

KM literature	KING RICHARD II Commentaire 1 : I, 1, line 1 (“Enter KING RICHARD...”) down to line 83 (“If I be traitor or unjustly fight”)
---------------	---

Beginning of the play: the king utters the first words = as is proper.

A crowded scene where one man stands out: the eponymous King Richard II, but opens with the word “old”, just like an “old conflict seems to be resurfacing = murder of Thomas of Gloucester in the background... The audience might have been familiar with it. => something is rotten in the state of England...

⇒ **How does this *in medias res* opening usher us into a kingdom whose symbolic order appears under threat?**

1. Introducing the King: a formal opening.

- Ushered into a formal universe: play opens on a spondee + word “old” (a whole tradition to abide by) + periphrasis “time-honoured Lancaster” (1). + royal “we” l.5 (“let us hear”) + modal “should” + “the rites of knighthood” 51
- Formality = crowded stage, with “Nobles and Attendants” + a “throne-room scene” / l.2 redundancy to insist on formal oath / Gaunt’s laconism l.7 => the king’s speech matters more.
- Ritualistic universe = and theatrically as well = formality also in expository scene: introducing the conflict (characters introduced in first lines, with their titles) / polyptoton: “knighthood”78, “knightly” 81...
- Formality replicated in the poetics + metrics too
 - ⇒ And yet, the scene opens on a conflict between two characters = formality potentially undermined by content of the scene = agon. However, it seems that its expression too is contaminated by formality.

2. The King (and the audience) faced with a very codified *agon*.

- An agonistic scene, but itself codified = Mowbray and Bolingbroke vying to be the most flattering (“my most loving liege” 21 = superlative + alliteration) = feudal relationship reinstated. Almost a play within the play setting => introduces hindsight (audience watching the king watching the opponents fighting).
- A dramatic conflict: scan l. 25 “yet” = spondee = contrast highlighted.
- Then the king, like a judge, presides over the conflict: overarching presence of the “silent king” (which will be Bolingbroke’s prerogative later). 54-55: conflict “civilised” only because the king, though silent, becomes a third party (they’re sub-jects = “curbs me”). 61: not a direct insult, but Mowbray saying to the king he is calling “coward” and “villain”
- Addressing each other (even insults: 39) and parodying each other (cf “first”) = rhetorical + highly symbolical gestures with inset stage directions = “I spit at thim” (60) = metaphorical or performative? + 66 “let this” deictic + “there I throw” 69 => a codified universe in which even conflicts are to be tackled ceremoniously (despite the insults). Importance of props: “my gage” 69, “that sword” 78... + heroic couplet at the end of the excerpt
 - ⇒ Yet, thanks to the play-within-the-play setting, some jarring elements lead the audience to realise that Richard’s position might not be that stable.

3. “Yet one but flatters us”: a symbolic order under threat?

- First of all = a traitor in the king’s court (one or the other) => in this agon, impossible to say who the protagonist and the antagonist “villain” 20 are. Another subject matter introduced: dark court secrets: l.9 (scan) = a feminine ending => continuation of such a “malice” in the present?
- First line: first character introduced = John of Gaunt, introduced by the King (unlike medieval theatre, where the mumpers, for instance, would introduce the characters).
- l. 25 = “flatters us” => the king’s tragic flaw mentioned right from the first scene + illustrated as well, since both Mowbray and Bolingbroke flatter him in an almost hyperbolic way.
- What matters: the dual nature of the conflict => cf King’s repetitions (15, 16) + metonymies and use of proverbial statements => a degree of derision? + proleptic of the King’s own conflict with Bolingbroke (in quasi similar configuration in trial scene) + Bolingbroke one letter away from being king: “the kindred of the king” (70) + mentions his “high blood’s royalty” (70) / Same derision in slightly mock-epic tone = 33, 34, reversal subject/verb => a little strained? / “sovereign” put between parentheses 44.