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## The Medievalism of Emotions in *King Lear*

**Abstract:** *King Lear* exemplifies two cultures of feeling, the medieval and the early modern one. Even though the humoral theory lay at the heart of the medieval and the early modern understanding of emotions, there was a sudden change in the understanding of specific medieval emotions in Renaissance England, such as honour as an emotional disposition. Emotional expression also changed, since the late Middle Ages favoured vehement emotional expression, while in early modern England curtailment of any affective responses was advocated. Early modern England cut itself off from its medieval past in this manner and saw itself as “civilized” due to this restraint. Also some medieval courtly rituals were rejected. Expression of anger was no longer seen as natural and socially necessary. Shame started to be perceived as a private emotion and was not related to public shaming. The meaning of pride was discussed and love was separated from the medieval concept of charity. In contrast, in *King Lear* the question of embodiment of emotions is seen from a perspective similar to the medieval one. The article analyzes medievalism in terms of affections and studies the shift from the medieval ideas about them to the early modern ones.

**Keywords:** medievalism, emotions in Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Reformation in England, humoral theory.

*King Lear*, a medievalist play that has as its source an episode from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regnum Britanniae* (c. 1136) (Geoffrey of Monmouth 81-87), is a text where two cultures meet. Shakespeare returns to emotions that were important in the medieval literary texts and he simultaneously distances himself from the world of the medieval past. Here medievalism is going to be understood in the formulation T.A. Shippey gave it: as “responses to the Middle Ages at all periods since a sense of the mediaeval began to develop” (Matthews 1). The turn away from the medieval was characteristic of Reformation England, particularly due to the Protestantization of England during the reign of Elizabeth I (Bagchi 47), since English culture tried to separate itself from its Roman Catholic past by casting off the medieval.<sup>1</sup> Mike Rodman Jones notes, however,

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<sup>1</sup> At the same time, such critics as E.M.W. Tillyard saw the early modern period as a continuation of the Middle Ages in its various manifestations (Tillyard 1959).

that the early modern period was marked by simultaneous rejection of the medieval, visible in the Dissolution (of monasteries), and reworking of the medieval, which he calls “the first post-medieval medievalism” (93). Early modern medievalism “existed in a kind of tension between destruction and generation, inspiration and adaptation” (Jones 90). The culture of feeling was inspired by medieval emotions, even if it rejected or criticized some of them. It adapted emotions (or emotional dispositions) such as honour for its own purposes. Furthermore, *King Lear* represents the two cultures of feeling in terms of the emotional expression in them: the medieval culture where emotions need to be expressed in order to be noticed, and the early modern perspective, where the expression of feelings should be restrained. The curtailment of emotional display was favoured in the English Renaissance for religious reasons (Karant-Nunn 2010). Even though *King Lear* is a medievalist play, Shakespeare distances himself from medievalist emotions and demonstrates some of the emotional differences between the medieval and the early modern cultures. The medievalist emotions of honour, anger, shame, and pride are the ones that Shakespeare addresses in *King Lear*. They are different from the historical and literary emotions usually found in the studies of early modern England. For example, Bradley J. Irish’s *Emotion in the Tudor Court: Literature, History, and Early Modern Feeling* is focused on disgust, envy, rejection, and dread as expressed in literary and historical texts about specific members of the Tudor court. He traces disgust in the literary and historical accounts of Cardinal Wolsey, envy in those of the Earl of Surrey, rejection in the case of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Sir Phillip Sidney, and the dread and dreadfulness of the Earl of Essex (Irish). In *Being Protestant in Early Modern England*, Alec Ryrie (17-98) discusses such early modern emotions inspired by Protestantism as despair, mourning, desire, and joy. In *King Lear* Shakespeare, however, is concerned with those emotions that used to be central to the medieval culture.

This analysis needs to be performed from the perspective of the history of emotions. Around twenty-five years ago, the so-called affective turn started to be noticeable in the humanities (Eustace et al. 1486-1531; Trigg 3-15). An interest grew in how emotions were expressed and verbalized in the past and how they are noticeable in human physiology. There were reassessments of Charles Darwin’s theorization of how emotions are expressed on a human face (Rosenwein and Cristiani 12, 80), William James’s interest in how the body itself experiences emotions (Rosenwein and Cristiani 14-15), the cognitivist and social constructionist approaches, and Sigmund Freud’s hydraulic model of emotions, in which the drives build until they find an outlet (Rosenwein and Cristiani 10) and which was similar to the early modern understanding of how the soul works (Park 469). Literary studies have also been influenced by this turn, but the matter of emotions became complicated in the case of studying literary texts from the past. It started to be debated whether emotions from the past could ever be analyzed in the manner in which the modern feelings are.

The terminology of feeling that the history of emotions uses is also taken from the times when the medieval was transforming itself into the early modern. The hydraulic theory of emotions as something that is moved out of the body is much older than Freud's considerations, since the term derives from the Latin term *e-movere*, which means "to move outside." In fifteenth-century France the term *emotion* was used in the context of uprisings and popular revolts (Boquet and Nagy 6), but the idea of emotions as something that flows from the inside and moves outside had been used earlier. "Passion" was an older word, and at first it was used as a translation of the Greek *pathé* and was the same as the Latin *pator*, "to suffer patiently" (Meek and Sullivan 10).<sup>2</sup> In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the term *affections* followed, which could be used in specific contexts, but was also applicable to a myriad of feelings (Meek and Sullivan 11). *Sentiment* was a term that appeared later, in the context of the eighteenth-century culture of Sentimentalism, the first "affective turn" noted in the history of Western culture.<sup>3</sup>

Yet another term for feeling is "mood," and this is a word that can be situated within the ancient and medieval humoral theory of emotions. The Aristotelian and Galenic thinking about feeling related what was happening to the soul with the physiology of the human body. As Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan write about emotion in Shakespeare, "the immaterial soul injects its potent form" onto the material body and this is how "mental and emotional processes" can be explained (1). In Shakespeare's time the humoral theory may have been the main explanation for how emotion was embodied (Meek and Sullivan 1). In *King Lear* the terminology related to the ancient and the medieval theory of emotions is also present:

Kent:

... Such smiling rogues as these,  
Like rats, oft bite the holy cords atwain  
Which are too intrince t'unloose: smooth  
    every passion  
That in the natures of their lords rebel,  
Bring oil to fire, snow to the colder *moods* [emphasis mine-A.C.];

...  
(2:2:77-82)<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Meek and Sullivan (10) refer to R.S. White's study "*False Friends*": *Affective Semantics in Shakespeare* for a discussion of the creative uses of the term *passion* in his plays (286-299).

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the eighteenth century as the time of "sensibility" see, for example, Alex Wetmore's *Man of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Literature* (1-25).

<sup>4</sup> All the quotations are from *King Lear* from Duthie and Wilson's *The New Shakespeare* edition (Duthie and Wilson).

Here “passion” is not related to the ancient and medieval *pathé/patior*, but rather to the emotion that rebels in the lords’ inner self and should not be “smoothed,” but moved out in order to culminate in some action. The “smiling rogues,” such as Oswald, Goneril’s steward, exacerbate the humoral condition of their masters, which is compared to bringing “oil to fire, snow to the colder moods” (2:2:76). The humours, cold, hot, wet, and dry, are generated inside, but on the outside they should be tempered rather than made even more potent. The evildoers’ intention is to make worse what is already bad in their masters’ bodily fluids. They are like rats not only in offering all too easy solutions to complex problems, but also in encouraging the behaviour that has its source in the human temperament.

The humoral theory is both an instance of medievalism in the early modern period and a theory that was a cornerstone of thinking about emotions in Shakespeare’s time.<sup>5</sup> The Aristotelian and Galenic humoral theory was believed in and practiced from antiquity through the Middle Ages to the early modern period, and this makes it exceptional among other concepts that will be discussed here.<sup>6</sup> In general, in terms of the history of emotions in *King Lear* there appear elements that belong either to the Middle Ages, which makes them forms of medievalism, or are characteristic of early modern times. Emotions, or at least their expression and conceptualization, belong to various cultural periods and they have to be seen as distinct, depending on the period we are discussing. This is how the history of emotions goes against the premises of affect theory, which argues that emotions are inborn and unchangeable, regardless of the historical period one lives in. The term “affect” is used to denote both all emotions and one of the emotions that can be felt (Rosenwein and Cristiani 11). On the opposite pole of the unchangeable “affect” there lies social constructionism, which assumes that emotions are learned and therefore depend on the historical period one lives in. There is variation among them that is culturally determined. The social constructionism is useful in research on medieval and early modern emotions and it appears to be more relevant to them, since it focuses on emotions expressed and not on those that were felt, since the latter are impossible to retrieve.

Some of the emotions from older periods are not no longer identifiable as such. In 1985 Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns famously announced the advent of the discipline they termed “emotionology.” It was formulated in order to study what the Stearnses called “emotional standards” (813-836) as they

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Paster’s magisterial study (Paster).

<sup>6</sup> Yet another influence that the ancient culture exerted on Shakespearian drama in terms of conceptualization of emotions was emotions in literature that were taught in the early modern period as a part of the grammar school education; Shakespeare also had access to this pedagogy of emotions and later used it in his plays (Enterline).

changed over time, hence this theory is still very much applicable to the study of, for example, medieval and early modern emotions. The Stearnses (813-836) accepted a division into six basic emotions (happiness, sadness, disgust, fear, surprise, anger), but the division proved to be unnecessary in the case of the older cultural periods. After all, both the Middle Ages and the early modern period are full of emotions that are no longer identifiable as types of feeling. For example, honour used to be seen as an emotion, while nowadays it is rather conceptualized as an emotional disposition. Ute Frevert (40) called honour one of the “lost emotions”, i.e. an emotion that is no longer recognizable to us. This is how honour features alongside love in *King Lear*:

Goneril:

Sir, I love you more than word can wield the matter;

Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty;

Beyond what can be valued rich and rare;

No less than life with grace, health, beauty, honour;

...

(1:1:54-57)

Among the values listed in this brief catalogue the only emotion is honour. Nowadays it is identified as an “emotional disposition” rather than an emotion *per se* (Frevert 41). The list of valuable things that Goneril voices may be telling in the light of what is going to happen in the plot: Gloucester and King Lear are going to lose their eyesight and they will lose everything else that is of real value. They will lose their liberty, the space they occupy will have to change due to their future exile, and they will have no share of grace, health, or beauty any longer. They both cherish the honour of medieval knighthood at the moment when King Lear organizes the contest for his daughters, but this honour will be lost for them as well. Rob Boddice argues that honour as an emotion was bound up with its expression in the social context:

[it was] bound up intimately and intrinsically with dynamics of power and social practice, where the outward display was the presence of these emotions as an essential component of a social relationship with power and the maintenance of social practice (90).

In *King Lear* some characters use the word “honour”, but it is no longer the chivalric value from the medieval world. The chivalric world is disintegrating before our eyes in Shakespeare’s play and what follows is a world of moral corruption and of people for whom honour is only an empty word. Even though Goneril is familiar with the need for social relationships and social practice, her swearing by honour is vacuous, since there is only the outward display of it and no inner feeling. She understands the need to talk about her love, even though

her version of love is perhaps closer to the need to use the father and reject him afterwards than to what is conventionally seen as filial love. When she talks about “A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable” (1:1:59), she contradicts herself, because she is able to speak when confessing love to her father. Shakespeare notices the importance of honour as something of medieval provenance, but writes about this emotion or emotional disposition as a value that is losing its importance.

The question of how emotions should be expressed becomes the site of conflict in the scene that is crucial for the plot: the scene when filial love is to be declared. The issue belongs both to the medieval past and to the early modern present of Shakespeare’s audience. Expression of emotions is medievalist in this scene since it refers to the courtly rituals and to a specific vision of the Middle Ages that historians of emotions, such as Johan Huizinga, held at the beginning of the twentieth century. Huizinga famously argued that medieval emotions were expressed very openly, especially in public. On the other hand, in early modern England the containment of emotions became a cultural norm. Emotions started to be expressed in restricted forms and at times indirectly, through some material rituals, such as the ringing of bells to announce the death of an important person (MacKinnon 169-181). This norm was shaped by political, social, and cultural factors. Excluding the period when religion was something merely political during the reign of Henry VIII and the return to Catholicism imposed by Mary Tudor, increasing Protestantization of England meant that the Protestant norms of behaviour and of emotional expression became accepted.<sup>7</sup> The social norms started to follow Protestant patterns, since a religious discourse of emotional restraint was combined with the discourse of “civilization”, and being civilized meant that you were able to contain the expression of your affections.<sup>8</sup> To quote Richard Strier, in Renaissance England “being ‘civilized’ is equated with being repressed rather than being ‘jocund’, ‘affable’ or ‘liberal’” (Strier 6). Repression of emotional expression became a societal and cultural norm. The consequences of the change were political, since through this emotional change England distanced itself from the Pope in Rome and from everything related to the times when it had still been a “papist” country. Steven Mullaney summarizes the process in *The Reformation of Emotions in the Age of Shakespeare*:

The Reformation in England sought . . . to make the break with the past a felt as well as a preached and proclaimed thing, an affective distantiating that would make theological and political reform more lastingly effective (3).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of emotions in Luther’s writings see: Karant-Nunn (2018: 243-263).

<sup>8</sup> The discourse of the progress of “civilization” was famously introduced by Norbert Elias in *The Civilizing Process* (Elias).



The changed expression of emotion was one of the elements that allowed England to separate itself from its own past. The “affective distantiation” (3) that Mullaney mentions in the Renaissance allowed early modern England to see itself as separate from its medieval antecedent.

The difficulty of expressing emotions that is portrayed in Shakespeare may be related to the new Protestant paradigm of emotional expression. If it is so, then Shakespeare breaks with the medieval standards of affectivity. In *King Lear* even if emotions are to be expressed, sometimes doing so is difficult. The question of emotional expression famously starts with Cordelia, who professes she cannot say what she feels for Lear:

Cordelia:  
Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave  
My heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty  
According to my bond, no more nor less.  
(1:1:90-92)

David Bevington notes that “[f]rom Lear’s point of view, Cordelia’s silence is a truculent scanting of disobedience” since “what he devised is, after all, only a prearranged formality, with Cordelia to receive the richest third of England” (636). The expression of the love that she feels for her father should only be a courtly ritual, whose origin lies in the medieval culture where feelings had to be voiced. The elaborate expression of one’s attachment to the king, including the king who is one’s father, belongs to the courtly etiquette of the past and Cordelia rejects this standard of behaviour.

The entire situation can be read as medievalist. On the one hand, it points to medieval courtly manners and the requirements that the presence of the king imposed on his subjects. When the king demanded that the subjects should declare some emotions, they had no alternative but to do what they were asked to. On the other, the difficulty of emotive expression that Cordelia voices may be related to the affective reticence so much favoured in Reformation England. Shakespeare distances himself from the medieval world of courtly display of feelings by making the so-far exemplary daughter pronounce her refusal to participate in the ritual. This scene emblemizes the clash between the medieval and the early modern with their different perspectives on what should be expressed, especially in public.

Historians of emotions saw especially the late Middle Ages as a time when feeling was expressed vehemently in public, especially by the mob. Johan Huizinga famously argued that what he called “the autumn of the Middle Ages” was marked by a greater “distance between sadness and joy” than was the case in the early twentieth century, when he wrote this (1). Huizinga also notes about the late Middle Ages that “every event, every deed was defined in given and



expressive forms” (1), and expression of emotions is what makes Shakespeare’s world different from the one Huizinga described. What happens in *King Lear* is similar: Lear requires Cordelia to give her filial love an expressive form usual in the medieval courtly culture. Yet, in the early modern manner, she retorts that the difficulty she experiences makes her unable to speak.

Bevington asks rhetorically: “Cannot such a ceremony be answered with the conventional hyperbole of courtly language, to which the King’s ear is attuned?” (636) Lear’s expectations are medieval, but they can only be answered with Cordelia’s “Nothing” (1:1:89). As a character in the play she does not belong to the medieval world that Shakespeare recreates, but to the early modern one, where restraint in the expression of emotions is a part of being “civilized” and where specific emotions are expected in some social contexts, but not others.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, *King Lear* often expresses the need to give vent to emotions in an open manner, as when he famously exclaims: “O, you are men of stones!” (5:3:257). Peter Holbrook argues that “there is something morally wrong with restraint of feeling at this dreadful moment” (264). At the same time, in Shakespeare’s England restraint of feelings was advisable and only the right feelings were to be displayed at the right moment. Perhaps *King Lear* belongs to the old world even with the expectations he has towards those who surround him: he wishes them to be expressive with their emotions, but this is not what such characters as Cordelia wish to do.

Anger is yet another emotion that could be expressed in accordance with the old, medieval, standards. Yet in the exchange quoted below Kent expresses his anger with some difficulty:

Cornwall: Why art thou angry?  
 Kent: That such a slave as this should wear  
 a sword,  
 Who wears no honesty.  
 (2:2:74-77)

Kent does not talk about his anger at first, but needs to be asked the question about the emotion in order to let the angry words out of himself. In the Middle Ages expression of anger was a force that acquired broad social acceptance. The idea of *ira regis* was a part of the repertoire of punishment one could get from the monarch. If the king was angry and expressed it, he meted out justice on his subjects in this manner (Althoff 59; Witalisz 124-127; Nash 251-271). Anger was noble if its function was to strengthen the social order. In Shakespeare

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<sup>9</sup> For example, Frederika Bain discusses “affective scripts”, by which she means the question of what emotions were staged by which participants of public executions in Renaissance England (Bain 221-240).

Kent's anger may also have this function, since he protests against Oswald's position as a knight. Even if it is generally appropriate for a steward, this position stands in opposition to Oswald's morals and behaviour. Kent shows through his anger a disapproval of the world he lives in, a world in which scoundrels still have the title of knights. Daniel Boquet and Piroska Nagy argue that in the medieval world anger "assume[d] a structural function in the sense that it reflected the political tensions of feudal societies" and where "the king's anger against his disloyal vassals demonstrated the strengthening of royal power" (125). Kent appears to be dreaming of the old medieval world, both with its political tensions and with the hierarchical order in which the expression of anger mattered, but he does not belong to this world as a character. Kent is not a king, but in the play there is no longer a king who is in charge. In contrast to medieval kings, who knew that their duty was to show wrath, Kent has some difficulties talking about his anger. Performing anger appears to have been more natural in medieval culture. In contrast, in the early modern world Kent needs to be asked first before he confesses how furious he feels about Oswald. Expressions of anger became less acceptable, since being "civilized" meant exerting self-control over one's emotions. Emotions were groomed and cultivated, and not expected to be freely given vent to.

The above does not mean that hierarchies disappeared in Renaissance England. In *Emotion in the Tudor Court* Irish writes about its culture as one "invested in the management of social, political, and spiritual hierarchies" (25). The term "management" seems to be the key to understanding the difference between the medieval and the early modern here. Medieval hierarchies were also central; yet they did not require so much management, but rather acceptance of the fixed order of things, visible in, for instance, the natural law, or the Great Chain of Being. Expression of emotions was something that related directly to one's social role. It appears that in the early modern culture there was more emphasis on regulating hierarchies and imposing very determined roles to all agents at, for example, the royal court. Emotions were assigned on the basis of one's role in the hierarchy and their control was crucial for the functioning of the society and the state. Early medieval emotions were also performed, but they were performed within the very strict limits imposed from the outside.

The new Protestant perspective led to a transformation of how the function of shame was understood. Shame is concomitant with honour as an emotional disposition.<sup>10</sup> The loss of honour may bring about the emotion of shame. When one does not act honourably, shame is inevitable. Medieval shame was more related to public shaming and the expression of shame as something that needed to be performed. The medievalism of the play could entail the vision

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the interplay of honour and shame in the late medieval society see, for example, Maddern (357-371).

of shame as something that would require performance. King Lear, however, discusses shame as an emotion that will come on its own, quietly, and the feeling will not require performance, but should rather provoke some inner change:

Lear:  
 . . . Thou art a boil,  
 A plague-sore, or embosséd carbuncle  
 In my corrupted blood. But I'll not chide thee:  
 Let shame come when it will, I do not call it;  
 I do not bid the thunder-bearer shot,  
 Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.  
 (2:4:219-224)

In *Lear* shame is not related to any public shaming, but rather it is an emotion that is experienced in private and may be a source of suffering. The Protestant perspective entails private meditation and inner feeling, not public disgracing and the concomitant loss of honour, as it happened in the Middle Ages. Shame is seen as a source of inner torment and ultimately something that leads to a sense of loss, which may be related to, for example, the loss of honour. A different attitude was famously argued by Shakespeare in *Sonnet 129*, where “Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action” (Wilson 67). When the once-felt shame is lost due to lustful actions, it is a waste of spiritual energy. Shame is valuable here, since it prevents one from being lustful. According to J. Dover Wilson the “spirit” that is subject to expense refers here to the “vital spirits” (247). Shame may be felt at first, but it is lost as a result of the lust that is “perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame,/savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust” (Wilson 67). When shame is wasted, spiritual waste is introduced, with the pun intended. Shame needs to disappear under the circumstances, but it is a value that is lost. While in *King Lear* shame only has to arrive, since people may lack it, in *Sonnet 129* shame has to be wasted, or lost, so that lust could take over in the human being.

Medieval shame had both negative aspects, since the public performance of the emotion meant that the subject of shaming could feel humiliation, and positive ones owing to the religious import of the emotion. On the one hand, Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy write that

in societies where imperatives of honour were profoundly important, shame was often even more dreaded than physical suffering (2).

On the other, in Christian terms shame was thought to be indispensable: this is how humans realized they had done something wrong. God took away his grace from sinful humanity after the Fall, but he gave humans shame instead (Boquet and Nagy 28). Protestant shame was more private and such indeed was the

perspective in *King Lear*: there was no specific moment at which shame could begin, but it should come so that someone who felt it could grow spiritually. In Shakespeare shame is both to be dreaded and it is a possible source of illumination and inner change. Again, Shakespeare distances himself from the medieval perspective on emotions in this respect.

When Lear accuses Cordelia of pride, the accusation indicates that the medieval sin of *superbia* may be at play (McDaniel 95-110). *Superbia* is harmful for one's soul, in opposition to pride understood in modern terms, which is relatively noble, since it is attached to one's social position or the feeling of self-worth:

Lear:  
 . . . Cornwall  
 and Albany,  
 With my two daughters' dowers digest the third;  
 Let pride, which she calls plainness, marry her.  
 (1:1:125-128)

Again, Lear is more medieval in his thinking than Cordelia. He is attached to the medieval concept of *superbia*, while she favours "plainness", which may have Protestant overtones. In early modern England emotions and the motivations that stand behind them need to be disguised rather than performed, especially in public. Cordelia prefers to keep the expression of her feelings plain and conceal them from the public. Lear does not understand this, since he accuses Cordelia of practising *superbia* through her deliberate silence, while he himself is attached to medievalist rituals, which in the Protestant world could be seen as full of pride.

Instead of the medieval courtly expression of feeling, Cordelia chooses the "truth" of not demonstrating emotions in public, especially when she is ordered to do otherwise:

Lear: So young, and so untender?  
 Cordelia: So young, my lord, and true.  
 Lear: Let it be so; thy truth then be thy dower!  
 (1:1:105-108)

Shakespeare is not medievalist in the same manner as some of his characters. For example, King Lear possesses the medievalist attitudes that are criticized. Shakespeare's medievalism consists in the criticism that he voices against the medieval open display of emotions. Cordelia is the one who is "true" in her reserve, as opposed to the falsehood of the declarations that Regan and Goneril make. Early modern medievalism involved some other discussion of truth and falsehood, with the former ascribed to Protestant culture and the latter to the

earlier Catholic one. The discourse of Protestantism as the one “true” religion was a part of Edmund Spenser’s complicated medievalism in *The Fairy Queene*. Spenser’s medievalism was critical, since he distanced himself from the historical and literary Middle Ages with its religion centered on Rome. Even though he placed “a gentle Knight . . . pricking on the plaine” (I: 1), who was the chivalric Red Cross or St George, in the centre of his epic narrative, he openly criticized the medieval church in England as Duessa, or falsehood, and praised the newly-emerged Anglican church as Una (Brooks-Davies 7). Like in *Fairy Queene*, medievalism percolates through *King Lear* and uses a propagandist idea of truthfulness in reference to the culture of the Reformation with its standards of emotional expression. Here “medieval” means obsolete and badly adjusted to the requirements of contemporary England.

The manner in which love is discussed is yet another instance of creating a distance between the medieval and the early modern in *King Lear*. The King of France defines love in a manner different from its medieval understanding, particularly the religious one. He sees love as affective involvement that does not include any reasoning:

France:  
 . . . Love’s not love  
 When it is mingled with regards that stands  
 Aloof from th’entire point.  
 (1:1:236-238)

Reasoning endows one with “regards that stands/ Aloof from th’entire point” (1:1:238). The King of France argues that love cannot be practiced in such detachment. Such a stance does not include love as involving charity. For medieval clerics love entailed not just showing affection and tenderness, but also compassion (Boquet and Nagy x). Charity was then an actual practice and the effect of using one’s reason, and not just what one felt inside for other fellow humans. In contrast, in the King of France’s words love entails complete involvement that excludes any rational approach. The earlier Christian practice of *caritas* had been more rational and its roots were philosophical and not merely emotive. The concept of love as involvement may belong more to the early modern sphere of emotions than to the earlier concept, which entailed both feeling and reason. The early modern perspective entails private feeling and not the public practice of charity.

There is one uncritically medievalist aspect of the representation of feelings in *King Lear*. The play makes a strong connection between emotions and embodiment. After all, in the early modern period emotions were treated as “part of the *fabric* of the body” (Paster 5). Language can be used to name

emotions and sometimes to misname them, but also to describe them as situated within the body as their site:

Lear:  
... When the  
mind's free,  
The body's delicate; this tempest in my mind  
Doth from my senses take all feeling else  
Save what beats there- filial ingratitude!  
(3:4:11-15)

Here, the idea that feeling resides in the senses is openly medieval, and does not involve any critical medievalist distancing from the earlier cultural period. To quote Boddice, “the feelings and the senses have a history that is at once a history of culture and a history of the body” (133). Already in the Middle Ages all emotions were imagined as embodied. In *King Lear* the body is visualized as a frail site of the senses, since it is so delicate that the responses from the senses (and the effects of emotions) shake it. There is no Cartesian division into the body and the intellect yet (Boddice 138): the “tempest in [the] mind” takes the feeling from the senses, as the two, the “soul” and the body, are closely interconnected. Lear does not feel anything himself; instead, he senses that “filial ingratitude” is what dominates in the emotional life of both Regan and Goneril. The vision that presents emotions as embodied is Aristotelian, strengthened by Thomas Aquinas’s theory. In this theory emotions, which are called passions by Aquinas, reside in the soul and then move the body once they are stirred (Frevert, 2014: 17). The movement of the soul, and in Shakespeare of the senses, comes first, and then the whole body is agitated. For Huizinga the “life of the senses” was central to medieval civilization and emotions were believed to stem from the senses (Boquet and Nagy 3), which continued to be believed in in Shakespeare’s times.

In *King Lear* expression of feeling is famously debated and the emotions once focal to the medieval culture of feeling—honour, shame, pride, and love as *caritas* or as a private feeling—are reconsidered. All of the topics above, with the humoral theory that returns in various forms in this play and others by Shakespeare, can be treated as forms of medievalism, a phenomenon which was a recurrent trope in the early modern culture. After all, the late Middle Ages were already very much medievalist, which could be exemplified by the rewriting of the Arthurian legend (Lynch 227-244) or other narratives that repeated the earlier medieval tropes, but with a difference. *King Lear* includes criticism of medieval emotional forms and expression. Damien Boquet and Piroška Nagy suggested emotive “retrenchment during the Renaissance”, (250) which would ultimately distance it from the more expressive late Middle Ages.

In writing about emotions Shakespeare consistently sees his own culture as early modern rather than suffused with things medieval, even when he uses a plotline from medieval historiography, as happens in *King Lear*.

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