰⁶ That Eleyne is married into the Trojan royal family is indicated by how she is referred to as Deiphebus's, and separately, as Troilus's "suster," and, a connection is forged between Eleyne and Criseyde when Eleyne "by the hond hire held," a moment which draws a parallel between the two women and suggests that Criseyde could be integrated into the family as well.¹⁰⁷ The whole of this event, which was arranged by Pandarus and is further motivated by the care Deiphebus has shown for Criseyde's reputation in Troy, and by the concern Troilus's family has for his health, fleshes out the social networks to which Troilus and Criseyde belong, and opens the possibility that a marriage match between the two of them could be socially appropriate.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1396.

¹⁰⁶ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1403, 1424.

¹⁰⁷ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II. 1559, 1693, 1604.

¹⁰⁸ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1427.; At line 1427, Deiphebus agrees to be Criseyde's "champioun," against Poliphete (for my purposes, it does not matter whether or not Pandarus is making up this threat). Deiphebus's readiness to defend Criseyde here

While the social networks present in the story open the door for a fully socially legitimate union, Chaucer's poem turns away from this and toward the possibility that Troilus and Criseyde contract a clandestine marriage in Book III. Most critical attention to the prospect of marriage in the text has been paid to the consummation scene and looks at the possibility of a clandestine union in it. The existence of both possibilities for marriage underscores the feeling readers or audience members have of there being a possible reproductive future for Troilus and Criseyde. As John Maguire and Karl P. Wentersdorf have argued, it is quite clear—in historical context—that what happens in the bed scene, where they say vow-like words and exchange pieces of jewelry, is at least supposed to hint at clandestine marriage.¹⁰⁹ Maguire reads this scene as adding up to a “clandestine but valid marriage” rather than sinful sex, while Wentersdorf contends that they are never married in the text but that Chaucer's adaptation of the bed scene to contemporary English clandestine marriage customs “raises the story above the level of an amorous intrigue.”¹¹⁰ Chaucer's narrator does not know the full significance of what is happening in this scene, referring to the “sondry thinges” “they spake,” but not what they are, and not telling us what the “scripture” on the ring says.¹¹¹ This is not the first time

is predicated on Hector's fondness for her, as Deiphebus explains that Hector “Speke of Cryseyde swich honour that he / May seyn no bet,” (II. 1453-54). Hector's opinion of Criseyde here aligns with his actions in Book I, where instead of punishing Criseyde for Calkas's treachery, he tells her to “Lat youre fadres treson gon... [and] Dwelleth with us, whil yow good list, in Troie” (I. 117,119). These lines taken together show that Troilus's family, broadly speaking, liked Criseyde.

¹⁰⁹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V. 1366-1372.

¹¹⁰ John Maguire, “The Clandestine Marriage of Troilus and Criseyde,” in *The Chaucer Review* (Vol. 8, No. 4, 1974), 263.; Karl P. Wentersdorf, “Some Observations on the Concept of Clandestine Marriage in *Troilus and Criseyde*” (Vol. 15, No. 2, 1981), 123.

¹¹¹ V.1366, 1366, 1369

that the narrator distances himself and obscures details in the consummation scene, yet his doing so enhances our perception that Troilus and Criseyde's relationship is realistic, private, and intimate. While I agree with Wentersdorf's interpretation that they are never married in the text, I do not think that their remaining unmarried lessens the importance of this scene. The possibility created here shows Chaucer re-orienting the story to themes of marriage, reproduction, and futurity. The narrative obscurity, and enigmatic relationship to social license and sexuality in this scene points to the unknowability of sex acts, and contributes to a sense that the story being told is not fully known, and therefore might not be fully inevitable.

Possible marital futures would also have been reinforced for Chaucer's courtly audience by the similarities between Troilus and Criseyde's story and the somewhat scandalous marriage of Richard II's parents, Edward the Black Prince and Joan of Kent (29 September 1328 - 7 August 1385).¹¹² To summarize: Before her marriage to Richard's father, Joan contracted a clandestine marriage to Sir Thomas Holland in 1340, and was forced to bigamously wed the earl of Salisbury by her family in 1341.¹¹³ Her clandestine marriage to Holland was held up as valid in court, at least in part because she did not have children by Salisbury; she went on to have five children by Holland. Joan married Edward after she was widowed, and she did so first in another clandestine ceremony in 1360. Their clandestine first marriage was initially invalidated by

¹¹² For more detail, see Wentersdorf, "The Clandestine Marriages of the Fair Maid of Kent," in *Journal of Medieval History* (Vol. 5, No. 3, 1979).

¹¹³ At the time, Holland was away at war.

consanguinity.¹¹⁴ Joan and Edward were wed legitimately by way of papal dispensation, in public in 1361; this marriage would produce two sons, the future Richard II and his older brother, Edward of Angouleme, who died at the age of five in 1370.¹¹⁵ The possibility of clandestine marriage further yokes the story to contemporary London and to courtly politics while it provides a path by which Chaucer's audience does not necessarily have to condemn the lovers as sinners, and by which we can see how the story could be “a tender and beautiful tale of human love.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, the way in which Pandarus sets Troilus and Criseyde up and then later encourages them into bed fits into a rubric of upper class courtship. Pandarus's lingering in the room, ending at line 1190, when he instructs Troilus not to faint again, might even be read as providing a kind of witness to their union. The mixture of almost-clandestine marriage and family-mediated courtship in Book III is designed to make us wonder why Troilus and Criseyde do not get married in some fashion, and, by association, why they do not have children.¹¹⁷ By leaving these questions unanswered, Chaucer leaves the door open to a queer, futureless alternate

¹¹⁴ They were second cousins.

¹¹⁵ Wentersdorf, “Some Observations...,” 121-22.; Karl P. Wentersdorf, “The Clandestine Marriages of the Fair Maid of Kent,” in *Journal of Medieval History* (Vol. 5, No. 3, 1979), 203.; *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, “Joan, suo jure countess of Kent, and princess of Wales and of Aquitaine [called the Fair Maid of Kent].”

¹¹⁶ Maguire, “The Clandestine...,” 276.

¹¹⁷ Wentersdorf is also correct that there comes a point, after the “prisoner” exchange has been brokered in Trojan parliament, that it is too late, and that it would have been impossible for Troilus to marry Criseyde with social license.

ending where Troilus and Criseyde love each other without taking part in the structures that give social sanction to sexual union.¹¹⁸

By gesturing towards possibilities which partake in reproductive futurist social structures, Chaucer draws our attention to the fact that Criseyde, Troilus, and the entire city of Troy cannot have a future, not even a queer one. The amount of effort put into creating places where an audience could think of a way for the story to have some kind of future reflects the narrator's discomfort with the impending tragedy. Chaucer's narrator attempts to disavow responsibility for the end of the story through statements like "I fynde ek in stories elleswhere," and "the storie telleth us," which draws our eyes to its participation in normative reproductive futurist structures of narrative and history.¹¹⁹ Through this gesture of disavowal, Chaucer's narrator attempts to leave the possibility of queer alternatives to received history open although he fails to do so as these alternative stories are overcome by the pressures of the received narrative. The power of the love story remains as a ghostly alternative ending which rejects reproductive futurity as the necessary outcome. A desire for their relationship to have a queer future, a future that would be non-reproductive and could only ever exist in a doomed place, is reflected by the way in which their desire for each other is portrayed.

¹¹⁸ Of course, Chaucer's story already had a received end, and the outcome of the events which take place here are part of the large history of the Trojan War, which would ultimately lead to the founding of England. This is true, and inescapable, yet Chaucer's own voiced struggle with the end of the story, and the way he alters his sources makes me think that entertaining alternate possibilities was part of Chaucer's intent. The necessity of a certain end also does not preclude changes to medial events, an idea made clear by Chaucer's general translation practice.

¹¹⁹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1044, 1051.

This portrayal contains a kind of relational realism and queer potentiality through an emphasis on female desire, from nearly the beginning of Troilus and Criseyde's relationship. In Book II, Chaucer describes the process by which Criseyde came to see Troilus as a potential love-object; Criseyde sees Troilus, returning from battle, "so fressh, so yong," having "a body and a myght, " "as wel as hardynesse" with "His helm tohewen... in twenty places / That by a tyssew heng his bak byhynde."¹²⁰ Troilus's partially naked, partially clothed body is subject to Criseyde's female gaze, recalling the moment when Troilus saw Criseyde in Book I and was struck with love for her.¹²¹ While Troilus was struck by love's arrow, making him the victim of external force or even external violence in falling in love with Criseyde, she swallowed a rhetorical drink, something she would have had to have chosen to swallow.¹²² Further, the narrator defends Criseyde against accusations of "sodeyn love," which might make her love of Troilus "light," by explaining that "she [nought] so sodeynly / Yaf hym hire love, but that she gan enclyne / To lyke hym first... / And after that, his manhod and his pyne / Made love withinne hire for to myne / For which by proces and by good servyse / He gat hire love."¹²³ This defense of her love aligns itself with the idea that taking a drink is more active than being struck by an arrow; Criseyde's falling in love is a consensual process. The initial moment where she sees his "body" together with the "myne"-ing metaphor in the stanza describing her process of coming to love him, paints a picture of female sexual

¹²⁰ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.636, 633-34, 638-39.

¹²¹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I.267-287.

¹²² Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, I.206-210, II.659-665.

¹²³ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II. 673-678.

desire. Her love was mined by Troilus's "good servyse," through a "proces," which, given Criseyde's initial attraction to his physical body, and only secondary processing of his good qualities, can be understood as sexual and indicative of penetration. Criseyde's experience of falling in love orients us toward bodily, intimate pleasures, which contribute to both the realism and the queerness of Troilus and Criseyde's sexual experience.

The consummation scene in Book III shows both reciprocal sexual desire and a kind of relational intimacy and bodily pleasures. Criseyde "Opned hire herte and tolde [Troilus] hire entente" at line 1239, but what that "entente" is left to the audience to infer from the ensuing action. We can tell that this must be positive, however, because we learn that Troilus will not die of lovesickness—rather, he begins to touch her as "He gan to stroke" various parts of her body, and "a thousand tyme hire kiste."¹²⁴ Understatement further expresses their mutual enjoyment of love-making, as when the narrator tells us "And therwithal Criseyde anon he kiste, / Of which certein she felte no disese."¹²⁵ The narrator intentionally omits details again, as he writes that the bliss and joy Criseyde and Troilus experience is so great that it is "so heigh that al ne kan I tell!"¹²⁶ The use of omission and understatement in this scene reflects the unknowability of sex acts and the experiential intimacy created by them. As readers we do not know exactly what took place in that bed because Chaucer's narrator cannot or will not tell us, yet the scene does come across as, in A.C. Spearing's words, "some of the most beautiful erotic poetry in the

¹²⁴ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1240-60.

¹²⁵ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1275-76

¹²⁶ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1323

English language.”¹²⁷ This beauty belies the queer rupture of *jouissance* which also takes place in this moment; Troilus and Criseyde’s pleasure stands at the limits of language and of social intelligibility. Through its silence, the poem conveys the unspeakable nature of sex acts and the queer impossibility of a sexual relationship that has no future.¹²⁸

The unspeakable intimacy of sex acts reveals how a non-reproductive relationship in a place which literally has no future ruptures the logic of reproductive futurism and the child. The break of day interrupts "this nygh, that was to hem so deere," and brings with it an emphasis on the link between Criseyde’s love for Troilus and bodily sexuality, and the possibility of pain caused by separation.¹²⁹ Hinting at the mining metaphor from Book II, Criseyde explains that Troilus is "so depe in-with myne herte grave" that she could not possibly remove him.¹³⁰ The mining process is here complete, because while "grave" does mean "engrave," it also means "bury," "hollow out" or "excavate."¹³¹ Through the process of sexual intercourse, Troilus has mined Criseyde's heart and been both inscribed and buried in it; this enclosure ties Troilus to the queer, rupturing experience of the bed scene and to the anti reproductive futurist side of the narrative. While Criseyde, at length, laments that day means "tyme it is to ryse and hennes go," Troilus responds to her "piëtous distresse" by her "In [his] armes streyne."¹³² Bodily contact remains preeminent

¹²⁷ A.C. Spearing, "The Medieval Poet as Voyeur," in *The Olde Daunce: Love, Friendship, Sex and Marriage in the Medieval World*, eds. Robert R. Edwards and Stephen Spector (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 70.

¹²⁸ Edelman, 108-9.

¹²⁹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1411.

¹³⁰ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1499.

¹³¹ "graven," *Middle English Dictionary*, Robert E. Lewis, et al., Eds.

¹³² Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1425, 1444, 1449.

in this scene, as Criseyde proceeds to reassure Troilus of her love as she “hym in armes tok, and ofte kest.”¹³³ When Troilus must finally leave, he again “in his armes took his lady free / An hondred tyme.”¹³⁴ After they have taken physical leave of each other, the narrator explains that “Criseyde... Troilus gan in hire heart shette” along with a list of his positive qualities which resembles those in Book II, bringing us away from her physical experience of love.¹³⁵

The queer possibilities opened up by the realistic intimacy of this scene are quickly foreclosed, as their physical separation at the end of this scene foreshadows the ultimate end of their relationship. Pandarus returns to the story and talks to the lovers separately, and as he does so the theme of fate rises to the surface.¹³⁶ The narrator tells us that Criseyde “foryaf” her uncle for setting up her and Troilus as “God foryaf his deth” after the crucifixion. To forgive in this sense also means to accept the necessity of a story that is preordained. Pandarus's words to Troilus at line 1625 further indicate the idea of fate or fortune, when he explains “For of fortunes sharpe adversitee / The worste kynde of infortune is this, / A man to han ben in prosperitee / And it remembren what it passed is.”¹³⁷ While the text of end of Book III is pleasurable to read, it also foreshadows the impending end that will consume the next two Books. The queer intimacy experienced by Troilus and Criseyde could have had a queer future in a different story, but in the story as it is received, and as it must join up to known history, everything must come undone.

¹³³ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1519.

¹³⁴ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1522-23.

¹³⁵ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1548-49.

¹³⁶ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1555.

¹³⁷ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, III.1625-28.

The opening of Book IV abruptly returns us to the story of the siege of Troy, explaining that "Ector, with ful many a bold baroun, / Caste on a day with Grekis for to fight" and the poem shifts from bedroom to battlefield.¹³⁸ The text's knowledge of history means that Criseyde, Troilus, and most of their family members have no future together, because the Greek army will win; this unalterable piece of history is the simplest explanation for the lack of marriage and reproductive futurity in the poem, yet Chaucer's characterization of Criseyde and Troilus's relationship leaves the audience and the narrator wishing the end could be otherwise. Normative forces overtake the queerness presented in the consummation scene as history itself, which is always already on the side of the child, takes over the story. Book IV rejects the lingering queer pleasures of Book III and reorients the poem towards an historically inevitable conclusion which normalizes the narrative and, to do so, must erase the intimate experience of Troilus and Criseyde. Later, as Troilus and Criseyde talk through their options for remaining together in spite of the prisoner exchange, the narrator fights to hold open the door of narrative possibility. He invokes outside authority telling us "treweliche, as writen wel I fynde," that Criseyde's "herte treweawas and kynde" towards Troilus as she promises to return.¹³⁹ The narrator insists that she "was in purpos evere to be trewe," to fulfill her promise and return to Troilus.¹⁴⁰ The narrator's plea for believing in Criseyde's truth indicates an awareness that love stories are not normatively tragic. That means that this love story was not normative, and that the queer intimacy of the text must be erased and

¹³⁸ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.33-34.

¹³⁹ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.1415, 1417.

¹⁴⁰ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, IV.1420.

rejected in order for the historical narrative which literally leads to the founding of Chaucer's London to be complete. Any possible future for Troilus and Criseyde would be queer, and impossible within the bounds of normative culture and reproductive futurist history.

Chaucer knows the tragic conclusion, and he attempts to find a way for us to come to terms with the conflict created by the narrator's push for a queer future for Troilus and Criseyde and the necessities of telling history as it happened. To do this, Chaucer turns towards medieval Christian ideas of truth and solace. Interpolating Boethian ideas, Chaucer alters Boccaccio once more. Boccaccio's Troilo meets death abruptly at the hands of Achilles and the narrator of *Il Filostrato* immediately pivots to make his story an exemplum, saying that he hopes the youths of Florence see themselves "specchiate" [mirrored] in Troilo.¹⁴¹ Chaucer's narrator lengthens the scene and interpolates Boethian ideas, writing after he is slain by Achilles, Troilus is lifted to the 8th sphere where "down from thennes faste he gan avyse / This litel spot of erthe that with the se / Embraced is, and fully gan despise / This wreched world, and held all vanite."¹⁴² Chaucer's ending portrays Troilus's death as positive to his audience, because Troilus finally sees the vanity of his love for Criseyde, and the bigger picture of celestial order, clearly. Troilus and Criseyde's experience, and all the potential for a queer alternatives within Troy that their love and sexual union point toward, are erased by the mandates of reproductive futurism as they exist in history and this erasure is further

¹⁴¹ Boccaccio, Giovanni, *The Filostrato of Giovanni Boccaccio*, 8.27.8, 8.28.1-2, 29.

¹⁴² Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1814-17.

enacted by the Christian-style moralization of the scene. Not only their love, but also the history it is a footnote to, and our experience of reading Chaucer's poem all become part of a grander plan. Chaucer's "litel bok" will "go" on, becoming part of the authorial family tree he outlines as "Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace," thereby creating normative culture and normative history while forcibly foreclosing the queer potentiality of changing the story, focusing on the intimate, and living in a place that has no future.¹⁴³

Child(less) Kingship: Richard II, Family, and Generativity

Questions of reproductive futurity were as important to real world London as they were to Chaucer's Troy. The lived history of Richard II's problematic reign presents a queer confrontation between the possibilities of childlessness and the necessities of kingship. Whether or not one believes that Richard II was ever in the audience for a reading of *Troilus and Criseyde*, his reign is also a place where personal desires and relational intimacy run counter to the needs of history and politics. I read Richard II's reign by outlining the reproductive futurist burdens inherent to the monarchy and how Richard II's personal life, in particular his childlessness, resisted the dominant discourse of reproductive futurity as his heirless body presented the literal prospect of no future for England. The specter of generational failure was present from when Richard ascended the throne at the age of 10 when the succession skipped a generation, because his father, Edward the Black Prince, had died in 1376, a year before his grandfather, Edward III died in 1377. This generation-skipping, the king's age, and the idea of youth, have often been

¹⁴³ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V.1786, 1792.

seen as important factors for understanding why Richard II was eventually overthrown, though they have remained under-theorized until recently. In his 2008 book, *Richard II: Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99*, Christopher Fletcher argues that the commonly held view of Richard as less-than-manly, effeminate, and childish comes from his critics, rather than from unassailable historical evidence.¹⁴⁴ Fletcher's argument does not, however, look at Richard's queens or Richard's lack of issue in much detail. This section links the idea of youth with the idea of fatherhood in Richard II's reign, as part of thinking through the issue of reproductive futurity and dynastic anxiety at the time to show how Richard's attempts to create an alternative version of kingship are queer, per Edelman's definition, and contribute to the context in which he was overthrown.

When Richard came to the throne, the future of England was assured by the existence of a legitimate heir, yet also tenuous because the new King was only a child. The King's age was officially ignored at his ascension: no regent was declared, and governance was carried on directly in the name of the King, with the aid of continual councils. Thomas Walsingham's account of Richard's coronation in *The St. Alban's Chronicle*, shows a concern with generation.¹⁴⁵ When Walsingham reports Lord Henry

¹⁴⁴ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

¹⁴⁵ For context, see John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs and Leslie Watksis, "Introduction" in *The Saint Alban's Chronicle, The Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham I, 1376-1394*, xxvii-xxviii.

Here, the authors explain that Walsingham can be shown to have been written contemporaneously with the events of 1376-94 through manuscript evidence; later sections, containing events after 1394 all come from manuscripts which were composed around 1420. Further information on the surviving manuscripts can be found in this introduction.

Percy's words when Richard took the oath, he is speaking in the optative subjunctive, as he prays

May his rule over the people be happy, and happily may the nations bow before him; may he live proudly amongst the assemblies of the nations, and be unparalleled in good judgment. Enrich [Richard] plentifully with your grace, grant that his country be prosperous, and bestow benefits upon his children. Give him a long life that during his time justice may grow; with your help may he keep the seat of government strong, and be glorified by you in your eternal kingdom with joy and justice¹⁴⁶

Percy speaks about children, but those children are not the focus of any construct in the passage, indicating that one of the things being prayed for is not the existence of the children themselves. Percy wishes that the King's rule "be happy," but when it comes to Richard's future children, he only supplicates God to "bestow benefits upon" them.¹⁴⁷ Those children, whom the King will have, are structurally linked to the King's long life and the strength of his government in the prayer, making their existence unquestioned. After Richard's enthronement, Percy again speaks, saying "'Stand, and henceforth hold fast this position which you have now inherited from your forefathers.'"¹⁴⁸ Richard's right to rule has been conveyed through a bodily and implicitly sexual chain of

¹⁴⁶ Thomas Walsingham, *The Saint Alban's Chronicle, The Chronica maiora of Thomas Walsingham I, 1376-1394*, eds. and trans. John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs and Leslie Watkiss (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 143.

In Latin, "Felix populis dominetur, et feliciter eum naciones adorent; uiuat inter gentium cateruas magnanimus, sit in iudiciis equitatis ingularis, locupletet eum tua prediues gratia, fructiferam habeat patriam, et eius liberis tribuas profutura. Presta ei prolixitatem uite per tempora ut in diebus eius oriatur iustitia; a te robustum teneat regiminis solium, et eum iocunditate et iustitia eterno gloriatur in regno," 142.

¹⁴⁷ Walsingham, *The Saint...*, 143.

¹⁴⁸ Walsingham, *The Saint...*, 149.

In Latin, "'Sta et retine amodo locum quem hucusque paterna successione tenuisti hereditarie,'" 148.

“forefathers,” and there is an assumption that Richard will join this chain. Presumed future reproductive success of the King was not unreasonable, seeing as all the Plantagenet kings before him (and after him) had had offspring of some kind.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, the words of the Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, during the opening of Richard’s first Parliament, reflected concerns with inheritance, lineage, and natural rights. Sudbury calls Richard “vostre droiturel sieignour liege,” then he tells the audience that “vous est naturel et droiturel siengour lige,” with the “droiture” of this position being secured “einz par droite succession de heritage.”¹⁵⁰ The word “naturel” makes inheritance sexual and physical, for nature must convey the succession of kingship. Sudbury further emphasizes the successful dynastic process of Richard’s becoming King, telling those assembled that they should “rejoier” at the King’s presence in spite of “la mort son noble pere le prince.”¹⁵¹ These words emphasize that without the Black Prince’s fatherhood, and therefore his sexual success, Richard would not exist. The focus on the rightfulness of Richard’s reign, as a continuation of dynastic genealogy, connects Richard to a line of royal blood via his father. All of this makes sense and would be expected when one lives under a political structure which relies on blood transmission rule, and on inheritance by children more broadly. My point is not that this dynastic

¹⁴⁹ Allison Weir, *Britain’s Royal Families: The Complete Genealogy* (London: The Bodley Head, 1989), 57-145.

¹⁵⁰ *The Parliament Rolls of Medieval England (PROME)* (CD-ROM), eds. C. Given-Wilson et al. (Leicester: The National Archives, 2005), Membrane 3, October 1377. In English and in the order I present them, “to you is natural and rightful liege lord,” “solely by rightful succession to an inheritance,” and “your rightful liege lord.”

¹⁵¹ *PROME*, Membrane 3, October 1377.

In English and in the order I present them, “rejoice” and “the death of his noble father the prince.”

language is or should be unexpected, rather, the presence of this language in and of itself serves to re-emphasize a point we often take for granted: that a king's succession, and his ability to fully accept the mantle of the crown, even when he is a child king, is also always about reproductive success.

The progress of Richard II's reign did not fulfill the reasonable reproductive and dynastic expectations articulated in these texts, and the lack of an official period of minority created a situation in which Richard would continually struggle to assert majority and have authority over his kingdom. Richard was, effectively, made a perpetual child for political purposes.¹⁵² Starting with the Great Revolt of 1381, and his marriage to Anne of Bohemia in 1382, Richard began to try to assert his majority.¹⁵³ Richard's marriage in 1382 was not in the best interests of England, because Anne arrived without a dowry and it is likely that Richard could have found a more politically advantageous wife, although it was a love match—a fact which I will discuss more later. At 15, Richard was approximately the same age his grandfather had been at marriage, and marrying for love followed the precedent set by his father Edward, the Black Prince, in his determination to marry Joan of Kent.¹⁵⁴ Edward III married in 1328, on January 24th aged 16, and within two years, his first child, Richard's father, was born on June 15, 1330.¹⁵⁵ This immediate familial and historical context is one Richard would likely have

¹⁵² See also: Gwilym Dodd, "Richard II and the Fiction of Majority Rule," in *The Royal Minorities of Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Charles Beem (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁵³ Fletcher, *Richard II...*, 97.

¹⁵⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, "Joan...".

¹⁵⁵ Weir, *Britain's...*, 92.

been aware of and, given the culture in which he lived, it is likely he would have expected to become a father shortly after his marriage; however, this trajectory of marriage and fatherhood did not come to pass.

The fact that getting married formed part of Richard's initial attempt to seize control of his kingdom speaks to how important marital status was, not only for late medieval kings, but also for late medieval men. I argue here that cultural history work on marriage, family, and fatherhood in late medieval England can have some bearing on Richard's life.¹⁵⁶ In providing context for Richard's marriages, I want to suggest that, in spite of dominant historical narratives which privilege royalty and the higher nobility, we may not yet have thought enough about the actual persons in positions of power, and looking at the men who ruled is particularly pertinent when looking at irregular reigns, such as that of Richard II.¹⁵⁷ Rachel Moss's recent book on manhood and fatherhood explains neither fatherhood nor marriage alone created a full man in late medieval England. This is shown in popular insular Romance and through conduct literature where

¹⁵⁶ My use of this information is intended in no way to undermine its original intent of enhancing our understanding of the gentry, middle, and lower strata of medieval English society. While a king is clearly a demographically exceptional person, it is also true that the king is a man of his place and his time, and the royal family is also, though exceptionally, an English family.

¹⁵⁷ This defense is an extension of the defense of doing masculinity studies tout court, as articulated by Rachel E. Moss when she writes that "The invisibility of particular individuals or groups within society as a result of their marginalisation by that society is an idea with which we should all be familiar. Curiously, however, invisibility can also be a by-product of privilege. Because patriarchal culture makes men and masculinities the touchstones for 'normal' behaviours and standards within society, maleness is taken for granted, creating the paradox of simultaneously privileging men and making them invisible," in *Fatherhood and its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 5-6.

“What makes a man is contributing to a *line* of fathers” through legitimate, socially legible, procreation, much like in Percy’s coronation speech.¹⁵⁸ Marriage created the context for a male person to enter into manhood in late medieval society, but to fully do so required producing offspring.¹⁵⁹ Keeping this context in mind, we can begin to see how dominant history has obscured the queer potential I find in Richard II’s childless reign.

The King’s fruitless marriage to Anne of Bohemia is famous for having been close and loving.¹⁶⁰ Their marriage is often narrated as unusually close by the standards of royal marriages because of their habit of traveling together on itineraries of the realm, the letters they exchanged, and Richard’s level of grief after her death.¹⁶¹ The idea that their marriage was unusual in its close, companionate nature is, however, largely inaccurate. Companionate marriage was not unusual in Richard’s family. Briefly, Edward

¹⁵⁸ Rachel E. Moss, *Fatherhood and its Representations in Middle English Texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2013), 61, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Moss, *Fatherhood...*, 71.

¹⁶⁰ A reinvigorated field of queenship studies has recently begun to focus on Anne of Bohemia in more detail. See, for example, Lynn Staley’s “Anne of Bohemia and the Objects of Ricardian Kingship,” in *Medieval Women and Their Objects*, eds. Jenny Adams and Nancy Mason Bradbury (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2017) for an analysis of how Anne enacted the powers of queenship in her reign, and how this is linked to literary and manuscript production.

¹⁶¹ Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 456. The import put on the single letter we have from Richard to Anne, attested in Cotton Tiberius BIX f.90.r, by Saul does not hold up to scrutiny when we consider the evidence related to preceding queens consort. Note that this letter is not, as Saul records it in his note, in Cotton Tiberius BXI f.90.r.. Cotton Tiberius BXI is a 9th century religious text; Cotton Tiberius BIX is a book recording the letters of the Abbey at Bury St. Edmunds, and contains a letter from Richard to Anne detailing business matters on folio 90.r. The use of this letter, and little other evidence, to suggest that they were unusually close is, in my view, part of the erasure of queerness from Richard II’s reign.

III was known for being fond of his queen, and the Black Prince clandestinely married the widowed Joan of Kent for what appears to have been love, in spite of several impediments.¹⁶² Additionally, most if not all of the royal couples in fourteenth-century England communicated via letter.¹⁶³ When we read, in Walsingham's chronicle, that "the King spent Christmas [1385] with Queen Anne, whom he rarely if ever allowed to be away from his side," it is not an unusual observation, especially when the queen was never limited by pregnancy.¹⁶⁴ It seems that the desire to explain Richard's marriage to Anne as unusual in some way other than its barrenness is reflective of an anxiety about their lack of participation in the reproductive futurist structure of kingship.

Childlessness, and the possibility of infertility, present a place where reproductive futurity fails, even if it is not intentionally rejected. Adam Usk, a pro-Lancastrian chronicler, found this lack remarkable, as he introduces Anne by writing that she was "most gracious queen of England," "though she died childless."¹⁶⁵ Also of note to Usk was Richard's level of emotional attachment to this childless queen. As Usk narrates it, "[the] most gracious lady Queen Anne of England died at the manor of Sheen ... which,

¹⁶² Lisa Benz St. John, *Three Medieval Queens, Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 5.; Wentersdorf, "The Clandestine...", 121-22.

¹⁶³ Benz St. John, *Three Medieval...*, 38.

¹⁶⁴ Walsingham, *The Saint...*, 737. In Latin, "fuit idem rex ad natale cum Anna regina, quam raro uel nunquam lateri suo deesse permisit," 736. Walsingham did not approve of this behavior or of their subsequent habit of traveling to spend Christmases together. He took pains to indicate that the queen and king wasted money in their travels together, so it is possible he overstates their closeness or their frequency of travel for rhetorical affect.

¹⁶⁵ Adam Usk, "The Chronicle of Adam Usk," in *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421*, ed. and trans. C. Given-Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 5. In Latin, "Angl' reginam benignissimam, licet sine prole defunctam," 4.

despite the fact that it was a royal manor and a most splendid one, King Richard ordered to be razed to the ground and destroyed, on account of the fact that this Lady Anne's death occurred there."¹⁶⁶ While Usk disapproves of the King's actions here, this account, combined with a letter from Richard to the Duke of Gelders in summer of 1394 gives us an idea that Richard was emotionally moved by his queen's death. Richard asks that the Duke delay his visit, writing that he could not entertain him properly on account of his "heaviest sadness."¹⁶⁷ Richard's affective attachment to Anne, as demonstrated by his reaction to her death, was profound in spite of his lack of heir.

Their conspicuous lack of children is something that many historians have tried to explain away, although none have done so definitively until recently. The most frequently aired explanations for Richard and Anne's lack of issue were that their marriage was celibate because Richard's patron saint was Edward the Confessor, that one or both of them was infertile, and that Richard was homosexual.¹⁶⁸ The homosexuality argument

¹⁶⁶ Usk, "The Chronicle...", 19. In Latin, "...moiebatur illa benignissima domina Anna Anglie regini in maerio de Schene ... Quod manerium, licet regale et pulcherimum, occasione ipsis domine Anne moritis in eodem contingentis rex Ricardus funditus mandauit et fecit extirpari," 18.

¹⁶⁷ Fletcher, *Richard II...*, 239.; Edouard Perroy, *The Diplomatic Correspondance of Richard II* (London: Butler and Tannen Ltd., 1993), 148, translation mine. In Latin, "gravissimio merore," 148.

¹⁶⁸ It is clear that Robert de Vere was a problematic favorite of Richard's and that they had a close and long-lasting friendship. The allegations of sodomy are, at the strongest plausible interpretation, similar to those levied against Richard's great-grandfather, Edward II about his relationship with Piers Gaveston. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully develop the possibilities opened by a comparative reading of Richard II and Edward II's two reigns, though such an inquiry would be a fruitful avenue for future study. I would note that Edward II still had four children by his queen, and one illegitimate child, before his deposition, and the case for homosexuality seems somewhat stronger for him than for Richard. These facts, along with the fact that medieval people

has fallen out of favor almost entirely, due to manuscript evidence for Walsingham's chronicle, which shows that accusations of "impure relations" were added after Richard's dethronement, and a more nuanced examination of Usk's chronicle in relation to the source the accusation of sodomy toward Richard II closely mirrors, and Richard's orthodox piety.¹⁶⁹ While the chastity argument carried some favor for many years, recent evidence has made it clear that the infertility explanation is most supportable. Kristen L Geaman's recent work reexamines primary sources provides definitive evidence that Richard and Anne had a sexual union and likely were infertile and aware of it.¹⁷⁰ In "A Personal Letter Written by Anne of Bohemia," Geaman transcribes and translates a letter from Anne of Bohemia to Wenceslas IV (her half-brother) dating to 1384-85. Of interest in regards to children and reproduction is the penultimate sentence of the letter, which "expresses Anne's regret that she has not yet borne a child and her hope that she will soon do so."¹⁷¹ Geaman's transcription and translation of the sentence in question reads "We thus describe our position to your highness as lacking nothing that could be desired, except that we write grieving that still we are not rejoicing in our *puerperio*, but,

do not seem to have thought of themselves as gay or straight in a binary way, indicate that it does not seem to matter, for my essay, whether or not Richard II and Robert de Vere had a sexual relationship.

¹⁶⁹ Usk, "The Chronicle...", 63.

¹⁷⁰ Kristen L. Geaman, "Anne of Bohemia and her Struggle to Conceive," in *Social History of Medicine* (Vol. 29, No. 2), 224-244. Included in this article are Geaman's transcription of purchasing records for Anne's household and her interpretation of the medicines bought in them as being related to fertility/infertility.

¹⁷¹ Kristen L. Geaman, "A Personal Letter Written by Anne of Bohemia" in *English Historical Review* (Vol. 128, No. 534), 1092.

concerning this, hope of health works in the near future, if the Lord permits.”¹⁷² The word “puerperium,” as Geaman explains, means something related to childbirth while conveying a degree of vagueness that includes possibilities such as miscarriage.¹⁷³ Saying that she is “lacking nothing that could be desired,” except something to do with having a child shows the problematic lack of successful reproduction and reveals this to be a site of anxiety for the discourse of reproductive futurity.

While their lack of children was unusual, the ways in which Richard’s sexuality can be seen as queer in Edelman’s sense become most evident after Anne’s death as Richard attempted to maintain his grip on the kingdom without an heir. Katherine J. Lewis breaks down the chaste marriage theory by analyzing his devotion to Edward the Confessor. Importantly, Richard’s devotion to Edward the Confessor intensified only after Anne’s death, when he was left a childless widower, and Lewis suggests that this was a “rearguard action.”¹⁷⁴ As Lewis writes, “Richard was using the performance of kingly virginity to deal with anxieties surrounding his status as both king and man” after the death of his first queen consort.¹⁷⁵ In Lewis’s view, Richard was trying to co-opt this

¹⁷² Geaman, “A Personal,” 1089. In Latin, “Vestre igitur celsitudini sic describimus stam nostrum ut nullo careat quod optare deberet nisis hoc quod dolentes scribimus quia adhuc de nostro puerperio non gaudemus set de hoc laborat in proximo spes salutis domino concedente,” 1091-1092.

¹⁷³ Geaman, “A Personal,” 1092.

¹⁷⁴ Katherine J. Lewis, “Becoming a Virgin King, Richard II and Edward the Confessor,” in *Gender and Holiness, Men, women and saints in late medieval Europe*, eds. Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih (London: Routledge, 2002), 89.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis, “Becoming...,” 89. Lewis’s argument about Richard II dovetails with her analysis of Edward the Confessor and Edith’s marriage, where she points out that it is unlikely that Edward the Confessor and Edith’s marriage was ever chaste, writing that the construction of their marriage as such was “[likely] nothing more than a product of the circumstances and concomitant

discourse of kingly chastity which provided an alternate view of kingship, to shore up his position in power by identifying with a role model who was no less than a Saint. In light of my argument about the place of reproductive futurity as a controlling logic of kingship and central struggle of Richard's reign, I we can see this latching on to an extant model of kingly sexuality, and this identification with Edward as revealing the ways that political power and sexual identities are tied together in kingship.

Being virginal or chaste was a legible sexuality for medieval people, whereas the possibility of a childless marriage was much less culturally legible, especially for a king.¹⁷⁶ It is not until the year after Anne's death, 1395, that we see Richard's coat of arms impaled with that of Edward the Confessor in a move that would render the two heraldically married.¹⁷⁷ While I agree with Lewis's reading that this was part of his attempt to gain political stability through his devotion to St. Edward, the idea that he, at least heraldically, married a Saint is worth thinking about in terms queer resistance to reproductive futurity. What Lewis terms the "partnership between the two kings" in this coat of arms is also a queer marriage of sorts because it appropriates the conventional use of impaled arms to reveal an alternate kind of intimacy while creating a socially legible sexuality for king Richard.¹⁷⁸ Further, Richard took these as his public arms in 1397, the

needs of his widow" because it does not appear as an idea in any of the sources until after the Conquest (94).

¹⁷⁶ Indeed, the possibility of non-reproductive, non-chase, and non-religious sexuality was nearly illegible for medieval people. Most people would have experienced marriage and parenthood as "life-cycle phenomena" rather than active personal choices. For more on this, see Ruth Mazo Karras. *Doing Unto Others, Sexuality in Medieval Europe*. London: Routledge, 2005. 29.

¹⁷⁷ Lewis, "Becoming..." 91.

¹⁷⁸ Lewis, "Becoming..." 91.

year after his marriage to the young Isabella, which codes that marriage as explicitly non-sexual and opens the possibility that he never intended to produce an heir with her, even if they had remained married long enough for her to come of age.¹⁷⁹ Richard can be seen as attempting to find a space for a queer identity as childless king as he used existing cultural spaces to render his family, sexuality, and kingship legible and socially legitimate.

Richard's relationship with young Isabella reads as quasi-familial, not sexual, marking it as categorically different in nature to his relationship with Anne; as Nigel Saul writes in his biography of Richard, "Richard appears to have treated the young Isabella as the child that he never had."¹⁸⁰ Richard himself seems to have been aware of this dynamic, as it is clear that he pushed for the match, as Michael Bennett explains, adding that "For his own private reasons, Richard may have been happy with the prospect of a child-bride."¹⁸¹ Thinking through the outlines of Richard II's reign and that of his new bride's father, Charles VI, the notion that Isabella was the child he never had and that he may have wanted a child-bride, possibly to be this child he never had, are both more true and more queer than Saul and Bennett might have intended. The two monarchs both came to the throne very young; born in 1368, Charles was slightly younger than Richard (b. 1367) and came to the throne when he was slightly older, in 1380.¹⁸² In a real way, the

¹⁷⁹ Lewis, "Becoming..." 93.

¹⁸⁰ Saul, *Richard II*, 457.

¹⁸¹ Michael Bennett, *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 69-70, 70.

¹⁸² Richard II: born January 1367, coronated July 1377, deposed September 1399, died February 1400; Charles VI: born 1368, coronated 1380, died 1422

young monarch's six year-old daughter was, in 1396, the age to be the child Richard and Anne had never had. Perhaps, Richard's "private reasons" for being happy with the match included the potential to act as a kind of father; however, much like his first marriage, we can see Richard failing to adequately account for political necessities in his choice of spouse.¹⁸³ Not only did a child bride not help the heirless state of England under Richard, but her very existence underscores the reproductive lack of Richard's reign, especially when compared with Charles VI. Richard's relationship with a child wife whom he treated like his child presents another kind of queer intimacy. He formed a close, familial bond with Isabella, but because that bond did not follow a normative reproductive path, it is another site of anxiety around non-normative and queer intimacies in his reign.

Richard's plausible attempt to construct an alternative kind of family through his marriage to Isabella, and his rebranded sexuality and heraldry show an attempt to find alternative to the dominant idea of primogenitive lineage and create another kind of future against the mandates of reproductive futurity. Lewis points out that there is some evidence that Richard succeeded in identifying himself as a chaste or virginal king: Phillippe de Mezieres wrote to Richard promoting peace between England and France in the middle of the marriage negotiations between Charles and Richard for Isabella and in his letter he mentions that "many valiant men in this world had no heirs of their body to succeed them!".¹⁸⁴ While Richard's devotion to Edward the Confessor may have succeeded in giving him a socially legible sexual identity for a time, it did not allow him

¹⁸³ Bennett, *Richard II...*, 70.

¹⁸⁴ Philippe de Mezières, *Letter to King Richard II*, ed. and trans. G.W. Coopland (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976), 37.

to remain in control of his kingdom for long. Richard's attempt to construct a virginal body after Anne's death speaks to the queerness of their childless union and the fact that it never fully worked speaks to the power of the mandates of reproductive futurity.

Richard's commitment to Anne, even after her death, is further evidenced by the tomb he had built for the two of them, yet its very structure exposes the reproductive lack of his reign and its failure to participate in futurist expectations. Modeling the tomb on his grandfather's Richard, perhaps unintentionally, highlighted the stark differences between them: where Edward III's tomb had small brass statues of his children, Richard II's tomb had—or planned to have—small figures of saints.¹⁸⁵ Edward's tomb is also a single.¹⁸⁶ In commissioning the joint tomb in Westminster Abbey, Richard II tied himself to his first queen consort in eternal representation no matter what was to happen; Richard had no way of knowing he would be deposed and murdered a mere 4-5 years after building her tomb, much like his grandfather had no clear reason to suppose he would outlive Philippa by more than five years when his tomb was built because both monarchs had spouses of nearly their own age.¹⁸⁷ Also of interest on Richard II's tomb is the fact

¹⁸⁵ Paul Binski, *Westminster Abbey and the Plantagenets, Kinship and the Representation of Power, 1200-1400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 200-1.

These figures are now lost, but the commission of the tomb indicates that they were at least ordered, if never installed, 201.

¹⁸⁶ Binski, *Westminster...*, 195.; Additionally, Philippa is buried separately from although very close to Edward III, 195.

¹⁸⁷ Binski, *Westminster...*, 201.; One might be able to make the argument that Richard's choice for a double tomb was related to space concerns, but that still does not preclude the possibility of him reserving the prime spot next to Edward for himself, and putting Anne somewhere slightly less desirable, e.g. to the left of King Sebert's tomb (for map and description, see Binski 112, 195). The large pillars between each grave mean that none of them are exactly next to each other.

that Richard and Anne were holding hands, showing their attachment to each other.¹⁸⁸ In the figures of saints, the tomb underscores that Richard's lack of heir was notable and had to be culturally mediated through an appeal to Christian discourse. Richard's choice to engage with discourses of virginal kings, to make a joint tomb, and to place Saints where his grandfather had children on that tomb reveal an attempt to articulate a non-reproductive futurist view of family and monarchy. However, spiritual heirs are not able to rule a country, and this kind of display probably enhanced political trouble rather than lessening it.

Richard II's attempts to create an alternative vision of kingly sexuality, marriage, and family—to be a queer king—was ended by his cousin's usurpation of the throne in 1399. Henry Bolingbroke's seizure of the English crown is bound up in the rhetoric of childhood which plagued Richard's rule, and which was linked to Richard's lack of fatherhood, which prevented him from taking part in that other discourse of late medieval manhood. As we can read in the Parliament Rolls, Henry Bolingbroke was said to be taking over because the kingdom was “mesnez, reulez, gouvernez par enfauntz, et conseil des [‘vefves’]” [led, ruled and governed by children, and by the advice of widows].¹⁸⁹ Neither “enfauntz” nor “vefves” are kings, and either or both being in the position of king points to a type of primogenitive failure; Henry's usurpation would circumvent this failure and put rightful or natural government back in place.

¹⁸⁸ Binski, *Westminster...*, 201. These hands have since been lost or stolen.

¹⁸⁹ *PROME*, Membrane 1, October 1399. Translation mine.; The widow in question here was Richard II's mother, Joan of Kent. Though she had died in 1385, Bolingbroke's words here reflect a concern that she had been given too much influence and power by Richard.

History and futurity jump to the rhetorical forefront during the proceedings—the themes of children, heredity, and good governance were a main feature of the parliament of 1399 during which Bolingbroke was enthroned. After Bolingbroke’s enthronement, for example, Archbishop Arundel delivered a sermon to the Lords and Commons in which he said, famously, “in the place of a boy willfully running riot, a man will now rule over the people.”¹⁹⁰ There is a deep irony to Henry Bolingbroke’s words when he reassures the Lords by telling them, “and do yowe to wyte, it is nocht my wille that noman thynk it be waye of conquest I wold disherit any man of his heritage” which was, after all, exactly what he was doing to his cousin Richard.¹⁹¹ Henry’s usurpation of the throne defied the line of inheritance that was so carefully outlined at Richard’s coronation and, somewhat confusingly, Henry based the justice of his claim on his manhood as opposed to Richard’s childhood. Confusingly, because Richard II and Henry Bolingbroke were both 32 years old in 1399; in fact, Richard was three months older than Henry. Neither man was in fact a child but only one of them was a father, a fact key to the way fatherhood and good governance were linked. Henry Bolingbroke had married Mary de Bohun in 1380 or 81, and his oldest son, the future Henry V, was 13 years old by 1399.¹⁹² While

¹⁹⁰ *PROME*, Membrane 17, October 1399. In Latin, “Et ita loco pueri voluntarie lascivientis vir modo dominabitur in populo.”

¹⁹¹ *PROME*, Membrane 17, October 1399. In modern English, “and know that it is not my will that anyone should think that by means of conquest I wish to disinherit any man of his inheritance.”; To be fair, Richard had first created a problem of inheritance between cousins earlier in 1399. By nullifying a set of letters he had created in October 1398, Richard created a situation whereby Bolingbroke had to sue for his inheritance from his father John of Gaunt, though this action had legal precedent. See Saul, 403-404.

¹⁹² Interestingly enough Mary had also died in 1394, but she did so in childbirth. See “Henry IV [known as Henry Bolingbroke] (1367-1413), king of England and lord of Ireland, and duke of Aquitaine,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

his wife was also deceased by 1399, Henry had three more living sons behind his namesake.¹⁹³ Henry's manhood is fully articulated in his culture by his fatherhood, and his ability to be the king England needed is linked to his reproductive successes. If we think of "heritage" as an obligation constantly moving in two directions, Henry's seizure of the throne does, in a sense, ensure the "heritage" of his grandfather by providing the second half of the movement of inheritance; not only is something passed to you in a structure of inheritance, but you must also pass that thing on, to not do so is to fail the logic of lineage, of primogeniture, and of reproductive futurity. This pressure of inheritance, and the necessity of securing it, a political and historical necessity, helps to explain the rhetoric surrounding Bolingbroke's usurpation, and renders Richard's failure to become a father as another means by which he was made a perpetual child.

Richard's status as a physically mature, yet childless male person in late medieval England made him less than a man, and his inability to seize the authority of manhood contributed to the ultimate failure of his rule. Added to this, the relationships Richard had with each of his queens was unusual in their non-reproductive natures. If we think of them in a broad historical context, Richard's loss of political control and lack of heir are tied together, and this tie points to the queer threat innate to a non-reproductive heterosexual relationship. While Troilus and Criseyde's non-reproductive love is already part of finished history, a history which ultimately led to England, and which had to be

¹⁹³ See "Henry IV..." in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Henry Bolingbroke's sons were, in birth order: Henry V of England (1386–1422), Thomas of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Clarence (1387–1421), John of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Bedford (1389–1435), Humphrey of Lancaster, 1st Duke of Gloucester (1390–1447).

foreclosed in order to allow the normative, generative, empire-founding story of Troy to finish taking place, Richard II's non-reproductive body and his queer family-formation with his second queen presented an active threat to the future/history of England in the late fourteenth century.

Closed Narratives, Forced Futures

The uncertainty of a stable future, in Troy, or in Troy Novant, opens the potential for resistance to reproductive futurism and critique of non-reproductive unions in these narratives, and opens our eyes to broader contexts in which to analyze the construction of futurism and its abject. The lack of children and of futurity can be read as the wound and rupture that Lee Edelman identifies with the queer. Both narratives I have examined here expose some elements of this idea. Neither text offers an explicitly, politically motivated rejection of reproductive futurism as Edelman calls for, but Troilus and Criseyde, in their lack of marriage and children, Chaucer's narrator in his desire to expose alternate endings, and Richard II, in his strained relationship with children, childhood and adulthood, show the same site of cultural tension that Edelman identifies. This site of cultural tension is just as rich in the late fourteenth century as it is in Edelman's moment, though its terms are changed in historical context. In these examples, there is a type of potential queerness not aligned with homosexuality. The context of the fourteenth century, when the future of English society was itself tenuous, provides a context where non-normative and non-reproductive marriage produces an anxiety similar to that of homosexual unions in later time periods. Defying the logic of history, inheritance, time,

and received story all present a threat of no future. In the culture Edelman identifies, the forces of “narrative” and “history,” serve to “normalize queer sexualities within a logic of meaning that finds realization only *in* and *as* the future” (74-74), and this power of normalization is also enacted on the two examples I have looked at here, as narrative and history simultaneously. This logic, where meaning is only created if it has a future, explains why Troilus and Criseyde cannot be together, and why Richard must be overthrown. The threat of no future is too real in these situations because they present a confrontation between queer alternatives to reproductive futurity and normative history itself.

Chapter 3: Ricardian Historiography: The Temporal Asynchrony of Richard Maidstone's *Concordia*

In the previous two chapters, I have detailed how Richard II was a queer subject in terms of the actual deviance of his sexuality from the social norms of his time due to his lack of children, and how this contrasts sharply with the cultural imaginary kings of insular romance. This chapter continues to explore the queerness of Richard II while further delving into the queer intertextual relationship of Richard II to his own history and to our later constructions of history to read that history and our experience of it as, in itself, queer.

Richard Maidstone's *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)* is a pro-Ricardian, royalist poem written by a Carmelite friar in response to the Crisis of 1392. It is also a text that exists in queer time because it creates temporal asynchrony for its readers. As a narrative poem and as an historical record, Maidstone's poem, in this temporal asynchrony, affords an alternate means of envisioning England's historical past, one that is based on failure, absence, instability, and queer fracture that reveals the normalizing potency of the teleological Lancastrian trajectory with which we are familiar. The historical record and literary artifact that Maidstone created in this poem exists as part of a pro-Ricardian world of Anglo-Latin poetry, a world which falls on the losing side of history. In doing so, the text forces its readers to confront the queerness of time and historical narrative through its very existence.

This text, of course, also forms part of another queer narrative: that of Richard II's own life. It is impossible to dismiss the possibility that Richard II and Robert de Verre

had some kind of affair, as has often been speculated. As Sylvia Federico points out in her article, “Queer Times: Richard II in the Poems and Chronicles of Late Fourteenth-Century England,” there is documentary evidence available to indicate that Richard’s sexuality and virility were topics of discussion during his lifetime, and her reading of the homoerotic undertone’s of Maidstone’s poem is excellent.¹⁹⁴ Richard II’s plausible homosexual or homoerotic relationship with Robert de Verre has, however, somewhat obscured other readings of his reign and sexuality, including in relation to Maidstone’s *Concordia*, and especially in relation to Richard’s lack of issue.¹⁹⁵ This essay endeavors to explore the queerness of Maidstone’s text as historical artifact of Richard II’s life, while not foreclosing other horizons of queerness and queer history in relation to Richard II’s reign.

Maidstone’s poem is one of six records which detail the reconciliation between Richard II and the City of London in 1392, which came about after a political crisis over the king’s majesty and London’s liberties.¹⁹⁶ Often called the Crisis of 1392, the events

¹⁹⁴ Sylvia Federico. “Queer Times: Richard II in the Poems and Chronicles of Late Fourteenth-Century England.” *Medium Ævum*, 2010, Vol. 79, No. 1, 25-46.

¹⁹⁵ For further exploration of Richard II and his sexuality, see Katherine J. Lewis, “Becoming a virgin king, Richard II and Edward the Confessor,” *Gender, Holiness, Men, Women and Saints in Late Medieval Europe*, Samantha J.E. Riches and Sarah Salih, Eds. (Routledge, 2002).

¹⁹⁶ Various, these records are Maidstone’s poem; an Anglo-Norman letter which can be found in Helen Suggett, “A Letter Describing Richard II’s Reconciliation with the City of London, 1392,” *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 61, No. 243, 209-213; and the chronicle sources of *The Westminster Chronicle 1381-1394*, Ed. and Trans. L. C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 502-507; *The Brut or Chronicles of England*, (London: Early English Text Society, 1906), 347-348; and *The St. Albans Chronicle: The Chronicle maiora of Thomas Walsingham I 1376-1394*, Ed. and Trans. John Taylor, Wendy R. Childs, and Leslie Watkiss (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), 930. As

which prefigured the occasion of Maidstone's work involved Richard II and the City of London coming into conflict over Richard II's request for a loan from the City and the City's refusal to grant it. In brief, when the City refused to grant him the loan in May, Richard removed all manner of royal administrative departments (including the exchequer and the common bench) from London to York. Then, in June, Richard imprisoned the mayor and sheriffs of London and replaced them with a royally-appointed warden. In August, after a continual ramping up of tensions, the City capitulated, with the formal reconciliation, as recorded by Maidstone, occurring on August 21. While these events have sometimes been seen as one of the events showing early evidence of Richard's tyrannical predispositions, what happened does not necessitate this reading because, as several recent historians have shown, it was well within the acceptable purview of the king's majesty to raise funds from the city, and Richard's response was also within the legally accepted, if sometimes controversial, standards of kingly power.¹⁹⁷

suggested first by Suggett it is important to note that the Anglo-Norman letter, *The Westminster Chronicle*, and Maidstone's poem are quite similar to each other, though there is no definitive evidence available about whether or not they are eye-witness accounts, or whether they are textually descended one from the other, or if there was an official program or news letter of any kind on which one or all are based. For further discussion of this, see David R. Carlson "Compulsion in Richard Maidstone's *Concordia* (1392)," in *John Gower: Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth Century England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2012), especially 108-9.

¹⁹⁷ For a comprehensive account of the events surrounding the quarrel, and an assessment of Richard II's careful strategy in it, see Caroline M. Barron, "The Quarrel of Richard II with London 1392-7," in *Medieval London: Collected Papers of Caroline M. Barron*, Martha Carlin and Joel T. Rosenthal, Eds. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2017), 27-55. For a briefer introduction to the key events in this quarrel, see David R. Carlson, "Introduction," in *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London)*, by Richard Maidstone, A.G. Rigg, Trans. (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 4-6.; For further assessments of the events, see, Charles Roger Smith, "*Concordia*:"

In its surviving form, the *Concordia* voices a side of history that has often been obscured from the writing of England's past and telling of her history: that is, the side that believes, at least to a point, that Richard was acting responsibly and showing his Kingly strengths to subdue a resistant city. The historiographically lost voice of this poem speaks in the present and creates a queer experience of asynchrony for its readers, an asynchrony which I believe forms an important part of the ongoing twenty and twenty-first century reevaluation of Richard II's rule by historians, and which has been responsible for the poem's interpretation and presentation in early editions of the poem and how the poem is viewed today. Resting on the losing, under-spoken side of history, Maidstone's words speak from a place of likely-authorized authority in his own time, but about a world that was lost to normative historiography as we most often encounter it in the now.¹⁹⁸ That common history, with its long and triumphal arc from the Lancasters forward to the present constitutional monarchy, fades away as the reader contemplates an alternate, queer history of England that shimmers, ghost-like, out of Maidstone's poem. While royalist records are not what we typically think of as inhabiting marginalized historical spaces, I propose that they can partially inhabit a marginalized historical space when they fall on the side of the usurped and the rewritten. Through the experience of queer

facta inter regem Riccardum II et civitatem londonie per Fratrum Riccardum Maydiston, Carmelitam, Sacre Theologie Doctorem, Anno Domine 1393, Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Notes" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1972), v, 14-27; Harold F. Hutchinson, *The Hollow Crown* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1961), 138-140; and Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (Yale University Press, 1997), 259.

¹⁹⁸ For another perspective on Maidstone's *Concordia*, the production of history, and our relationship to it, especially in regards to the stereotypes of queenly behavior, see Paul Strohm, "Queens as Intercessors," in *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton University Press, 1992).

asynchrony, the failure of Richard II's reign, his suffering and death, the victory of the Lancastrian dynasty, the rise of English language public poetry in the early fifteenth century, the destructive force of the English Protestant Reformation, and the place Maidstone's poem holds as documentary evidence for the Crisis of 1392 all crash together into one experience that makes us, as readers, simultaneously aware of what did and did not happen in the past and how it was and was not recorded in the annals of history. Maidstone's royalism is all the more apparent knowing full well that Richard II is going to be overthrown by the cousin he disinherited, while knowing that Richard II will die childless makes Maidstone's portrayal of him as London's lover all the more striking. By reading with this temporal asynchrony celebrated rather than hidden, I argue that in resting on the ill-fated side of history, and in examining the non-teleological (im)possibilities of historical artifacts, the political forces which shape history and literature become clearer. Revealing the machinations of the power structures which control how history is written and understood allows queer literature such as this to speak for the losers and permit us to see a fuller, queerer version of the plausible horizon at a particular moment in history, and thereby better understand the past and its people as well to reflect on how current history continues to be made and interpreted.

The term "temporal asynchrony" I use comes from Carolyn Dinshaw's *How Soon is Now?* and refers to the way in which things have multiple existences due to the literal passage of time, our experience of time, and our ability to see things from the past both in and out of time. For Dinshaw, this kind of temporality creates a queer experience in the present. For example, Dinshaw narrates her experiences at the medieval festival

sponsored by the Cloisters Museum in New York City, which included such temporally asynchronous experiences as a man wearing a modern-day bathrobe as a medieval costume. Dinshaw's idea of temporal asynchrony articulates how our experience of discordant artifacts causes us to experience time and history out of joint, in a way that reveals the normalizing powers of the historical record and historical accuracy.¹⁹⁹ In this essay, I use the idea of temporal asynchrony to reflect on how our encounters with the past are always already informed by the normalizing forces of time and history and show how artifacts from the losing side of history, such as Maidstone's poem, can reveal a queer alternate history, and be used to interrogate our own understanding of the historical record.

The queerness of this asynchronous text exists in the present, and is enhanced by the historical realities of the poem, which tell us that Maidstone was likely writing with license from someone in a position of power to control the stories told about events in Richard II's reign, possibly even Richard himself.²⁰⁰ Maidstone's poem is the only surviving poetic account of the events of 1392, and forms part of a limited body of his known work, which also includes "The Seven Penitential Psalms in English,"

¹⁹⁹ Carolyn Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now?* (Duke University Press, 2012), 5-7.

²⁰⁰ Strong documentary evidence exists for Richard Maidstone having been John of Gaunt's confessor during this period, and it is not out of the realm of possibility that Maidstone may have served the King's household in some capacity as well, potentially as a court poet or religious advisor. Maidstone's own religious orthodoxy, depicted in "The Seven Penitential Psalms in English," would have fit well with Richard II's own religious beliefs and practices, and while there is no direct evidence in the surviving record that Maidstone served Richard II directly, that does not mean we should dismiss the possibility of royal license behind this poem. For fifteenth-century records claiming Maidstone as Gaunt's confessor, see Bodleian Library MS E Museo 86, f. 55v.

Protectorium Pauperis (“A Defense of the Begging Friars”), *Determinationes*, and “Canon in anulum Johannis de Northampton e ejusdem ordinis; scilicet regulæ . . . ad inveniendum literam dominicalem.”²⁰¹ Written in Latin, the *Concordia* has been somewhat neglected over the years, both as a work of literature and, to a lesser extent, as an historical document. Like much other recent work on Richard II’s reign and its related documents, the poem has been aided by rehabilitation efforts such as the 2003 TEAMS edition. The single copy of the poem, in the acephalous *e Musaeo* 94 (SC 3631) at the Bodleian library, is in a collection of Carmelite writings or a collection of Richard Maidstone’s work—not enough pages remain to firmly determine which it was. Original foliation indicates that the manuscript was much longer than its current 12 leaves, which are marked as 121-32.²⁰² It is also likely that the poem we have witness of is a redacted version, indicating that it was important and plausibly somewhat-well-known in Richard II’s England.²⁰³ Its present-day rarity and survival against the odds of time and political winds stands in contrast to its origins, when it was likely widely circulated and read as an authorized version of events.

In its own time, Maidstone’s work shows the possible future of the *Concordia* as real and possible, because its author cannot, of course, know the future of events. Yet the

²⁰¹ There is evidence, from John Bale’s list of Maidstone’s writings in *Illustrium maioris Britanniae scriptorum summarium*, that Maidstone’s corpus was at one time extensive, and that many other works have been lost to time and history. For a list of Maidstone’s writings which were extant at the Reformation and recorded by Bale, see his *Illustrium maioris Britanniae scirptorum summarium* (Wesel: D. van der Straten, 1548), fols. 172v-173r.

²⁰² Carlson, “Introduction” 32.

²⁰³ Carlson, “Introduction.” Carlson also asserts his estimation, that it is likely that “the text we have derives from a second- or subsequent generation of Maidstone’s poem” 32.

sincerity and first person witness evident in the text render it queer out of historical time because it presents a possibility that had no future, and which was nearly erased from record. As both a pro-Ricardian and Catholic poem, it is somewhat remarkable that the *Concordia* survived for us to read at all. It comes down to us as part of what was likely a larger attempt to preserve the religious-poetic production of the Carmelites around the year 1400 when intentionally preserving a pro-Ricardian text would have been politically risky. Having made it through the destruction of the monasteries, and the rounds of intentional and unintentional destruction of records which occurred during both the Reformation and the Civil War, it is doubly fortunate that this particular text still exists at all.²⁰⁴ The manuscript history of the poem, limited as it is, opens a speculative, asynchronous door to a world of authorized, pro-Ricardian historiographic propaganda which we can experience only in surviving fragments such as this one. Reading it transports us out of time, and into an asynchronous space where the history we think we know—a pro-Lancastrian sweep leading inevitably to the British Empire and then today’s constitutional monarchy—does not exist; its temporal asynchrony is part of its queer existence, which shows us another way of being in time, a history that could have been otherwise, and a viewpoint on past-present events that allows us to better understand what was thinkable and knowable during Richard II’s reign.

Additionally, the relative lack of editorial treatment of Maidstone’s poem contributes to the layers of historical residue this poem has accrued, and to the temporal

²⁰⁴ Margaret Embree Poskitt, “The English Carmelites, Houses of Study and Educational Methods,” in *Carmel in Britain, Vol. 1, People and Places*, Patrick Fitzgerald-Lombard O.Carm., Ed. (Rome: C.E. Institutum Carmelitanum, 1992).

asynchrony the poem can provoke today. Although it documents a relatively rare pro-Ricardian perspective, the poem was not easily accessible in modern edition until TEAMS published it as a stand-alone text in 2003. Before the TEAMS text became available, a scholar wishing to read Richard Maidstone's *Concordia* had four options: they could examine the single manuscript copy, preserved in the British Library; they could obtain a copy of Charles Roger Smith's unpublished 1972 dissertation, which includes an edition of the poem; or they could turn to two nineteenth century versions edited by Thomas Wright. Wright's inclusion of the text in two separate volumes was part of a nineteenth century impulse to professionalize knowledge production while preserving English history and cultural patrimony.²⁰⁵ The 1838 imprint contains two texts presented together: *Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of King Richard II*, and *Ricardi Maydiston de concordia inter regem ric. II. et civitatem londen*. The 1859 edition which also contains the text is a much longer volume, presenting the *Concordia* alongside 34 other items to make up *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History Composed During the Period from the Accession of EDW.III. to that of RIC.III.*²⁰⁶ These editions,

²⁰⁵ Thomas Wright (1810-1877) was a member of several nineteenth-century scholarly societies. Most relevant for the purposes of this essay is his involvement in the founding of the Camden Society (founded in 1838, and which joined with the Royal Historical Society in 1897), an antiquarian society which published the 1838 volume in question and whose mission was dedicated to editing primary sources from English history into modern editions. For more on Wright, see "Wright, Thomas," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Michael Welman Thompson (Oxford University Press, 2020). For information about the Camden Society, see *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-1886*, Philippa Levine (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 13-30.

²⁰⁶ It may be interesting to note that this later volume also includes a version of the *Alliterative Poem otherwise known as Richard the Redless*, which Wright entitles *On the Deposition of Richard II* and lineates differently from the 1838 volume.

the most readily available point of access to the text for over a century, both present Maidstone's poem in a physical context that predetermines the meaning of its contents. In doing so, they reveal the extent to which our encounters with the past are constructed by how we can access its remains in the present.

Simply put: the other texts in each volume cast a shadow on the contents of Maidstone's work. Most clearly, the 1838 volume prefaces the *Concordia* with *The Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of King Richard II*, which is today better known by the name *Richard the Redeless*, and is a fifteenth century pro-Lancastrian text which imitates the style of *Piers Plowman*. Framing the *Concordia* with *Richard the Redeless* presents the texts out of historical order but in an order that reaffirms a normative, pro-Lancastrian version of history. If a person were to open Wright's edition, and read in order from first page to last, then the text of *Richard the Redeless* would be in their mind before a single word of Maidstone has the chance to be heard. For the reader, 1399 takes place before 1392; Richard II has already been deposed from his throne before he has the chance to make peace with London. Almost inevitably, this format makes Maidstone read like a royalist embellishing the truth to placate an already-tyrannical king, rather than like a probable court poet recording an event in the world of the king and court where he worked. Interrogating the assumptions handed down by editorial treatments of documents like the *Concordia* reveals the power structures and political agendas that can be at play in the representation of documentary/literary evidence. Looking at Maidstone's poem with this in mind reveals how history and literature have often been used and edited for

teleological purposes, to support the existing regimes of power and politics, and to hide the experience of the losers and misfits.

Wright's introduction to his edition suggests that he was not necessarily conscious of how this presentation obfuscated the full historical record, but rather that he found the Maidstone text to be less certain in its origins and poetically inferior to the other poem. Of Maidstone's poetry, Wright comments that "some lines sin grievously against the sage rules of Latin prosody," and that the poem "does little to credit its author."²⁰⁷ Wright's comments further indicate that he was aware of the approximate dating for *Richard the Redeless*, the first poem in the book; he explains that the poem "bears internal evidence of having been written after the time when the king fell into the hands of his enemies" and that the hand of the text was "of the beginning of the 15th century," and makes the inference that "the scribe of this unique MS seems to have been a partizan [sic] of the opposite party [to the author of the other poem in the book]."²⁰⁸ Wright has much less detail to share about the Maidstone text, and while he does provide a summary of it in the 1838 volume, he refrains from commentary on the text there as well. His opinions on Richard II are nonetheless made clear elsewhere; at the beginning of the "Introduction" to the 1859 volume, he writes

the reign of Edward III, glorious in many respects, was followed, as it had been preceded, by a reign of weakness and vice, ending similarly in the deposition of

²⁰⁷ Thomas Wright, "Preface," in *Alliterative Poem on the Deposition of King Richard II, Ricardi Maydiston de condorcía inter Ric. II. et civitatem London*, edited by Thomas Wright (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Son for the Camden Society, 1838), vii.

²⁰⁸ Wright, "Preface," vi.; For further insights into Thomas Wright's editorial practices, and how they have influenced critics views on various texts, see David Matthews, *Writing to the King Nation, Kingship and Literature in England, 1250-1350* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

the reigning king... Then came a short and peaceful reign under the first monarch of the house of Lancaster, followed by the military glories of that of Henry V²⁰⁹

While *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History Composed During the Period from the Accession of EDW.III. to that of RIC.III.* engages only obliquely with the reign of Edward II in this passage because it is not in its titular purview, the omission of the name Richard II and association of him with Edward II speaks volumes. Wright's view of history subsumes the existence of both Edward II and Richard II to the nearly unspeakable, while validating the usurpation of Henry IV through word choice. To Wright, Richard II and his grandfather bookend Edward III's "glorious" reign with "weakness and vice," while Henry IV oversees a "short and peaceful" prelude to Henry V's own "glories." The repetition of forms of glory link Edward III to Henry V, thereby validating the Lancastrian usurpation, and aligning good kings with military might, while "weakness and vice" come to characterize that which was (implicitly justly) deposed. Due to this "Introduction" in one, and the presence of *Richard the Redeless* before the *Concordia* in the other, a reader of either volume is left with the weight of pro-Lancastrian narrative as the most accessible gloss to Maidstone's text. The editorial practices and introductory matter I have described cast Richard's reign in a light that makes Richard already "redeless," and his rule already full of "weakness and vice," before Maidstone's pro-Ricardian voice appears on the page. As these historical texts are

²⁰⁹ Thomas Wright, "Introduction," in *Political Poems and Songs Relating to English History Composed During the Period from the Accession of EDW.III. to that of RIC.III.*, edited by Thomas Wright (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1859), ix.

transcribed and arranged by Wright, history is also written and re-written to side with the Lancasters and dampen the surviving evidence of a pro-Ricardian world view.

This editorial and historiographical history are two of many temporal layers that exist simultaneously in the poem for its present-day readers, and which contribute to our experience of temporal asynchrony. Carlson's "Introduction" to the TEAMS edition of 2003 discusses Wright's edition, but is not concerned with its editorial practice, and does not address the physical presentation the poem had received before being published as a single text. Focusing on a more literary re-habilitation of the poem, Carlson takes pains to address the historical context in which the poem was written, the other attestations we have of the same event, and the critique that Wright and others had made of the Latin verse. Carlson argues that, rather than being faulty, "Maidstone's *Concordia* shows Anglo-Latin poetry, on a specific occasion, in the process of making itself a public poetry—a broadly appealing, flexible legible medium for addressing public issues."²¹⁰

Carlson's reclamation of Maidstone for English poetry here is part of a longer argument about the value of Maidstone's works and their meanings.²¹¹ Through this reclamation,

²¹⁰ Carlson, "Introduction," 39.

²¹¹ The most-studied of Maidstone's works are the *Penitential Psalms*. For recent treatments of the psalms, see especially: Valerie Edden, "Richard Maidstone's *Penitential Psalms*," in *Carmel in Britain: Essays on the Medieval English Carmelite Province*, Patrick Fitzgerald-Lombard, O.Carm., Ed. (Rome: C.E. Institutum Carmelitanum, 1992); Lynn Staley, "Maidstone's Psalms and the King's Speech," in *The Psalms and Medieval English Literature: From the Conversion to the Reformation*, Tamara Atkin and Francis Leneghan, Eds. (Rochester: Boydell and Brewer, 2017) and "The Penitential Psalms: A Lexicon of Conversion from the Medieval to the Early Modern Period," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37, 2007. Staley's "Maidstone's Psalms and the King's Speech" presents an interesting argument about Maidstone's goals in writing, which disagrees with the characterization of the *Concordia* as pro-Ricardian. While I

Carlson's editorial strategy puts the *Concordia* into the discourse of English literature and public poetry, and demonstrates how that discourse was tied to contemporary historical events. Adding another layer of temporal accretion, the TEAMS edition enacts a different kind of history-making than Wright's texts, as it lays out a literary-historical context for reading the poem as a poem more than as an historical artifact, which contrasts with how the text has been used as only a source for the events of the reconciliation.

The simultaneity of temporal layers in this poem make up a queer landscape of alternate ways of being in time, both literary and historical, while forcing us to encounter the powerful normalizing forces enacted by writing itself. In its historical moment, Maidstone's record of this event is pro-Ricardian and an orderly kingdom exists after this text where Richard II and his country are at peace. In this kingdom, the message of the text—the importance of regnal and civic accord—can take hold among the king, the citizens of London, and the country at large, and Richard will become a better and better king as the years wear on. Yet, as we read it in the now, we are also aware that its pro-Ricardian sentiment yokes the poem to the side of history which did not become part of the normalizing and normalized vision of futurist historical record. We know Richard II will be overthrown just seven years later, and that he will die while imprisoned by his cousin, Henry IV, less than a year after that. The temporal world of the poem crashes against the historical world as we thought we knew it. Presenting what seems to be an authorized, intentional version of current events in a Latin poem provides yet another

disagree with Staley's assertion that Richard's contrition at the reconciliation was "only putative," and her view that the *Concordia* must be understood via the *Penitential Psalms*, her reading of the psalms as gloss for the *Concordia* is interesting.

experience of temporal disjunction for its readers, as the poem presents a plausible other history of England where public poetry was written in Latin, while its Latin-ness reminds us of the development of English-language public poetry by the Lancastrian kings.

Dealing with these layers of temporal asynchrony is, of course, impossible to do in a neutral manner—the very idea of neutrality and objectivity themselves being, perhaps, anti-queer and part of the futurist project of conventional history. Yet, it is worth returning to the poem, and attempting to confront Maidstone's text as a literary artifact with a fraught historical context, as well as the temporally-inflected and sexualized vision of kingship revealed by Maidstone's words, in order to try to understand the text and to work through our own queer, temporally asynchronous experience of it. Like all texts, the poem itself contains its own world of accrued time and meaning, with references to the past, and calls to history we think we know too. As he narrates the events of the recent past, Maidstone calls on biblical literary and historical references, Trojan literature and history, and theories of political order, religion and sexuality to advise and praise his king; this portrait reflects a world in which concord was possible and possibly durable, and wherein Richard II could fit into the landscape of English history.

From nearly the beginning of the poem Maidstone presents Richard's relationship to the city of London in emphatically sexual and marital terms. This choice, and the comparisons it elicits in Maidstone's work, reflects a view of kingship that, like medieval marriage, requires a type of mutuality while acknowledging an innate balance of

power.²¹² He predicates his explanation of the quarrel between the city and the king on the relationship between spouses, writing:

Lux, tibi, Londonie, rumor amenus adest;
Namque tuum regem, sponsum dominumque tuumque,
Quem tibi sustulerat Perfida Lingua, capis.
Invidiosas cohors regem tibi vertit in iram,
Desereret thalamum sponsus ut ipse suum;
Sed quia totus amor tuus est—et amantis ymago
Formosior Paride—nescit odisse diu.

[For now you get your king again, your spouse, your lord
Whom Wicked Tongue had taken from you by deceit.
Its grudging troop had roused the king to wrath at you,
So that the groom gave up and left his marriage bed;
But since your love is whole—your lover’s face more fair
Than even that of Paris—he can’t hate for long]²¹³

Maidstone’s “tibi” is the people of the city, while the King is the “dominus,” but also the “sponsus” of the city, descriptions which outline a joint obligation between them, and recall Ephesians 5:22-23, which states “Mulieres viris suis subditae sint, sicut Domino / quoniam vir caput est mulieris, sicut Christus caput est Ecclesiae [Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord / Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church.]” The idea of “dominus,” meaning lord, shows Maidstone’s understanding of the quarrel being reconciled, as well as the tandem parts of the financial relationship between the king and the city; the parties are not equal in power, but share in

²¹² On this topic, see Emma Lipton, *Affections of the Mind The Politics of Sacramental Marriage in Late Medieval English Literature*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 2011); and Cathy Hume, *Chaucer and the Cultures of Love and Marriage*, (D.S. Brewer, 2012).

²¹³ Richard Maidstone, *Concordia (The Reconciliation of Richard II with London*, Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 21-16.; All translations are taken from the TEAMS edition of the poem, and are written by A.G. Rigg. Lines 1-14 of Maidstone’s poem, as it has been preserved, make up a dedication to an intended reader, a “Richard,” so line 21 is line 6 of the poem proper.

a relationship that, theoretically at least, involves layers of submission and obligation which make it some kind of just. In this situation, the city caused its “sponsus” (bridegroom) and “dominus” (i.e., Richard II) to leave the “thalamus” because it listened to “Perfida Lingua.” The word “thalamus” refers to an inner chamber, most commonly bedroom, and thereby, figuratively, to marriage; hence, Carlson's rendering of “marriage bed.” By referring to the quarrel as taking place in the “thalamus,” Richard II is figured as the husband of the city in a sexual sense, and its lord. The deeply normative, Christian valence of this assertion is that, as the city must submit to and worship the king, like the wife the husband or the Church Christ, so will Richard, like good husbands or like the Lord God, uphold his side of the obligation, to love and sustain the city once order is restored. Maidstone says as much in the words “sed quia totus amor tuus est,” meaning that the “amor” of the city is “totus” or complete, and because of this wholeness, and because of his own desirable beauty Richard II cannot hate the city for long (“nescit oddisse diu”). Charles Roger Smith’s translation of this phrase, in his unpublished dissertation, is, “But because your love is true and the form of your lover more handsome than Paris, the king is not long angry.”²¹⁴ Smith’s version indicates the emphasis I see Maidstone making on the double-motion of reconciliation: the city's love must be whole and true for the king to return to making love with the city, while King’s own beauty is seductive to the city in a way that encourages reconciliation. King Richard, in these descriptions, is no tyrant. The marital metaphor used here implies a type of mutual

²¹⁴ “*Concordia: facta inter regem Riccardum II et civitatem londonie per Fratrum Riccardum Maydiston, Carmelitam, Sacre Theologie Doctorem, Anno Domine 1393, Edited with an Introduction, Translation, and Notes,*” 167.

dependence between the king and his subjects, and combines with the invocation of Paris to show us an attractive king, beloved of, or even desired by, his people. Maidstone's vision is of a kingship that is simultaneously sexual, literary and religious in this opening, as he brings ancient history together with recent events into one Christian-inflected understanding of orderly rule and reconciliation.

As Maidstone continues to flesh out his portrait of kingship, Richard II is compared to Solomon: "Talis adolescens toto non restat in orbe, / Qui sciat ut Salomon regna tenere sua. [In all the world there's no young man alive like him, / Who knows how, just like Salomon, to rule his realm]."²¹⁵ Solomon is and was known for his wise and just rule as the penultimate king of the united monarchy in the bible, and also as the author of the *Song of Songs*, again showing that Maidstone's understanding of the king's relationship to his people joins good rule with sexuality. Maidstone's description of Richard's person and its power makes this link more explicit, as he explains, "Hic licet accensus foret in te, Troia, parumper, / Grata modo facies se docet esse piam. / Non poterat mordax detractans lingua tenere / Quin cuperet thalamum sponsus adire suum. [Although his anger, Troy, blazed at you for a while, / His face, now pleasing, shows that he is merciful. / Detraction's bitter tongue could not derail the king / From yearning to approach his marriage bed as spouse]."²¹⁶ Maidstone makes Richard's kingship good on a Biblical scale in his comparison of Richard II to King Solomon because he "tenere [holds/rules]" his "regna [kingdom]" in the same way, while the reference in the next

²¹⁵ Maidstone, 37-8.

²¹⁶ Maidstone, 39-42.

sentence to the “thalamus” and Richard’s “cuperet... adire [desire to approach]” brings back the idea of sexual union between the king and the city. Richard II is, in Maidstone’s articulation here, a good king because he is a desirous lover of his kingdom. This link between good or just kingship and sexual desire for the kingdom itself is, at its most literal level, a queer kind of sexuality in its unconventional object choice, and, at a metaphorical level, a very traditional kind of sexuality that implicitly ties just rule to sexual generation. The Trojan historical valence of Maidstone’s work also continues throughout the poem, as London is referred to as Troy and New Troy several other times, underlining the literary-historical ties between this single moment and Maidstone’s understanding of it.²¹⁷ His awareness of history and their own place in it, which Maidstone brings to his writing through these references, contrasts sharply with views such as Thomas Wright’s, which have often dominated common understandings of history. Where Wright sees a reign that is not even worthy of mention by name through the lens of what happened afterwards, Maidstone sees his work as recording important events for history, even if that history ultimately ends tragically like that of Troy.

The impulse to record an event for and as part of the historical record continues as the poem goes on. The king and the city are both attractive in a way that reflects historical or literary figures; their mutual beauty, and mutual significance in the scheme of human knowledge, make them fitting partners for each other in Maidstone’s vision. At line 112, Richard II is compared to both Troilus and Absolon to explain that he is

²¹⁷ Maidstone, 12, 18, 123.

exceptionally handsome.²¹⁸ Again Maidstone ties Richard up in a simultaneously religious/political/sexual description with these references. Troilus was known as handsome, and as a lover, both in Trojan literature and history (and if we think of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, we might even be able to call him a skilled lover). Absolon, a son of King David, was known as handsome and to be well loved of his people, though heirless (his sons having died before him).²¹⁹ This vision of kingship, literature, and history is one that Maidstone tries to control for his intended audience. He refers to Helen, Troilus, and Absolon only in terms of beauty in a way that attempts to shut off the ill-fated potential any of them can introduce to a story. These unspoken valences are another moment of temporal crash for modern readers, and potentially for Maidstone's contemporary audience, because they all invoke the queer specter of Richard II's childlessness / lack of reproductive success. From our perspective in present time, knowing that Absolon died without an heir reminds us that Richard II died without an heir too, and was childless in 1392 which left the future of the realm troublingly uncertain; remembering that Troy fell and Helen of Troy was not in Troy of her own free will makes it possible the king is raping his doomed city; thinking about how Troilus ended up first alone, and then dead, at the end of Chaucer's poem implicitly questions whether his beauty and skill as a lover are praiseworthy things. If Maidstone meant for his readers to think any of these things, it seems to be only in the sense of a mirrors for

²¹⁸ "Iste velud Troylus vel ut Absolon ipse decorus, / Captivat sensum respicientis eum. [And he, so fair, like Troilus or Abasolon, / Makes captive all the hearts of those that see him there]" (56-7).; For a reading of these lines that emphasizes the homoerotic potential contained within them, see Federico, 38-39.

²¹⁹ II Samuel 14:25, 18:18, 18:33.

princes— as advice and negative model rather than as predictive. Whether or not the negative side of these references was intended to come to the forefront of his readers' minds, they all contain a futureless alternate path for us as readers today and expand the ways in which we might view Richard's sexuality as queer. The text is haunted by the ascension of Henry IV here, and while it is damagingly teleological to assume that Maidstone made these references to correct his King's inevitable malignant trajectory, seeing these possibilities is part of the queer reading experience of this text in its temporal asynchrony. Multiple histories coalesce in the reader's mind to draw these parallels, and that shimmering positive alternate history collides with the negative future that ultimately came to pass. In this, we can see how Richard II's lack of success in the realm of reproductive futurity—his lack of issue—positions his sexuality and his reign as queer in the sense that Lee Edelman uses the term in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*.²²⁰ Unintentionally, Maidstone's emphasis on the king as lover and as participant in a chain of fathers and sons draws our eyes to his non-reproductive queer sexuality.

With an awareness of the multiple histories contained in the poem, and of Richard II's queer reproductive lack, Maidstone's transformation of historical procession to literary narrative, and the normalization it enacts on events becomes all the more apparent to the contemporary reader. The way in which a reader's own mind must fight between the illusive, alternate, queer history shimmering out of Maidstone's text and the end of Richard II's reign that we know will come to pass helps us to see history being made as

²²⁰ Duke University Press: 2004.

Maidstone writes it, and reflect on the way in which our reading practices are always-already informed by the normalizing, futurist project of history, and troubled by the multivalent nature of literature. The reconciliation process builds through the poem, and one of the later steps shows Richard visiting various parts of London to receive gifts:

Sumit ab angelicis manibus tabulas modo dictas
Custos, sicque sua publice verba refert:
'Salve, pater populi! Rex, dux, princeps, modo salve!
Salvet et ominipotens vos deus, alma salus!
Quam fuit hec preclara dies hiis civibus, in qua
Constituit regem vos deus esse suum!
Prole patrissante—Ricardi quod fuit ante
Nomen adhuc repetit quicquid honoris erat.
Regibus ergo probis patribusque bonis bona proles
Successura fuit: sors dedit ut decuit.

[The warden [of Ludgate] took the tablets from the angel's hands
And thus in public made the speech that follows here:
'Hail, father of the people! King, prince, leader, hail!
May God almighty, kindly health, keep you all the while!
How splendid was that day for London's citizens,
The day when God appointed you to be their king!
As father, so the son—King Richard's name repeats
His ancestor's and all the honor it entails.
To good and noble kings and ancestors, his line
Was sure to correspond: faith granted what was right]²²¹

The warden's language invokes a logic of generation onto Richard's rule by referencing his ancestors and by saying "as the father so the son"—since Richard's ancestors had been "good and noble," he reasons, it follows that he would be as well. The idea of lineage here leads to Richard in the present moment, but there is an implicit assertion, propped up by Maidstone's earlier emphasis on Richard as lover, that the royal line may continue—an implication that runs counter to our readerly and historical knowledge of

²²¹ Maidstone, 429-436.

Richard's lack of issue. This reading is enhanced by the earlier omnipresence of children in the city, as seen in the presentation of crowns to the king and queen by children at "The Cheap" around line 290, and the child choir which entertains them at St. Paul's before they visit the shrine at Erkenwald's tomb around line 348, making the lack of children in Richard II's personal life all the more apparent in retrospect and his sexuality all the more non-normative when viewed from this perspective.

The generational logic of inherited goodness combined with the children we see all around the city presents us with three ideas at once, as history crashes against itself. Firstly, the possibility, or even plausibility, that Richard II and Anne of Bohemia would have children, and make another "good and noble" future king who will be just like his father exists in Maidstone's words at their own time and in their own place. Secondly, and closely linked to the first idea, Richard's childlessness is more obvious than usual during his reign, and opens up the question of why he and Anne do not already have a child, the question of how Richard's sexuality may have been somehow queer, and the more anxious question of who, given this lack, the next good king could be. Thirdly, the idea of Richard II, inept child-king at his deposition in parliament haunts these words when read from the now. Maidstone's poem contains within it not only multiple histories, hidden narratives, and the queer potential of what could have been otherwise, but also a guide to examining how we read historical documents with history already in mind, and the damage we can do to understanding them when normative teleology takes preeminence over the voice speaking to us from the past.

This contrast is furthered a little later in the poem when we see Anne being given gifts, with similar inflections of generational logic and reproduction.²²² Maidstone details how Anne's "decor [beauty]" has "nobilitant nimium [enobled greatly]" her father's "soboles [line/stock]," which is no less than the line of "Caeser."²²³ Being part of Caesar's line, Anne is of good blood, while she is also sufficient in "decor," and "forma" to enhance the nobility of that line, and reflect well on her own father. Even more than that, Anne shares a name with the mother of the Virgin Mary, which brings her significance and goodness out of the secular realm and into the spiritual one. Maidstone gives the warden lines which meditate fairly extensively on Anne's name here. While Anna does mean "gracia [grace]," and that is the primary valence here, St. Anne's role as Mary's mother (and Jesus's grandmother), links Queen Anne's name with the idea of maternity, and of historically and religiously significant maternity at that.²²⁴ As Maidstone puts it, with St. Anne as a namesake, Queen Anne's name "non decet hunc titulum vacuum fore [should not be meaningless]" in two senses: the first, that her grace should be active, and operate in intercessive service to her people, and second, that she should not neglect her father's noble line and St. Anne's significance in terms of reproduction.²²⁵ Again Maidstone skillfully references multiple meanings in his present, and these associations cause multiple layers of history to crash together as we read these

²²² Maidstone, 391-400.; For more on Anne's role in this poem and the process of reconciliation, see Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton University Press, 1992), 106-110, 116-119.

²²³ Maidstone, 431-432.

²²⁴ Maidstone, 434.

²²⁵ Maidstone, 435.

lines in the now. Simultaneously, we both remember the version of Queen Anne who died “sine prole [without offspring]”²²⁶ at a young age, and the Queen Anne of Maidstone’s moment, a young woman who should and would become the mother of a king. The possibility of an alternate history, where Richard and Anne had children, Richard retained control of the kingdom, and Richard and Anne were remembered as a good king and queen who fully participated in the generational logic Maidstone has outlined reverberates through these passages, even as we know that it is not what came to pass.

At first glance to a modern reader who has been educated in the dominant, pro-Lancastrian version of events presented to us by British history, the end of the poem is shockingly (or perhaps naively) optimistic. Maidstone gives some of the last lines of his text to Richard II himself, in a speech in which he effectively accepts the city’s apology and puts all to right:

Sed modo suscipite claves, gladium quoque vestrum,
Legibus antiquis hanc regitote plebem.
Antea quod licuit, liceat modo, dum tamen equum
Extiterit, solitum non variando modum.
Permineat maior, electus qui regat urbem,
Regis et, ut solito, suppleat ille vices.
Vos quoque, felices dulci iam pace potiti,
Pergite gaudentes ad loca quisque sua!

[But now take back your keys, receive your sword again,
And henceforth rule this people by your ancient laws.
A chosen mayor should be above, to rule the town,
And, as is usual, to act the role of king.
You too, now blest (since you have won the peace you sought),

²²⁶ Adam Usk, “The Chronicle of Adam Usk,” in *The Chronicle of Adam Usk, 1377-1421*, ed. and trans. C. Given-Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 5.

Go joyfully, each one, returning to your homes!]²²⁷

Richard's words show a return to normalcy, and with it the possibility of progress and a future. This future is also a return to the usual rhythm of life in the city, with Maidstone stating that "regitote [henceforth]" things will return to "antea [previous]" condition, with a new mayor being chosen and the keys of the city returned. Time is cyclical or continual in nature here, indicating that both the city and the king's rule over it are part of a natural and ongoing process that is at once the past and the future due to its repetitive, predictable qualities. King Richard further tells the people to return to their homes, being "felices [blessed]" to enjoy this newfound peace, in another example of the logic of cyclical time and generation where they can return to the way things were before the conflict as a way of going forward, going back to the rightful relationships that make the future. Maidstone presents a real future for Richard II, the city of London, and the people here as they return to their roles and are reconciled, king to city as groom to bride.

This possible future for Richard and his kingdom is further emphasized by the closing lines of the poem, which recount the crowd's physical and verbal response to Richard's speech:

GAUDET AD HEC turba, prostrata ruit, iacet humo,
Acclamat laudes vocibus altisonis:
'Vivat rex! Vivat semper! Vivat bene! Vivat!
Longa sit in regno sospite vita suo!
Sint sibi felices anni mensesque diesque,
Floreat et victis hostibus ipse suis!
Dumque strepunt, abeunt, redeunt, regem benedicunt,
Exitus est operi terminus iste rei.

[AT THIS THE crowd rejoice and fall prostrate and lie

²²⁷ Maidstone, 531-8.

On earth, and sing out praise in voices to the skies:
'Long live the king, live long, live safe and well, long live the king!
Long may he reign, and may his realm be well!
May all his years and months and days be blessed ones,
And may he flourish, quelling all his enemies!
And while they shout and come and go and bless the king,
The end of this affair brings closure to this work]²²⁸

Laying “prostrata [prostrate]” on the ground, as they “laudes vocibus altisonis [praise in voices to the skies],” the crowd acts in a way reminiscent of a religious ceremony as they wish that the king “vivat semper! vivat bene! vivat! [live long! live safe and well!].” “Vivat rex! [Long live the king!]” is a statement which demonstrates the cyclical time of monarchical rule, while the further statements of “longa sit in regno [long may he reign]” and “floreat et victis hostibus ipse suis! [may he flourish, quelling all his enemies!]” forecasts current events into the future. The people’s response to Richard’s speech engages with his terms of reconciliation through these statements and their use of the traditional discourse of kingship and ceremony. Maidstone ends his poem abruptly here, likely the result of writing immediately after these events took place, and therefore not having anything to say about how it all worked out. As readers today, however, this abrupt ending contributes to the sense we have of reading queer history, and of having an experience that is out of time. Reading this poem today, or even just after the events of 1399, however, shows a tantalizing possibility of another future for Richard II, the city of London, and the kingdom in general. This possibility is that of returning to a peace that will endure beyond the lines of this poem. Maidstone’s presentation of this peace is predicated on a discourse of sexuality, generation, and literature which ties the way

²²⁸ Maidstone, 539-546.

things may be in the future to the way they have worked in the past. The future at the end of the poem is incredibly straight and idealistically normative, and stand in sharp contrast to how Richard II's reign ended with his deposition and untimely death, again illuminating the queer temporal asynchrony of this poem.

The future Maidstone speaks to us from 1392 can never come to pass, and in this sense, it is a queer future. This queer past-future can, however, point us to a better and deeper understanding of how history is constructed in and out of time. By speaking a now-alternative, then-mainstream, history into the present, Maidstone's poem reveals the way that history is made, has been made, and continues to be made by the winning, normative, futurist side of power structures. At the time the poem was written, Richard Maidstone's record of events was firmly on this winning side, but as Richard II's final years unfolded, Maidstone and Richard abruptly were no longer historical winners, leaving this poem in a queerly asynchronous position in the present and in history. In my reading, the experience of this temporal asynchrony forces us to confront the editorial process of history—a confrontation which breeds scholarly discomfort by shining a mental light on the ways in which we may be complicit in the re-inscription of normalized and normalizing power structures as we read historical narratives, and write our analyses of them. This process of normalizing violence wrought on actual events in order to render them readable as history speaks to our present-day world as well, with its multiple "truths" and multiple "realities," which are constructed from the same actual events on a continual basis by continuously updated and edited digital media. A queer reading of Maidstone's text points us toward a way of understanding how there can

possibly be “alternate facts” by showing us how the same event was reinvented according to political winds throughout history. Through the experience of temporal asynchrony in this text, we come to an uncomfortable, yet productive awareness of the processes which have made and continue to make history, which allows us to understand the full possibilities of time and its record, and to account not only for disparate histories, but also for disparate nows.

Chapter 4: Richard II, Dramatic Representation, and the Making of (Queer) History in William Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Gordon Daviot's *Richard of Bordeaux*, and Nicholas de Jongh's *A Plague Over England*

My examination of Richard II and his life has, thus far, focused on texts which preceded Richard or were contemporaneous with his reign. This chapter will focus, instead, on Richard II's literary afterlives and the way in which those afterlives have often assumed that Richard II was queer in the sense of being exclusively or mostly sexually attracted to men. The historicity of this version of Richard II, as I believe has already become clear, is not without contest, for reasons tied to both the history of sexuality and Richard II's lived experiences in particular. This view of Richard II, however, lies just under the surface of discussions of Richard II, both historical and literary. It is my assertion, in what follows, that this interpretation of Richard II stems from readerly affinity for the king and his life, and that that affinity is firmly grounded in his queerness even if that queerness is not particularly tied to historicized understandings of sexuality and identity.

One of the main ways in which the view of Richard II as being sexually attracted to men has entered the popular imagination is through stage and screen adaptations of William Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Literary critic Charles R. Forker documents this tradition, unsympathetically, in a note to his article "Unstable Identity in Shakespeare's *Richard II*," where he traces a history, starting in 1929 and going through 1979, of playing King Richard "effeminately," as possessing "homosexual lust," "a kind of drag queen," and "in a state of semi-nakedness in a bath-house," among other, more distasteful

descriptions and details which rely on twentieth-century stereotypes of gay men and prejudices against them.²²⁹ This tradition continues in the twenty-first century, where *The Hollow Crown*, a 2012 television production of Shakespeare's *Richard II* directed by Rupert Goold, takes part in this relatively steady performance tradition of emphasizing the queerness of Richard II in 20th- and 21st-century adaptations of Shakespeare's play.²³⁰ In this production, the now-out actor Ben Wishaw's King Richard leans into the homosexual undertones in Shakespeare's play and this longstanding theatrical tradition, and does so in a way that is dramatically queer.²³¹ King Richard revels in a set of movements, gestures, and facial expressions, and a tone of voice which evoke the most common contemporary stereotypes of gayness. In evoking these stereotypes, King Richard's characterization draws on the way that we are trained to read social cues to pick up on the sexuality, or potential sexuality of others.²³² The queerness of King

²²⁹ Charles R. Forker. "Unstable Identity in Shakespeare's *Richard II*." *Renascence* 54, no. 1 (Fall, 2001). 3-22.

Forker. "Unstable Identity." 20-21 (note 7).

²³⁰ Forker also documents how, when King Richard has been played in other ways, it has struck theater critics as odd, including David Warner's portrayal for the RSC in 1964, where his Richard had an "unexpected masculinity." 21.; This performance tradition extends to this day. For a recent review of similarly inflected productions, see Liam Donovan. "Acting Out: An extravagantly queer production of *Richard II* claps back at Shakespeare purists' conservatism." *Maisonneuve*. October 4, 2023.

²³¹ The homosexual undertones of *Richard II* are most evident in Bolingbroke's speech at the beginning of 3.1 where he suggests that Bushy and Green "...have in manner with [their] sinful hours / Made a divorce betwixt [King Richard's] queen and him." William Shakespeare. *Richard II*, in *Shakespeare's Histories*, Richard Bevington, Ed. New York: Pearson-Longman, 2003. lines 11-12.

²³² This skill is often referred to by the term "gaydar," which is somewhat contested both as a term and as a real ability. There is a good amount of evidence that this skill exists in some form, even if that form is inextricably tied to social stereotypes and the ways in which we are all socialized by the society that holds those stereotypes. Numerous studies

Richard in this production is not particularly medieval, or even Elizabethan, in its representation. For instance, King Richard is one of the characters who wears lighter, brighter colors, and his movement and speech patterns correspond to contemporary

have looked at how accurate people are at judging sexual orientation from short video clips, tone of voice in recordings, and still photographs. Overall, it has been shown that people are better at identifying sexual orientation than they would be by chance, which indicates that the “gaydar” phenomenon does exist in some form; it is also clear that self-identified homosexuals are better at this skill than self-identified heterosexuals, and that women are stronger in this skill than men across sexual orientations. Sexual identity is, moreover, associated with speech codes, and that people code-switch in certain settings to hide or reveal their sexuality via verbal cues. Of note is the fact that the evidence of “gaydar” has increased over time, as being openly gay has become more acceptable in Western society; a foundational study from 1987 indicates that only 20% of subjects had their sexuality judged more accurately than chance, while a 2010 study indicates that 81% of targets were accurately judged (see below). For further details from a sexual behavior science perspective see: Gregory Berger et al., “Detection of Sexual Orientation by Heterosexuals and Homosexuals,” *Journal of Homosexuality*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (1987): 83-100; Nalani Ambady et al. “Accuracy of Judgments of Sexual Orientation From Thin Slices of Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (1999): 538-547; Kerri L. Johnson, et al., “Swagger, Sway, and Sexuality: Judging Sexual Orientation from Body Motion and Morphology,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 93, No. 3 (2007): 321-334; Gerulf Rieger et al., “Dissecting ‘Gaydar’: Accuracy and the Role of Masculinity-Femininity,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 39 (2010): 124-140; Valentina Cartei and David Reby, “Acting Gay: Male Actors Shift the Frequency Components of Their Voices Towards Female Values When Playing Homosexual Characters,” *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, Vol. 36 (2012): 79-93; Minna Lyons et al., “Detection of Sexual Orientation (‘Gaydar’) by Homosexual and Heterosexual Women,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, Vol. 43 (2014): 345-352; Gayle Brewer and Minna Lyons, “Discrimination of Sexual Orientation: Accuracy and confidence,” *Personality and Individual Differences*, Vol. 90 (2016): 260-264; and Sven Kachel, et al. “Gender (Conformity) Matters: Cross-Dimensional and Cross-Modal Associations in Sexual Orientation Perception,” *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2020): 40-66. For further details from a linguistics perspective see: Robert J. Podesva, et al., “Sharing Resources and Indexing Meanings in the Production of Gay Styles,” *Language and Sexuality: Contesting Meaning in Theory and Practice*, eds. Kathryn Campbell-Kibler, et al., (CSLI Publications, 2001), 175-189; and Benjamin Munson and Molly Babel, “Loose Lips and Silver Tongues, or, Projecting Sexual Orientation Through Speech,” *Language and Linguistics Compass*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (2007): 416-449.

understandings of effeminacy, although not to medieval conventions of self-presentation, while Rory Kinnear's Bolingbroke, for example, is emphatically "masculine" in his movements, dark dress, and lack of cleanliness according to contemporary standards, although not necessarily to medieval ones.²³³ The deployment of these stereotypes ties together fairly well-known history—that Richard II and Anne of Bohemia ruled during a

²³³ The medieval conventions of self-presentation, that I reference here come down to the fact that, in all likelihood, everyone would have been wearing the brightest colors, boldest patterns, and finest fabrics that they were entitled to, Henry Bolingbroke and his company included. The fourteenth-century was a time of much regulation around what English people could wear, and the regulations were focused on maintaining class hierarchy and protecting the English textile trade. Notably, these laws were much stricter for men than for women. The Fur Act of 1337 regulated the wearing of fur to those with titles, while the Cloth Act of 1337, and the Importation Act of that same year, restricted English people to English made cloth. Slightly later, the Statute Concerning Diet and Apparel of 1363 further restricted who could wear what and how much it could cost, in an incredibly detailed way, based on social rank and occupation. While these acts are phrased prohibitively, they leave the finest qualities of cloth and other clothing materials for the highest ranks of society by prohibiting them for everyone else. The highest ranks would have had access to cloth of gold, as well as ermine and weasel fur (approximately polka dots and stripes respectively), and the upper parts of society had access to silk, velvet, and other finer fabrics. Because of this, clothing color, style, and fabric was an important marker of class status in medieval England in a way that is almost the opposite of present-day sartorial class markers. Essentially, it is safe to assume that the vast majority of noblemen in Richard II's England would have worn bright colors and well-cut clothing and would have thought that wearing brown made someone look poor and/or like a religious. As mentioned above, these laws were more specific in regard to men than women, which is another important difference in relation to gender and its performance between the Middle Ages and today. In short, the actual historical man Henry Bolingbroke would likely have dressed just as beautifully and just as colorfully as the actual historical man Richard II.; On sumptuary laws and medieval dress, see, among others, Kim M. Phillips, "Masculinities and the Medieval English Sumptuary Laws," *Gender and History*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 22-42; and Claire Sponsler, "Narrating the Social Order: Medieval Clothing Laws," *Clio*, Vol. 21, Issue 3, 265-283.; For the text of the laws, see: *The Statutes of the Realm, Printed by command of his majesty King George the Third. In pursuance of an address of the House of Commons of Great Britain. From Original Records and Authentic Manuscripts, Volume 1, Printed by William S. Hein and Company, Inc. (Buffalo, N.Y., 1993.)*

period when fashion developed and became more complex in England—with present-day stereotypes to ask us to see King Richard as a representative of particular present-day queer identities. Bright costuming is used to delineate King Richard’s affinity in this production, in a way that leans into contemporary realities of gay style as part of gay culture, and societal stereotypes about gay men being more fashionable, but runs counter to medieval practices of self-representation.²³⁴ Additionally, *The Hollow Crown* production of *Richard II* relies on the associations of St. Sebastian with gay culture throughout, further developing the theatrical tradition at play and more deeply tying *Richard II* to the historical affinities of gay culture. Early in the episode, Bushy is shown painting an image of St. Sebastian, as King Richard grasps his shoulder, and Bushy glances back at him with what can only be described as lingering eyes. Further, King Richard’s death is accomplished by having arrows pierce his body in several places, which more closely mirrors images of St. Sebastian than of Christ, whom Shakespeare’s Richard has sometimes been compared to, again associating this version of King Richard

²³⁴ Writing about the success of shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and *RuPaul’s Drag Race*, David Halperin reflects on the “commonplace” view that “male homosexuality [comprises] not only a set of specific sexual practices but also an assortment of characteristic social and cultural practices” that “implies a refined sensibility, heightened aesthetic sense, a particular sensitivity to style and fashion, a non-standard relation to mainstream cultural objects, [and] a rejection of common tastes.” Halperin points out that these things, which are stereotypes, are not the end-all and be-all of gay culture, but they do reflect an outside appreciate of parts of gay culture and therefore should not be completely avowed as part of the “gay way of being,” “rooted in a particular *queer way of feeling*” that “involves a characteristic way of receiving, reinterpreting, and reusing mainstream culture, of decoding and recoding the heterosexual or heteronormative meanings already encoded in that culture, so that they come to function as vehicles of gay or queer meaning.” *How to Be Gay*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 10-11, 12.

with the Catholic martyr and art-historical gay icon, as St. Sebastian is often termed.²³⁵

Winshaw's portrayal of King Richard, under Goold's direction, is captivating, and presents King Richard as a man whose world is not built for him, a theme which is strongly present in the play. The portrayal of Richard II in *The Hollow Crown* is an excellent example of the way in which Richard II is often thought of in contemporary popular imagination and reveals the way in which Richard II possesses a transhistorical queer affinity through association with certain aspects of gay culture and gay style.

This gay coded Richard II is not necessarily historically inaccurate—and I argue that Richard II's sexuality was definitely what we would today call queer—but it reflects a partial understanding of the particular sexual issues at play during Richard II's reign and obscures some of the other ways in which Richard II, his reign, and his textual afterlives can be seen as queer in more multifaceted ways, while revealing how narrating Richard II's sexuality as simply homosexual is itself a form of normalization. The assertion that Richard II was what we would now term gay, or bisexual, or at least had same-sex desires is commonplace in literary understandings of the king, and makes up a major part of the vague commonly understood version of the historical Richard II in the popular imagination, although most historians of his reign would argue against the idea. Our historical understanding of Richard II's potential homosexuality comes from two

²³⁵ See: Richard A. Kaye, "Losing his Religion, Saint Sebastian as contemporary gay martyr," in *Outlooks: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities and Visual Cultures*. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis, Eds. London: Routledge, 1996: 86-105; James Saslow, "The tenderest lover: Saint Sebastian in Renaissance painting," *Gai Saber*, Spring 1977: 58-65; and Wayne Dynes. "responses. Putting St. Sebastian to the Question," *Gai Saber*, Summer 1977: 72-73.; For an analysis of how Shakespeare's *Richard II* figures himself as Christ in the play, see, for example, Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies*, 1957.

moments in two of the chronicle sources, one in Thomas Walsingham's *Chronica Maiora* (1376-1422), and one in *The Chronicle of Adam Usk* (1377-1421). Walsingham writes that Richard was said to have an "impure relationship" ("familiaritatis obscene") with Robert de Vere while complaining that de Vere was promoted to Duke of Ireland, and Usk mentions "sodomitical acts" ("sodomidica") among the reasons he gives for deposing Richard.²³⁶ Added to this, we are told that Richard II had several close male advisors who were unpopular with the lords of the realm, but whom he personally promoted and trusted. This information dovetails well with post-medieval understandings of gay culture and of Anne and Richard's court. If we allow our thoughts to spin into contemporary stereotypes, certain historical impressions of Richard II's life as king make him even more accessible for queer historical reclamation: Richard II's love of art and fashion and foreign culture; his insistence on courtliness and ceremony (as an Englishman); his well-known personal cleanliness; his overspending/love of the "finer things"; his inability to succeed as king, especially from a martial perspective; his lack of children; his being overthrown; his manifest failure to be a "man."²³⁷ While

²³⁶ Walsingham, 799, 798.
Usk, 63, 62.

²³⁷ For the numerous budgetary concerns of Richard II and his government, as well as accusations of his "over spending," see, for example: Harold Hutchinson, *The Hollow Crown A Life of Richard II*, Butler and Tanner, Ltd., 1961. 42-47, 212; Nigel Saul, *Richard II*. Yale University Press, 1997. 49, 53-58, 206, 141-144, 258-261, and, in particular, 80-82 and 438-439. For his appreciation of the arts and association with foreign culture, see: Hutchinson, 239; Saul, 346-348 (influence of Bohemia), 349-358 (France), 358-365 (literature); For his courtliness, the large size of Richard II's court, the theatrical performances associated with it, and pageantry and the use of courtly ceremony, see: Saul, 332-345; For his personal cleanliness related to the building of baths and the popularization of the handkerchief, see: Hutchinson, 239; Saul, 332; *History of*

anachronistic, making a reading Richard II's life as gay, and as embodying contemporary impressions of certain gay cultures, covers up the futurity problem of Richard's reign that I discuss in my earlier chapters, i.e. his manifest lack of living heirs from his first marriage and choice of a young girl—far from reproductive age—as a second wife. The argument goes something like: if Richard were gay, meaning he only had sex with men, then *that* explains why he and Anne of Bohemia never had children, and *maybe* it even explains why he would choose a child for his second wife—no seven year old would out him or expect him to pay his marriage debt, after all.²³⁸ These suppositions ignore, however, the full queerness of Richard's subject position and the historic-cultural prejudices and anachronistic stereotypes that underlie them and which form the basis of the transhistorical affinity the texts, authors, and actors I discuss in this chapter have for Richard II and Shakespeare's *Richard II*.

Importantly, contemporary historians who study Richard II and his chronicles largely dismiss the assertions by Walsingham and Usk as meaning much of anything in regard to Richard II's sexuality. The evidence for Richard engaging in a “sodomitical” relationship with Robert de Vere has generally failed to convince historians because it comes either from pro-Lancastrian narrative, as in Usk, or is only found in versions of

the King's Works, Volume III. R.A. Brown, H.M. Colvin, and A.J. Taylor, Eds. London, 1963. 934, 998.; G.B. Stow, “Richard II and the Invention of the Pocket Handkerchief,” *Albion*, xxvii (1995). 221-235. For his lack of “success,” see: Saul, 439-442. For his lack of heirs, see: Saul, 456-457, and 396-397. For his martial ambitions in Ireland, and the ways in which they were sometimes curtailed, see: Hutchinson, 145-150, 209-210; Saul, 155, 257-261, 268-292. For his inconsistent pursuit of peace with France and the controversy surrounding that, see: Hutchinson, 137-138; Saul, 205-234. For his deposition, see: Saul, 417-423. For questions related to masculinity, see: Saul, 451-453.
²³⁸ For Richard II's second marriage, see: Hutchinson, 160-161; and Saul, 457-459.

Walsingham which were written after Richard's overthrow.²³⁹ Moreover, the meaning of “sodomica” was more complicated in the fourteenth-century than it would be later, and when taken in historical context this word may not have referred directly to homosexual sex acts.²⁴⁰ Chris Given-Wilson additionally notes that “Usk is quoting from the sentence of deposition of Pope Innocent IV on the emperor Frederick II... This mentions sacrilege, heresy, dispossession of his subjects, and reduction of his people to servitude, but not sodomitical acts, which Usk has substituted for heresy” in his reuse of the accusations.²⁴¹ This substitution makes sense, because accusing Richard II of heresy would have been absurd given Richard's well-known and highly orthodox piety. Separately, Nigel Saul concludes that “Almost certainly these allegations [of sodomy] were baseless,” in his biography of Richard, citing de Vere’s more strongly documented

²³⁹ Fletcher 240 n. 97.

²⁴⁰ Discussions of sodomy in medieval law and literature are myriad. Broadly, “sodomica” was one of the sexual sins, but who it involved would often vary and it was not construed of separately from other sexual sins in penitential manuals. As John Boswell discusses, and R.I. Moore confirms, the laws governing sexuality intensify over the medieval period and what we would now term homosexuality is increasingly identified as a particular sin, but this is far from exclusive, and there are persistent discussions of “sodomy” in what we would term heterosexual contexts. On sodomy, see, among others: John Boswell. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980; and Glenn W. Olsen. *Of Sodomites, Effeminate, Hermaphrodites, and Androgynes: Sodomy in the Age of Peter Damian*. Rome: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies. 2011. For one discussion of an instance of “conjugal sodomy,” between a man and a woman, see Robert S. Sturges, “Purgatory in the Marriage Bed: Conjugal Sodomy in *The Gast of Gy*.” *Framing the Family, Narrative and Representation in the Medieval and Early Modern Period*. Rosalyn Voaden and Diane Wolfthal, Eds. *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, Vol. 280. ACMRS, 2005.

²⁴¹ Given-Wilson, 63, note 4.

reputation for womanizing as supporting evidence.²⁴² Christopher Fletcher, somewhat remarkably, dismisses these questions so thoroughly that he does not examine them at any length in the otherwise perceptive reevaluation he makes of Richard II's reign in *Richard II Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99*.²⁴³ Michael Bennett, on the other hand, does not dismiss the possibility of homosexuality outright in *Richard II and the Revolution of 1399*, where he writes that "The nature of [Richard's] sexuality can only be a matter for conjecture."²⁴⁴ Indeed, much "conjecture," to borrow Bennett's term, has

²⁴² Saul, *Richard II*, 121.

²⁴³ Fletcher's book is excellent and examines the relationship between cultural understandings of manhood in Richard II's England, particularly related to military action, to the king's own behavior in detail, concluding that Richard II was prevented from enacting the stuff of true manhood by those around him, and that this was why he did not succeed as king, rather than any personal or otherwise innate failing. Fletcher explains, "The initial aim [of this book] was to understand the import of the themes which they [political texts from Richard II's reign] manipulated the context of both late medieval culture and the politics of this reign. It soon became clear that the conclusions which many had drawn from these texts—that Richard was somehow observably unmasculine or effeminate—did not stand up to analysis of the complex discourse which his critics deployed." He concludes, "When the events of Richard's reign are re-examined in the light of the wider associations of manhood, he emerges not as a champion of an alternative masculinity but as an unimaginative if vehement adept of certain conventional qualities associated with being a 'man': the deeds in war and the household establishment which would show him to be a worthy claimant to his full estate and authority. Arguably, he would have been far less dangerous had his ideas been original or unusual. His opponents found it difficult to deny the validity of his desire for a royal expedition, his insistence on the illegitimacy of imposed conciliar mechanisms and his rejection of attempts to control his choice of officers and intimates. They resorted to a rhetoric of youth which contradicted their nominal acceptance of the king's full authority." Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. vi, 279.; Fletcher does not deal with Richard II's sexuality at all. This strikes me as an oversight, because the king's lack of issue, and the discourse of masculinity surrounding fatherhood in fourteenth-century England, would dovetail beautifully with what Fletcher lays out. For the discourse surrounding fatherhood, see: Rachel Moss. *Fatherhood and Its Representations in Middle English Texts*. London: D.S. Brewer. 2013.

²⁴⁴ Bennett, 71.

been made about Richard II's sexuality, from the time the chronicles were written through to the present day, and that conjecture reveals more about our understanding of Richard II, gayness, history, and historical identification than it does Richard's own sex life. In my assessment, the allegations of sodomy are, at the strongest plausible interpretation, similar to those levied against Richard's great-grandfather, Edward II about his relationship with Piers Gaveston. While it is still unlikely that Edward II inhabited an identity we would consider homosexual today because of how differently medieval people understood the relationship between sexual acts and their own identities, the case for his having some kind of romantic and/or sexual relationship with Piers Gaveston is more substantial than the one for Richard II and Robert de Vere, although both kings suffered from political dislike, which clouds the historical record of these details for both of them. It is, however, worth noting as we conjecture, that Edward II still had four children by his queen, and one illegitimate child, before his deposition, and the case for "homosexuality" seems somewhat stronger for him than for Richard in the chronicle accounts.²⁴⁵ It is also my assessment that to dismiss Robert de Vere and the topic of sexual orientation, both separately and together, is to miss an important aspect of Richard II's eventual overthrow. Whatever the exact relationship was between Richard II and Robert de Vere, we know that they were close, that de Vere was one of Richard's most trusted advisors, and that their relationship somehow violated social norms around

²⁴⁵ On Edward II, Piers Gaveston, and sexuality, see: Chaplais, Pierre. *Piers Gaveston, Edward II's Adoptive Brother*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and Lumsden, Andrew. "The Fairy Tale of *Edward II*." *The Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*. Vol. 2, Number 27.

sexual relationships. One part of the story that is especially significant, although I have not seen it narrated as such, involves Richard's cousin Philippa de Coucy, Robert de Vere's first wife, and de Vere's reputation for what Nigel Saul calls "womanizing," which may have included any number of triangulations of sexual and romantic attraction. In the absence of detailed documentation of this "womanizing," what we do know is that, while married to Philippa, de Vere had a public affair with one of Anne of Bohemia's ladies in waiting, Agnes de Launcekrone, which ultimately led to his divorcing Philippa and marrying Agnes in 1387. These events were scandalous in general, but were also a particularly contentious matter for Richard's family, and strained his relationship with his aunts, uncles, and cousins henceforth.²⁴⁶ Regardless of anything else, Robert de Vere is an important piece of Richard II's story for sexual reasons, even if those reasons were not tied to his having sex with Richard himself. We could also see in this story, any number of non-normative relational and sexual paths down which one might speculate involving any combination of Anne, Richard, Robert, Philippa, and/or Agnes. The important point is not these speculative paths, rather it is that Richard II and Robert de Vere were violating social norms around sex and its socially relegated place even if they were not having sex with each other, and that this aberrant behavior was tied to the strain that existed between Richard and his family, including between Richard and his eventual usurper, Henry Bolingbroke. Because the available evidence is limited, and much of what we do have has a Lancastrian tinge, it is impossible to know exactly how, when, or if Richard II engaged in any number of sex acts, nor is it possible to know exactly whom he

²⁴⁶ Saul, *Richard II*. 121-122.

would have considered a romantic partner, nor can we assert that any sexual preference or romantic relationship was an exclusive one for Richard or came at the expense of others. These facts, along with the fact that medieval people do not seem to have thought of themselves as gay or straight in a binary way may encourage us to draw the conclusion that, even if Robert de Vere and Richard II had a sexual relationship, that fact alone does not matter much in assessing Richard II's reign overall, while the impetus to make it the explanation for the failure of his reign matters incredibly.²⁴⁷

I propose that it is vital to interrogate *why* Richard II has often been thought of as gay, what the impulse to reclaim him for gay history means, and how those two things have come together in popular twentieth-century renderings of Richard II, including *Richard II*, but also going beyond Shakespearean adaptation, and the theatrical tradition surrounding these portrayals. This examination furthers the discussion around the queerness of King Richard in *Richard II*; as Judith Brown writes, "Richard's verse calls out to ears attuned to alternative narratives, to hidden spaces of desire, to bent history, and to tales pulled out of standard temporality."²⁴⁸ In the rest of this chapter, I will examine two non-Shakespearean renderings of Richard II that answer the "call" to which Brown refers, as they explore the edges of "standard temporality" while deploying Richard II in contexts that go beyond Shakespeare's play itself. The first of these renderings is the 1932 play, *Richard of Bordeaux*, by the Scottish writer Elizabeth

²⁴⁷ For a summary of information about how medieval people thought of their own sexuality and how it related to their other identities, see: Ruth Mazo Karras. *Sexuality in Medieval Europe, Doing Unto Others*. London: Routledge, 2005. 8, 155.

²⁴⁸ Judith Brown. "Pretty Richard (in Three Parts)." *Shakespeareer*. Madhavi Menon, Ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011). 286.

Mackintosh under the pseudonym of Gordon Daviot, which drew heavily on Shakespeare's play and starred John Gielgud as Richard II.²⁴⁹ The second is the much later play, *Plague Over England* (2008) by the gay playwright Nicholas de Jong, which centers on John Gielgud's arrest in 1953 for "persistently importuning men for immoral purposes," and in the process features Gielgud playing the part of Shakespeare's Richard II. These plays put Richard II and *Richard II* into conversation with twentieth- and twenty-first-century theater culture as well as with the gay lives of John Gielgud and Nicholas de Jongh, and the queer penumbra surrounding Gordon Daviot and her work. Who Richard II slept with may not matter much in overall assessments of the events of his reign, but what does matter a lot for our understanding of Richard II as history, and what is interesting about Richard II's purported "gayness," is the way in which it is related to the collection of literary and historical artifacts which have accrued around him. As a childless monarch, Richard II inhabited, as I have previously argued, a particular kind of queer identity, and it is that queer identity which, as I will argue, has created the affinity for Richard II which binds *Richard of Bordeaux*, *Plague Over England*, John Gielgud, Nicholas de Jongh, and Gordon Daviot together in both their use of the historical Richard II and Shakespeare's play.

²⁴⁹ Sir Arthur John Gielgud (1904-2000) was part, through his mother's side, of the famed Terry family of actors. His grandmother, Kate Terry, was an actress, and her siblings Dame Ellen Alice Terry, Marion Bessie Terry, and Fred Terry were all also actors, and were more famous than she. Their father, Benjamin Terry, was also a noted actor in nineteenth-century London. Having these famed actors as great-aunts and a great-uncle meant that John Gielgud grew up surrounded by acting and familiar with the life of the theater; his becoming a Shakespearean actor was something of a birthright. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

There is a queer affinity across these texts for Richard II and his own queerness both in history and as an historical text. That queerness reflects both in bell hooks' formulation of "queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live," and in Jack Halberstam's argument in *The Queer Art of Failure* that queers "dismantle the logics of success and failure with which we currently live."²⁵⁰ Halberstam suggests that, by focusing on failures, we can see another aspect of the power structures of "heteronormative common sense" which "leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, theatrical conduct, and hope," while "Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes" of being "lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique."²⁵¹ Notions such as these allow us to see how Richard's "failure" as a king is, at least partially, an index of his queerness. It is his being overthrown as king, his "failure," that creates an affinity between variously non-normative subjects across time in a way similar to what Heather Love discusses in *Feeling Backward Loss and the Politics of Queer History* where she "suggest[s] the value of some aspects of historical gay identity...that have been diminished or dismissed with successive waves of liberation."²⁵² For Love, what has been lost with liberation is loss itself, along with the

²⁵⁰ from a panel entitled "Are you Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body," Eugene Lange College The New School for Liberal Arts, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJk0hNROvzs>

The Queer Art of Failure, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

²⁵¹ *The Queer Art of Failure*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 89.

²⁵² Heather Love, *Feeling Backward Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 23.

“marginalization and abjection” that accompanied it.²⁵³ Love (re)claims the value of “the association between homosexual love and loss,” stating that she “see[s] the art of losing as particularly queer art.”²⁵⁴ To be clear, I am not claiming that a crowned king of England (Richard II), a renowned Shakespearean actor (John Gielgud), a well-regarded theatre critic (Nicholas de Jongh), or a published author (Gordon Daviot) are “at odds with everything around” them, nor that they or their work is a “failure” in every sense of that word, but they are tied together by an interest in one particular failure through the figure of Richard II, and his failure to remain king is linked to why some readers and critics of Richard II and history, myself included, feel queer affinity for him. While not enacting every aspect of Halberstam’s list of “subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes,” Richard II, these texts and the people who wrote them are, as I will demonstrate, in some ways counter to “heteronormative common sense” and reflective of individuals who are “at odds with” the social positions in which they live(d), and it is the pain and suffering of Richard II, and his experience of romantic and political loss as an historical person, which creates queer affinity for him through queer sentiments and queer lived experience across time.

In this exploration of how queer lived experience, queer sentiments, and the subject of Richard II are intertwined in these texts, I am also exploring the vexed intersection of LGBTQ+ history and queer theory. Forming one part of this intersection, we see how the depiction of Richard II as a readily identifiable contemporary gay man, as

²⁵³ Love, *Feeling Backward Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, 29.

²⁵⁴ Love, *Feeling Backward Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, 24.

in *The Hollow Crown* production of *Richard II*, is informed by the way that LGBTQ+ history seeks out and recovers queer lives hidden by conventional historical narrative, even when they may appear to fit present-day stereotypes and therefore may not correspond to deeply historicized understandings of sexualities and identities. At the second corner of the intersection, the gay man known for playing Richard II, John Gielgud, has his worst personal experience narrated by Nicholas de Jongh in *Plague Over England*, as a key demonstration of the bad old days in order to facilitate de Jongh's focus on gay liberation as the outcome of gay history. Here, John Gielgud as King Richard, in *Richard II*, by way of de Jongh's recreation of Gielgud's experiences, become part of LGBTQ+ history in a way that, at least in part, maneuvers around the issue of medieval or Early Modern historicity and Richard II. Finally, on the third point of the intersection, Gordon Daviot tells a more sympathetic story about Richard II in *Richard of Bordeaux*, which John Gielgud helped to edit for performance and in which he also starred, and which is inextricably informed by her personal position as a never-married woman author who came of age during World War I and was part of a generation formed by the losses of that period, in a way that makes the subject of Richard II in her play queer in the more capacious sense of the word and the field of queer theory. Because the subjects of LGBTQ+ history and queer theory share an origin, in their participation in the feminist and the sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s (which was, in turn, a responses to a period of unusually persecutory oppression of homosexuality in the 1940s and 1950s), and their involvement in social activism during the AIDS crisis, queer

theory and LGBTQ+ history are sometimes viewed as the same, although they are not.²⁵⁵ Queer theory has become an increasingly slippery and, at times, divisive term, as the field has progressed over time and alongside the ongoing growth of the field of LGBTQ+ history and the successes of LGBTQ+ liberation movements. As Tyler Bradway and E.L. McCallum phrase it in their introduction to *After Queer Studies Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*, “Queer marks an opportunity for reinterpretation. In this sense, queer is not an identity, a thing, or an entity but an *activity*,” meaning that it is in the practice of queer studies where the meaning of queer theory as a field is made.²⁵⁶ The differences and overlaps which exist between queer theory and LGBTQ+ history are especially evident in the poly-temporal and multi-modal subject of Richard II that I examine in this chapter.

Ricardian Affinity Beyond the Grave

When we think about Richard II as a theatrical character, most (if not all) literary critics think of Shakespeare’s history play first. As Nigel Saul writes in his seminal biography on the king, *Richard II*, Shakespeare’s *Richard II* is “one of the most powerful of Shakespeare’s history plays,” and explores how there are “terrible consequences for a realm of usurpation.”²⁵⁷ Like many narratives, both historical and literary, of Richard II’s

²⁵⁵ Tyler Bradway and E.L. McCallum, Eds., “Introduction Thinking Sideways, or an Untoward Genealogy of Queer Reading,” *After Queer Studies, Theory and Sexuality in the 21st Century*, (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

²⁵⁶ Tyler Bradway and E.L. McCallum, Eds., “Introduction Thinking Sideways, or an Untoward Genealogy of Queer Reading,” 3.

²⁵⁷ Saul, *Richard II*, 1.

life, Shakespeare's focus is on his poor judgment as king, his downfall, and the implications thereof. Shakespeare's historical materials were, as Harold F. Hutchinson has accurately termed them, full of "Lancastrian prejudices and distortions" regarding the events of Richard II's reign. Shakespeare's play offers a window into the views of historians at his time, and the ways in which historical materials are used for purposes other than recovering the past. Interestingly, it is not Shakespeare alone who found fertile ground for an historical drama in the history of Richard II available to them at the time of writing. *Richard of Bordeaux* by Gordon Daviot offers a similarly partial, and at times ahistorical retelling of some of the events of Richard II's career, although it is little known. In fact, with the exception of print-on-demand services, Daviot's play is currently out of print. It did, however, enjoy a fairly intense, if brief, era of popularity beginning with its initial successful run at the New Theater in London in 1932. After this, *Richard of Bordeaux* was performed in professional theatrical productions in 1933 and 1934, in BBC television productions in 1938, 1947, and 1955, and in BBC radio productions in 1941 and 1952.²⁵⁸ Daviot's play in two acts is, with its similar material to Shakespeare, and its own temporal and social positioning, as fascinating an artifact as Shakespeare's work in many ways. Daviot chose to write in contemporary, rather than historical, dialect. The play includes the two years covered by Shakespeare's play as well as a number of other events from 1385-1398, although its focus is substantially different, tending toward the personal rather than the political, while portraying Anne and Richard, a-historically,

²⁵⁸ Jennifer Morag Henderson, *Josephine Tey A Life*. Dingwall, Scotland: Sandstone Press, 2015. location 7053.; Disappointingly, no known copies of any of these BBC performances exist, whether film or radio.

as pacifists. In its 1932 London run, John Gielgud, a young actor then-known for his Shakespearean performances, found immense success. In important ways, his performance as Richard II in *Richard of Bordeaux* helped to cement his career as an actor and springboard his career as a director, which would go on to span seven decades, and included several stints performing in and/or directing Shakespeare's *Richard II*.

Gordon Daviot was one of several pseudonyms used by the author best known as the mystery novelist Josephine Tey, but legally named Elizabeth MacKintosh. She lived, for most of her life, in Inverness, Scotland. Piercing the cultural wall of London theater of the 1920s and 1930s, Daviot found success as a playwright, while becoming part of a circle of queer actors and writers, including Gielgud, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies (who played Anne of Bohemia opposite Gielgud's Richard of Bordeaux) and her partner Marda Vanne. Scholarship about *Richard of Bordeaux* itself is thin on the ground. The academic discourse surrounding Daviot/Tey/Mackintosh centers almost entirely around the works of Josephine Tey, and often briefly discusses her other noms de plume. The only semi-dedicated study of the play appears in Niloufer Harben's book, *Twentieth-Century English History Plays From Shaw to Bond*,²⁵⁹ where *Richard of Bordeaux* is one of three key texts examined in "Three Plays of the 1930s: Reginald Berkely, *The Lady with a Lamp*; Clifford Bax, *The Rose without a Thorn*; Gordon Daviot, *Richard of Bordeaux*."²⁵⁹ Possibly due to the use of several pseudonyms, the biographical details of Daviot's life are not widely known, and are only available in a popular biography, *Josephine Tey, A Life*, by Jennifer Morag Henderson. Daviot was born in 1896, and like many other people

²⁵⁹ (Barnes & Noble Books, Totowa NJ, 1988), 63-104.

whose young adulthood was directly impacted by the occurrence of World War I, her life did not turn out the way she thought it would in both personal and professional ways. She had trained as a PE teacher, but had to leave her chosen career when her mother died in 1923 because she was unmarried and therefore seen as the one who had to return to her family of origin to care for her father and his household.²⁶⁰ After her return to Inverness, Daviot became a writer—eventually a very successful writer whose plays would be produced on the West End, whose mystery novels have remained continuously in print, and whose work has gone on to inspire later genre fiction, including Nicola Upson’s *An Expert in Murder*. Daviot’s use of pseudonyms enabled her to create separate lives for different parts of herself. The playwright Gordon Daviot attended parties with John Gielgud, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, and Marda Vanne; Josephine Tey evaded Daviot’s fame to write detective fiction in relative peace, free from an overbearing agent; and Elizabeth MacKintosh died from liver cancer at her sister Moire’s house in 1952, much to the shock of John Gielgud and her other close friends.²⁶¹ Today, Daviot’s once most famous play, *Richard of Bordeaux*, is somewhat forgotten, as is the Gordon Daviot pseudonym more generally. *Richard of Bordeaux* is, in its creation of a well-researched medieval world, simultaneously historically accurate in its attention to certain medieval details, and creates a strange type of medievalism in its use of historical materials to advocate for pacifism. With its breakout success in 1932, *Richard of Bordeaux* also stands in an historical place full of potential what-could-have-beens, or places where we

²⁶⁰ Morag Henderson Location 552, 333, 289, 1251, 1237

²⁶¹ Morag Henderson Location 2838, 3166, 5240

can glimpse how history might have been otherwise, as the popularity of theater would soon be eclipsed by cinema, the interwar period would soon give way to World War II, and society would change dramatically in many other ways, especially in regards to the queer spaces and queer identity politics which inform the text and which intersected Daviot's life.

The life of the star of *Richard of Bordeaux*, John Gielgud, as well as his own textual afterlife, provides another fascinating inter-text to Daviot and Shakespeare's works, as well as to Richard II's life and my other discussions of it. Gielgud was, as stated earlier, a very successful Shakespearean actor from the 1930s until the 1990s. He was also a gay man, who lived through nearly the entirety of the twentieth century, and who remained reticent to openly discuss his sexuality until his death. Gielgud's own correspondence sheds some light on his thoughts and feelings about that existence, including the 1953 incident where he was arrested for "importuning male persons for immoral purposes," during one of Britain's most actively homophobic eras. This event in Gielgud's life, and the atmosphere in London surrounding it, are, further, the focus of Nicholas de Jongh's *Plague Over England*, a 2008 play in two acts. de Jongh presents Gielgud, counter-factually, as playing Richard II in *Richard II* at the time he was arrested, a significant change to real events which colors the tone of the play and links Gielgud's misfortune to that of Richard II. The play has a nostalgic, semi-tragic vision of the "importuning" incident in a Victorian bathroom in London, the court proceedings that followed, some theatrical productions Gielgud was involved in around that time, and a variety of interactions in a Shakespeare-inflected gay bar called "Queen Mab's." Running

at the Finborough Theatre in February 2008, and on the West End in the Duchess Theatre from February-May 2009, de Jongh's play was extensively praised, and presents a look at another moment where theatrical and queer history intersect with the subject of Richard II.

Tied together by their use of and broader connections to Shakespeare's *Richard II*, de Jongh's and Daviot's plays are little known and have not met lasting success. *Plague Over England*, in spite of its relatively warm reception, closed two weeks early in its West End run, and, as far as I am aware, has been out of production since and has not provoked much scholarly interest.²⁶² *Richard of Bordeaux*, and the name Gordon Daviot, have largely been forgotten, eclipsed in popularity by the novels written by the same author under the name of Josephine Tey.²⁶³ Daviot's sympathetic portrayal of Richard II in *Richard of Bordeaux* was a flash in the pan of a play that served as springboard for John Gielgud, but which has not merited its own study. Elizabeth English remarks in her essay about Tey's *Miss Pym Disposes*, that "[Tey] also found success as a playwright, working under the name Gordon Daviot, and is particularly remembered for her play

²⁶² "Plague Over England Comes to an End," theatretickets.co.uk. "Despite popular reviews, Nicholas De [sic] Jongh's Plague Over Engalnd will be closing at the earlier date of Saturday 2nd May 2009. The production, about the famous actor John Gielgud in 1950s Britain, was due to continue for a further two weeks until Saturday 16th May 2009."

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120422075251/http://www.theatretickets.co.uk/theatre-news/85/Plague+Over+England+Comes+To+An+End.html>

²⁶³ My own knowledge of *Richard of Bordeaux* was not brought about through careful research or typical scholarly discovery. Instead, I discovered the play existed through Amazon's since-you-bought-this-you-might-want-that recommendation function. A purchase of Nigel Saul's *Richard II* resulted in a recommendation that I purchase a print-on-demand edition of *Richard of Bordeaux*, and my purchase of *Richard of Bordeaux* resulted in a recommendation for *Plague Over England*.

Richard of Bordeaux” (145).²⁶⁴ English’s use of the phrase “is particularly remembered” begs the question: who remembers? And the answer to that question is, at least in part, tied to the queer affinity that accompanies Richard II and *Richard II* through time and adaptation in the world of London theatre which held/holds both. This queer affinity encompasses Daviot’s interest in the subject of her play, Gielgud’s love of playing both King Richard and Richard of Bordeaux, and de Jongh’s play, where Gielgud is (mis)remembered as a version of King Richard, and ends Act I reciting part of Richard II’s “What must the king do now?” monologue from act III, scene iii. This chapter explores the intriguing intersections of these texts in terms of subject matter, and the way Richard II has been configured in history and literature. I will explore their queer potentials and their relationship to history, both medieval history and LGBTQ+ history, as I tease out these resonances and postulate that Richard II’s queerness forms its own kind of historical text. These historical resonances are tied the experiences of loss, failure, and struggling to fit in. Through Richard II’s own failure as king, we can see the link to failure as a queer subject in Gordon Daviot’s choice of subject matter, John Gielgud’s reflections on playing Richard II, and Nicholas de Jongh’s authorial choice to use a speech from *Richard II* in his play about John Gielgud. The queer intertextual relationship between all of these texts is intimately bound up in the subject of Richard II—both the life of the historical person as it has been and is still reconstructed, and the broader cultural understanding of him as an historical figure. The affinity these texts,

²⁶⁴ See Elizabeth English, ““Murder is a Queer Crime””: The Lesbian Criminal and Female Communities in Detective Fiction.” *Lesbian Modernism Censorship, Sexuality and Genre Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2017. 145.

authors, and actors have for each other is silently informed by perceptions of Richard II's queerness, both in his purported homosexual behavior and in his failures as monarch—to produce an heir, remain king until his natural death, and govern his kingdom well—which intersects with their own partial failures and their own queer lives.

Richard of Bordeaux: *English Theater Between the Wars, Medievalism, and Historical Interpretation*

Gordon Daviot's *Richard of Bordeaux* was directly inspired by Daviot's watching Gielgud act Shakespeare while on vacation in London. She went home, wrote the play, and then sent the play script to him directly. Later, she edited it according to his preferences.²⁶⁵ The print edition of *Richard of Bordeaux* is, further, dedicated "For John

²⁶⁵ Morag Henderson Location 2256, 2327.; Sheridan Morely. *John Gielgud. The Authorised Biography*. London: Simon and Schuster, 2002. 115.; Which play John Gielgud was acting in at the time she saw him, before writing *Richard of Bordeaux* is somewhat up for debate: Jennifer Morag Henderson, biographer of Daviot, insists that it was Hamlet that Gielgud was acting at the time, while Jonathan Croall and Sheridan Morely, biographers of Gielgud, insist that it was Richard in *Richard II*. Gielgud acted both roles in 1930, when Daviot could have been in his audience; he played Hamlet in the 1929/1930 season at the Old Vic, and Richard in the 1930/31 season. It is, however, important to note that the evidence for Daviot having seen him play Hamlet, rather than Richard, comes from Daviot's own letters written to Gwen Ffrangcon Davies and Marda Vanne. While these letters were written well after the fact, because Daviot met Ffrangcon Davies and Vanne when Ffrangcon Davies was in *Richard of Bordeaux*, it is more likely that Daviot's own recollections of her inspiration is correct. From a literary perspective, however, the roles of Hamlet and Richard might be seen as able to inspire the same kind of interpretation, because *Richard II* is connected to *Hamlet* in terms of the themes Shakespeare explores within the text and the way in which the parts "attract[] and challeng[e] major actors." Suggesting that it is in *Richard II* that Shakespeare begins to explore the concept of ideas and their opposites, and how dwelling on that can reveal the emptiness of language, or, as Richard says, how it is "nothing." As Géza Kállay writes, "what Richard wishes to say [in his final soliloquy] is something like this: each thought

Gielgud,” and he and Daviot remained friends throughout her life. The play has a certain kind of charm for those interested in the Ricardian period, although, as Sheridan Morley puts it, “*Richard of Bordeaux* was one of those plays that nobody liked except the public.”²⁶⁶ The charm it holds is in reimagining the way in which Richard II may have existed as an historical person, and why his reign was so troubled, but it is true, as Morley’s words imply, that the play is no theatrical masterpiece (much like *Plague Over England*). It presents several portions of Richard II’s reign, in chronological order; if a spectator or reader were not familiar with either or both of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and the history of Richard II’s reign, it would be rather hard to understand, and may still be hard to understand if one were only familiar with Shakespeare’s play, because the place where Shakespeare starts does not come until Act II, Scene 4 of Daviot’s work. The play text itself features the extensive stage directions and descriptions common in 19th-century and later plays. Gordon Daviot’s descriptions in the front matter of the play, and at the beginning of each scene give a description of the setting and enough dating information to establish an approximate chronology of events. Act 1 scene I begins in “February 1385,” and the rest of the act covers very little time, ending in “Autumn

implies its opposite, yet none contains naturally, by itself, as if it were, its opposite. It is roughly five years after *Richard II* that Shakespeare will have created a character for whom each thought also comprises its opposite: that character is Hamlet.” While it is most likely that Daviot saw Gielgud as Hamlet, not Richard, it is worth thinking about the connections between the two characters in Shakespeare’s oeuvre and how there are some underlying thematics which join the two works.; “Is a Dramatic Theory of History Possible? Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and Historical Truth.” *Towards a Revival of Analytical Philosophy of History: Around Paul A. Roth’s Vision of Historical Sciences*. Boston: Brill, 2017. 219-220.

²⁶⁶ 117

1386.²⁶⁷ Act 2 takes place starting “three years later [1389]” in scene I, and covers far more time more quickly, as it is punctuated by Anne’s death in 1394 in scene IV and ending in 1398 in scene VII. While scene VII is indicated to take place in 1398, the dates are obviously off although the sequence is correct, because the final scene contains Richard II’s usurpation, which occurred in 1399.

The play is notably like Shakespeare’s portrayal of history in that it uses additional characters of non-noble origin—the “commoners” as they are often termed in Shakespeare studies—to both set the tone and provide additional details to the audience. Before the start of Act I, where we are introduced to the Fair Page and Dark Page characters, Daviot instructs us that there is a “large mullioned window” visible on stage, which is a “chamber” inside “The King’s Palace of Westminster.” This specific setting reflects Daviot’s familiarity with the history surrounding Richard II, and with English history more broadly; Richard II used Westminster as a residence as did all British monarchs until the sixteenth century, and he had rebuilt the great hall of the Palace starting in 1394, a fact which associates him especially with the palace.²⁶⁸ In the first scene, the Fair Page and the Dark Page are playing dice in a hallway, when King Richard appears from a door where he was meeting with his council; Daviot’s notes describe him as “furious” in his initial emergence, before “his eye comes to rest on the two absorbed figures bent over the dice [i.e. the Pages], and curiosity and interest gradually replace the

²⁶⁷ Gordon Daviot. *Richard of Bordeaux*. Oxford: Oxford City Press, 2011. xvii.

²⁶⁸ The Palace of Westminster ceased to be a royal residence after a fire took place in the Palace in 1512. See Edward Wedlake Brayley and John Britton, *The History of the Ancient Palace and Late Houses of Parliament at Westminster*. London: John Weale, Architectural Library, 1836. 351-52.; Saul, note 39, page 339.

anger in his face,” and he goes to watch the game.²⁶⁹ The Pages notice the King, but he stops them from rising, saying, “No, no, Go on with the game. Who is winning?” a comment and situation which, in this opening scene, give an indication of the way Daviot will portray the King throughout. Daviot’s Richard is engaged with the environment he is placed in, as here, and is not particularly obsessed with ceremony or tradition—a choice of characterization which modernizes the character while maintaining the sense of Richard II as innovating royal presentation and practice, even if to modernize it Daviot must take the character in the opposite direction of the historical person.

Throughout the play, Richard and Anne are characters who grate against the traditional, pro-war structures around them and consistently advocate for peace. This has only a partial analogue in the life of Richard II, because while he did actively pursue peace with France he simultaneously wanted to continue military activities in Ireland; the plotline rather reflects Gordon Daviot’s own concerns as a woman who came of age during World War I and whose entire life was influenced by the events of that conflict.²⁷⁰ Daviot’s Richard is, furthermore, acutely aware of his situation within a family in this

²⁶⁹ 2.

²⁷⁰ Richard’s desire for peace with France was part of an understanding that England and France were in an intractable conflict and peace needed to be made for the well-being of both countries. Importantly, it was not motivated out of an ethics of pacificism or general dislike of military action; Richard was in favor of military pursuits when they were in situations that were winnable and saw himself as part of a chivalric world order. The conflict between Richard and parliament, and to a lesser extent between Richard and Gloucester, was about the expenses related to pursuing peace with France and ultimately marrying Isabella, rather than the pursuit of a truce itself. See, Harold Hutchinson, *The Hollow Crown*, pp. 138-164; Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II, Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99*, pp. 221-248 and 127-150; and James L. Gillespie, “Richard II: Chivalry and Kingship,” in *The Age of Richard II*, James L. Gillespie, Ed., Sutton Publishing, 1997. 115-138.

play. Toward the midpoint of the first scene, Anne insists, “But, Richard, you are the King,” in response to Richard’s offense at how his uncles treat him “like a child,” and refuse to listen to him. Richard responds, “No, I am merely Edward’s grandson. And my father’s son. They compare me always in their minds with my father. . . . Because my father was a general and loved campaigning they think me a weakling. They have no vision.” These lines show Richard’s awareness of his place within a family as king. By being “merely Edward’s grandson,” Richard is saying that he is a function of the system he was born into, rather than seen as a person fully in his own right. His uncles “compare [him] always in their minds with [his] father” because he is his “father’s son,” and the assumptions of primogeniture-based power structure in which he lives is that Richard should be a continuation of his father and grandfather. Daviot’s Richard is not only aware of this dynamic, but actively resistant to it; he says his uncles “have no vision” in not being able to see any alternatives to perpetual war and conflict, and he sees their inability to see other possibilities of ways of being in the world as bound up in that same power structure. Later, in reference to his uncles, Richard says, “My grandfather was distressingly prolific,” in creating all of them. By describing his grandfather as “distressingly prolific,” Richard is subtly critiquing the reproductive-futurist regime under which he is king; a more normative comment on Edward III’s large number of sons would indicate that his “prolific” creation of offspring was an unquestionable good, but for Daviot’s Richard, that prolificacy is preventing his will from being done and the social change he hopes that will would create from occurring.

This early critique of his uncles sets up the dynamic for the rest of the play: a new, pacifist contingent, consisting of Richard, Anne, and their friends up against Richard's pro-war uncles and the power structures that back them up.²⁷¹ Daviot's descriptions of the characters in the play, which she gives in the stage directions, are very informative in terms of conveying how she wants her characters to be perceived and for those of us familiar with the history of Richard II and Shakespeare's *Richard II* to understand how this play is different from those sources. Succinctly, the characters with whom Daviot wants us to sympathize are described relatively positively, while the characters who are opposed to Richard's aims are described negatively and in martial terms. Richard is "a slender, delicately made youth with a finely cut, expressive face, and the fair colouring and red-gold hair which made his mother famous as the Fair Maid of Kent"; Anne "is not beautiful, but she has great charm, with dignity breaking every now and then to discover a bidden mischief, and humour always in her eyes and at the corners of her mouth"; and Lancaster (John of Gaunt) is described as "a good-looking man of middle age, who carries himself with the confidence of a practised diplomat."²⁷² Daviot's description of Richard shows a familiarity with either the *Historia Vitae Regni Ricardi Secundi*, or with a historical text using that chronicle as its source; the author of this chronicle, the Monk of Evesham, emphasized Richard's paleness and his tendency to

²⁷¹ This set up does reflect one of the many power struggles within Richard's reign, between John of Gaunt and Thomas of Woodstock over whether or not peace with France was the correct course of action. In the historical version of events, this conflict became most acute after Anne's death and during the marriage negotiations between Richard and Isabella. See Hutchinson, pp. 160-162.

²⁷² Act 1, Scene 1.; Act 1, Scene 2.

flush in his description of him, which Daviot links to the typical complexion of redheaded people, while also invoking Richard's mother's beauty as part of what informs his appearance.²⁷³

The Anne whom Daviot describes contrasts with her Richard, with personality leaping to the forefront of her description rather than physical traits; the emphasis Daviot places on Anne's "charm," and the "humour always in her eyes at the corners of her mouth," do not have, as far as I am aware, any basis in either the chronicles or Shakespeare, and in this, they form part of Daviot's expansion of Anne's role in the play and fleshing out of her as a character more broadly. Lancaster's description, as both "good-looking," and a "practised diplomat," again shows Daviot's interpretation. Her Lancaster is a "diplomat," rather than a warrior, even though the historical Gaunt was known for both; this detail contrasts sharply with how Gloucester and Arundel (Earl Arundel, not the Archbishop) are described. Gloucester (Thomas of Woodstock) is "a soldier and less composed edition of his brother LANCASTER. He has the restlessness of all irritable men, and a perpetual air of being about to explode," while Arundel (Earl Arundel, not the Archbishop) "is the prototype of all those retired soldiers who believe that the world is going to the dogs. A stupid-looking individual, with small suspicious eyes which always seem to be searching for slights."²⁷⁴ Meanwhile, De Vere (Robert, Earl of Oxford), is described as "a dark young man with a withdrawn air. He is even better-looking than RICHARD, but lacks that flame of spirit which illumines RICHARD

²⁷³ "Inerant enim ei crines glauci, facies alba et rotunda et feminia, interdum sanguinis fleumatice uiciata" 166.

²⁷⁴ Act 1, Scene 2.

to the most careless observer.”²⁷⁵ These descriptions, which emphasize the military roles of Gloucester and Arundel, align militaristic pursuits with “all irritable men,” and being a “stupid-looking individual,” while Daviot’s choice to describe them as “soldiers,” rather than “knights” makes the characters insistently contemporary and removes the historicized glamor from the idea of knighthood.

The modernized, anti-military tone of the play dominates the action, not only because of the dialogue, but because of choices like naming Richard's adversaries as “soldiers” rather than knights, and the way that Richard’s faction talks about “new” things in the beginning third of the play. The focus on the “new” being with Richard and his faction is another marked departure from Shakespeare’s play, where Richard is associated with the old, medieval way of being, and Bolingbroke with the new.²⁷⁶ This starts in the first scene where Richard tells us that “Robert is sprouting a new poem,” which associates Richard and his friends with the production of new literature in this particular line, but the refrain of new things takes on deeper significance as we get further into Act 1. When the older generation is discussing Richard's refusal to pursue war, De La Pole remarks, “I can hardly expect Lord Arundel to understand it, but what we are seeking is something new; some way out of the stalemate; out of the everlasting alternation of war and armistice and war again.”²⁷⁷ This line figures the anti-war, pacifist position as “new,” and the “new” idea of not pursuing perpetual war becomes the source

²⁷⁵ Act 1, Scene 2.

²⁷⁶ See Robert Ornstein, “A Kingdom for a State (1972),” in *Richard II Critical Essays*, Jeanne T. Newlin, Ed., Garland Publishing Inc., 1984. pp. 45-68.

²⁷⁷ Act 1, Scene 2.

of conflict between Richard and his elders in the play. As the conflict about whether or not to invade France goes on, Richard becomes increasingly worried saying, “It is all coming to pieces, Robert! They won't try to understand, and Parliament will think as they do. It is going to fail,” and De Vere responds to him, “Cheer up, Richard! It may fail this time. You can't expect them to absorb anything as repulsive as a new idea without some coaxing.”²⁷⁸ The construction of De Vere's line is important, “anything as repulsive as” implies that the “new idea” is the worst thing imaginable to those opposed to peace. Richard continues to be incensed by the lack of openness to peace, saying, “you would like that we were trying to do something that would harm them, instead of something that would be to everyone's advantage!” De Vere replies, “Everyone's advantage is nobody's business,” a line which figures the third way in which Richard and his faction are resisting the traditional power structures around them in this play, which is a resistance to wealth and a promotion of more collective ways of thinking. Daviot's characters, in her descriptions of them and in their own words, take a different route to make the history of Richard II comprehensible to a contemporary audience than the adaptations of *Richard II* I discussed in the previous section do. Richard's sexuality as an issue is not the main focus of Daviot's play, although it is also not entirely absent; there is, for instance, a joke about “Robert's tongue,” which makes a double-entendre about De Vere, and Richard is described as “flipping the boy's tunic with his finger,” a direction which could be played with sexual overtones.²⁷⁹ These moments are accompanied by much longer ones showing

²⁷⁸ Act 1, Scene 2.

²⁷⁹ Act 1, Scene 1.

Richard's relationship with Anne and De Vere's Relationship with Agnes, which show development of and interest in the women characters of the play. Morag Henderson and Morely both note that, based on their consultations of the original playscript of *Richard of Bordeaux*, that the homoerotic insinuations and playful moments were part of Gielgud's addition to the text.²⁸⁰ De Vere's relationship with Agnes is the source of his undoing in Daviot's plot; he abandons the battlefield at Radcot Bridge because he "wanted to live" to be with her. Anne suggests that "Agnes is the one precious thing he can save from the wreck" of failing his duty, in spite of "the world...falling about his ears."²⁸¹ The main conflict in Daviot's play is emphatically tied to sexuality, but the conflict is one between people who are aware of the oppressive way in which hereditary power structures assume things about and limit the people within them—oppress the people who are open to the "new idea" of pacifism, who "want to live" and who are acting for "everyone's advantage."²⁸² In this way, we can see how these characters are queer because Richard and his allies are, particularly in the first act of Daviot's play, "at odds with everything around [them]" in a way that is trying to find and think of a new and different way to live in their society and be King of that society.

One very noticeable difference between Daviot's *Richard of Bordeaux* and Shakespeare's *Richard II* is the character of the queen. Instead of Shakespeare's amalgamation of queens, Daviot gives us a fully fleshed out rendering of Anne of

²⁸⁰ Morag Henderson. Loc 2802.; Morley 115.; See also, Helen Grime, *Gwen-Ffrangcon-Davies, Twentieth-Century Actress*. Routledge, 2016. 61.

²⁸¹ Act 1, Scene V.

²⁸² Morag Henderson. Loc 2802.; Morley. 115.; See also, Helen Grime. *Gwen-Ffrangcon-Davies, Twentieth-Century Actress*. Routledge. 2016. 61.

Bohemia, including her death.²⁸³ Act II, Scene 1 is set at the King's palace at Sheen, and it is Anne's death, along with the death of De Vere at the end of Act 1, which forms the pivot of the plot from showing Richard's reign as an experiment in new ideas to showing old fashioned forces slowly and methodically defeating the King's agenda. Anne's death, in Daviot's play, comes very suddenly, and in the middle of good happenings: earlier in the scene Richard declared his majority by saying, "I am of age; and since I am not insane, I am fit, *by law*, to share in the government of the country and in choosing of my ministers," and Richard has finally managed to negotiate a tentative peace with France in the immediate fore-action to her falling ill. Her illness and death take place entirely on stage. She complains of "A little chill" to Gloucester early in the scene, but her falling mortally ill and dying takes place in a little more than four pages at the very end of the scene. Richard is rejoicing in his new command of his government, asking the rhetorical question, "Who says I am not a king?," and further suggesting to Anne that, in order to strengthen control of Ireland, "I've been thinking. Anne, wouldn't it be a fine idea to make pilgrimage to Ireland? You could teach the women to wear—Anne, you're not listening!" Richard's rhetorical question, "Who says I am not king?," indicates the general spirit of this scene: Richard feels in control of his kingdom and its affairs, which is broadly speaking an accurate read on how Richard's reign was trending around the time of Anne of Bohemia's death. The answer to the question is implied to be "no one," because Richard has finally come "of age" and been able to "share in the government of

²⁸³ See Margaret Shewring. *Shakespeare in Performance, King Richard II*. Manchester University Press. 1996. 12.

the country and in choosing of my ministers.” Further, Richard intends to take Anne on a pilgrimage, a remark which underscores Daviot's choice to portray Richard as a pacifist—the historical Richard went on an expedition to Ireland around the time of Anne's death in order to help quell rebellion and reaffirm the loyalty of the Irish, but it was a militaristic expedition, rather than a religiously inclined one.²⁸⁴ The exclamation which interrupts Richard's planning, as he says “Anne, you're not listening!,” occurs because Anne has begun to show outward signs of illness.

What happens next is swift, dramatic, and full of further exclamations by Richard, something which is characteristic of how Daviot renders his speech. Anne goes from chilled to dead in the space of three pages up to the “CURTAIN” direction at the end of the act. Her demise begins with her complaining of cold, to which Richard responds “Cold! In this weather? What is the matter with you?,” to which Anne replies, “I don't know. I have shivers up and down my back, and I feel--strange.” Richard questions if she is ill, and she insists that she is not, but Richard responds to her refusals and further description of her symptoms by saying, “you frighten me.” She responds to his fear by stating, “There isn't anything to be frightened of. Besides, Richard of Bordeaux is frightened of nothing. Hasn't he faced his enemies for three years and outfaced them in

²⁸⁴ This expedition was, however, one of the main points of contention between Richard II and his government because it was expensive, and required authorizing the raising of funds to occur. Anne of Bohemia's death occurred almost in the middle of Richard's demands to parliament to grant him the funding for his expedition to Ireland, which took place between the autumn of 1394 and spring of 1395 See Nigel Saul, *Richard II*, Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 258-290; and Christopher Fletcher, *Richard II, Manhood, Youth, and Politics, 1377-99*, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 240-248, including a compelling discussion of how this expedition formed part of Richard II's attempts to figure himself as a man, rather than a boy, and seize stronger authority as king.

the end!" Anne's description of Richard as "frightened of nothing," and a man who "outfaced" his enemies shows her high esteem for him, something which has been consistent in Daviot's characterization of her, while her first statement of "There isn't anything to be afraid of" indicates the inevitability of events which characterizes the whole scene because we, as the audience familiar with British history, know that Anne of Bohemia dies. Richard calls for Anne's "waiting-woman," and Anne continues talking almost as if nothing is wrong; she asks "It is true about the peace with France, isn't it?" to which Richard responds, "Yes, our dream is coming true" right before the Waiting Woman enters and Richard commands Anne to "go to bed." She tells Richard, "You are a tyrant, Richard. Do you know it? You bully your most faithful and loving subject," by telling her to go to bed, a line of relatively playful banter which does not belie how she is about to collapse when she tries to stand. The Doctor arrives on stage as she collapses, telling Richard "You must keep away," "because you are the King.... You have a duty to your subjects, and the contagion is deadly. Richard exclaims, "Oh, no! No!," then "Anne! Anne!" and finally "*flings himself against the DOCTOR'S detaining arm*" before the curtain closes.

Act II, Scene 2 also goes beyond Shakespeare's material as it features the destruction of the palace at Sheen and as it animates Richard's selection of the young French princess as his second wife. Richard, while talking to Gloucester, says, "Be assured, my Lord. You will never come to Sheen again," then further explains, "I have given orders that the place shall be pulled down." To this, Gloucester questions him, "Pull down the palace of Sheen? Are you crazy? What wantonness of destruction is this?"

In response, Richard insists, “What I destroy is bricks and mortar” before remarking that, “If all reports are true, England is well content. I may even yet become popular, it seems.” These lines, taken together, show Richard's increasing disconnect, after Anne's death, with the agenda of his kingdom. Gloucester thinks Richard is "crazy" for tearing down what he terms mere "bricks and mortar," showing the beginnings of reignited conflict within Richard's government. The reignited conflict between Richard, Gloucester, York, Arundel, and Mowbray continues in this scene, as Richard tells them of his plans that, "At the earliest possible moment I shall marry the daughter of the King of France," which is a means to his long sought ends of having stable peace with France and no more war. Gloucester, Arundel, and York are incensed by this suggestion, exclaiming respectively, “A French alliance,” “Marry a child! A child of eight!,” and “My dear Richard—! You can't be serious.” Their objections, that a “French alliance,” and a marriage to a "child of eight" “can't be serious” addresses the heart of Richard's new conflict with the Lords surrounding him in Daviot's play; his pacifism and search for peace is now joined a new lack of care for his potential issue and the succession of the realm. York tries to persuade him away from the marriage match, explaining that “There are other things to be considered [besides peace]. There is—there is the matter of an heir for instance.” Richard replies “*savagely*,” “Have my uncles not children enough!” Daviot’s choice to animate the conflict in this scene presents a clear interpretation of Richard's second marriage and the destruction of the Palace of Sheen, tying together his grief for Anne and the destruction of the Palace to his choice of second wife and his (and Anne’s) pacifist desire for lasting peace with France.

In his choice to pursue peace with France above all else, Daviot's Richard once again alienates himself from the political structures around him which are invested in upholding the hereditary monarchy of England. Scene 4 of Act II offers the audience another set of commoners who provide a critique of Henry and a further interrogation of the theme of heirs and reproduction. Two Pages are "*leaning by the railings and watching the ball*" at the Palace of Westminster, and one of their topics of discussion is Henry (Bolingbroke), with the First Page commenting that "Henry is putting on weight, isn't he? He must do himself well on those crusades," and the second page responding "He does himself well always. Hadn't he seven children before he was thirty?" These lines are gossipy in nature, and associate plenty with success; Henry's increasing body size is seen as a sign of his doing "well on those crusades," while his seven children is a sign of his doing "well always." However, the two pages do not harbor much fondness for Henry, as becomes clear when the First Page says, "I think I can hear his [Henry's] voice booming from here. Between his voice and the children I don't wonder his wife died," a comment which is critical and cold and somewhat troubles the earlier association of plenty with success because his "booming" voice is characterized negatively, and that voice combined with the large number of children are implied to have killed his wife. The pro-Ricardian sentiment of this play again shines through in these lesser characters, and is again linked to a critique of reproduction and or the mainstream ethics of plenty or excess being a mark of success.

These themes in the play of pacifism, of resistance to dominant power structures, of questioning and/or critiquing the idea of inheritance and family structure are not only

interesting in terms of how they interpret Richard II's life, but are also interesting in terms of how they link to Gordon Daviot's own life. The concerns that we can see in Daviot's interpretation of Richard II's life and Shakespeare's *Richard II* in *Richard of Bordeaux* intersects with her own particular historical moment and the life of John Gielgud. When Daviot saw John Gielgud act Shakespeare in 1930, she became convinced that she had found the vehicle to bring her research about Richard II to life, and began to draft *Richard of Bordeaux* in earnest. Daviot sent the manuscript to John Gielgud in early 1932, and he was enamored of the idea that it was written especially for him. Reflecting upon his first reading of it in *An Actor and His Time*, Gielgud writes of this that, "I thought her script for *Richard of Bordeaux* charmingly written, with vivid characters drawn lightly and without pomposity."²⁸⁵ He found the part of Richard particularly appealing in contrast to Shakespeare, explaining, "The part of Richard was written with a great sense of humor, and was a splendid opportunity.... [whereas] Shakespeare's Richard, although a wonderful part for an actor, has no humor and can be monotonously lyrical."²⁸⁶ Gielgud credits Daviot's play with advancing his career, saying that it gave him the vehicle for his "own first West End success as a director ... in 1933," and that "*Richard of Bordeaux* was a big stepping-stone in my career."²⁸⁷ Gielgud, however, was not entirely satisfied with the first draft of the play, and sent it back to Daviot with a number of significant edits, most of which removed politically inclined historical details

²⁸⁵ London: Penguin Books. 1982. 104

²⁸⁶ Gielgud. *An Actor and His Time*. 104.

²⁸⁷ Gielgud. *An Actor and His Time*. 104, 105.

and reoriented the focus to the personal.²⁸⁸ This play was, indeed, part of how John Gielgud became John Gielgud, but it was also Gordon Daviot's first theatrical success, and the text which resulted in Gordon Daviot becoming part of the social circle of gay and lesbian actors, Gielgud included, and who form part of the transhistorical queer affinity around Richard II and his literary afterlives. Gielgud's positive view of Daviot's play was, in part, due to his desire to work with "plays that would provide substantial parts for several actors" rather than a mere "star vehicle" for himself.²⁸⁹ This is how Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies became involved in the production, a recruitment by Gielgud that would provide Gordon Daviot with a close friend.

Beyond the subject of Richard II in *Richard of Bordeaux*, Daviot had a broad interest in misunderstood and maligned figures of history. She wrote two plays featuring such figures, *Queen of Scots* about Mary, Queen of Scots, and *Dickon* about Richard III, as well as a novel, *The Daughter of Time*, about the historical myths surrounding Richard III, and a biography of John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, entitled *Claverhouse*.²⁹⁰ The history which Daviot chose to animate in these examples of her

²⁸⁸ Morag Henderon. Location 2357.; The materials which document this exchange are available at the Inverness Museum and Art Gallery, or possibly at the Highland Archive Center, in Scotland.

²⁸⁹ Jonathan Croall. *Gielgud: A Theatrical Life 1904-2000*. London: Continuum Intl. Pub Group, 2001. 156.

²⁹⁰ *Queen of Scots* was not one of Daviot's more successful plays, and even she admitted not being happy with it.; As one of the five novels in Josephine Tey's series of mysteries featuring Alan Grant, *The Daughter of Time* tells the story of Grant investigating the case of the Princes in the Tower and coming to the conclusion that Richard III was probably not a murderer, and that our view of him as such is colored by subsequent Tudor propaganda.; John Graham Claverhouse was a sympathizer of James VII after his deposition, and he was an antiestablishment leader in post-Glorious Revolution Scotland. Morag Henderson. Location 3322

work directly “contend with a less tidy past,” while “contending with legacies of failure,” as Jack Halberstam puts it in *The Queer Art of Failure*. The reality that Gordon Daviot is not well remembered or well known as an author of this history asks us to confront the relationships between success, failure, history, and subject matter. In the immense success of *Richard of Bordeaux*, and the forgetting of its existence by most of the literary and theatrical world, although not by the world of those who acted it in and their most ardent fans, *Richard of Bordeaux* troubles the relationship between success and failure in a way that highlights the queer affinities of the play and Richard II. It is a play about a usurped monarch which makes that usurpation out to be unjust, a fact which becomes most clear at the very close of the play. In the end of the final scene, Maudelyn, played by the same actor as the Fair Page from the opening scene, informs the imprisoned Richard that the Commons are “complaining of [Henry’s] extravagance.” Richard exclaims “Extravagance! Isn’t life amusing? Extravagance! How Robert would have laughed” in response, before the final curtain. The stage directions indicate that Richard “savors” this final line, indicating that he appreciates the deep irony of the new King being accused of the same fault as him. The “extravagance” of the monarchy appears to be an intractable condition, as does the Commons’ disquiet with it. Richard has failed to remain king, but his replacement seems to be doing little better when it comes to controlling the Commons and having his prerogative respected. In her writing of *Richard of Bordeaux*, Daviot rehabilitates Richard II into a relatively sympathetic character, but does not rehabilitate the status quo of the monarchy and its power structures. This ironic ending, combined with Daviot’s broader interest in other oft-maligned historical figures

and her own sometimes misunderstood way of being in the world come together to form a picture of the operations of history writing and our own participation in the telling of history and stories and the queer affinity which has accrued around the subject of Richard II.

A Plague Over England: *Nostalgia, Oppression, and Shakespeare's Richard II*

de Jongh's 2008 play, *Plague Over England*, presents itself as a window into the horrific "before times" of gay rights, and in the end comes across somewhat like a "Mission Accomplished" poster for the cause, which makes it fascinating from a queer theory and an LGBTQ+ history perspective. To de Jongh, it is clear, the victories of the gay rights movement are total enough that we, as his audience, need to be reminded of our homophobic past and its horrors so that the success of the current era can be appreciated. The way in which that presentation comes across is, however, surprising in that it seems to long for oppression, due in large part to a partial presentation of the history of events, yet also deeply tied to the transhistorical affinity which exists for the subject of Richard II and *Richard II* and the theatrical tradition of how King Richard is acted in *Richard II*, a tradition which is inextricable from John Gielgud's own life and fame. The longing for the bad old days, which we can see in de Jongh's play, is jarring, although it seems to stem directly from de Jongh's own life experience as a gay man born in 1944, and his long time involvement in gay rights and gay advocacy work in the UK. de Jongh is a noted theater critic and reporter who wrote for both the *Evening Standard* and the *Guardian* during his career, and an openly gay man. While he was known for his

“waspish” critiques of theatrical productions, it is also of note that, as far as possible, he sees himself as focused on gay subjects in his reporting.²⁹¹ In an interview about a later dramatic foray, *The Unquiet Grave of Garcia Lorca*, de Jongh is asked about his time at the *Guardian*, and he reflects, “The *Guardian* wasn’t very keen on gay issues and I was the only gay man around, as far as I knew. . . . So I interviewed quite a lot of gay people for them. I picked up gay stories that no one else would touch.” Similarly, about his time at the *Evening Standard*, he commented, “I went on writing gay-related articles at the *Standard* whenever I could. Derek Jarman was a friend of mine and I was delighted to give him the chance to talk about his films and let people appreciate his stoic, inspiring bravery in the face of AIDS.”²⁹² In another interview, in advance of *Plague Over England*’s premier, de Jongh revealed that the police officer character, who we see in the sub-plot struggling to navigate a gay relationship in an intolerant working class world, was “based on two people I knew” who “probably are dead,” and who had been de Jongh’s lovers in the 1980s. de Jongh comments further about these men, that after he ended the relationships “by my stupidity,” he never saw them again, remarking “Like gay life—people just vanish.”²⁹³ This last comment, as well as the earlier context de Jongh feels is important to his own work, reveals part of what I see to be de Jongh’s motivation for writing *Plague Over England*— to record these aspects of “gay life” before they may

²⁹¹ Simon Hattenstone. “Interview: ‘I’m disgusted by the old me’.” *The Guardian*. February 22, 2008. <https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2008/feb/23/theatre>

²⁹² Jesse Dunford Wood. “Interview: My West London Life.” *West London Living*. October 2, 2014. <https://www.westlondonliving.co.uk/people/my-west-london-life/nicholas-de-jongh/>

²⁹³ Hattenstone. “Interview.”

“vanish” into the ether in a post-liberation era. de Jongh misses (at least some of) the aspects of gay life which have, to him at least, vanished and this informs the portrayal of the events on which *Plague Over England* focuses. Of course, for me, writing in a renewed era of vitriol and hate against LGBTQ+ communities in 2022, this seems at best quaint, at worst short-sighted, but this personal history contributes to de Jongh’s tone in the play and the focus he chooses in the historical events he does and does not portray.

Plague Over England stands as a museum to John Gielgud’s mostly-closeted and once-prosecuted life, while also presenting a fictionalized window into the experience of gay men more generally, and, via a time-lapse fantasy at the end, a progress narrative. As should be clear from the previous sentence, the play has several sections, which are at times disjointed. In the opening of Act 1 de Jongh presents three scenes as vignettes of England in the 1950s to show how the police were “hunting queers” in Hyde Park after dark, and how the political and judicial establishment were determined to persecute and prosecute gay men.²⁹⁴ In the rest of its first act, which, after the vignettes, begins with Gielgud’s arrest for cruising in a bathroom in London, the play goes on to convey the suffering Gielgud experienced due to his arrest and shows Gielgud as a paradigmatic example of what life was like for gay men in the homophobic climate of England in the 1950s, while using a pair of fictional characters, including the police officer from the Gielgud sting, to show the tensions of gay intimacy before it was possible to be out in

²⁹⁴ Nicholas de Jongh. *Plague Over England, A Play*. London: Samuel French, 2009. 1.1-3.; I say “cruising,” although the term in the UK in the 1950s was “cottaging.” Both terms describe the same behavior.

public.²⁹⁵ The second act shows theatre as a place of redemption and acceptance for Gielgud in that homophobic world, and also exhibits, in a rather nostalgic way, more aspects of gay intimacies through its continued focus on the fictional couple and a number of scenes in a gay bar named Queen Mab's, the name of which is another nod to Shakespeare and to Gielgud's fame as a Shakespearean actor. At the very end of Act 2, de Jongh presents a fantasy sequence, where Gielgud and some other characters from Queen Mab's observe a gay pride parade in the future.²⁹⁶ It is the fact of gay rights and of progress that creates the romanticization in the text; de Jongh implicitly brings the view from 2009 to all of the events within the play, varnishing darker happenings with a known better future.

When it premiered in London, *Plague Over England* was well received, although not without criticism. Critics variously remarked that, although flawed, “[i]t [wa]s an extraordinary insight into the dramatic changes in social attitudes to gay life in the last fifty years,” and, “where it matters the play proves touching and true, memorably mixing its real-life characters with fictional ones, and evoking its period with wit and sensitivity.”²⁹⁷ Criticism related largely to its overly symmetrical plot, and to the end sequence which “did not feel particularly satisfying given the world of the well made play we had been cocooned in. But it prove[d] a nice metaphor for the changes in society—and in theatre—there [sic] were coming. You fe[lt] unnerved and disoriented

²⁹⁵ 1.9-15.

²⁹⁶ 2.1-13.

²⁹⁷ “Reviews: Plague Over England.” londontheatre.co.uk February 23, 2009.; Charles Spencer. “The kind-hearted critic: Nicholas de Jongh’s Plague Over England.” *The Telegraph*. March 3, 2008.

and s[aw] the world change in front of your eyes.”²⁹⁸ As can be seen in these comments, one of the overarching impressions we get of this play, as readers or spectators, is that it highlights the changes that have taken place in society in a way that largely feels good, at least at first blush. de Jongh’s play tells the audience to pity John Gielgud’s misfortunes while also reveling in how much progress has been made, which, in 2008, meant being four years past the passage of the Civil Partnerships Act and British society becoming increasingly accepting of queer subjects. This, however, is not all there is to say about this play. For starters, the unsatisfying nature of the end sequence indicates a larger blind spot of the play which was pointed out by Claudia Pritchard in her review, where she writes, “the implication that everything is all right now is oddly parochial—homosexuality is still illegal in 80 countries.”²⁹⁹ Pritchard’s point, that the play is remarkably limited in cultural scope is true: it stays in England, about English gay rights. To Pritchard’s point, this does feel surprisingly closed-minded for a play focused on society becoming more accepting, especially in the closing Pride Parade sequence. But the ending, I think, is also unsatisfying because the play is nostalgic for the past and therefore fails to deal with the full realities of that past in its romanticized portrayal. It also feels, when regarded from the third decade of the twenty-first century when LGBTQ+ communities are suffering renewed social and political attack, optimistic to the

²⁹⁸ Michael Billington. “Review: Plague Over England, Duchess, London. Four Stars Out of Five.” *The Guardian*. February 23, 2009.; “Plague Over England—Review, Duchess Theatre.” westendtheatre.com February 23, 2009.

²⁹⁹ Claudia Pritchard. “Plague Over England, Duchess Theatre, London.” *The Independent*. March 1, 2009.

point of being naïve about how durable the victories of rights movements are. The Gielgud character speaks the last, wildly optimistic line of the play saying, “Strange how the past loses its sting in the end.”³⁰⁰ That idea, of no longer being stung by the past with its homophobic atrocities (and the implication that such things no longer happen), seems to be what de Jongh wants to want to say, yet the play itself, and in particular its counterfactual use of part of Richard II’s “What must the king do now?” speech as the fulcrum of the plot, gestures toward the aforementioned nostalgia the text has for the era of persecution it portrays. It calls on John Gielgud as the definitive King Richard in *Richard II*. This moment, through its use of Shakespeare’s King Richard coming out of John Gielgud’s mouth, cements the play in a long literary and theatrical tradition—giving the scene a cultural weight and importance that was not there in the facts of events, but is embodied in the transhistorical affinity this play (and its audience) have for Richard II and *Richard II*. de Jongh’s play, as I will show, registers awareness of how time and history operate and the way that victory for gay rights resulted in lost intimacies and ended certain ways of being in the world, as Heather Love suggests in *Feeling Backward*. The past may have lost its sting for de Jongh, but losing that past is its own kind of conspicuous absence for him as well, and losing the sting is another loss.

Act 1 ends with the John Gielgud character taking the stage after his conviction. In scene 15, the sequence of events and placement of Gielgud’s speech from Shakespeare’s *Richard II* at the close of the act, strongly implies that the historical John Gielgud played Shakespeare’s Richard II in some theatrical production around October

³⁰⁰ 2.1.

20th, 1953, which is a counterfactual detail based on available records, including Gielgud's own letters. While Gielgud did reprise the role of Richard II in 1953, it was as part of a special production Bulawayo, Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), not a regular theatrical production in London as de Jongh's portrayal suggests.³⁰¹ Between October 20th 1953, when he was arrested, October 22nd 1953, when he was fined £10 and told to seek the help of his physician by a magistrate, John Gielgud was, however, starring in *A Day by the Sea*, opposite Sybil Thorndike. There are two possibilities for this seeming error in de Jongh's sequence of events: that de Jongh is confused about his dates, because the historical Gielgud did play Richard II for the Lyric Theatre in December, 1952, or that de Jongh is intentionally interpolating Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the character of Richard II into his play. If intentionally interpolated, de Jongh's choice is likely linked to the queer affinity which exists around the historical Richard II and productions of *Richard II*, because putting this speech here further joins together Gielgud's fame for playing Richard II with his own queer life, although de Jongh mis-remembering who Gielgud was playing the night of his conviction as King Richard in *Richard II* would make largely the same point. With how readily available the historical details of

³⁰¹ John Gielgud. *Sir John Gielgud, A Life in Letters*. Richard Mangan, Ed.. London: Arcade, 2012. 165.; Benjamin Britten. *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten, 1913-1976*. Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, Eds.. Berkely: University of California Press, 1991. 137.; Sherridan Morely also notes, in *John Gielgud, The Authorized Biography*, that Gielgud was not particularly proud of this performance in Bulawayo. Gielgud said, of it, "On the verge of my fiftieth year I was simply too old for it [the part of Richard], and all I really achieved was a rather poor imitation of the performance I had given in London sixteen years earlier," and "I was terribly disappointed to find that, contrary to all my expectations it [playing Richard again] gave me no pleasure at all." 258.

Gielgud's performances, and twentieth-century theatrical performances more broadly, are, the second of these options seems likely, especially likely when we take into consideration de Jongh's note in the front of the play that "this is not quite a realistic play," which, while directly addressing staging concerns in the front matter of the text, seems to also characterize the text more generally, leaving room for historical improvisation and approximation.³⁰² In *Plague Over England*, Gielgud takes the stage as Richard II the night that news of his conviction broke and Shakespeare's King Richard's suffering is thereby affined with the particular tragedy of gay persecution during the post-war era, and the suffering caused by that persecution, that de Jongh is interested in in Act 1.

The presence of these lines, as I hint at above, and as I explained in more detail at the outset of this chapter, is fundamentally linked to the significant twentieth and twenty-first-century theatrical tradition of coding of Richard II as explicitly gay, which is, further, impossible to disentangle from John Gielgud's particular fame for playing Richard II beginning in 1929 at the Old Vic. Charles Forker has described this tradition, as an "obvious, if misguided means of conceptually unifying a role that incorporates imperious demeanor, personal vanity, histrionic flamboyance, wit, love of ceremony and display, weeping, artistic sensibility, deep-seated insecurity, physical handsomeness, selfishness, cruelty, masochism, and, ultimately, martyrdom."³⁰³ Forker's point is that Richard II being gay explains him in a way that makes him comprehensible in the

³⁰² *Plague Over England*.

³⁰³ "Unstable Identity in Shakespeare's Richard II." 16.

present/modern day where sexuality is one of the main identity categories that defines people and their relationship to power structures. As Forker also points out, this portrayal is “misguided” when it comes to understanding what Shakespeare is getting at in his play, and what the historic Richard II likely experienced as the limits on his own power and bodily autonomy as an historical person. Forker makes a further point in his essay, that “Richard’s emotional volatility and psychological complexity, frequently discussed in other contexts, stem essentially from conflicts inherent in his dual role as king and man—as both *rex imago Dei* and as fallible mortal,” which, through our watching of Richard's downfall in the play, “point[s] perhaps to larger uncertainties and instabilities in the shifting conception of the state” because “the deposition of a legitimate monarch signaled the irreparable crack-up of th[e medieval world] order with the implication of terrible consequences to ensue, both to individuals and to the body politic.”³⁰⁴

Forker’s “crack-up” is not only an historical event, as much as he argues it be viewed as such because, from the perspective of recent queer theory, the “crack-up” he identifies is a crucial part of the transhistorical queer affinity which encompasses both Richard II and *Richard II*. As many queer theorists, including Lee Edelman, through his critique of our future-oriented political and social discourse, Leo Bersani, through his positing of asocial sexuality, and Judith Butler, through her articulation of gender as construct, have addressed, the threat of queerness to the current social order is the threat of what Forker terms a “crack-up” of our world order by exposing the arbitrariness of all of our seemingly naturalized social institutions related to sexuality, gender, love,

³⁰⁴ Forker. “Unstable Identity in Shakespeare’s Richard II.” 3, 18.

marriage, inheritance, and the family. Here, although the position of a king is one which does not strongly resemble the experience of most queer people throughout history, there is a point of identification which has, “misguided” as it may have been, resulted in the conclusion made by filmmakers like Goold, and playwrights like de Jongh, and, we may speculate, actors like Gielgud, although he never addressed it, that Richard II, in *Richard II*, should be played as gay and which is the source of the queer affinity that exists around this subject.

Further, the queer affinity which exists around Richard II and *Richard II* invokes Carolyn Dinshaw’s ideas in *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*. Shakespeare’s play embodies the breach in world view between the medieval way of thinking, articulated by King Richard, and a more modern view of kingship of Shakespeare’s time, articulated by Bolingbroke. This breach of world view is a fact of the play’s plot, but, as Charles Forker has observed, it requires mediation to be comprehensible to present-day audiences. The breach of world view, the “crack-up,” has been, as Forker has again observed, linked to homosexuality in production in order to provide this legibility, whereby recent productions often direct Richard as contemporarily gay, and which is also a fact inseparable from John Gielgud’s life events and other roles, including his role in Gordon Daviot’s *Richard of Bordeaux*. The title *Plague Over England* itself calls on the medieval because of the word “plague,” which, while mostly referring to homosexuality in the extended use of the word as “something which causes constant, incessant, or overwhelming trouble or annoyance,” also brings to mind the

Black Death and the literal sense of plague and, therefore, the fourteenth-century.³⁰⁵

Here, we can see an example of what Carolyn Dinshaw astutely points out in her book: in our contemporary world, the abject, the queer, and the medieval are often aligned, and that this alignment can result in misuses and misrepresentations of medieval history in ways which align it with contemporary queerness. She makes this point through her analysis of Michel Foucault's use of the Middle Ages, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, as the contrast point to more recent regimes of sexual identity. As Dinshaw explains, Foucault, in his "tactical, forward-looking and resistant" use of the Middle Ages, "is fictioning history [of the Middle Ages] on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, in order that he can fiction a politics not yet in existence." Foucault, in correctly identifying that the regime of power governing sexual acts and social identities in the Middle Ages was substantially different from that which came later and which is currently oppressing him as the writer of this history, makes what Dinshaw further terms "nostalgic" use of the Middle Ages. In his nostalgia, "the Middle Ages Foucault most deeply desires is a time whose lack of unified sexuality is *preferable* to the present with its 'fictitious unity' of normative heterosexuality, a time whose sexual disaggregation is not to be feared but can for the future offer a creative, even liberatory potential."³⁰⁶ de Jongh's interpolation of lines from *Richard II* into *Plague Over England* is related to this impulse that Dinshaw identifies in Foucault's work.

³⁰⁵ *OED* .

³⁰⁶ *Getting Medieval*. 205.

In Act I, de Jongh positions the newly convicted Gielgud as Shakespeare's Richard, and this positioning draws together the queer affinity which I posit exists around Richard II and the nostalgia for foregone eras which *Richard II* and *Plague Over England* both exhibit. It is my contention that de Jongh's play contains within it a nostalgia for the era in which Gielgud was arrested, while the idea that Shakespeare's *Richard II* is nostalgic for the end of the Plantagenet era and/or enacts a kind of sixteenth-century medievalism has long been established. As reproduced in de Jongh's text, Gielgud's lines at the end of Act 1 are

What must the king do now? Must he submit?
The king shall do it. Must he be deposed?
The king shall be contented. Must he lose
The name of king? O' God's name let it go. (*He stands*)
Down, down I come like glistering Phaeton,
Wanting the manage of unruly jades.
In the base court? Base court where kings grow base
To come at traitors' calls and go them grace.
In the base court? Come down? Down court, down king!
For night owls shriek, where mounting larks should sing.³⁰⁷

This interpolation serves two functions in the play here: it shows Gielgud the character playing a Shakespearean roll, and thereby connects with the historical Gielgud's most well known acting; and it draws a parallel between the misfortunes of the historical Gielgud, the historical Richard II, and the dramatic representations of both. In choosing Richard II as the role which Gielgud plays the night of his conviction, the play deploys the character of Richard II in a way that underscores his transhistorical queer affinity. At this point of *Plague Over England*, these words from Shakespeare voice character-

³⁰⁷ 1.15.

Gielgud's uncertainty about the future of his career after his arrest. The lines serve as a metaphor where Gielgud, as a famous Shakespearean actor, is a kind of "king" who is facing the possibility of his own "deposition." These lines, by way of that metaphor, ask us to read Gielgud as a King Richard II, and to draw a parallel between a threat to the legitimacy of a coronated king's rule and the legitimacy of a knighted actor as the best of his generation. By using these lines from *Richard II* in this part of the play, de Jongh is revealing the history he too desires of events—lending them increased gravitas through the presence of Shakespeare and relying on the cross-temporal identification of Shakespeare's Richard with homosexuality to add another layer of depth to that night, which would likely not be adequately conveyed by lines from *A Day by The Sea* (the play Gielgud was actually rehearsing at the time). The cultural import of all things Shakespearean unites with the otherness of medieval things in de Jongh's play to make this an inflection point in *Plague Over England* that rewrites history by way of desire and nostalgia. In his medieval-ness, Shakespeare's Richard is open to a similar use by de Jongh in his play that Foucault makes of the entire time period—to be an alternative to present-day regimes of homosexual oppression.

The speech in de Jongh's play splices together lines 143-146 of 3.4 with lines 178-183, omitting 58 further lines of Richard's speech, as well as two intervening lines by Northumberland. Because *Richard II* has often been subject to extensive cuts in performance, it is possible that this cut and splice is one familiar to de Jongh from theatrical performance and/or accurate to a version of the lines performed by the

historical Gielgud, although this would be difficult to determine definitively.³⁰⁸ The splicing, however, emphasizes a certain image of Richard II from the play, which de Jongh is here tying to Gielgud and his troubles: that of Phaeton drawing Helios's chariot and being unable to control what Shakespeare here terms the "jades," or wild horses, which draw it. "Jade," in this use, is "a contemptuous name for a horse," but also "a term of reprobation applied to a woman. Also used playfully, like *hussy* or *minx*."³⁰⁹ "Jade," "hussy," and "minx" are, of course, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*—which may have something of an outdated and homophobic blind spot here—words that refer to women whose sexuality does not correspond to socially accepted norms. It is, however, not a stretch to see how these words could apply to male lovers in the context of Gielgud speaking them because of the common use of gender-coded sexual insults in gay rhetorical culture and slang.³¹⁰ Beyond the straightforward sense of these lines, that Phaeton could not control his father's horses and fell from the sky, these lines imply that Gielgud and Richard II could not control their own "jades" and in one case could have

³⁰⁸ What can be ascertained clearly is what is missing from the speech as it is presented in *Plague Over England*, which is a long meditation on exactly what, in both material and philosophical terms, Richard II would be losing in being deposed or in giving up being king. Possibly of further note: in the 1960 audiobook recording of *Richard II*, where John Gielgud is Richard II, the ending of 3.4 is retained in its entirety.; *Shakespeare Network*.

³⁰⁹ *OED*.

³¹⁰ See: Greg Jacobs, "Lesbian and Gay Male Language Use: A Critical Review of the Literature," *American Speech*, Spring, 1997, Vol. 71, No. 1, 49-71; Stephen O. Murray, "The Art of Gay Insulting," *Anthropological Linguistics*, Vol. 21, No. 5, 211-223. The use of insults related to sexual behavior and sexuality is complex and not exclusive to the realm of gay, lesbian, or otherwise LGBTQ language. For a study of this problem and how the relationships of other forms of sexual insults in speech, in particular those of women's language, has been relatively under-studied, see: Don Kulick, "Gay and Lesbian Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 29, 243-285.

fallen, and in one case actually did fall from grace. Gielgud's conviction for cruising contained the potential of his own fall from the sky of fame, and this connection strongly invokes the sexual connotations of the word jade, while these connotations tie character-Gielgud to the plausibly homosexual historical Richard II, even though Richard II's historical fall was not tied to homosexual indiscretion but was plausibly tied to Richard's lack of issue, and therefore his lack sexual normativity. For Richard II as he is depicted in Shakespeare's play, these lines clearly refer to the influence of his inner circle, figured by Shakespeare as Bushy, Green, and Bagot, and invoke the idea that Richard II's rule was led astray by a set of horses he could not control, which may or may not include (homo)sexual possibilities and which ties character-Gielgud to King Richard through the queer affinity I have traced throughout this chapter.

The interpolation of this speech ties Richard II's historical troubles to John Gielgud's historical troubles, and this serves to cast a positive light on King Richard, one which John Gielgud himself shared. In his own reflections on playing Richard II in *Richard II* Gielgud commented, "it is a rewarding part, with lovely things to say, and I thought it suited my personality."³¹¹ As the previous section of this chapter illuminates, it was through a combination of his early career performance in *Richard II* and *Richard of Bordeaux*, that John Gielgud became strongly associated with the role—particularly in its Shakespearean form—along with the role of Hamlet. This strong association between Gielgud and the role of Richard II is probably, at least in part, why de Jongh interpolates the Richard II speech into a time/place when Gielgud was not playing Richard II. There

³¹¹ John Gielgud. *Acting Shakespeare*. New York: Macmillan, 1991. 52.

is something more to this association as well, and it has to do with John Gielgud not openly discussing his sexuality throughout his life.³¹² The strong tie between John Gielgud and Richard II in *Richard II* is a kind coding—a public nod toward his sexuality, the truth of which was only widely acknowledged in his private life, while also forming, in and of itself, part of the broader queer affinity that exists around Richard II and productions of *Richard II*, as I mentioned at the outset of this chapter.³¹³ de Jongh’s explicit reclamation of John Gielgud for gay history, by making a play out of an episode of his life that Gielgud never discussed, is, I think, tied to his use of the *Richard II* speech in the play in this way and is further evidence of the queer affinity around these subjects.

At this point, it must be said that there is an uncomfortable aspect to de Jongh’s reclamation of Gielgud because Gielgud actively avoided becoming part of the gay rights movement, although de Jongh is not the only one who talked about Gielgud’s sexuality after his death and saw him as a key part of gay and queer history. Every obituary I can find of Gielgud mentions his sexuality and the 1953 incident, as does his final biographer, Sheridan Morely, who spoke with him at length while writing the biography. It is also clear from Gielgud’s letters that everyone who knew him in a personal way was aware of his sexuality, particularly in his later years. As Ian McKellen writes in his own obituary

³¹² Given his 1953 prosecution and the publicity surrounding it, I think it would be incorrect to think of Gielgud as fully “in the closet,” yet he did not discuss his sexuality with the press or the public and did not appear publicly with any of his partners throughout his life.

³¹³ See Note 7 in, Charles R. Forker has documented this tradition extensively in a note to his article “Unstable Identity in Shakespeare’s *Richard II*.” *Renascence* 54, no. 1 (Fall, 2001): 3-22, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/unstable-identity-shakespeares-richard-ii/docview/194936512/se-2>. 20-21.

of Gielgud, “he never wanted to be publicly involved in gay concerns. Privately he sent regular contributions to Stonewall, the UK lobby group.... [But] I had asked him to allow Stonewall to publish that he was a benefactor- ‘No, no, no, no’ began his reply,” indicating Gielgud's lack of openness but not a lack of engagement with LGBTQ+ concerns.³¹⁴ McKellen remarks, later in his “Tribute” to Gielgud, “What a pity that he couldn't accept his honoured position as one of the most distinguished gay men who contributed so much to world theatre and, of late, to the film industry,” a comment which reflects at least part of de Jongh’s motivation in writing his play as well. Moreover, the inclusion of his arrest and prosecution is something that was central for Gielgud’s final biographer. He writes, “the only way of writing fully about John’s life, as opposed to his work, which had already been handsomely chronicled elsewhere, was to confront the issue of his arrest for homosexual soliciting in 1953, and that was precisely what John wanted me to avoid” in writing the new biography.³¹⁵ Morely, along with de Jongh and McKellen, sees Gielgud as significant as part of gay history in Britain, beyond his work as an actor.³¹⁶ Notably, in the “Acknowledgements” of his biography, Morely reveals

³¹⁴ Ian McKellen. “Tribute, John Gielgud (1904-2000).” mckellen.com May 22, 2000.

³¹⁵ Morely. 8

³¹⁶ Britain, in the 1940s and 1950s, experienced a period akin to the Lavender Scare in the United States, although it went far beyond the halls of the government, where homosexual people were outed by those in positions of power. Gielgud’s arrest for cruising/cotaging led to a fairly large degree of public outrage, conveyed through a newspaper debate of sorts, about how homosexuality was being prosecuted/persecuted in Britain in the 1950s, and how Britain was out of line with contemporary European laws in this regard. Gielgud’s arrest, prosecution, and subsequent continued career success came in the middle of the end of this era of active persecution, coming a few months before the more notorious arrest of Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, Michael Pitt-Rivers, and Peter Wildeblood for buggery, which directly precipitated the formation of the committee

“John had given me all of his own letter and private papers,” and that “John must have known what was in them,” which “would destroy the secrecy in which he had managed to shroud his past.”³¹⁷ Morely is, naturally, motivated in how he describes his interactions with Gielgud regarding this matter, but the handing over of his personal letters indicates to me that Gielgud had some kind of acceptance of the fact that his sexuality would be openly discussed after his death. Gielgud’s refusal to discuss his sexuality seems to have been more of an official and public stance rather than a deeply guarded secret. One common narrative of the British/English gay rights movement puts Gielgud and his arrest for cottaging, at the origin of the modern day movement, and so the impetus to tell that story and demonstrate Gielgud’s “honoured position” in history is understandable, but it

which would produce the Wolfenden report. The report would, in 1957, recommend making consensual same-sex relationships legal. The recommendations of the report in regard to homosexuality were not made law until 1967 via the Sexual Offenses Act of that year, superseding both the Buggery Act of 1533, portions of the Offenses Against the Person Act of 1861, and the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 (sometimes known as the Labouchere Amendment), the later of which is the law under which Oscar Wilde was infamously prosecuted. It must be mentioned that, while John Gielgud was merely fined for his offense, the three men in the other case mentioned above were all imprisoned for between twelve and eighteen months. Of note, in regards to this whole situation, is that Gielgud never claimed the Wolfenden Report as part of his own legacy, while Lord Montagu, Pitt-Rivers, and Wildeblood all acknowledged it in a positive way, and Wildeblood was an active campaigner in the early days of gay rights.; For a near-contemporaneous commentary on the Wolfenden report, with the overall point that the Wolfenden Report does not go far enough tolerating homosexuality, see Eustace Chesser, *Live and Let Live The Moral of the Wolfenden Report*, Heineman, 1958.; For a near-contemporaneous review of the Wolfenden report, from a psychoanalytic point of view, see Charles Berg, *Fear, Punishment Anxiety and the Wolfenden Report*, Ruskin House, 1959.; For a more recent, annotated edition of the evidence presented in the Wolfenden Report, alongside historical information about the witnesses as far as is available, see Brian Lewis, *Wolfenden’s Witnesses Homosexuality in Postwar Britain*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2016.

³¹⁷ 9, 10.

is important to acknowledge that John Gielgud did not want to hold that place in history, even if he eventually found some acceptance of it, as Morely recounts.

To fully appreciate de Jongh's Foucault-esque nostalgia, and the use of John Gielgud's personal history the play makes, we must appreciate his use of the lines from *Richard II* in the broader context of events in *Plague Over England* and in the broader context of events of John Gielgud's real life. In the scene which precedes the speech from *Richard II*, scene 15, character Gielgud and Binkie Beaumont are having a conversation about Gielgud's misfortunes.³¹⁸ Gielgud enters Binkie's office, and he has to tell Gielgud that he is on the cover of the *Evening Standard*, because of his conviction. After handing Gielgud a copy of the paper, Binkie says "Yes, it's most unfortunate," to which Gielgud replies, "But they said there wouldn't be any press. (*Pause*) I was seen early." When he says "seen early," Gielgud is commenting on the fact that at his court appearance, he was seen first thing so as to reduce the possibility of publicity; Binkie's words that "it's most unfortunate" indicate what turns out to be his overall assessment of this incident—unlucky in the utmost, but not Gielgud's fault. They discuss the matter further, and we hear Gielgud say "I'm finished," then "I'm ruined," then "I've let you all down very badly. I can only apologize." After Gielgud says "I'm ruined," Binkie responds, "A tricky

³¹⁸ "Binkie Beaumont" refers to Hughes (Hugh) Griffiths (Binkie) Beaumont (1908-1973). He was a noted theater manager in the West End, founding H.M Tennent Ltd. alongside H.M. (Harry) Tennent; when Tennent died of a sudden heart attack in 1941, Beaumont took over the company. He "did more to raise the standard of the London theater than any other manager, past or present. This company was very successful, especially in the years immediately following the WWII. The company's success was, in part, because of Binkie's close friendships with John Gielgud and Noël Coward (another famed stage actor of the era). Binkie Beaumont was also a gay man. *ODNB*

situation, yes. Ruined? Certainly not!” This scene shows some of the inner workings of the theater management world of the 1950s West End, while also depicting the friendship between Gielgud and Beaumont, and gesturing more generally to the large circle of gay men who ran the West End of which they were a part. Gielgud clearly views the publicity surrounding his conviction as the end of his theater career, while Binkie believes it is just a “tricky situation,” which Gielgud can navigate through; this is further emphasized by Binkie’s insistence that Gielgud not panic until after the theater company’s board meeting that evening. This conversation, with Binkie’s relative kindness and self-assured impression that it will not “ruin” John’s career is another moment where de Jongh, reconstructs events to align them with his own historical desires, and in doing so, contributes to the nostalgic tone of his play and his Foucault-esque nostalgic use of history, where de Jongh renders an approximation of the historical events related to Gielgud’s arrest and conviction with a more intimate register and more exclusively gay social horizon.

de Jongh is not wrong, in his portrayal of these events, that the West End theatrical community bet on John Gielgud’s fame and popularity as capable of seeing him through this crisis. The way in which the details are presented is, however, inaccurate in significant and telling ways. For starters, it was not Beaumont who broke the news to Gielgud that his conviction had made the papers; rather, he found out himself during rehearsals for *A Day by the Sea*, and it was Sybil Thorndike and the rest of the people working directly on *A Day by the Sea* who interacted with Gielgud in the immediate aftermath of his reading the newspaper headline. When Gielgud returned to the

production for afternoon rehearsals, Sybil Thorndike is reported to have said “Oh John darling, you have been a silly bugger!” or “Well, John, what a very silly bugger you have been.”³¹⁹ Thorndike’s daughter, however, contests this account, believing her mother to have never used such crude language in public, and citing a letter written to her brother that same day which states, “John G has been a bit indiscreet again and it’s a great worry... but we went on as if nothing had happened today!”³²⁰ Furthermore, the son of Lockwood West, another cast member on *A Day by the Sea*, recounts his father telling him that Thorndike said, “John, you’ve been very naughty, but we don’t want to talk about it now, we’re all friends here so let’s get on with the rehearsal.”³²¹ These accounts vary in word choice, but they do not vary in sentiment: Thorndike’s words brought Gielgud back into the fold of the production and showed support of and friendship towards him. The pithier versions of her quote, involving the word “bugger,” seems less likely to be the true one because of the accounts given above by her daughter and the child of one of her costars, and its being rather too on the nose of the situation. It is interesting, however, that this episode does not make it into de Jongh’s play, nor does Thorndike directly interact with Gielgud during this time immediately around his conviction, especially given the possible dramatic and comedic potential of Sybil Thorndike’s apocryphal commentary. Much like the earlier interpolation of the lines from *Richard II* into his play, de Jongh’s creation of this scene between Binkie Beaumont and

³¹⁹ Jonathan Croall, *John Gielgud Matinee Idol to Movie Star*. New York: Methuen Drama, 2011. 392.; Morley. 269.

³²⁰ Croall. 392-393.

³²¹ Croall. 392-393.

John Gielgud, instead of between Sybil Thorndike and John Gielgud, changes the tone of what happened. Gielgud is, in de Jongh's version of events, talking to a gay male peer, rather than an older woman, which emphasizes the way de Jongh's play shows gay history more than anything else.

It is also not entirely inaccurate for de Jongh to frame Gielgud's processing of his being outed by the *Evening Standard* headline as involving Binkie Beaumont, but Gielgud's biographers make it clear that Sybil Thorndike's role in the immediate aftermath of his seeing the papers that day, and her role in helping him on stage on opening night of *A Day by the Sea*, were more crucial in his surviving this period and remaining part of the theater community than anything particular Beaumont said or did that day. The portion of events which did involve Beaumont is, however, markedly different than how de Jongh represents them. In Scene 15 of Act 1, Binkie mentions the "board meeting at seven," where the board of the theater company in the play will meet to decide Gielgud's fate with the company, in light of his conviction. Again, how this is represented by de Jongh, and what Gielgud's biographers recount happening at this meeting is markedly different. Act 2 opens with a conversation between Gielgud and a character named Chiltern Moncreiffe, who is a theater critic whom John Gielgud talks to often throughout the play; Binkie enters, coming from the board meeting.³²² Gielgud asks, "What did the board say?" to which Binkie responds, "Nothing clear-cut. We're in a wait-and-see position," explaining that they have "decided to pause for twenty-four hours. Consider the morning papers and so forth." These lines indicate that the board

³²² As far as I can tell, Chiltern Moncreiffe is not an historical person.

meeting, which took place the night of the *Evening Standard* story, resulted in their deciding to wait and see if they would need to either pull John Gielgud from the *A Day by the Sea* production in Liverpool, or pull the production entirely; “the board” is also figured as a remote entity, with Binkie being the only representative of it we see or Gielgud seems to know.

As Gielgud’s recent biographers recount this meeting, however, it was not really a board meeting, and the people who met were all well known to John Gielgud. Johnathan Croall and Sheridan Morely both term what occurred that night a “crisis meeting,” initiated by Binkie Beaumont and John Perry, who convened a number of other actors at their shared apartment: Angela Baddeley and her husband Glen Byam Shaw, Lawrence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, Ralph Richardson and Meriel Forbes, as well as the assistant stage manager from *A Day by the Sea*, and John Gielgud’s brother Val.³²³ This shows a wildly different community existing around John Gielgud than the lack of community that de Jongh’s play implies. Yes, the nexus of this meeting was Binkie Beaumont, but it encompassed many more people who held different levels of importance in Gielgud’s life and the world of the West End. Notably, for understanding the personal side of this meeting, John Perry, actor and playwright, was Gielgud’s romantic partner until Perry left Gielgud for Beaumont, and the three men remained close until the deaths of first

³²³ The details of who exactly all of these actors were is not hugely important for this essay, but all of the names listed here were actors who ran in the same circles as John Gielgud and Binkie Beaumont. They worked for or with the H.M. Tennent organization at least sometimes, even if, as with Olivier and Leigh, they did other work in other places as well. We should understand this collection of names as an impressive collection of contemporary talent and a major force in London theater at the time.; Croall. 392.; Morely. 270-271.

Beaumont, then Perry. In terms of what the meeting decided, it was much less equivocal than de Jongh's play represents, and the non-equivocal conclusion of it was made via two types of relationship that de Jongh writes out of Gielgud life—those with family and those with women. As recounted by Croall and Morely, while Beaumont was cautious about leaving Gielgud as lead in the play, all but one other person at the meeting thought he should remain in his role. The dissenting voice was that of Lawrence Olivier, who suggested that “they announce that Gielgud had suffered a nervous breakdown,” and while Gielgud was sent on a trip to recover, Olivier could take his place in the play.³²⁴ To this suggestion, Vivien Leigh is reported to have said, ““You’re a cunt Larry, you’ve always been jealous of John, and you know perfectly well that if he doesn’t open in the play on Monday night, he’ll never act again.””³²⁵ At the same time, Gielgud’s brother Val, who was a producer at the BBC and who had evidently come to the meeting only for this purpose, told Binkie Beaumont that if John were not allowed to continue in his role and with the company, that he would publicly release the names of all the actors, directors, and other theater employees in H.M. Tennent who were part of Beaumont’s circle of gay friends and colleagues. This was an ominous threat which, if enacted, would have destroyed a powerful theater empire and likely resulted in legal consequences for many of them.³²⁶ This record of the meeting, its constituents, and their conclusions is, as I have already suggested, markedly different from what de Jongh recounts and, similarly to the earlier scene where he leaves out Sybil Thorndike’s role, I cannot believe that those

³²⁴ Croall, 392.

³²⁵ Croall, 392.

³²⁶ Morely, 271.; Croall, 392.

editing choices were made for lack of dramatic potential in what happened according to the best sources we have available. What these alterations do, however, is make the world in which the character John Gielgud operates in much smaller and much more exclusively male, and gay male at that. We can note in the list of actors who were present at the meeting that this meeting included three heterosexual couples, showing that Gielgud's social circle (and by inference Beaumont's) was not exclusively male or exclusively gay. This reality, however, disrupts de Jongh's nostalgic portrayal of Gielgud's persecution and prosecution in the play. By showing Gielgud nearly isolated, speaking with only a theater critic (an obvious Mary Sue for de Jongh himself) and Binkie who, in the play, appears to be only his manager and not also an intimate friend, de Jongh romanticizes Gielgud's plight in a nostalgic way as he paints a picture of events that is deeply sentimental. This sentiment is an unhappy one, dwelling the isolation and social tenuousness, but in this it is still nostalgic in a Foucault-esque way. Deviating from the events as they took play, where Gielgud's personal crisis was taken up as a collective crisis by some of the most important actors of his day—importantly including women actors—rather than just a business matter for his manager, and where Val Gielgud was willing to use his professional power to protect his brother, de Jongh's image of 1953 depicts the past in a way that makes separation from mainstream society and relative isolation constitutive of Gielgud's experience. This reflects the play's broader nostalgia for an era of secrecy and separatism that may never have fully existed, as shown by the details of how the historical Gielgud was surrounded by support structures.

Nostalgia, operating in a very similar way to what Dinshaw identifies in Foucault's work, for a time when sexuality was markedly other to the now is evident in how *Plague Over England* narrates and alters the history of Gielgud's conviction. The nostalgic and sentimental tone of the text continues through the play, but is particularly notable in the ending. As I described earlier, the end of the play contains a time jump fantasy sequence—a structure which is in and of itself longs for the past while also revealing a future-past. Act 2, Scene 13 takes place in the “Dudmaston Mews public lavatory,” which is the public bathroom where the sting operation which entrapped John Gielgud occurred in Act 1, Scene 11. Here, Gielgud returns to the public bathroom with Greg, who was also in the bathroom during the sting operation, and they encounter Witherby, the bathroom attendant, who asks, “Trip down memory lane before we close down?” as he is cleaning the stalls. At this point, the year is 1975, and the Victorian public bathrooms of London are being closed down and replaced with more modern conveniences, a fact which shows both progress and loss, as the conversation in this scene reveals. Witherby comments, “I’m afraid we got too popular [the bathrooms],” while Greg remarks that, “This place changed my life,” and Gielgud says, “I’ve very mixed memories,” about the bathroom and its significance to them. As Witherby moves to continue cleaning, Greg and Gielgud have a conversation in which it becomes clear that Gielgud recognizes Greg as the man who tried to stop him from getting arrested “That night,” as he says “You tried to save me.” Their conversation illuminates what the loss of these bathrooms means for them personally and for the gay community more broadly, with Gielgud telling Greg that he came to the bathroom because, “I was always

tempted by risk—and danger,” and Greg explaining why he was in the bathroom that night by stating, “I’m eighteen again. No one in the world knows I’m gay. I’m anxious all the time,” and “I’m only here to watch.” In this conversation, Greg and Gielgud are discussing a specific past event, but in a way that characterizes the historical environment of popular cruising bathrooms such as the Dudmaston Mews. Gielgud’s frequenting them for the “risk” and “danger” interweaves with the young Greg’s desire to “watch” and learn how to be gay, a fact which “no one” knew at the time of Gielgud’s arrest, details which animate an historical world for the play, and the fantasy world of this sequence. The fantasy of the scene deepens as Terry, the police officer from the sting, who we have followed in the other half of the play as Greg’s long term romantic partner, who says “They’re playing our song,” to Greg, in response to “*the sound of chanting Gay Liberation marchers*” outside the bathroom. At Greg’s prompting, Terry asks Gielgud, “Wait a minute. Didn’t I arrest you once?” to which Gielgud responds, “You did indeed. Fortunately there wasn’t a twice.” Terry then apologizes to Gielgud for the arrest, and they shake hands.

At this point, Witherby reenters the scene, saying “Well, gents. You won’t believe this. But there’s these queer marches coming down our way. And people coming out to look.” Greg wants Gielgud to come with him to join the march, but Gielgud does not want to, as he says “Think of the scandal if anyone saw me,” to which Greg replies, “You’d be a great gay hero—if you only stopped hiding in the closet and came out on a march,” and “If it wasn’t for you it would have taken years longer to change the law.” These lines, which recount the issue I discussed earlier, of activists like Nicholas de

Jongh wanting John Gielgud to take his place in the history of gay rights, fail to convince Gielgud he should take part in the march, as he concludes, “They’ll always hate us and harry us.” Terry exits the bathroom and “*vanishes,*” followed by Greg, who *walks across the stage and out of sight,*” after which Witherby re-enters with a tea service, and he and Gielgud chat about the past over tea and biscuits. Then, in the very last lines Gielgud says, “The parade’s gone by,” to which Witherby replies, “You can only look back,” and Gielgud then says, “Strange how the past loses its sting in the end.” This last scene explicitly brings up many of the tensions I have identified in *Plague Over England* and the material it covers in regards to both Foucault-esque nostalgia and the queer affinity I have documented around Richard II and *Richard II*. John Gielgud was still afraid of causing another “scandal” here, while younger gay men, embodied by Greg and Terry, wanted him to join the gay rights cause, telling him that he could be a “great gay hero” if he did so. The very last line of the play, where Gielgud tells Witherby and the audience that, “the past loses its sting in the end” brings about the creation of John Gielgud as a kind of hero in this play. By losing its “sting,” the “past,” which refers to the events of the play but also to the pre-gay-rights era more generally, stops hurting Gielgud’s character in this moment. He is thereby, at least partially, created as the “hero” Greg wants him to be; even though he does not participate in the gay rights march, by having his story told on stage in this play, character Gielgud is enacting his place as part of the pantheon of gay rights figures in the UK.

Simultaneously, the play is deeply aware that John Gielgud’s fame as a Shakespearean actor was, in large part, how and why his arrest and prosecution in 1953

did not end his career, and, as this chapter has documented, Gielgud's particular ties to the role of King Richard in Shakespeare's *Richard II* were key to that reputation, which ties this play and the events it depicts to the queer affinity around Richard II and *Richard II*. These links are impossible to disentangle, because the relationship between King Richard, in *Richard II*, frequently being directed as contemporarily gay and John Gielgud's fame for the role and his direction of the play as part of his actual gay life is discursive. What is, however, clear from the foregoing analysis is that the link between the man and the role is enduring and forms part of Nicholas de Jongh's vision of how and why John Gielgud mattered enough to theatrical and gay history to write *Plague Over England*. His nostalgic (mis)portrayal of the history surrounding Gielgud's prosecution both shines light on the horrors of one of England's most homophobic eras and obscures the broader community of men and women, gay and straight, where John Gielgud navigated his biggest scandal. In its Foucault-esque nostalgia, the play reclaims Gielgud, as shown rather too clearly in its last scene, as a kind of "hero" for the gay rights cause in the UK, and in doing so makes Gielgud into a transitional symbol he never wanted to be. This reifying of Gielgud into a symbol for a past age, and the spectacularizing of his suffering which goes along with it, and de Jongh's direct interpolation of lines from *Richard II*, ties the play and its Gielgud character all the more deeply to *Richard II*.

Plague Over England, in these ways, shows the transhistorical affinity of Richard II, *Richard II* and queer experience this chapter advocates for. This affinity binds the fraught life of Richard II to later texts and later lives through an understanding of shared queerness between those in this affinity and Richard II. Both John Gielgud and Gordon

Daviot found Richard II interesting as a subject of study in their respective roles as writer and actor because of their affinity for his queerness and their own queer experiences. Gordon Daviot's modern adaptation of the history of Richard II, in *Richard of Bordeaux*, and the queer experiences and gay life of John Gielgud in particular, while not at all aligned with the experiences of Richard II in specific terms, create an affinity for his subject and form part of the theatrical tradition of representing Richard II, in *Richard II*, as queer. Nicholas de Jongh's work takes part in this tradition as he narrates a particularly difficult moment in John Gielgud's life that stemmed from his identity as a gay man. In total, these texts expand our understanding of the queerness of Richard II to encompass not only his historical moment, but also in how his history was narrated into the future to become part of queer history.

Appendix: [A Footnote and Letter: Richard II's Companionate Marriage in the Archive](#)

Among the many notable elements of Richard II's reign is the fact that there is a surviving letter between Richard II and Anne of Bohemia, dating to 1392. This letter, however, has not been accessible outside of the manuscript in which it is contained until now. I believe this is because the letter has been subject to mis-citation in Nigel Saul's *Richard II*, the main source in which it has recently been discussed at length, which made the letter harder to identify than it might have been. I mention this mis-citation in a note to Chapter 3; it is my purpose here to correct this mis-citation and to provide a transcription of the letter. The mis-citation is due to the simple transposition of an "I" and an "X" in roman numerals. Saul writes "on the rare occasions when [Richard and Anne] were separated they kept in touch by letter," as evidenced by the letter I am concerned with here in which "the archbishop of Canterbury and the abbot of bury... agreed to let Anne's bailiffs temporarily execute writs on their behalf." The footnotes attached to these two comments cite to the same manuscript, given as "Cotton MS Tiberius BXI, fo.90r," which is incorrect.

The letter is, in fact, contained in Cotton Tiberius BIX, where it is indeed on f.90.r. Cotton Tiberius BIX is a book recording the letters sent from the Abbey at Bury St. Edmund's, and includes the king's correspondence from when he visited; f.89.r reads "Dep. le Roy," sectioning it off from the correspondence of others. Unfortunately, Cotton Tiberius BIX was one of the victims of the Cotton Library fire and is badly damaged. The edges of its pages were shrunken and curled by the fire, and are now mounted to flatten them, leaving a number of tears on both edges of each leaf. This makes portions of the

manuscript impossible to read and all pages more difficult to read than they otherwise might be, including f.90.r. The letter is written in Anglo-Norman, although most of the rest of the manuscript is in Latin. As far as possible, I transcribed the Anglo-Norman to be found on these pages, and then translated it with assistance from Kristen L. Geaman. Portions of the letter have, thus far, proven impossible to decipher; these are represented by ____ below. The letter reads as follows:

Very dear and entirely well-loved companion, I greet you with the sounding of my entire heart because of various disputes which had been at issue between the Archbishop and the prior of Canterbury on the one part and the Abbey /Abbot of Bury Saint Edmund's in the other part. The return of writs in the town of Had[ley] and Illey which are within the franchise of the said Abbot. Because of the pleas/dispute between the said persons, the writ was given to Thomas Curson, at that time sheriff of Suffolk, to execute all the writs that were prosecuted in the said vill, of which your ministers are executing within the said vill. And now likewise is undertaken between the said archbishops and prior [of Canterbury] and the council of the said Abbot who I and my ministers will execute the writs of the said town as others [who] are stewards of the franchise of Bury do within the honor. Wherefore send to you by the bearer of the said writs for our king which are you not entrusted to do the execution of the many return of writs within the seven hundred and ____ which are called the franchise of Bury which are within the said vill. By which I pray you so entirely of all my heart like I am the more powerful and like I put my faith in you ____ I wish you to change your ministers who are more able [to do] the return of all the writs which are pursuant within the said franchise to me and which honor is not mixed within the said franchise in the aforesaid of my said office. Very dear and entirely well-loved companion if anything is within my person which you desire me to do entirely [ask] and I will do it with all my power And I pray etc. Written in London on the 13 day of May

[Tres chier et es-ent(er)ment bien ame compaignoun jeo vous salue es-sonent de es-entier coer c'est-por ceo qui/que diverses debates onnt estez per/par entre lerceveske et priour de tant dime part et labbe de Bury Saint Esmon [Edmonds] dan l'tre part sour retourn des briefs en les villes de hadllley [Hadley] et Illey [Illey] qui/que sunt deniz le franchise de dit Abbe Sur quoi pendant le plee par entre les dits persones. Brief fint mande a Thomas Coursoun a-donc-quis vis de Suff[olk] de faire execucion des toutz les briefs queux fuerinit persuys deniz les

dites ville per cause de quelle voz ministres font execucioun deniz les dites ville. Et ore accordi est pris par entre les ditz Ercevesque. Priour et le conseil de dit Abbe qui ies et mes ministres serroms execucioun des toutz briefs deniz les dites vill come au l'tres qount estes seneschalles de la franchise de Bury sount fait de nuit ces heures Sur quoi jeo voz envoie par le porto[r] de cestes Brief mes _____ le Roy qui/que voz plus ne melleres de faire xcucion de mille Retorn de Brieft deniz les sept hundres et dr qui sunt appellees le franchise de Bury deniz quelle ditz les ville sunt Par quoi vous pri si esentement de estout mon coer come jeo plus puisse et come jeo maffie en vous _____ vous vueillies charger voz ministres qils facent plus Retornes des toutes briefs qui sunt p suys deins le dit franchise a moy et qils ontne ne se mellerent denis? le dit franchise en p indite de mon dit office Tres chier et esentement bien ame compaignon si rienz soit enuers ma psone qui/que jeo fair prisse/puisse me vueillez entier et jeo le ferra a toute mon pouair/Et pri et c Escr a Lonndres le xiii de May]

This letter is typical of medieval letter writing in that it deals with business matters and only sounds personal in the framing of the contents. As Geaman has pointed out in her recent book *Anne of Bohemia*, this letter “indicat[es]” Richard’s “affection for her” with the phrase ““very dear and entirely well-loved companion.””³²⁷ In its singularity, it forms a critical part of our understanding of Richard and Anne’s relationship, emphasizing its companionate nature while also reflecting how Richard and Anne were engaging fully in the standard matters of governing the kingdom. The companionate nature of Richard and Anne’s relationship and the existence of correspondence between a king and his consort which reflects that relationship, was typical, not unusual among Richard’s predecessors, and can be seen as one of the ways in which Richard II and his marital relationship did conform to expectations. As Lisa Benz St. John documents, in *Three Medieval Queens: Queenship and the Crown in Fourteenth-Century England*, Richard II’s immediate predecessors had relationships with their queens that included letter writing and sending

³²⁷ London: Routledge, 2022. 39.

the queens on business-type missions around the kingdom, and even internationally. For example, Margaret, queen to Edward I, corresponded with her husband via letter as he travelled around the realm, and Edward II's queen, Isabella, also kept in touch with him via letter when they were separated, including when Isabella acted as an ambassador to France in 1314.³²⁸ The letter from Cotton MS Tiberius BIX f.90.r illustrates a moment in Richard II's reign when, in 1392, Richard II and Anne of Bohemia were engaging in standard matters of governance, with the king delegating certain matters to the queen as part of his prerogative. It is, in this sense, nothing special. In its lack of unusual contents or qualities, however, it illustrates, from 1392, an alternative, more normative path via which the history of Richard II may have gone by showing how Anne of Bohemia, in her queenly duties, was closely parallel to her predecessors.

³²⁸ 36, 38, 33.

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