"Thus play I in one person many people:"
Performing Kingship in Richard II

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"Thus play I in one person many people:"
Performing Kingship in *Richard II*

Rachel Cohen

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“Textual histories are nevertheless histories, and revision, elisions, suppressions, accretions are essential elements of drama by its very nature…”

--Stephen Orgel, Impersonations (54)

Radically different versions of Shakespeare’s plays have always existed due to the various purposes the texts have served: to stage a performance, to capture a performance retrospectively, or to create a posthumous literary canon. However, for three hundred years, scholars cleaned up and conflated variant editions of Shakespeare’s plays to create composite texts meant to approximate a hypothetical original manuscript. In the early twentieth century, scholars attempted to distinguish between “good” and “bad” quartos, creating elaborate scenarios involving rogue actors’ unreliable memories and the vulgar taste of audiences outside London to justify the inconsistencies between early editions of Shakespeare’s plays. The variations between the different versions have furthermore engendered volumes of scholarship dedicated to identifying the sources of “corruption” in each. Only in the past few decades has the field of New Textualism, with scholars such as Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, broadly rejected as anachronistic the conception of one definitive, authentic version of each work, the “hypothetical X,” as Randall McLeod terms it (“No more” 154). Instead, variant material texts are viewed as representative of the demands of theatre and of the fluidity of performance to which they relate. As I intend to show, variations can illuminate the political and theatrical context of the
Renaissance, indicating censors’ cuts or the demands of a specific acting company. Some of the scribbled notes in various promptbooks, manuscripts, and quartos, which led to the variant texts, may indicate revisions, cuts, and additions by contemporary writers and actors. Later revisions from long after Shakespeare’s death, including those in Nahum Tate’s adaptations and eighteenth-century editions, reflect a new political landscape or changing theatrical practices.

What are the implications of these variant texts and how do they construct meaning? In order to explore this question, I will turn to Richard II as an example of Shakespearean drama concerned with the construction, performance, and dissolution of kingship and aristocratic identity, focusing on variant editions published from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries: Q1 (1597), Q4 (1608), Q5 (1615), F1 (1623), Q6 (1634), Nahum Tate’s edition (1681), and four eighteenth-century editions (1734, 1735, 1770, and 1774). Variations in stage directions, entrances, exits, speech prefixes, soliloquies, and dialogue construct different Richards and Bolingbrokes, who represent subjectivity, monarchy, and aristocratic identity in revealingly different ways. My examination of the impact of textual instability on character construction demonstrates above all the contingency of the figure of “King Richard II,” emphasizing the fact that character does not precede its textual construction but is an effect of it.

I. Framing the king: competing visions of monarchy

A good place to begin examining differences between editions is the title page and prefatory material. Together with the physical format of the text (folio, quarto, octavo etc.), the title page announces the text’s purpose, situating and physically framing the text for a reader. In fact, one of the most striking elements of Richard II title pages between 1597 and 1774 is the
variation both of the title itself and of the genre to which the play belongs. While the early Elizabethan and Jacobean quartos up to and including Q5, printed in 1615, define the play as a tragedy (*The tragedie of King Richard the Second*), the Folio catalogue includes it under “Histories.” The play is not only resituated generically; it is also retitled as *The life and death of King Richard the second*. Parenthetically, although this may be due simply to space constraints, the play’s listing in the catalogue leaves out the title of king, calling it only *The life and death of Richard the second*; it is only at the beginning of the play that “King” is added to the play’s title. When the play was reprinted in quarto format in 1634, it was titled after the First Folio as *The life and death of King Richard the second*. Nahum Tate’s 1681 edition changes the title again to *The history of King Richard the Second*, perhaps as part of his (unsuccessful) attempt to distance the play from the contemporary political situation. It was, in fact, as impossible in the 1680s as it had been in Elizabeth I’s reign, when Elizabeth herself is reported to have said “I am Richard II, know ye not that?” (Albright 692). In a desperate attempt to stage his version of the play, Tate renamed his play *The Sicilian Usurper*, turning all the characters into Italians so as to emphasize the geographical as well as the temporal distance of his work from contemporary England—yet it was shut down for a second time. Fifty years later, the 1734 and 1735 editions reverted to the First Folio’s title: *The life and death of King Richard the Second*. But the 1770 Oxford edition attempted to combine the First Folio’s definition of the play with the earlier quartos’ emphasis on the play as a tragedy, naming it *The LIFE and DEATH of KING RICHARD II. A TRAGEDY*. And the 1774 Oxford edition renamed the play as *KING RICHARD II. A TRAGEDY*, eliminating the First Folio’s emphasis on the play’s historicity.

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1 See Appendix A for reproductions of the title pages.
I will explore in detail below the problem of the title “King” in a play where two different men lay claim to it. Here, one can see the striking significance of the play’s paratexts (in particular, speech prefixes and stage directions, which are not part of the performed text but that guide a reading of the play). A central problem, as I will show, is when or whether to rename Bolingbroke as “King.” The early quartos, for instance, introduce “Bullingbrooke” in the stage directions immediately preceding the final scene, but refer to him as “King” in the speech prefixes, while F1 and the Tate, 1734, 1735, and 1770 editions all maintain “Bullingbrook” or “Bolingbroke” in both the stage directions and the speech prefixes. Only the 1774 edition introduces him as “King Henry” in both the stage directions and speech prefixes. However, what the 1774 editor confers on Bolingbroke in terms of legitimacy by renaming him as king is retracted in a footnote: “The true political hypocrite is fully exhibited by the fourth Henry in this speech, mourning over the sacrifice his ambition long and warmly wished to make.” In identifying Henry as a “true political hypocrite,” the 1774 edition undoes the legitimacy that the renaming of him as “King” asserts.

II. “The very names of the Persons:” What is a character?

In “The Materiality of the Shakespearean Text,” Margreta de Grazia and Peter Stallybrass challenge the “long tradition [which] has understood character to precede language” (266). They highlight the lists _dramatis personae_ as a textual device that leads to the implicit assumption that characters precede the texts that construct them—but they never appeared in the early quartos, and the first editions to contain such lists always placed them at the end of the play. By contrast, the existence of such lists in every modern edition of a Shakespeare play lends credence to the notion that characters existentially precede text.
In 1723, Pope famously declared:

Every single character in *Sheakspear* is as much an Individual, as those in Life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike;...had all the Speeches been printed without the very names of the Persons, I believe one might have apply’d them with certainty to every speaker. (*Preface to Shakespeare*)

Randall McLeod has demonstrated, to the contrary, that in the early text, Shakespeareran characters are identified by multiple names, from speech prefixes to stage directions to direct addresses in dialogue. In light of this, McLeod reformulates Pope’s quote to read, “*when it comes to the very names of the Persons, every single character in Shakespear is as Dividual as those in Life itself,*” illuminating the different identities a “single” character can manifest in relation to others on stage (“The very names of the Persons” 88). McLeod cites the example of a passage from the Folio edition of *All’s Well that Ends Well* to illustrate this point. We are introduced to a character named “Countess,” but after a second character named “Helen” enters, the “Countess” is renamed in the speech prefixes as “Old Countess.” McLeod writes, “in this silent moment [of Helen’s entrance], she would be re-perceived by the audience as an *Old* countess—not because she *is* old (though she is), but because with Hellen beside her she suddenly *looks* old…She is “*Old,*” by the way, only when Hellen is present” (91). In this example, McLeod remarks on the “interpretive…redundancy” of different speech tags, which, in *All’s Well that Ends Well*, variously serve to draw the reader or actor’s attention to themes of “Age vs. Youth,” “Being Female,” “Gentility,” or of a “Maternal-Filial dynamic” (92). In short, the modern editorial tendency to standardize speech prefixes and stage directions obscures the multiplicity of identities in and out of which characters move, as well as the subtle relationships that are constructed and highlighted through theatrical notation.

Similarly, both within and between early editions of *Richard II*, the character of Bolingbroke moves through a multiplicity of identities: Harry, Cousin, “my son,” Bolingbroke,
Henry of Hereford, Duke of Hereford, Derby, Duke of Lancaster, Lord of Hereford, King, and King Henry IV. At any given moment, his identity is relationally contingent on and defined by others, especially Richard, and the appellation “King” proves particularly slippery and problematic throughout early editions of Richard II. Between Q1 and F1, there are moments in which there two kings, one king, or no kings: “both texts waver, although in strikingly different ways, between the naming and the unnaming of monarchs” (“Naming” 7). Random Cloud elucidates this, explaining that the title, “King,” in early editions of Shakespearean plays may not directly correlate to the monarch’s political status: “In general it suggests an authorial focus less on the political than on the psychic or moral stature of the hero” (“The Psychopathology of Everyday Art” 137). Just as Cloud emphasizes the particular Shakespearean use of “king,” we must remember that Restoration and modern editing practices similarly reflect ideologies of monarchy and contemporary paradigms.

The final scene of each edition provides an excellent opportunity to explore the ways in which speech prefixes, stage directions, and language construct Richards and Bolingbrokes whose characters vary wildly from edition to edition. Q1 and F, for instance, define Bolingbroke’s role in radically different ways: in Q1, “the King” enters with “his nobles”; in striking contrast, F1’s “Bullingbrooke” enters with “other lords” (italics mine). Stallybrass notes this discrepancy, remarking, “The name “King” is inflated by the whole of his train, which is no less than the kingdom…But “Bullingbrooke” is just one lord among others” (“Naming 6). In Q1, Bolingbroke’s title and the specification of “his nobles” (italics mine) complete the transfer of monarchy initiated by Richard’s surrender of the crown, scepter and robes—the trappings of kingship. But there is no simple opposition between Q1’s “King” and F1’s “Bullingbrooke.” If the First Folio names Q1’s “King” as “Bullingbrooke” in his final entry, this is not because the
name of “King” is unambiguously occupied by Richard. In fact, Richard is given the speech prefix “King” in F1 only up to Act I, scene iii, while Q1, with some inconsistencies, continues to refer to Richard as “King” throughout Act V, scene i. Both Q1 and F1, however, give Richard the speech prefix “Rich.” for the final scenes of the play.

Several decades later, Tate explicitly declares that political aims and ideology guide his editorial practices and therefore characterizes Richard and Bolingbroke much more uniformly throughout his edition: Richard as the legitimate king and Bolingbroke as a conniving usurper. His invocation of “King Richard,” even after his death, is one striking manifestation of his glorification of Richard as rightful king. And, almost one hundred years later, the 1774 edition uses “King Henry” in both the final stage direction and speech prefix; this speech prefix along with the editor’s note about his political hypocrisy reveal a more modern sensibility about the nature of kingship. Bolingbroke certainly is “king” in the sense that he wears the crown, but he has arrived at this role through political maneuvering and does not necessarily possess the psychic or moral stature of a king. Modern editors’ efforts to stabilize characters by standardizing and explaining away inconsistencies in naming ignore how texts both construct and destabilize characters.

To demonstrate the likely reality that the messy and inconsistent early texts we have are indeed authentic promptbooks, McLeod provides a facsimile of a modern promptbook for Richard II, from the 1970 John Barton production, marked up and similarly full of inconsistencies, and applies to it the exact same logic which is so often applied to early Shakespearean texts. One quickly realizes the untenability of insisting these early texts could not possibly reflect the true intentions of Shakespeare. Given that we know modern promptbooks can be messy and ambiguous, why can we not accept that Shakespeare’s might have been, also?
III. “Improving Shakespeare:” A Matter of Taste

From the politically-motivated changes of Tate’s edition to standardized speech prefixes to commentary on the nature of a character’s speech, editorial modifications reflect the reality of an edition’s political, theatrical, and literary situation. Shifting norms of language, different standards of taste, and changing theatrical practices all contributed to the changing face of these editions over the course of nearly two hundred years. The introduction of new theatrical technologies demanded new cues and instructions within the texts, demonstrating the tension between the reading and theatrical experience; paratextual elements invisible to a theatre audience could dramatically alter the reading experience in potentially unanticipated ways. For instance, a discrepancy in a music cue arises between the early quartos (Q1 and Q4) and F1 and Q6, and the editions color Richard’s last moments very differently.\(^3\) F1 reads:

Thus play I in one Prison, many people,

And none contented. Sometimes am I King;

Then Treason makes me with my selfe a Beggar,

And so I am. Then crushing penurie,

Perswades me, I was better when a King:

Then am I king’d againe: and by and by,

Thinke that I am vn-king’d by Bullingbrooke,

And straight am nothing. But what ere I am, Musick.

Nor I, nor any man that but man is,

With nothing shall be pleas’d, till he be eas’d

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\(^3\) See Appendix E for reproductions of these passages.
With being nothing. Musicke do I heare? (V.v.31-41)\(^4\)

Note that the cue for “Musick” is written next to the line in which Richard says, “And straight am nothing,” in comparison to Q1:

Thus play I in one person many people,
And none contented; sometimes am I King,
Then treasons make me with my selfe a beggar,
And so I am: then crushing penurie
Perswades me I was better when a king,
Then am I kingd againe, and by and by,
Think that I am vnkingd by Bullingbrooke,
And strait am nothing. But what ere I be,
Nor I, nor any man, that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleasde, till he be easde,
With being nothing. Musicke do I heare,… the musike plaies

In the earlier versions, in which Richard verbally acknowledges the music almost instantaneously, he seems keenly aware of his surroundings; in the later versions, the lag between the music starting and Richard noticing it highlights his preoccupation with the subject of his soliloquy and makes him appear less than totally attuned to his environment.

We cannot presume to know why such a discrepancy exists; since these texts served as promptbooks with cues for stage performances, the “early” music cue is quite possibly no more significant than an early stage direction to get ready for the sound effect. Yet this innocent marking, which may simply reflect different theatrical practices for indicating music cues, can

\(^4\) All act, scene, and line citations are from the Arden third series edition (2002).
dramatically change the reader’s perception of the character, underscoring the potential for theatricality to impact the reading experience. In this case, the contrast between the two Richards we read is dramatic: Q1 and Q4’s Richard might be falling into despair as he reflects on the nature of his kingship, but the despair is one of knowing all too well exactly what is happening to him, with all faculties intact. F1 and Q6 give us a Richard who is spinning himself around and around in convoluted clause after convoluted clause, king’d, unking’d, negating himself and all men, and ultimately oblivious to the sounds of the world around him. The three lines which separate the music starting from Richard’s verbal acknowledgment (in F1 and Q6) are some of the most incoherent of the play and allow for the lapse in Richard’s attention to the music to compound what seems like a growing nihilism, self-negation, and internal anarchy.

Another example of such a theatrical modification is found in the specific indication of place pervading each of the four eighteenth-century editions which are broken down into acts and scenes, another recent innovation: “A Prison at Pomfret Castle,” “Changes to the prison at Pomfret castle,” “Pomfret. Dungeon of the Castle” (1734, 1770, 1774). In Shakespeare’s time, “plays had been performed in ornate theatres by actors lavishly costumed, but upon stages that gave no pictorial representation of place or time…Location was signaled, if at all, by three-dimensional functional props like thrones” (Taylor Reinventing Shakespeare 15, Marsden 24). Accordingly, precise descriptions of location only came with the advent of movable scenery and machines allowing for special effects (first introduced by William Davenant in the mid-seventeenth century), at which point the location of a given scene became much more visually prominent in theatrical staging.

Davenant’s theatrical anachronism, which applied new theatre technology to older plays (a practice absent from many other types of theatre, including Noh, Kabuki and the Comédie-
Française), extended to matters of taste and linguistic norms, also. However, these modifications were not considered corruptions but necessary adaptations. The title of Jean Marsden’s chapter in *A Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Performance* perfectly captures the attitude of eighteenth century editors and theatre: “Improving Shakespeare.” The major impetus for changes to Shakespearean plays in the eighteenth century was the consensus that Shakespeare wrote at a time when the English language was “barbarous,” and Alexander Pope edited ruthlessly, removing “bad grammar, bad logic, bad meter, and bad manners,” as well as elements he deemed “unartistic” (Marsden 22). While Shakespeare’s plays remained popular and were produced frequently, “the text of his plays was not considered inviolable” and eighteenth-century editors saw themselves as part of a collaborative effort to redeem his language (Taylor 82, Marsden 25).

### IV. Nahum Tate and the Politics of Kingship

Nahum Tate uses a similar, even more explicit, language of improvement in his prefatory epistle to justify the sweeping changes of his edition, specifically comparing *his* Richard II favorably to the Shakespeare character: “Take ev’n the Richard of Shakespear and History, you will find him Dissolute, Careless, and Vnadvisable; peruse my Picture of him and you will say, as Aeneas did of Hector Quantum mutates ab illo!...Every Scene is full of Respect to Majesty and the dignity of Courts, not one alter’d Page but what breaths Loyalty....” Tate’s aim at

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5 However, in a trend which reverses the general eighteenth century tendency to “improve” a text by moving away from the Shakespearean language, the 1774 edition retains several passages that are marked for excision in the 1734, 1735 and 1770 editions. Furthermore, 1774 often reverts to Q1 in the case of a discrepancy between Q1 and F1. Examples include the title (discussed earlier), III.ii.155-170 (a passage I will discuss in detail later), and V.v.31 (another passage I will discuss later). The 1774 edition uniquely uses Q1’s language, indicating a desire for scholarly “authenticity.”
redemption is entirely within contemporary norms of “improvement,” although his language explicitly acknowledges the construction of a character through the text of a specific edition. The motivation for Tate’s emendations, however, stemmed from the political circumstances of England in 1681. On the very first page, he calls attention to the Prefatory Epistle in Vindication of the AUTHOR.

Occasion’d by the PROHIBITION of this

PLAY on the Stage.

trumpeting his attempt to fashion a version of this play which would be perceived as inoffensive and unthreatening to the monarch. But, as the prohibition demonstrates, this proved impossible, especially given that his efforts came immediately in the wake of the Exclusion Crisis, in which, as in Richard II, the problem of who should next succeed to the throne was at the center of the debate between Charles II and Parliament.

The theatre and the monarchy had a troubled history: in 1649, “the English monarchy and the English theatre fell together [with the execution of Charles I],” and eleven years later, “they rose together…less than three months after his own restoration to the throne, Charles II officially sanctioned the restoration of English drama” (Taylor 9). Although Charles II enjoyed the theatre, he and his censors did not hesitate to ban those plays which spoke too directly to the rivalrous relationship between the monarch and his Parliament. Despite radical changes that Tate made throughout his The history of King Richard the Second, his version still bore potentially damaging parallels to the contemporary situation of the monarchy and it was banned before even being performed (24). Tate’s renaming of his play as The Sicilian Usurper was not enough because, as Odai Johnson points out, “Tate does little to soften the signature events of the
Richardian myth: rebellion, abdication, regicide. And if the English mystique of Monarchy has
an arch-nemesis, it is the recurring Richardian nightmare of abdication and execution in the face
of popular rebellion” (“Empty Houses” 507). Ultimately, despite Tate’s attempt to rehabilitate
Richard, he found no way to stage Richard II without threatening the monarchy.

Nevertheless, the prefatory epistle tries to illuminate exactly how Tate had portrayed
Richard as a benign monarch, unjustly overthrown. This introduction clearly proclaims Tate’s
agenda to redeem Richard and identifies particular scenes and passages of dialogue in which
Tate modified Richard’s lines or actions to reflect more positively on his character. One of these
scenes revolves around Richard’s decision to appropriate a certain portion of revenues unjustly.
In F1, Richard moves to seize the people’s revenues to support his war and lavish court lifestyle;
York immediately deems his actions “wrongful” and warns that they

…pricke my tender patience to those thoughts

Which honor and allegeance cannot thinke. (II.i.207-8)

This linking of cause and effect, in which Richard’s actions provoke Yorke’s disloyalty, is
dramatically transformed in Tate’s version of the same scene. Rather than seizing popular
revenue, Tate’s Richard claims only “for a time…in Herford’s absence” to take Gaunt’s
revenues—vowing to

Shortly…with interest restore

The Loan our sudden streights make necessary.

In this single passage, Tate has removed one of the primary popular grievances against Richard,
and in York’s speech, Tate shifts the blame for the conflict to Hereford, characterizing him as an
unprovoked aggressor, “too apt t’engage against your Power.”
At the end of Act II, Tate inserts an entirely new scene depicting Bolingbroke meeting a “rabble,” including “A Shoomaker, Farrier, Weaver, Tanner, Mercer, Brewer, Butcher, Barber, and infinite others with a Confused Noise.” The ultimate purpose of this addition lies in demonstrating the danger of popular rebellion—and by extension, it functions as a critique of Parliamentary involvement with the business of the monarchy—further undermining Bolingbroke in Tate’s version. Over the course of Bolingbroke’s exchange with the “rabble,” we hear him disingenuously disavow his actions as a “Usurpation,” explaining that he only intends to

…ascend the Throne,

To see that justice has a liberal course,

In needful Wars to lead you forth to Conquest,

And dismiss you laden home with Spoils.

The scene closes with all the commoners chanting, “A Bullingbrook, a Bullingbrook, a Bullingbrook, &c.” Bolingbroke’s hypocrisy—the distaste he voices for the commoners juxtaposed with this scene, staging his willingness to exploit their concerns in order to facilitate his rise to power—serves as one of Tate’s many warning signs that depict Bolingbroke as an unscrupulous usurper. Another example comes in Act III, immediately after the lines in which Richard declares he will descend “like Blazing Phaeton” but before he reappears below the ramparts, when Tate adds a few lines for Bolingbroke:

Northumberland to London, with all speed,

Summon a Parliament i’th’ Commons Name,

In Order to the Kings Appearance there….
The emphasis on the Commons or the common suit as a mechanism for legitimating Bolingbroke’s usurpation should make any royalist wary and bolsters Tate’s vilification of Bolingbroke, part of his attempt to make the play palatable for performance.

Another sweeping change in Tate’s edition is the characterization of York, who maintains his loyalty to “King Richard” almost until the end, when the plot to kill Bolingbroke is revealed and York (as in the earlier editions) is compelled to report Aumerle and the rest of the conspirators. This scene reads somewhat incoherently in Tate’s version, perhaps to increase York’s function as a comic character, a role which is, uncharacteristically for Shakespeare, almost entirely absent from the play. However, York’s steadfast allegiance to Richard for most of the play leads Tate to reassign some of York’s line to Northumberland as well as to modify some of the lines that York retains. One remarkable moment arises in Act III, when Northumberland refers to Richard merely as “Richard,” without the title of king. York retorts:

> It would become the Lord Northumberland
>
> To say King Richard, that so good a King
>
> Should be compell’d to hide a sacred Head,
>
> And Thou have leave to shew a Villains Face! (III.iii.7-9)

While this exchange is present in the earlier editions, Tate adds York’s final line; the earlier editions are much more nuanced in representing right and wrong, but Tate never misses an opportunity to underscore the dichotomy between the good King Richard and the evil and villainous usurpers. This is similarly manifested in Act IV, when York comes to Carlisle’s support in the middle of his impassioned defense of Richard’s kingship, again serving Tate’s ultimate interest in maintaining a clear, unambiguous distinction between the heroes and villains.
Finally, Tate closes his edition of the play with a version of Bolingbroke’s speech dramatically different than that in any other edition. Exton presents Richard’s dead body, to which F1’s Bolingbroke responds (with which the other early editions are consistent):

_Bul._ They loue not poyson, that do poyson neede,

Nor do I thee: though I did wish him dead,

I hate the Murtherer, loue him murthered.

The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labour,

But neither my good word, nor Princely fauour.

_With Caine_ go wander through the shade of night,

And neuer shew thy head by day, nor light.

Lords, I protest my soule is full of woe,

That blood should sprinkle me, to make me grow.

Come mourne with me, for that I do lament,

And put on sullen Blacke incontinent:

Ile make a voyage to the Holy-land,

To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.

March sadly after, grace my mourning heere,

_In weeping after this vntimely Beere. (V.vi.38-49)_

Bolingbroke’s final words onstage constitute a hypocritical salve to his conscience, distancing himself from Exton and the act of Richard’s murder. The combination of his proclaimed “soule…full of woe” and the introduction of the crusades as repentance creates a sense that in

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6 See Appendix F for reproductions of these passages.
these few lines he has already gone through the necessary steps for absolution: guilt and penance.

The Tate version transforms this into a speech of recriminations:

- They love not Poyson that have need of Poyson,
- Nor do I Thee, I hate his Murderer.
- Tho' I did wish him Dead: Hell thank thee for it,
- And guilt of Royal Blood be thy Reward;
- Cursing and Curst go wander through the World,
- Branded like *Cain* for all Mankind to shun Thee.
- Wake *Richard*, wake, give me my Peace agen,
- And I will give Thee back thy ravisht Crown.
- Come Lords prepare to pay your last Respects
- To this great Hearse, and help a King to Mourn
- A King's untimely Fall: O tort'ring Guilt!
- In vain I wish The happy Change cou'd be,
- That I slept There, and *Richard* Mourn'd for Me.

Tate does not allow for the possibility of absolution, introducing no opportunity for Bolingbroke to repent. Additionally, Tate changes the line in which Bolingbroke castigates and curses Exton from “The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labour,” to “guilt of Royal Blood be thy Reward,” emphasizing Richard’s legitimacy as king and continued claim to the throne.

Bolingbroke’s claim that, were Richard to wake again, “I will give Thee back thy ravisht Crown,” formulates his stripping of Richard’s kingship in the violent language of rape, and rejects his seizure of the throne through to the very last line. While the tone of his end speech is
startling in comparison to the other editions, it appropriately concludes a version of the play
which is preoccupied throughout with maintaining Richard’s true right to the throne.

V. Parliamentary authority: “The Common suit” and the Parliament scene

The prohibitions Tate’s plays faced were part of a legacy of Richard II’s politically
threatening nature. As mentioned earlier, Queen Elizabeth identified herself as King Richard
following the Earl of Essex’s uprising in 1601. In light of this, speculation about censorship has
underpinned the discussion of the so-called “deposition scene,” about 150 lines of Act IV, scene
i which are absent from the first three quartos. This scene stages Richard’s deposition and, until
recently, its absence from the early editions was generally understood to be the result of
Elizabethan censorship, a theory lucidly argued in Janet Clare’s “Censorship in the Deposition
Scene in Richard II.” Clare’s premise, that the monarch viewed the theatre as a powerful social
tool, makes the danger of staging usurpation and the deposition of a monarch appear self-evident.
However, in the last few decades, several scholars have challenged the inevitability of censorship
and raised the possibility of authorial—Shakespearean—revision. David Bergeron has quite
logically argued that the deposition scene proves no more treasonous than the rest of the play’s
carnivalesque portrayal of the fall of Richard and rise of Bolingbroke. And Leeds Barroll posits
that we overestimate the potential for subversion which Renaissance monarchs saw in the
theatre, and reinterprets the performance of Richard II commissioned by the Essex uprising
circle in that light: those men “were deemed dangerous because they were doing something they
thought to be seditious” (Clegg 432, 433, Barroll 454).

Regardless of the exact dynamic between the monarchy and the theatre, in considering
the question of dramatic censorship it is important to differentiate between two mechanisms for
licensing plays: for printed texts (including plays), under the authority of the Bishop of London, and for theatrical performance, under the Master of Revels. While Barroll argues that the monarchy did not consider theatrical staging as threatening or subversive as is often postulated today, some evidence suggests that performances could indeed be considered dangerous. Although at a considerably later date, it is striking that Nahum Tate was able to publish his version of Richard II in 1681 under its original title. But he notes at length that the performance of the play had been prohibited. Indeed, the epistle that precedes the printed text of the play was, Tate writes, “Occasion’d by the PROHIBITION of this PLAY on the Stage.” The initial performances were pre-emptively banned, and although the play was performed after some major revisions, it was shut down after two nights. Granted, there is no direct comparison to be made: Barroll’s argument addresses the Elizabethan crisis around Essex’s uprising, while Tate’s performances came in the wake of the Exclusion Crisis under Charles II. However, the ease with which Tate’s playtext was printed in contrast to the harsh censorship of the staging indicates, at the very least, irregularity in the process of censorship and Barroll’s argument that printed texts were subject to more stringent standards than were performances must be qualified.

How, then, are we to account for the missing deposition scene in the early editions of Richard II? Cyndia Clegg proposes a compromise of sorts, suggesting the deposition scene may have been the victim of Elizabethan dramatic censorship, but for reasons different than those that have previously been proposed. Clegg’s argument draws on a simple observation concerning the title pages of Q4 and Q5, the first editions to contain and advertise the previously absent scene. They claim to feature “new additions of the Parliament Scane, and the deposing of King Richard.” These “new additions” were universally referred to by critics before Clegg as “the deposition scene,” thus obscuring what the title page foregrounds: namely, the addition of “the
Parliament Sceane” (italics mine). Through a synthesis of close textual analysis, a detailed account of Elizabethan print censorship, and a selection of key arguments from earlier theories, Clegg suggests that the radical element of the so-called “deposition scene” is the involvement of Parliament in the deposing of Richard. After all, the entirety of Richard II depicts the downfall and deposition of a king, and while ahistoric assumptions about censorship assumed that the explicit staging of a deposition was dangerously treasonable, the deposition of monarchs was repeatedly staged in the English Renaissance theatre. What makes the deposition of Richard so specific is that it is done by course of law through Parliament. As Clegg writes,

Shakespeare’s Richard II creates an uneasy dialectic between alternative views of successions, alternative views of kingship, and alternative views of the actions of both Richard II and Bolingbroke. Any resolutions the play makes of this dialectic are tentative and tenuous, ultimately leaving judgment to the audience. The play’s one element that does not participate in this dialectic is Parliament. (442)

Clegg acknowledges that her evidence for censorship is circumstantial but she persuasively argues that there was a keenly felt tension between monarchical and parliamentary authority throughout Elizabeth’s reign. When Parliament attempted to persuade Elizabeth to name a successor in the 1560s, “she made it clear that Parliament was not to address the matter. She alone would determine the succession at a time she deemed convenient. It was, she said, ‘monstrous that the feet should direct the head’” (441).

The significance of Parliament’s role with regard to the vulnerability of Richard’s kingship certainly was not lost on seventeenth and eighteenth century editors. The earliest editions with the Parliament scene, Q4 and Q5, have stage directions which only explicitly indicate that Bolingbroke and Aumerle enter; the rest of the nobles who enter with them are simply referred to as “others.” However, the Folio and Q6 individually name Northumberland, Percie, Fitz-Water, Surrey, Carlile, Abbot of Westminster, Herauld, Bagot as well as Officers, in
addition to Bolingbroke and Aumerle. Additionally, they add a qualifying phrase to their entrance, “as to Parliament,” giving the actors and their characters a sense of destination, or at least lending a motivation to their presence. Furthermore, the Tate (1681) and 1774 versions emphasize that the lords of this scene are members of Parliament who make up the House of Lords, and these editions specify the lords taking their seats. This highlights the point that the lords in this scene are members of the upper house of Parliament who legitimate the deposition of the king through their actions as a legally constituted body, not as discontented individuals.

As part of her argument, Clegg demonstrates the divergent possibilities for Parliament’s role arising from Q4’s variant attribution of one line of speech—certainly not the result of censorship, but a small change which illuminates the different forces shaping Parliament’s responsibility. In F1, and all other editions with the Parliament scene, Northumberland proclaims, “May it please you, lords, to grant the commons’ suit?” to which Bolingbroke adds:

“Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender.” (IV.i.155-7)

In contrast, Q4 gives all of these lines to Northumberland:

“May it please you Lords, to graunt the common suite,
Fetch hither Richard, that in the common view
He may surrender,…”

This verbal and visual conflation of the “common suite” and “fetch hither Richard” suggests that the common suite is indeed to fetch Richard and have him surrender in the common view—implicating the House of Commons in the deposition rather than simply having them condone it once it happens. Northumberland’s insistence here that the commons’ suite is to fetch Richard

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7 See Appendix C for reproductions of these passages.
and have him publicly surrender (echoed in later parts of this scene in other editions, when Northumberland insists that Richard read out a list of his wrongdoings, emphasizing that the commons will not be satisfied otherwise) serves as a displacement of responsibility in some respects. By situating the call for Richard’s deposition in the House of Commons, it appropriates a note of populism and distracts us from, arguably, where the call for deposition truly lies: with Bolingbroke and his elite coterie of lords. This aristocratic elite certainly takes advantage of popular unhappiness with Richard and his policies, but this edition increases Northumberland’s and the other lords’ distance from the center of the political call for deposition.

Finally, arguing that the debate surrounding censorship should be situated in the context of printed works that we know to have been censored, Clegg introduces a highly controversial text written by Robert Parsons in 1595, *A conference about the next svcession*, “the object of an active censorship campaign” (437). Clegg highlights the Parsons text’s declaration of “the monarch’s subjugation under law,” as well as the justification of Richard’s deposition given that “the king was deposed by act of parlement,” (438, 440). Since we know Parsons’s text was censored for its glorification of parliamentary authority, and that Q4 and Q5 emphasize the addition of a “Parliament sceane,” Clegg’s hypothesis proves a compelling alternative to earlier theories.

An earlier scene depicting Richard’s return to England provides further evidence that the radical nature of the deposition resides in Parliament’s role. F1’s Richard arrives at Barkloughly Castle and declares:

…I weepe for ioy

To stand vpon my Kingdom once again. (III.ii.4-5)
introducing his return to England as sovereign king who still lays claim to the land. His triumph proves short-lived, however, once Salisbury informs him that his legion of supporters has been drastically curtailed by defection, beginning the process of undoing his kingship by reducing his train. Upon hearing this news, F1’s Richard cries out:

For Heauens sake let vs sit vpon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of Kings:
How some haue been depos'd, some slaine in warre,
Some haunted by the Ghosts they haue depos'd,
Some poysn'd by their Wives, some sleeping kill'd,
All murther'd. For within the hollow Crowne
That rounds the mortall Temples of a King,
Keepes Death his Court, and there the Antique sits
Scuffling his State, and grinning at his Pompe,
Allowing him a breath, a little Scene,
To Monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with lookes,
Infusing him with selfe and vaine conceit,
As if this Flesh, which walls about our Life,
Were Brasse impregnable: and humor'd thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little Pinne
Bores through his Castle Walls, and farwell King. (III.ii.155-170)

His implicit self-identification as part of a lineage of “the death of Kings” is complicated by the fact that each method of overthrow is different from the one he will experience—legal deposition by Parliament. While this scene is present in almost identical form in Q1, in later editions this
scene effectively sets up the Parliament scene by highlighting the radical nature of Richard’s particular deposition. The disconnect between Richard’s articulation of standard procedure for overthrowing a king and his ultimate fate at the hands of Parliament underscores the acuity of Clegg’s argument.

In addition to bolstering Clegg’s suggestion of the Parliament scene’s political censorship, this passage introduces a different kind of censorship, resulting in certain discrepancies in tone and framing the nature of the king’s role. In every edition, the passage is present in its entirety, but the first line in Q1 and Q4 reads “For God’s sake,” and apparently proved ripe for the attention of the Act of Abuses, passed by Parliament in 1606. The statute proclaims:

…That if at any time or times after the end of this present Session of Parliament, any person or persons, doe or shall in any Stage-play, Interlude, Shew, Maygame, or Pageant, jestingly and prophanely speake, or vse the holy Name of God, or of Christ Iesus, or of the holy Ghost, or of the Trinitie, which are not to be spoken but with feare and reuerence, [? he or they] Shall forfeit for euery such offence by him or them committed tenne Poundes. (Gazzard)

Given that the act’s passage preceded Q4’s printing, it is unclear how Q4 escaped censorship, yet it would appear that F1 certainly was modified to “For Heauen’s sake” because of its restrictions.8 The change of diction alters the tone Richard’s exclamation, tempering the raw emotion of Q1 and Q4’s Richard in the face of now-imminent defeat. As seen here, external theatrical and political forces can have tremendous consequences for artistic representation; this speech illuminates the potential for the change of one small word to reframe an entire passage.

This passage also anticipates the central question of different version of the play and of the Parliament scene: the nature of kingship, and specifically, how the different Richards articulate kingship. F1’s punctuation immediately following the final statement, “All

8 See Appendix B for reproductions of these passages.
murther’d,” a period, separates the litany of kings’ fates from the following reflection on the theatrical nature of kingship. In contrast, Q1 conflates them into one syntactical unit, with a mere comma separating the apparently inevitable fate of kings from “Death’s court” residing in the “hollow Crowne,” in which a king can “monarchize” for a “little scene,” before “farewell.” In all editions, the language of these lines is explicitly theatrical, and underscores the role of king as a part to play. Furthermore, the construction of kingship as residing within the mortal temples of a king foregrounds the natural, human body of a king, highlighting the inevitable fate of death rather than a transcendent identity connected to the body politic.

The vocabulary of theater and pageantry is remarkable in each edition, but none more than in Tate’s, usually preoccupied with asserting Richard’s divine and inalienable claim to the throne. In contrast to many of his other changes, Tate’s amendments to this scene actually emphasize the theatrical element of kingship:

...for within the hollow Crown
That rounds the mortal Temples of a King,
Keeps death his Court, and there the Antique sits,
Scorning his State, and grinning at this Pomp!
Allowing him a short fictitious Scene,
To play the Prince, be fear’d, and kill with looks,
‘Till swell’d with vain conceit the flatter’d thing
Believes himself immortal as a God;
Then to the train fate’s Engineer sets fire,
Blows up his pageant Pride and farewell King.
Tate makes much of the language more literal adding the word “fictitious” to describe the “short Scene,” changing “monarchize” to “play the Prince,” and simplifying

…As if this Flesh, which walls about our Life,

Were Brasse impregnable…

to “Believes himself immortal as a God.” While these attempts at clarity are normative in Tate’s edition, the diction of “fictitious,” “playing the Prince,” “believes himself immortal as a God,” and “pageant pride,” ultimately characterize kingship as far more theatrical than the earlier editions. To an even greater degree than the earlier editions, Tate’s Richard of this scene, lamenting the fleeting and artificial nature of the monarch, shapes an audience’s understanding of kingship as a role to inhabit for a finite period of time rather than a divinely ordained identity.

Early editors noticed the implications of the language of theatre and pageantry; in fact, the 1774 edition’s notes for this passage emphasize the theatrical nature of kingship, noting “to *monarchize* is a phrase extremely well conceived, as it implies merely playing a part.” In full, the note reads:

*There are many beauties perceptible in this speech, and several very useful deductions to be drawn from it, particularly a lesson to proud mortality, showing how frail, instable, and trifling human grandeur is, how transient all its glory: the figure of Death keeping his court within the circle of a crown is exquisitely fine and instructively philosophical; to *monarchize* is a phrase extremely well conceived, as it implies merely playing a part.*

This editor’s commentary perfectly captures the complex problems of kingship found throughout the different editions of the play—and within each edition. Is Richard a divinely-ordained king or is his kingship as fragile as his mortality? Approving recognition of “how frail, instable, and trifling human grandeur is, how transient all its glory”—even in the figure of a king—as well as the assertion that the metaphor of “Death keeping his court within the circle of a crown” is “instructively philosophical” suggests that this editor subscribes to a philosophy of kingship as a
role, rather than an essence. The 1774 edition explicitly recognizes how Richard’s recitation of the “death of kings” in combination with conjuring the conceit of Death’s court and “monarchizing” lends pathos to his figure, leaving his kingship in a remarkably precarious position.

V. The Monarch as Subject: “I, no; no, I”

The implications of Richard’s vulnerable position extend beyond his personal kingship; the very institution of kingship is threatened, and this is brought to the fore in the famous Parliament scene. Yet different versions of this scene have variations in spelling and punctuation which effect dramatic changes in the characterization of kingship, as seen in the heart of the Parliament scene with Richards’ wavering responses to Bolingbroke’s solicitation of the crown. When F1’s Bolingbroke asks if Richard is “contented” to resign the crown, F1’s Richard answers [see Appendix D]:

I, no; no, I: for I must nothing bee:

Therefore no, no, for I resigne to thee.

Now, marke me how I will vndoe myselfe. (IV.i.201-3)

Censorship may account for whether we ever get to read two such lines at all—and indeed they are not present in Q1. But the specific forms that these lines were to take over a period of a century and a half was governed by quite different factors, including spelling reforms and changes in how editors and compositors punctuated texts—and the micro-changes between these texts consequentially constructed different meanings. F1 presents “I, no” and “no, I” as two discrete clauses separated by a semi-colon. In fact, each of the four words is separated by a comma, colon, or semi-colon, and the second line, beginning “Therefore, no, no;” is also divided
by a semi-colon. Additionally, the colon of in the first line of F1 allows us to read the second half of the line as a causal explanation; i.e., “I, no; no, I:” *because* “I must nothing bee.” The additional colon intervening between “I must nothing bee” and “Therefore, no, no” similarly creates a conditional or causal relationship between the two clauses. But while the actual words of these two lines remain constant across the four earliest versions (Q4, Q5, F, Q6), the punctuation fluctuates, lending slightly different tones and meanings to the various Richards’ responses. The Q4, Q5, and Q6 versions are reprinted below to compare with F1:

I, no no I; for I must nothing bee,

Therefore no no for I resigne to thee.

Now marke me how I will vn doe my selfe: (Q4)

I, no no I; for, I must nothing bee,

Therefore no no, for I resigne to thee.

Now marke me how I will vn doe my self: (Q5)

I, no; no, I: for I must nothing be:

Therefore no, no, for I resigne to thee.

Now, marke me how I will undoe my self: (Q6)

In contrast to F1, in which a comma separates “no, no” in the second line, the lack of punctuation in Q4’s “Therefore no no” opens up the possibility that the second no is actually negating the first rather than reinforcing and emphasizing it. Accepting this implication of Q4’s reading, the 1956 and 2002 Arden editions of the play repunctuate the phrase to read “Therefore no ‘no.’” These distinctions—the extra punctuation which allows for a conditional relationship as well as that which lends a valence of consideration to “Therefore, no, no,”—make F1’s Richard speak as

9 See Appendix D for reproductions of these passages.
though he recognizes and accepts a chain of action that has been set in motion. The earlier versions, in contrast, maintain more ambiguity and reflect a less decisive resignation.

Q4, Q5, F1, and Q6 all maintain the ambiguous spelling of “I” in Richard’s response to Bolingbroke, which was Renaissance spelling not only for modern “I” but also for what we now spell as “Ay.” The ambiguity of these editions allows us to read the soliloquy in two ways: either Richard equivocates between acquiescence and refusal, saying “Yes no no yes,” or he interrogates—and negates—his own identity. In either case, part of the complexity of this phrase lies in the echoes of both meanings ringing through the words. Additionally, the chiasmus of “I, no; no, I” formally reflects and compounds the confusion and ambiguity of “I”’s meaning. However, one iteration of “no no” visually buttresses the other, reinforcing Richard’s ultimate reluctance to give up the crown. The second halves of each line also parallel one another, beginning “for I”—and in both cases the meaning of “I” is unambiguously referring to the speaker and subject, Richard. The two lines end differently in their phrasing but they share a rhetoric of self-negation and the tight meter and rhyme scheme suggest that the first line’s “must nothing bee” is essentially repeated in the second line’s “resigne to thee.”

Tate’s version diverges radically from the early seventeenth century editions, continuing to refer to Richard as “King” in the speech prefixes and changing the ambiguous and ambivalent “I, no: no, I” to a bluntly confused “Yes—No—.” In line with his general tendency to reduce ambiguity, Tate removes the possibility for “I” to mean Richard himself and, simultaneously, removes the possibility of Richard’s self-negation, a theme echoed in the later soliloquy in Act V. Instead, Tate’s version presents a rightful king threatened with uncrowning who does not know what to say. In addition to disambiguating between “Ay” and “I,” Tate’s change standardizes the reading and the theatrical experiences. Even if, as in most modern editions, one
reads “I” as “Ay,” the difference only makes a difference in the reading of the play, not on what an audience hears. Tate, on the hand, makes sure that the reader and the play-goer are presented with the same word and meaning. While an Elizabethan reader might have initially read “I no no I” as “Yes no no yes,” the spectator in a theatre might have heard “I” and immediately thought of “I” as Richard, the subject. Tate’s clarification certainly succeeds in stripping ambiguity from the exchange, but it also diminishes the complexity of a moment in which the question of whether a king who is no longer a king has any “I” who can either consent to or resist his own uncrowning. If he is no longer “Richard II,” he must “nothing be” – and “nothing” cannot “resign” the crown or do anything else. If the “I” is negated, there is no position from which to say either “yes” or “no.”

Furthermore, part of Tate’s political project entailed a rejection of the premise that anyone—especially Parliament, but including the king—had the power to strip a monarch of kingly authority. In his version, Tate excises all the lines in which Richard explicitly cedes his kingship to Bolingbroke as well as the lines in which Richard deems himself a Traytor with the rest:

…a Traytor with the rest:

For I haue giuen here my Soules consent,

T’vndeck the pompous Body of a King

Made Glory base; a Soueraigntie, a Slaue;

Prowd Maiestie, a Subiect; State, a Pesant. (IV.i.248-252)

In the early editions of Richard II, one of the most interesting questions revolves around the possibility of a king, with infinite authority, stripping himself of that power, a paradox of recuperating agency by relinquishing it; or, as Ernst Kantorowicz describes it, “the king’s body
natural becomes a traitor to the king’s body politic” (39). In censoring these lines, Tate removes Richard’s consent to what happens in the Parliament scene.

The later eighteenth century versions reflect an early eighteenth-century shift from the Renaissance double meaning of “I” to the disambiguation of “Ay” from “I” (OED). The “I”s of this passage are consequently changed to “Ay,” reflecting the apparent editorial belief that Richard’s assent, rather than his subjectivity, should be given primacy. In fact, all of the eighteenth century versions vary from F1 and either remove or marginalize these lines. The 1734, 1735, and 1770 editions relegate the whole exchange to a note at the bottom of the page, marked for excision. In the 1774 version, the revised lines are printed in the body of the text:

Ay,--no: No,--ay; for I must nothing be;
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now mark me how I will undo myself:--*

But the asterisk affixed immediately after the lines corresponds to a note below which reads: “This and the two preceding lines are pregnant with [a] most ludicrous quibble, and should certainly be erased,” referring back to the already established practice of cutting these lines, as in other eighteenth century editions.

One consequence of standardizing “I” and making it “Ay” is the absence of a tension between the personal “I,” used by Richard, and the royal “we,” which a king used in his official capacity as monarch. Leeds Barroll suggests that Shakespeare added the Parliament scene to provide an opportunity for exploring “the dilemma of regal status as an objectification of psychic identity” (449). While the transfer of the crown immediately following this exchange is often identified as the moment of divestiture for Richard, if he indeed refers to himself as “I” in this speech, he has already suffered an erasure of status and part of his royal identity has already been
compromised. As mentioned in the discussion of Tate’s version, the question of Richard’s power is paramount in this passage. If we can read “I” as Richard, the subject, the reduction of kingly status through language amplifies the stripping of his kingly trappings, and, as alluded to earlier, perhaps allows Richard to recuperate some of his agency through self-divestiture.

VI. The Monarch as Body Politic

The question of Richard’s kingship, especially the tension between kingship as a divinely-ordained identity and kingship as a role to inhabit, becomes even more prominently foregrounded in his Act V soliloquy, found in every edition. After the divestiture of Act IV, scene i, every edition’s Richard, at this point, has been stripped of all that make a king: followers, crown, robes, and name. Each Richard finds himself alone; while Q1 and Q4 lack scene divisions as well as descriptions of setting which surface much more frequently in later editions, they do have a stage direction, “Enter Richard alone.” At first sight, this direction seems to serve an obvious purpose: ensuring that everyone involved in the staging knows Richard should enter alone. However, the Folio stage direction is slightly different, and reads only “Enter Richard.” One can see that, while to a theatre audience it would be obvious in either case that Richard enters the scene physically alone, when considering the reading experience, as well as the cue for an actor in the theatrical experience, the emphasis of “alone” seems significant precisely because it is ambiguous and can have both a physical and a psychological meaning. Including “alone” as a qualifier for how Richard should enter underscores his mental isolation as well as his physical solitude.

In both F1 and Q6, scene divisions have been added in, and the Tate version has scene divisions along with a detail that specifically locates the scene: “SCENE, A Prison.” In addition
to reflecting changing trends of staging with more scenery, this typical Tate clarification concretizes the ambiguous, metaphorical element of the word “prison” which, for earlier audiences and readers, would only become clear after Richard had started speaking. While Richard is physically in a prison, he is also trapped symbolically: the body of the king becomes a sacred vessel, which no longer belongs to its inhabitant, the subject Richard. Tate’s assertion that “Prison” is solely the physical location strips away the potential for prison to echo through the text in multiple ways. This is compounded by Tate’s removal of the section of the soliloquy in which Richard muses on his multiple identities and roles within one “Prison.”

This tension of the body or the “person” as “prison” is suggested in a difference between Q1 and the later texts (Q4, F, Q6) versions of Richard’s soliloquy. Q1 reads:

Thus play I in one person many people.

But Q4, F1, and Q6 read:

Thus play I in one Prison many people. (V.v.31)\(^{10}\)

In Q1, Richard recognizes the many roles and characters that inhabit his physical body: Richard, the king of England, Richard, the personal subject, Richard, the newly-deposed king stripped of his divinity. But “in one person many people” alludes more significantly to an image of the king as one person who literally embodies many people—the royal “we.” In *The King’s Two Bodies*, Kantorowicz dubs *The Tragedy of King Richard II* “the tragedy of the King’s Two Bodies,” or more specifically, the demise of the union between the body natural with the immortal body politic (26, 30). The idealized conception of king is one that coherently contains the entire body politic (a notion manifested strikingly in the frontispiece image of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*)\(^{11}\), but in this speech, Richard’s royal “we” has fallen apart as he refers to himself as “I,” and he

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\(^{10}\) See Appendix E for reproductions of these passages.

\(^{11}\) See Appendix G for a reproduction of this image.
claims to “play” many people. The theatricality of this seems impossible to ignore, as he characterizes himself as a mere player, someone literally inhabiting roles, none of which work as an identity. We see here the problem of subjectivity: there is no “Richard” outside of the roles he plays and the Q1 version of this scene pointedly recognizes the theatricality of Richard’s identity. Had this passage read “Thus act I in one person many people,” the potential for an ambiguous blend of theatricality and agency would be maintained, but to “play” strips Richard of kingly authority without retaining agency or interiority. Later versions, which read “Thus play I in one Prison many people,” can either be understood on a literal level, referring to the physical prison in which he is being kept, or we can keep the echo of “person” and read the “Prison” also as the prison of a physical body that is no longer the royal “we.”

Three eighteenth-century versions (1734, 1735, 1770) maintain the Folio wording of “Thus play I in one prison many people;” however, in the 1774 version, the editor has reverted to the Q1 “Thus play I in one person many people” in another example of its efforts to achieve scholarly “authenticity.” The most striking aspect of this text, however, is the editorial note added at the bottom of the page:

†The thirty-nine indented lines [of which V.v.31-41 are part] would, for recitation particularly, be better omitted than retained; as they tend more to puzzle conception, than to inform judgment: the author seems to have indulged his own fancy, without consulting either the stage or closet.

The footnote directly addresses the two purposes of the text: for reading and theatrical experience (the title page notes “An introduction, and notes critical and illustrative, are added, by the authors of the dramatic censor”), explaining that the passage should be cut for both “stage” and “closet,” as it represents the author’s “indulgence” and “puzzles conception.” This note reminds us of the freedom with which eighteenth century editors, especially, amended and reformulated passages to match their standards of language, clarity and taste. Tate’s edition also
attempts to standardize the reading and theatrical experiences in disambiguating this scene’s stage direction, using the Latin term “solus” for the stage direction and inserting the word “lonesom” before “Prison:”

SCENE, A Prison.

King Richard, Solus.

Rich. I Have bin studying how to compare

This lonesom Prison to the populous World…

Tate’s changes clearly indicate for both the reader and spectator that Richard first enters the stage alone and then feels the crushing solitude of his situation.

As F1 Richard considers the roles he plays, he muses:

…Sometimes am I King;

Then Treason makes me with my selfe a Beggar,

And so I am. Then crushing penurie,

Perswades me, I was better when a King:

Then am I king’d againe: and by and by,

Thinke that I am vn’king’d by Bullingbrooke,

And straight am nothing. (V.v.32-41)

In three of the four early versions (Q1, F, Q6), the first line of this passage reads “Sometimes am I King,” but Q4 has an indefinite article before “King” (“Sometimes am I a King,” [italics mine]), which suggests the comparison between playing the king and playing any other part, whether “a King” or “a Beggar”—i.e. despite the actual upper-case, a lower-case “k” king on a par with “a Beggar.” In contrast, “Sometimes am I King” implies the King—a role much harder to move in and out of. From this latter perspective, one cannot play the divinely ordained and
sanctioned ruler of a people, being “king’d” and “unking’d” like an actor putting on and taking off a costume. In an echo of Richard’s self-divestment of his kingly trappings in the Parliament scene of Q4, F, and Q6, these editions which have Richard verbally “kinging” and “unkinging” himself seem to reassert the essential nature of kingly authority. Yet Richard articulates his “kinging” and “unkinging” passively in all the editions: first treason “unkings” him, then penury “perswades” him he is king, then he is “unking’d” by Bolingbroke. Richard’s articulation of his alternate investment and divestment of kingship returns to the question of authority, but an authority that he himself does not constitute.

VII. Conclusion

Each edition of Richard II ends in an anti-essentialist position with Richard soliloquizing on the nature of kingship, framing it as an act within a person/prison. David Kastan has recently characterized the view that a work transcends any possible material incarnation as “platonic,” in contrast to the “pragmatic” view that no text exists apart from the material forms and practices through which it is read or heard (Shakespeare and the Book 117-8). “The play,” in the platonic sense, is concerned with the fragmentation and fragility of kingship as well as the kingly identity of Richard and an ultimate question remains: is there a platonic king? But here is where the problem of the platonic play arises: there is a parallel instability between the editions of the play, and the different Richards they construct. In other words, the breakdown of “the play” breaks down over and between the editions. While there are limitations to constantly acknowledging the perilous instability of the play, we must remain aware that there is no “hypothetical X” to which Randall McLeod refers; “the play” Richard II, studied in classrooms throughout the world does not, in fact, exist except as a modern conflation of these earlier editions. In a sense,
however, it seems appropriate that our oscillation between platonic and non-platonic discussions of “the play” and an emphasis on various editions of the play mirrors the oscillation both within individual editions and between editions about the conflicting claims of Richard and Bolingbroke.

The historical existence of Richard II, king of England, tempts us to believe in the possibility of a Platonic Richard II. Yet the ambiguity of Richard’s staged identities—the impossibility of asserting that there is one Richard who transcends the variant texts—reflects back on the complexity of the historical narratives. Especially in terms of the question of status, we see the importance of narrative in shaping identity. What could represent the problem of historical narrative more powerfully than the stark contrast between F1’s Bolingbroke entering with “other lords,” at the end of the play and Q1’s King Henry entering with “his nobles”? There is no way to conflate these radically contradictory perspectives: on the one hand, F1’s “Bolingbroke,” a usurping lord; on the other, Q1’s “King Henry,” attended by “his lords.”

Through this exploration of Richard II, I have tried to show the significance of the New Textualism for an understanding of how textual difference constitutes meaning. Above all, I would stress the separate value of each of the early editions, the contingency of characters depending upon the specific texts that define them, and the problematic effects of modern conflations and standardizations. In this examination of the overlapping but differentiated Richards engendered by the various editions, I have attempted to show that the instability of Richard is not just a given of the historical sources; it is materialized in the changing textual details of speech prefixes, stage directions, punctuation, and speech. More broadly, I have attempted to situate the texts in their political and theatrical contexts, considering the ways in which shifting linguistic and cultural norms shape theatrical texts. The theatrical nature of these
texts make the interplay between text and performance particularly intriguing and close textual readings with an appreciation of the differences between editions can yield far more than a conflated text which has erased or obscured inconsistencies.
THE Tragedie of King Richard the Second.

As it hath beene publikely acted by the right Honourable the Lorde Chamberlaine his Servants.

LONDON
Printed by Valentine Simmes for Androw Wife, and are to be sold at his shop in Paules church yard at the signe of the Angel.
1597.

AT LONDON, Printed by W. W. for Mathew Law, and are to be sold at his shop in Paules church yard, at the signe of the Foxe.
1608.

THE Tragedie of King Richard the Second:
With new additions of the Parliament Scene, and the depoing of King Richard.

As it hath been lately acted by the Kings Majesties Servantes, at the Globe.

By William Shake-speare.
THE Tragedie of King Richard the Second:

With new additions of the Parliament Scene, and the deposing of King Richard.

As it hath been lately acted by the Kinges Maiesies servants, at the Globe.

By William Shakespeare.

At LONDON,

Printed for Mathew Law, and are to be sold at his shop in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe.

1615.
THE LIFE AND DEATH OF KING RICHARD THE SECOND.

With new Additions of the Parliament Scene, and the Deposing of King Richard.

As it hath beene acted by the Kings Majesties Servants, at the Globe.

By William Shakespeare.

LONDON,
Printed by John Norton, 1634.

THE HISTORY OF King RICHARD The SECOND.
Acted at the THEATRE ROYAL, Under the Name of the Sicilian Usurper.

With a Prefatory Epistle in Vindication of the Author.
Occasion'd by the PROHIBITION of this PLAT on the Stage.

By N. TATE.

Inultus sunt filio Puer? Hor.

LONDON,
Printed for Richard Tonson, and Jacob Tonson, at Grays-Inn Gate, and at the Judges-Head in Chancery-Lane near Fleet-street, 1681.
THE LIFE and DEATH OF RICHARD THE SECOND.

By Mr. William Shakespear.

LONDON:
Printed for J. Tonson, and the rest of the Proprietors; and sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster.
M. DCC. XXXIV.

THE LIFE and DEATH OF RICHARD II.

By SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
Printed by R. Walker at Shakespeare's Head in Turn again Lane, by the Ditch-side; and may be had at his Shop, the Sign of Shakespeare's Head, in Change Alley-Cribbll.
M. DCC. XXXV.
For God's sake let vs sit upon the ground,  
And tell sad stories of the death of Kings:  
How some have been depos'd, some slain in warre,  
Some haunted by the Ghosts they haue depos'd,  
Some poision'd by their Wives, some sleeping kill'd,  
All murthered, for within the hollow crowne  
That roundes the mortall temples of a King,  
Keptes death his Court, and there the antique fits,  
Scowling his State and grinning at his Pompe,  
Allowing him a breath a little Scene,  
To monarchize be fear'd, and kill with lookes,  
Insuing him with selfe and vaine conceit,  
As if this Flesh which was about our Life,  
Wore brasse impregnable: and humord thus,  
Comes

For Heauens sake let vs sit upon the ground,  
And tell sad stories of the death of Kings:  
How some have been depos'd, some slain in warre,  
Some haunted by the Ghosts they haue depos'd,  
Some poision'd by their Wives, some sleeping kill'd,  
All murther'd. For within the hollow Crowne  
That roundes the mortall Temples of a King,  
Keeps Death his Court, and there the antique fits  
Scowling his State, and grinning at his Pompe,  
Allowing him a breath, a little Scene,  
To Monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with lookes,  
Insuing him with selfe and vaine conceit,  
As if this Flesh, which was about our Life,  
Wore Brass impregnable: and humor'd thus,  
Comes at the last, and with a little Pinne  
Bores through his Castle Wall, and farewel King;

Q1 (1597) III.ii.155-170  
F1 (1623) III.ii.155-170
For heav'n's sake let us fit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of Kings;
How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
Some poiyon'd by their Wives, some sleeping kill'd;
All murther'd: for within the hollow Crown
That rounds the mortal Temples of a King,
Keeps Death his Court, and there the Antick fits,
Scoffing his State, and grinning at his Pomp!
Allowing him a short fictitious Scene,
To play the Prince, be fear'd, and kill with looks,
Till swell'd with vain conceit the flatter'd thing
Believes himself immortal as a God;
Then to the train fate's Engineer sets fire,
Blows up his pageant Pride and farewell King.

Tate (1681) III.ii.155-170

For God's sake, let us fit upon the ground,
And tell sad stories of the death of kings:
How some have been depos'd, some slain in war,
Some haunted by the ghosts they dispossess'd,
Some poiyon'd by their wives, some sleeping kill'd;
All murther'd: For within the hollow crown,
That rounds the mortal Temples of a king,
Keeps Death his course, and there the antick fits,
Scoffing his state, and grinning at his pomp;
Allowing him a breath, a little scene
To monarchize, be fear'd, and kill with looks;
Infusing him with self and vain conceit,—
As if this flesh, which walls about our life,
Were brash impregnable: and humour'd thus,
Comes at the last, and with a little pin
Bores through his castle-walls, and farewell King!

* There are many beauties perceptible in this passage, and several very useful deductions to be drawn from it, particularly a lesson to proud mortality, showing how frail, instable, and vainly human grandeur, how transient all its glory: the figure of Death keeping his court within the circle of a crown is exquisitely fine, and instructively philosophic: to monarchize is a phrase extremely well conceived, as it implies merely playing a part.
THE LIFE and DEATH OF KING RICHARD II.
A TRAGEDY.

By W. SHAKESPEARE.

EDINBURGH:
Printed by A. DONALDSON, and sold at his Shop, corner of Arundel-Street, Strand, London; and at Edinburgh.

M. DCC. LXX.

KING RICHARD II.
A TRAGEDY, by SHAKESPEARE.

AN INTRODUCTION,

AND

NOTES CRITICAL and ILLUSTRATIVE,

ARE ADDED, BY THE AUTHORS of the DRAMATIC CENSOR.

LONDON:
Printed for JOHN BELL, near Exeter-Exchange, in the Strand; and C. ETHERINGTON, at York.

MDCCCLXXIV.
North. Well haue you argu'd Sir, and for your paynes,
Of Capitall treason, we arrest you here:
My Lord of Westminister, be it your charge,
To kepe him safely till his day of triall.
May it please you Lords, to graunt the common suite,
Fetch hither Richard, that in common view
He may surrender: so we shall proceed without suspition.
Bull. Are you contented to resign the Crowne?

Rich. I, no no I, for, I must nothing bee,
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now marke me how I will undoe my selfe:
I giue this heauie weight from off my head,
And this unwieldie Scepter from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart:

Bull. Are you contented to resign the Crowne?

Rich. I no; no, I: for I must nothing be:
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now, marke me how I will undoe my selfe:
I give this heavy weight from off Head,
And this unwieldy Scepter from my hand,
The pride of Kingly sway from out my heart.

F1 (1623) IV.i.200-206

Tate (1681) IV.i.200-206

Q4 (1608) IV.i.200-206

Q6 (1634) IV.i.200-206
Appendix D

Now, mark me how I will undo myself;
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart,

Boling. Are you contented to resign the crown?
K. Rich. I no; no I, for I must nothing be:
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me, &c.

Now, mark me how I will undo myself;
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart,

Boling. Are you contented to resign the crown?
K. Rich. I no; no I, for I must nothing be:
Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me, &c.

1734 (lines moved to note below)
IV.i.200-206

1735 (lines moved to note below)
IV.i.200-206

Now mark me how I will undo myself;
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;

Boling. Are you contented to resign the crown?
K. Rich. Ay, no;—no, ay;—for I must nothing be:
Therefore no no; for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me, &c.

Now mark me how I will undo myself;
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;

Boling. Are you contented to resign the crown?
Ric. "Ay,—no: No,—ay;—for I must nothing be;
"Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
"Now mark me how I will undo myself:—
I give this heavy weight from off my head,
And this unwieldy scepter from my hand,
The pride of kingly sway from out my heart:

• This and the two preceding lines are pregnant with most ludicrous quibble, and should certainly be erased.

1770 (lines moved to note below)
IV.i.200-206

1774 IV.i.200-206
Thus play I in one Prison, many people,  
And none contented; sometimes am I King;  
Then Treasons make me with my selfe a Beggar,  
And so I am: then crushing penury,  
Perswades me I was better when a King;  
Then am I King’d againe; and by and by,  
Thinke that I am vn-kings’d by Bullingbrooke,  
And straight am nothing. But what ere I am,  
Nor I, nor any man, that but man is,  
With nothing shall be pleas’d, till he be eas’d  
With being nothing. Musicke do I heare.

Musick.

Thus play I in one Prison, many people,  
And none contented; sometimes am I King;  
Then Treason makes me with my selfe a Beggar,  
And so I am. Then crushing penury,  
Perswades me I was better when a King;  
Then am I King’d againe; and by and by,  
Thinke that I am vn-kings’d by Bullingbrooke,  
And straight am nothing. But what ere I am,  
Nor I, nor any man, that but man is,  
With nothing shall be pleas’d, till he be eas’d  
With being nothing. Musicke do I heare?  

Musick.
This passage is absent from Tate's edition.

- Thus play I in one prison, many people,
- And none contented. Sometimes am I King,
- Then treason makes me with myself a beggar,
- And so I am. Then crushing penury
- Persuades me, I was better when a King;
- Then am I king'd again; and by and by,
- Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
- And straight am nothing——but whate'er I am,
- Nor I, nor any man, that but man is,
- With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd

1734 (lines marked for excision)
V.v.31-41

1770 (lines marked for excision)
V.v.31-41

1774 (lines marked for excision)
V.v.31-41

Thus play I in one prison, many people,
And none contented. Sometimes am I King,
Then treason makes me with myself a beggar,
And so I am. Then crushing penury
Persuades me, I was better when a King;
Then am I king'd again; and by and by,
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing——but whate'er I am,
Nor I, nor any man, that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd

1735 (lines marked for excision)
V.v.31-41

Thus play I in one prison, many people,
And none contented. Sometimes am I King,
Then treason makes me with myself a beggar,
And so I am. Then crushing penury
Persuades me, I was better when a King;
Then am I king'd again; and by and by,
Think that I am unking'd by Bolingbroke,
And straight am nothing——But, whate'er I am,
Nor I, nor any man, that but man is,
With nothing shall be pleas'd, till he be eas'd

† The thirty-nine indented lines would, for recitation particularly, be better omitted than retained; as they tend more to puzzle conception, than to inform judgment; the author seems to have indulged his own fancy, without consulting either the stage or closet.
Appendix F

Bull. They love not poyslon, that do poyslon neede,
Nor do I thee: though I did with him dead,
I hate the Murtherer, love him murthered.
The guilt of conscience take thou for thy labour,
But neither my good word, nor Princey favour.
With Caine go wander through the shade of night,
And neuer shew thy head by day, nor light.
Lords, I protest my soule is full of woe,
That blood should sprinkle me, to make me grow.
Come moune with me, for that I do lament,
And put on sullen Blakke incontinent.
He makes a voyage to the Holy-land,
To wash this blood off from my guilty hand.
March sadly after, grace my mourning hert.
In weeping after this untimely Beere. Extent
Frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*
Works Consulted and Cited


Cohen 53


Shakespeare, William, and Nahum Tate. *The History of King Richard the Second: Acted at the Theatre Royal, Under the Name of the Sicilian Usurper. With a Prefatory Epistle*
in Vindication of the Author. Occasion'd by the Pro hibition of this Play on the Stage.


---. The Life and Death of Richard II. London: printed by R. Walker at Shakespear's Head in Turn-Again Lane, by the Ditch-Side; and may be had at his shop, the Sign of Shakespear's Head, in Change-Alley-Cornhill, 1735.

---. The Life and Death of Richard the Second. London: printed for J. Tonson, and the rest of the proprietors; and sold by the booksellers of London and Westminster, 1734.

---. The Tragedie of King Richard the Second. London: Printed by Valentine Simmes for Andrew Wise and are to be sold at his shop in Paules Church-yard at the signe of the Angel, 1597.

---. The Tragedie of King Richard the Second. London: Printed by Valentine Simmes, for Andrew Wise, and are to be solde at his shop in Paules churchyard, at the signe of the Angel, 1598.

---. The Tragedie of King Richard the Second. London: Printed by William White for Mathew Law, and are to be sold at his shop in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe, 1608.

---. The Tragedie of King Richard the Second. London: Printed by Thomas Purfoot for Mathew Law, and are to be sold at his shop in Paules Church-yard, at the signe of the Foxe, 1615.


