The Stylistic Self in *Richard II*

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In the deposition scene of *Richard II*, Shakespeare’s king obsessively repeats the word “myself.” Only once in the play’s first three acts does Richard use this word. But in the midst of the deposition, he says it seven times in seventy-five lines.1 Pressed by Bolingbroke to resign, Richard famously replies: “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” (4.1.201–3). The speech’s wordplay has received much comment. Richard, we are told, plays on the homophone of “Ay” and “I” to express the annihilating impact of abdication: “I know no ‘I’.” The lines represent, as Ernst Kantorowicz puts it in his influential reading, “the demise of Richard and the rise of a new body natural.” We see the king “break apart” as the royal “we” slips away along with Richard’s unified identity.2 But it is not the body natural’s “I” that Richard suddenly repeats here; he has used “I” since the opening scene. Instead, he repeats “myself,” a word—rather, a phrase—whose textual, linguistic, and literary condition calls into question the orthodox belief that deposition “break[s] apart” Richard’s identity.

“Myself” counts as a phrase because in Shakespeare’s time most reflexive pronouns appeared as not one but two words.3 The First Folio prints Richard’s lines this way:

*Rich.* I, no; no, I: for I must nothing be: 
Therefore no, no, for I resign to thee.
Now, mark me how I will vn doe my selfe.

Figure 1: Excerpt from the First Folio, Sig. d2v. Image taken from *The Bodleian First Folio: digital facsimile of the First Folio of Shakespeare’s plays*, Bodleian Arch. Gr. 7. URL: http://firstfolio.bodleian.ox.ac.uk.

Editors and scholars have largely taken the difference between the early modern “my selfe” and the modern “myself” as an “accidental” textual feature, but the fact that “self” remains distinct from what possesses it (“me”) suggests a complexity within orthographic convention. Even as “my self” func-
tions reflexively and emphatically, the phrase features a "self" possessed grammatically by the personal pronoun "my." At once two words and one, it combines reflexivity (Richard undoes himself) and self-possession (he undoes his self). This peculiar morphology provides Richard the means to speak as if he possesses a self even as he talks about himself. Given the deposition scene's centuries-old status as a flashpoint of debate over sovereignty and selfhood, the king's repetition of "my self" introduces the question: if deposition is the "demise" of Richard's identity, why then would Shakespeare insist on, at the very moment of abdication, a term that denotes identity? Why, that is, would a figure supposedly losing his sense of self repeat a word that emphasizes self-possession?

This essay argues that Richard is not losing but gaining a coherent sense of self. When Shakespeare gives Richard a flurry of "myself"s, he is activating a Senecan, Stoic keyword in early modern culture. In the 1580s and early 1590s, "my self" and other reflexive language had provided writers in the Senecan tragic vein with verbal resources for self-reference. While the vogue for Senecan drama leveled off in the mid-1590s, a Christianized Stoicism inspired by Seneca's writings found new popularity, and that trend too featured extensive use of reflexive language. This essay shows that Richard's repetition of "myself" constitutes a specifically Stoic linguistic capacity. In and after the deposition, he speaks with a new language of the self, rooted in the reflexivity of "my self." Both Senecan hero and sage, he finds personal empowerment in political disempowerment, and he manages to hold in unprecedented tension these evolving versions of the Stoic self. Such a dramatic trajectory cuts across the tradition that follows Kantorowicz in reading the play as Richard's journey from unity to fragmentation. Instead, only when Richard deposes himself, and in doing so completes his first sustained reflexive speech act, does he begin to speak with the unity of self-possession.

This new perspective on Richard II provides fresh insight into Shakespeare's writing practice. Richard's trajectory toward Stoic personal empowerment illustrates Shakespeare's active engagement with overlapping theatrical and print markets, and with surging political discourses. Shakespeare, sensitive to the highly politicized and ever-shifting demand for Senecan drama and political writing, created a specific and marketable kind of play that would (and did) have a life beyond 1595 in the theater and in print. Indeed, the play's many printings and its likely staging on the eve of the 1601 Essex rebellion suggest its currency, however complex, as a piece of political-philosophical writing. Yet it is primarily in and through "myself" and other formal features that the play obtains such currency, interacting with a network of early modern texts, writers, and ideas. What emerges from this essay's reading of Richard II is thus a picture of Shakespeare responding to and exploiting the changing values of the "self" as it relates to the larger social world. Not simply a play that opposes political and poetic skill, nor a
resistance text that carries a whiff of “monarchical republicanism,” Richard II uses the Stoic idiom of the self to dramatize the empowerment of the politically disempowered. In and through form, Shakespeare makes history.

Know “My Selfe”

Critics of the play have much to say about its politics. Much scholarship comments on the play’s exploration of sovereignty, its relationship to chronicle history, and Richard’s subjectivity. But as I have noted, Seneca and Richard II rarely inhabit the same scholarly ground, a surprising omission considering that political philosophy, national history, and subjectivity were central components of Seneca’s influence in the Renaissance. Tragedy in the Senecan vein, which dominated the English stage throughout the 1580s and into the 1590s, offers a notion of the self “defined by its own will, sufficiency, empowerment, and its drive toward actualisation of that power.” Meanwhile, from the mid-1590s onward, Christianized Stoicism (or Neostoicism) achieved vogue status at court. This brand of humanism valued constancy as its chief ethical principle, which the Neostoic thinker Justus Lipsius defined as a “right and immovable strength of the minde, neither lifted up, nor pressed downe with externall or casuall accidentes.”

The years 1594–95—the time Shakespeare was writing Richard II—witnessed a key moment in the evolution of Seneca’s stage popularity and in the rising popularity of Stoicism when writings by Lipsius, Guillaume du Vair, and other Neostoic writers appeared in print. These writers addressed crucial questions about the relationship between politics and personhood, and they shared with the drama a “commitment to the self’s superiority to all public ambitions and intimidations.” Although, as Gordon Braden has argued, “Stoicism and Senecan drama . . . generally run on separate tracks,” the two trends shared an approach to the self—unified, reflexive, constant—even as they emphasized different aspects of the self’s engagement with the world. To be sure, from the 1560s onward Senecan tragedies had operated, like Lipsius’ writings about tyranny and civil war, to “help [English readers] respond to the politics of kingship and power.” Whatever their differences in emphasis, as this section will demonstrate, Senecan tragedy and Neostoic political philosophy belong on one continuum of thought that posits the self as the primary recourse and refuge for those out of power. And both use “self” language to do so.

In the Senecan tradition, reflexive language constitutes the primary marker of the unified self. Gretchen Reydams-Schils observes that “we encounter the Roman Stoic self in innumerable passages [of classical Latin texts] that contain reflexive language,” because that language provides a means of self-reference. For example, in his epistle on friendship, Seneca describes how
the wise man, even when fully engaged in public life, “is hidden in himselfe, . . . is only with himselfe.” Early modern English dramatists writing in the Senecan vein maintained this trend with the “self” pronouns. Most often they played on the rhetorical and personal potential embedded in “my self,” especially in moments of personal drama. Alexander Nevill’s translation of Seneca’s *Oedipus* features speeches such as this: “Fro[m] none but fro[m] my selfe / Who have a breast full fraught with guilte: who, wretched caiffie Elfe / Have all embrude my hands with bloud.” “My selfe” here works as the antecedent of both relative clauses and results in a second possessive gesture to “my hands.” The King’s “self” has “embrude” his hands with blood. The self-referential power of “my self” made its way to the playhouse, where Thomas Kyd, the usual Senecan suspect, helped set the “my self” trend on the stage even as he made noticeably different use of Seneca than Nevill did. Early in *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587), Lorenzo claims: “Ile trust my selfe, my selfe shalbe my freend.” In Kyd’s less popular *Solymam and Perseda* (c. 1592), the title character Soliman, having allowed his friend Erastus to woo his beloved Perseda, cries out in passionate regret: “Foolish Soliman, why did I strive, / To do him [Erastus] kindnes, and undoe my selfe? / Well governed friends do first regard themselves.” Soliman uses the same phrase (“undoe my selfe”) Richard does when he deposes himself. In the final line, he articulates the Stoic doctrine that self-regard must precede even friendship, as in the line above from Seneca’s epistles.

Insofar as any use of “myself” or another reflexive pronoun articulates a strong, unified sense of interiority, it is Stoic on some level. But the writers surveyed here, before and after Shakespeare wrote and revised *Richard II*, consistently use reflexive language as the currency of the Senecan-Stoic self. Writers spent that currency in dramatic moments of personal empowerment, even in scenes of political disempowerment. In the Senecan tradition, however, as in much poststructuralist thinking about the self, language does not merely mark a pre-linguistic self but brings it into being, gives it a shape and texture, and uses it as a means of engagement with the social world. Seneca’s rhetoric, Robert Miola writes, is the “language of self-creation, the means by which characters will themselves into being and power.” Marlowe’s Tamburlaine (c. 1588, published 1590) speaks “my self” fluently, for example. He uses the phrase in moments that coordinate with his strongly articulated sense of self, as when he offers gifts to Zenocrate, the daughter of the Sultan of Egypt:

My martaill prises with five hundred men,  
Wun on the fittie headed Vuolgas maves.  
Shall all we offer to Zenocrate,  
And then my selfe to faire Zenocrate.
He gives his “self” in a way that effectively forces himself on her; he does not so much give his “self” as assert that self. Instead of simply marking Tamburlaine’s subjectivity, “my selfe” generates and even constitutes it within the political situation of the play. His sense of self becomes the basis of his engagement with the world. Later he uses “my self” in place of the subject pronoun “I”: “My selfe will bide the danger of the brunt” (sig. A8v). As we will see, Bolingbroke makes the same substitution. And in the same way that Mowbray throws “my self” at Richard’s feet early in Shakespeare’s play, so Tamburlaine promises: “My crowne, my selfe, and all the power I have, / In all affection at thy kingly feet” (sig. Gv), asserting his selfhood by giving away that self. Exploited in this way, “my selfe” enriches A. J. Boyle’s claim that Senecan “autarchic selfhood”—literally, self-ruled selfhood—“manifests itself ubiquitously and conspicuously in the ability of characters to construct their identity and their domination of the world in language.”22 The phrase offers not just a style of self but a stylistic self, fashioned reflexively in words.

This trend extended beyond the stage and into the world of reading. Following Newton’s compilation Seneca His Tenne Tragedies (1581), Kyd himself contributed to this world in 1594 when he translated Robert Garnier’s Neo-Senecan play Cornélie. Early in the play, the title character Cornelia bemoans:

O heavens, what shall I doe? alas must I,
Must I my selfe, be murderer of my selfe?
Must I my selfe be forc’d to ope the way?
Whereat my soule in wounds may sally forth?23

Unlike his plays for the public stage, which tend to appropriate Seneca’s themes and rhetoric, this play follows other closet dramas in imitating Seneca’s tragic structure and declamatory style. Remarkably, however, Kyd’s sensitivity to the personal potential of reflexive language remains consistent across the two modes. Cornelia’s self—the seat and source of her personhood—is distinct from the “I” of her subjectivity, yet at the very same time it is indistinguishable from the “I.” “I” is not “my self” but also identical to it. The reflexive pronoun permits her to speak simultaneously as a unified self and as a fragmented self, just as Richard II will do after his deposition. Similarly, in Samuel Daniel’s closet play Cleopatra (1594), the Egyptian queen laments, “Ile bring my soule, my selfe, and that with speed, / My selfe will bring my soule to Antony.”24 The first line identifies Cleopatra’s self and her soul, but the second sets them apart from and against each other. These and many other “self”s reflect the range of the pronouns’ value in Shakespeare’s time.

Shakespeare himself wrote in the Senecan vein. When he wrote Richard II
in 1595, he had completed about nine plays, five of which were tragedies variously influenced by Seneca. They feature on-stage fighting, gruesome death, lengthy set-speeches in blank verse and rhymed couplets, and historical events with nationalistic implications. He would continue to draw on and respond to Senecan tragedy and Stoicism throughout his career, especially in \textit{Hamlet, Julius Caesar,} and \textit{Coriolanus.} But in the mid-1590s, as Martin Dzelzainis has argued in the context of \textit{The Rape of Lucrece} (1594), Shakespeare was thoroughly engaged with the “new humanism” spurred by Lipsius and others. He was, moreover, highly sensitive to the verbal qualities of the stylistic self. Richard III, after the parade of his victims’ ghosts haunts his dreams (itself a Senecan convention), asks:

\begin{quote}
Is there a murtherer here? no. Yes I am, 
Then fly, what from my selfe? great reason whie? 
Least I revenge. What my selfe upon my selfe? 
Alacke I love my selfe, wherefore? for anie good 
That I my selfe have done unto my selfe: 
O no, alas I rather hate my selfe, 
For hateful I does committed by my selfe.  
\end{quote}

Richard talks about his “self” as if it remains distinct from the “I” of subjectivity. He is talking to himself about his self, realizing that if he wants to be the hero revenger, then he must take that revenge upon himself. But at the same time as the speaking “I” and the “self” are distinct, they also remain identical, and that is the very problem this Richard confronts. The reflexivity that enables him to articulate a fragmented sense of self also traps him in an unavoidably unified sense of self. Whereas this king finds this situation paralyzing, Shakespeare’s Richard II finds it liberating, as we shall see.

Even as Senecan drama reached a popularity plateau in the mid-1590s, a rapid and far-reaching rise in Neostoicism occurred at court, in print, and on the stage. Beginning with Philip Sidney, who met Lipsius on the continent and popularized Christian Stoicism in the English court, the so-called new humanism took root in the Essex circle and later in the household of Henry Stuart, Prince of Wales. Courtiers found in Neostoicism a philosophy that offered the disempowered subject a sense of personal agency in the worst political circumstances. Along with the court vogue came a publishing boom: translations of Lipsius’ \textit{Sixe Bookes of Politics or Doctrine} appeared in 1594, his \textit{On Constancy} in 1595, and du Vair’s \textit{The Moral Philosophie of the Stoicks} in 1598. The Stoic trend, meanwhile, would feature such stage figures as Chapman’s Bussy D’Ambois (c. 1603) and Shakespeare’s own Brutus and Horatio, along with plays such as Thomas Lodge’s \textit{The Wounds of Civil Warr} (1594) which echoes Lipsius’ many warnings against political strife. Shakespeare thus wrote \textit{Richard II}, a play about a subject taking arms against
his prince and becoming a usurper, amid the rise of a philosophy whose central questions included whether, in Montaigne’s words, “it is lawful for a subject to rebel and take arms against his prince.”

As in Senecan tragedy, reflexive language operated as the idiom of the new Stoicism, offering a way of talking with and about the self. William Jones’s translation of Lipsius’ *Sixe Bookes*, for instance, features over four-hundred reflexive pronouns, more than four per quarto-sized page. Lipsius exhorts his reader to “Seeke thou thine owne praise in thy self by a true and inward vertue, not grounding thy selfe upon the shew of fraile and vaine things. Be thou moderate in thy apparell and courteous in thy speech.” Not least because this section contains multiple quotations of Seneca and admonitions to be “resolute against fear,” Lipsius’ use of “self” language comports with that of Senecan tragedy. Chapman’s Bussy makes similar use of reflexive language. Taking up the Neostoic topic of tyranny as he promises the king not to commit violence, for instance, Bussy claims:

> I loth as much a deede of vniust death,  
> As law it selfe doth; and to Tyrannise,  
> Because I have a little spirit to dare,  
> And power to do, as to be Tyranniz’d;  
> This is a grace that (on my knees redoubled)  
> I craue to double this my short lifes gift; . . .  
> When I am wrong’d and that law failes to right me,  
> Let me be King my selfe (as man was made)  
> And doe a justice that exceeds the law.”

Even in assuring the king he will not commit unjust murder, Bussy undermines the law’s authority by appeal to his reflexive sense of self. Finally, Shakespeare’s Brutus uses reflexive language frequently and Stoically, as his early speech to Cassius illustrates:

> Be not deceiu’d: If I haue veyl’d my looke,  
> I turne the trouble of my Countenance  
> Meerely vpon my selfe. Vexed I am  
> Of late, with passions of some difference,  
> Conceptions onely proper to my selfe,  
> Which giue some soyle (perhaps) to my Behaviours.”

The “self” pronouns maintained this Stoic value at least until 1614, when Lodge’s translation of Seneca appeared, a “monument to the Jacobean Neo-Stoic cult.” Lodge translates Latin phrases such as “similis sibi” and “pars sibi” as “like himself.” He even Englishes Seneca’s “ unus idemque inter diversa”—“one and the same in changing situations,” perhaps the single
clearest definition of Stoic selfhood—as “like himselfe in good and evill fortune.”

Tapping into this rich set of keywords, poets and playwrights used “self” pronouns to generate a Stoic style of self, a practice evident even in texts often discussed alongside *Richard II*. Daniel, whom Neostoicism influenced deeply, uses reflexive language to describe his *Richard II* in *The Civil Wars* (1595): “The youth of Princes have no boundes for sinne, / Unlesse themselves do make them bounds within.”36 “Unhappy kings,” he writes, “that never may be taught / To know themselves. . . .”37 The king’s problem with what lies “within” invites the reflexive language of the Stoic self. Marlowe’s Edward II so attaches himself to his friend Gaveston that his reflexive language suggests his lack of self-sufficiency: “Rend not my hart with thy too piercing words,” he tells the banished Gaveston early in the play, “Thou from this land, I from my selfe am banisht.”38 Unlike Tamburlaine and Bolingbroke, Edward’s “self” language manifests his well-known incapacity for self-possession. Finally, the title character of the anonymous Woodstock play (c. 1594) appeals explicitly to Stoicism as he explains to King Richard why he has dressed with unusual decoration:

I am no Stoic, my dear sovereign cousin,  
To make my plainness seem canonical,  
But to allow myself such ornaments  
As might be fitting for your nuptial day  
And coronation of your virtuous queen.39

He eschews Stoicism as a philosophy that would prescribe plain dress as “canonical”; but in using “myself” to appeal to decorum, he actually affirms deep Stoic commitments to self-sufficiency. The true Stoic can dress however he wants because of his indifference to external things, as Lipsius also claimed in the line quoted earlier concerning apparel. Accordingly, after he removes his rich clothes Woodstock acknowledges, “I’m now myself, Plain Thomas” (2.2.35).

Although early modern writers often viewed Woodstock’s type of Senecan reason in opposition to Tamburlaine’s Senecan passion—Seneca the philosopher versus Seneca the tragedian—the differences between the two become visible because of their “deep affinities,” specifically their conception of the self and its relationship to society.40 Senecan tragedy and the new Stoicism, that is, operate upon the style of selfhood described above—as we will see, the very one Bolingbroke possesses and Richard does not articulate before the deposition. A reflexive sense of self formed in language precedes, on one hand, quiet indifference to tyranny, oppression, injustice, and death and, on the other, violent opposition to them.41 That this selfhood appears in and through “myself” and other reflexive forms must not go overlooked, how-
ever. The power of the Senecan, Stoic self, which would later inform Enlightenment thought and modern republicanism, emanates from its chief formal expressions. “My self” makes visible and distinct a kind of subjectivity that thinkers such as Descartes and Montaigne—not to mention Locke and Hobbes—found incredibly attractive. As we have seen, Shakespeare understood well this verbal potential in reflexive language, its associations with Senecan tragedy, and its value for Neostoic political philosophy. His exploitation of that potential in Richard II, a play generically, politically, and stylistically steeped in Stoicism, drastically changes how we view the play.

Kings Fall Apart

A scholarly commonplace insists that Richard II presents an elaborate dynamic of subjectivity. Scholarship on the play, following Kantorowicz, has long viewed this dynamic as the king’s progress from unified selfhood to fragmentation. But the play’s Senecan context and pedigree, and moreover its culturally thick reflexive language, suggests instead that the king’s early attempts at self-possession constitute failed attempts. The widespread currency of “my self” as the keyword for Senecan-Stoic selfhood coordinates Richard’s struggles to speak about himself with his lack of self-possession. At the same time, Bolingbroke and others demonstrate an ability to speak that coordinates with selfhood of the Senecan flavor. Even though that selfhood is connected inexorably to the rhetorical circumstances of specific utterances, the play’s reflexive language works within those circumstances as both instrument and agent of self-possession. Speaking “my self” thus amounts to a capacity for self-reference that Richard achieves only in the act of self-deposition. Even if the “self” pronouns do not create a unified ontology by themselves, they conjure the impression of one, and this quality makes them powerful forms with which Shakespeare dramatizes the chiasmus of Richard’s fall and Bolingbroke’s rise. The first three acts contrast a noticeably self-possessed Bolingbroke with Richard, whose attempts at self-speech fall apart.

In the play’s opening scene, despite the king’s claim that “We were not born to sue but to command” (1.1.196), Richard does much more suing than commanding. As the dukes of Hereford and Norfolk enter, he remarks on how “High-stomached are they both and full of ire, / In rage, deaf as the sea, hasty as fire” (18–19). The unexpected, almost bombastic couplet registers the apprehension and even envy with which Richard views the dukes’ fury, but not before he declares his intent that “Face to face, / And frowning brow to brow, ourselves [our selves] will hear / The accuser and the accused freely speak” (15–17). An approach assuming kingly unity would read the royal plural “our selves” as an “indication of a linguistic unity or integrity of char-
acter.” Yet to seek singularity within a word (“our selves”) popularized in the sixteenth century out of the need for a plural is to look past Shakespeare’s language. When “self” became a noun, the plural “our” did not fit with the singular “self,” and a vacuum opened for an unambiguous plural with which to treat the two parts as if they were aspects of the same entity, “we.” The kingly self-unity for which “ourselves” supposedly stands thus conflicts with the word’s plurality, both its grammatical number and its plural textual state.

Never again in the opening scene does Shakespeare give Richard a “self”-marked pronoun, and the king oscillates throughout between singular and plural self-references, as when he invites Mowbray to speak freely:

Mowbray, impartial are our eyes and ears.
Were he my brother, my, my kingdom’s heir,
As he is but my father’s brother’s son,
Now, by my sceptre’s awe, I make a vow
Such neighbour nearness to our sacred blood
Should nothing privilege him nor partialize
The unstooping firmness of my upright soul.
He is our subject, Mowbray; so art thou.
Free speech and fearless I to thee allow.

(115–23, emphasis mine)

Charles Forker suggests that “Shakespeare may have intended an occasional reversion to the more personal [pronoun] as a means of suggesting the private Richard behind his public façade,” but so rigid a scheme of external versus internal is unnecessary, even if Richard wants Mowbray to keep his mouth shut about the king’s responsibility for Woodstock’s death (116n). Indeed, Richard acts with bias (or “partialize[s]”) against Mowbray, and demonstrates a lack of “firmness,” not least because he shoplifts from the unyielding combatants the idea of a firm soul. Both men refuse to budge, equating their strong speech with strong actions. Bolingbroke promises, “what I speak / My body shall make good upon this earth” (1.1.36–37) and “look what I speak, my life shall prove it true” (87). Faced with the dukes’ appeal to wholeness and stability, Richard wobbles between a singular and a plural subject position. He wants to speak like a Senecan hero, but he sounds like a failed version.

The problem only worsens as Shakespeare correlates Richard’s moments of struggle and the dukes’ most self-possessed statements. When Mowbray calls Bolingbroke a traitor, his forcefulness derives from his reflexive language: “in myself [my selfe] I boldly will defend . . . to prove myself [my selfe] a loyal gentleman” (145, 148). Ambiguously reflexive and substantive, Mowbray’s use of “my self” cues the actor playing him to gesture to himself as he speaks. Before he ever picks up a weapon, his passionate speech—which taps into the same cultural resources as Tamburlaine’s promise,
“Those walled garrisons wil I subdue, / And write my selfe great Lord of Africa”—establishes his autarchic selfhood. Richard’s response, “Wrath-kindled gentlemen, be ruled by me,” accepts Mowbray’s reflexive boldness—as proof of his gentle status. Instead of saying “I rule you,” he requests that they “be ruled by” him. However much Richard pleads, though, the dukes remain constant. Mowbray turns Richard’s line “Norfolk, throw down, we bid; there is no boot” into a reflexive gesture, kneeling as he turns the line back at the king: “Myself [My selfe] I throw, dread sovereign, at thy foot” (164–65). That he can throw himself—or his self—anywhere is a powerfully self-presenting act. That he throws that self at the king has the force of a taunt. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the scene ends with Richard allowing the men to prepare to fight, exactly the outcome he wanted to avoid. Mowbray and Bolingbroke do something Richard does not: they have spoken persuasively about themselves.

Notoriously, Bolingbroke does not declare a desire to become king; his oddly muted progress to the throne comes across as Machiavellian machination. So it may be. But his many moments of strong self-speech hearken back to figures such as Tamburlaine:

Fill all the aire with fiery meteors,
Then when the Sky shal ware as red as blood,
It shall be said, I made it red my selfe,
To make me think of nought but blood and war.44

Although unlike Marlowe’s overreacher in most respects, Bolingbroke shares with Tamburlaine a consistent appeal to and use of the stylistic self. As the drama unfolds, Bolingbroke speaks with a stability constituted in the “self”-marked pronouns. He uses “my self” repeatedly before becoming king, several times as a substitute for “I” and always as a way of asserting and even producing a sense of self-possession. In the moments leading up to the duel, he claims, “Mowbray and myself [my selfe] are like two men / That vow a long and weary pilgrimage” (1.3.48–49). Before Flint castle, he proposes that “King Richard and myself [my selfe] should meet” (3.3.54). Both moments end with Bolingbroke somehow getting the best of his interlocutors. Green reports to the Queen that “the banished Bolingbroke repeals himself” (2.2.49). He has not simply “come back”; he has repealed himself, an act in which subject and object come together in one person. Finally, when he accuses Bushy and Green of treason, the Duke defines himself even as he provides evidence against the two men: “Myself [My selfe], a prince by fortune of my birth . . . Have stooped my neck under your injuries” (3.1.16, 19). The lines produce a rhetorical oneness, which emerges from the pronoun/ noun “my self.” Although less passionate than the tragic heroes of Marlowe and Kyd, Bolingbroke maintains a self-style remarkably similar to theirs. His
whole speech comports with Lipsius’ promise that one free from hope or fear will “be a king indeed, free indeed, only subject unto God, enfranchized from the servile yoke of Fortune and affections.” Bolingbroke maintains just such a sense of himself in the face of misfortune.

We cannot say the same for King Richard. Characters who speak reflexively about themselves—Mowbray, Gaunt, York, Northumberland, and finally Bolingbroke—contrast with Richard, whose struggle to self-speak produces his willingness, perhaps desire, to depose himself. While Harry Berger’s claim that Richard is the mastermind of Bolingbroke’s usurpation may seem dubious in the light of the king’s failures to self-speak, Berger is right that Richard’s “actions as well as his language dare Bolingbroke to assume the usurper’s role.” Richard’s persistently unstable attempts at self-description create a kind of linguistic vacuum that the assertive if understated Bolingbroke fills: “In God’s name I’ll ascend the regal throne” (4.1.114). Richard, turning his attention to Ireland, proclaims “We will ourself [our selfe] in person to this war” (1.4.42), and the plural “we” and “our” jars against the singularity of “self.” He again renders passively what ought to be a decisive act, disguising his own agency: “We are enforced to farm our royal realm” (45). Bolingbroke’s “my self” works to identify the agent of his actions, but Richard is “enforced” rather than enforcing. When Gaunt says Richard is “possessed now to depose thyself [thy selfe],” he promises that the only reflexive act available to Richard is self-deposition.

In the homecoming scene (3.2), Shakespeare shows Richard’s several unsuccessful attempts at articulating the parts of himself as a unified whole. Again, Berger is only half-right to see Richard’s claims to divine right as “blatant experiments in self-representation.” They are, more precisely, failed experiments. The king has recourse to the language of a divinely granted stature, but he cannot escape Gaunt’s claim that self-deposition is his only reflexive option. Richard describes the rebels as “trembling at themselves” (3.2.46) and “self-affrighted” (53), speaking of them as he does not yet speak of himself. Only in forgetting his status as king does Richard manage to speak reflexively. Aumerle comforts the king—“Remember who you are” (82)—and Shakespeare introduces Richard’s only pre-deposition-scene use of “myself”: “I had forgot myself [my selfe]” (83). Richard plays so effectively on the pronoun’s ambiguity, reflexively forgetting himself and forgetting his substantive self, that the two prove indistinguishable yet nevertheless distinct. But the insight disappears as he remembers his circumstances: “Awake, thou coward Majesty, thou sleepest!” (84). The fiction of oneness collapses when his claims to the status of king pull him apart once more. Richard registers the unsustainability of his kingly self and anticipates deposition as a result: “Subjected thus, / How can you say to me I am a king?” (176–77). Like Marlowe’s Edward II, who also apologizes for his lack of self-possession by saying “I forgot my selfe,” Richard’s phrase spot-
lights his personal and political struggles. Unlike Edward, however, Richard makes an unprecedented and astonishing shift that reverses critical narratives of the king’s fragmentation. The so-called deposition scene, to which I now turn, presents Richard’s achievement of a stylistic self.

**Majesty a Subject**

If, in the Neostoic political culture of 1595, “only the wise man is a king (because he has absolute sovereignty over himself),” then Richard is most kingly the moment he gives away the crown. In his first “my self” of the deposition scene, Richard articulates something new not so much from the shambles of a fragmented identity as from the act of talking about himself: “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 [my self]” (4.1.201–3). The speech’s reflexive form shows something more complex than what Forker calls a “disoriented psychic state” (201n). As we have seen, the king has been disoriented from the start. Richard’s “Ay, no. No, ay” moves outward (the first “Ay”) and back, reflexively inward (“no. No”), before the final outward-moving assent (“ay”). His ensuing speech proves anything but disoriented. It is dramatic, even passionate, but it is also just as deliberately self-possessed as Bolingbroke’s earlier accusation of Bushy and Green. The flash of nihilism (“No I”) disappears as Richard recuperates a stylistic means of self-reference. His “my self” here works as part of the reflexive verb, “to undo oneself,” and as its substantive object. He speaks the imperative (and also reflexive) “mark me” with an authority he lacked when doling out sentences of exile in Act I, and the line’s perfectly iambic rhythm bespeaks stability rather than turbulence. Richard’s self-undoing entails a powerful stylistic self-possession, and possession is the very topic he takes up as he gives up the crown:

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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;
With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
With mine own hands I give away my crown,
With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
And with mine own breath release all duteous oaths.
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(204–10, SDs omitted)

In this speech act, an inverted coronation rite, Richard himself takes back what had been posited. He repeats “my” and “mine own” with relish bordering on pleasure. On his return from Ireland, he claimed to own nothing but
“death” (3.2.152). In undoing himself here, however, Richard speaks for the first time as if he owns what he gives away.

Throughout the scene, by contrast to unwilling Edward II, Richard achieves a peculiar combination of Senecan passion and Stoic strength. Marlowe’s king cannot face his usurpers and unloads the crown like a hot potato (“Heere, heere,” he says). Dispossessed of the crown, which had been a sort of life-force for him, Edwardlongs for death: “Come death, and with thy fingers close my eyes, / Or if I live, let me forget my selfe.” Losing the crown means losing his self. Shakespeare, in a stunning reversal long understated in criticism on the play, supplies unkinged Richard with the linguistic resources for self-unity. Whereas he had previously demonstrated obstinacy—which Lipsius calls “a certaine hardnesse of a stubborne mind, proceeding from pride or vaine glorie”—and even tyranny—“a violent government of one, besides the customs and lawes”—he now begins to act like a Stoic hero. Thomas Rosenmeyer describes such heroism in a way uncannily similar to Richard’s behavior in the deposition:

Stoic heroism is a planned, a highly contrived and intellectualized activity. It achieves its full meaning only if it draws attention to itself as the central spectacle in a crowded arena. Self-dramatizing, seeing oneself as an actor with an audience, entails the admission that life has meaning only as a performance.

When Northumberland implores him to read the articles of deposition, Richard articulates this sense of himself as a spectacle: “Nay, all of you that stand and look upon me, / Whilst that my wretchedness doth bait myself [my selfe]” (237–38). Richard’s line suggests that, like the baited bear to which he alludes, “the spectators watch Richard being attacked by his own wretchedness.”

Richard’s ensuing responses to Bolingbroke and Northumberland showcase “my self.” What he previously lacked—the ability to talk simultaneously about his self and himself—he now attains, and he takes noticeable relish in doing so. His celebrated verbal puissance in the scene flies in the face of arguments that would completely “disunify” him. When Northumberland again tries to make Richard read the articles (243), Richard responds with a reflexive gesture:

Nay, if I turn my eyes upon myself [my selfe],
I find myself [my selfe] a traitor with the rest;
For I have given here my soul’s consent
T’undeeke the pompous body of a king,
Made Glory base and Sovereignty a slave,
Proud Majesty a subject, State a peasant.

(247–52)
Whereas Richard’s statements about kingship in Acts 1–3 collapsed as soon as he spoke them, this speech’s rhetorical flair displays Richard’s ability to turn his eyes upon himself and find something—his self—there. Reflexivity precedes Richard’s statements about kingship, so that an act of self-speech brings about the celebrated exposé of sovereignty.\(^{57}\) Denying Northumberland’s third attempt to make him read the articles of deposition, Richard turns the play’s sun/king imagery back on Bolingbroke:

Alack the heavy day,
That I have worn so many winters out
And know not now what name to call myself [my selfe].
O, that I were a mockery king of snow,
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,
To melt myself [my selfe] away in water-drops!

(257–62)

Hugh Grady claims that Richard here “laments his loss of identity” on the way to an “unfixed” subjectivity.\(^{58}\) Insofar as Richard has lost his status as king, Grady’s point obtains. Richard has lost something, and he laments that loss. But through his loss of kingship, Richard has also mastered the ability to call himself something at all, and in that fact he takes pleasure as well as sorrow, dominating the scene with a virtuoso display of verse equivalent to Falstaff’s great prose scenes. The linguist’s terminology fits this situation perfectly: whereas Richard as king continually sought for a content word to describe himself (“Arm, arm, my name!”; 3.2.86), he now discovers a function word, “my self,” and in it the content word he was looking for, “self.” He is not just “unfixed” but Stoically self-fixed. If we ignore the coherence that “myself” gives Richard, then we mistake his unifiable self, fashioned in language, for a disunified self beyond words.

Given Shakespeare’s exploitation of “my self”’s potency, the mirror that Richard breaks, linchpin of Kantorowicz’s reading, becomes less a romantic symbol of the king’s shattered inward self than it is a prop to unify the parts of Richard in language.\(^{59}\) The mirror breaks for a rhetorical purpose—to show Bolingbroke the state of kings. Richard demands a looking glass: “I’ll read enough / When I do see the very book indeed / Where all my sins are writ, and that’s myself [my selfe]” (273–75). Again he repeats the crucial phrase, “my self”: he will read himself, and he will read his self. All his sins—that is, all those acts that have previously thrown him into an imbalanced multiplicity—come together in the book of his own identity. From that act of self-possession come the lines in which he begins to speak of kingship as part of his past and part of Bolingbroke’s present and future:

Was this face the face
That every day under his household roof
Did keep ten thousand men? Was this the face
That like the sun did make beholders wink?
Is this the face which faced so many follies,
That was at last outfaced by Bolingbroke?

(281–86)

For Kantorowicz and many other scholars, the disjunction of "inner experience" and "outer appearance" acts as evidence that Richard's previously unified, stable identity has dissolved.60 But isn't it quite the opposite? Richard articulates more clearly than ever how the parts of himself—his physical appearance, emotional experience, past and present condition, and place as subject in the new order—fit together and relate to one another. His repetition of the Marlovian "was this the face" drives home the distinction between past and present as well as inside and outside. For the first time, Richard addresses his former condition as king, and he does so fittingly in the past tense ("did keep . . . did make . . . faced . . . outfaced"). But the questions have further, more significant purpose as rhetorical questions. Like my own rhetorical question above, these interrogatives carry the force of indicative statements: this was the face that kept ten thousand men, made beholders wink, and faced follies. The questions refer to the very things that gave Richard such trouble as king. The excess of feasting thousands, the continual recourse to sun imagery in an attempt at self-description, and Bolingbroke's remarkably self-possessed rise: as we have seen, all are symptoms of Richard's incapacity for reflexive self-speech.

When Richard breaks the mirror, therefore, he breaks it because its fragments no longer represent his identity. He breaks it because it represents the kingly identity that he can only describe as he loses it. Richard speaks as a subject, and he enjoys it. If this stylistic self anticipates modern theories of bourgeois subjectivity, as previous new historicist approaches have asserted, then that form of subjectivity is continuous with the early modern Stoic self.61 Having broken the mirror, Richard hurls Bolingbroke's words back at him:

'Tis very true, my grief lies all within;
And these external manners of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief
That swells with silence in the tortured soul.
There lies the substance.

(295–99)

This is not, as many critics hold, a moment rooted only in loss. Yes, he is talking about grief, and a terrible grief at that. But he is referring it in a deeply Stoic way to the "unseen" "soul" that lies "within," and the same verbal power Richard derives from that reference also allows him rhetorically to dominate the "silent king" Henry. He turns the reflexivity of the pronoun into a kind of reflectivity, by which he locates his "self" at some remove
from the shards of kingship that remain when the mirror smashes. Like Seneca’s wise man, he “is hidden in himself, is with himself.”

Richard Alone

The problem with the claim that Richard becomes a Stoic is that during his final scene, only about half of what he says sounds Stoic in the ordinary sense of the term. In some moments he seems indifferent to external events and influences; at others he seems passionate and even angry. Indeed, in the play’s only soliloquy, Shakespeare has Richard place himself on the spectrum going from king to beggar and back again, thus making it seem reasonable to call him “fragmentary.” As we have seen, however, the impression of multiplicity derives from Richard’s newfound stylistic wholeness. He knows how to talk about himself as a coherent set of parts because he has begun to talk about his self. Furthermore, as the above discussion of early modern Senecanism and Neostoicism demonstrates, indifference and passion form a continuum based on a particular linguistic capacity—the ability to talk about one’s “self.” From Hieronimo to Brutus and beyond, the way in which reflexive forms create a rhetorical, personal force permits a range of responses to hardship, especially political hardship. The fury of Seneca’s heroes and the constancy for which Lipsius advocated are not opposites; both emerge from the sense of self produced by “my self.” Curiously, I will argue in conclusion, rather than resolving the apparent contradictions in Richard’s behavior, Shakespeare brings those conflicting aspects fully into view and offers Richard, not Bolingbroke, as the chief figure of political resistance. As a result, James Siemon’s claim that “Richard is less interested in the political reality embodied in his forced resignation than in his attempt to construct an authority for himself by means of extended self-possession” needs serious qualification. Richard’s “extended self-possession,” which flows from his use of “my self,” actually makes up his response to “political reality.”

Richard appears as an ordinary subject and speaks a soliloquy, self-willed discourse of the Stoic kind. Disempowered and alone—just the way a Stoic likes it—Richard begins his speech with the reflexivity he struggled to perform as king:

I have been studying how I may compare
This prison where I live unto the world;
And, for because the world is populous
And here is not a creature but myself [my selfe],
I cannot do it. Yet I’ll hammer it out.

(5.5.1–5)
His ability to compare prison to the world derives from being alone with his self. He talks about himself as a multiplicity within wholeness, “in one person many people, / And none contented” (31–32). These “people’s” discontent only adds to the sense in which Richard speaks like a Stoic. As Lipsius maintains in the long sections of On Constancy devoted to the question of fate, the “wise and valiant hearted man” who loses his liberty does not pretend not to suffer but instead looks inward for courage. Quoting Homer, he advises: “Though cause of griefe be great, yet let us keepe / All to our selves.”66 Doing just that, Richard imagines himself king again, but, he says, “treasons make me wish my self [my selfe] a beggar” (33). Instead of “make me want to be a beggar” or “make me wish I were a beggar,” Shakespeare gives Richard the keyword of self-possession. “And so I am” a beggar, the ex-king says, accepting his disempowered state. Ambiguously playing king and beggar leads to a seemingly nihilistic conclusion: “Nor I nor any man that but man is / With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased / With being nothing” (38–41). Foller glosses these lines as “Richard dwell[ing] on conflicting senses of his own identity, which . . . reduce him to nonentity” (39–41n). In their reflexive context, though, the lines make up Richard’s most unified, stable moment. The prospect of “being nothing” in death provokes the comfort of self-sufficiency. Like Brutus, Richard anticipates his own death as neither setback nor achievement. He demonstrates what Jerrold Seigel calls “the aim of the Stoic sage,” a “freedom from external conditions.”67 To “be eased / With being nothing” is the Stoic’s primary goal. Richard again evokes Lipsius, who (quoting Seneca) concludes his long discussion of court politics with the claim that “as for me, I will fill my selfe with pleasant ease, and in an obscure place will take the benefit of quiet pleasure.”68

In the course of the speech, Richard seesaws between anger and indifference, between Seneca the tragedian and Seneca the philosopher. The “still-breeding thoughts” produced by his verbal self-possession fall into three categories (8). He passes over “thoughts of things divine”; these thoughts reflexively “set the word itself / Against the word” (12–14). The second sort of thoughts invoke the Senecan tragic hero:

Thoughts tending to ambition, they do plot
Unlikely wonders—how these vain weak nails
May tear a passage through the flinty ribs
Of this hard world, my ragged prison walls,
And, for they cannot, die in their own pride.

(18–22)

Hercules, Tamburlaine, Hieronimo, and Richard III think such ambitious thoughts and die such proud deaths. Later in the soliloquy Richard returns to
this emotional note, angrily calling for the music playing to “sound no more” (61). Before that, though, he modulates to a third kind of thoughts:

Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves  
That they are not the first of Fortune’s slaves,  
Nor shall not be the last, like silly beggars  
Who sitting in the stocks refuge their shame  
That many have and others must sit there;  
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,  
Bearing their own misfortunes on the back  
Of such as have before endured the like.

(23–30)

These thoughts take up the Stoic mantle. They reflexively “flatter themselves” and bear suffering with indifference borne from the precedent of others who have done the same. In doing so, they make manifest Lipsius’ exhortation to “[bear] thy selfe upright in all misfortunes, neither puffed up nor pressed downe with either fortune.”69 Later, having angrily called for the music to end, Richard nevertheless offers a “blessing on his heart that gives it me” (64). Counting himself among “wise men” (and evoking the Stoic term sapiens), he thanks the musician for the “sign of love.” These conflicting statements do not collapse but rather cohere—many people in one person. The reflexive forms in the speech, coupled with the reflexive, self-directed form of the soliloquy and the distinctly Senecan topics discussed in it, animate the multifaceted display of Richard’s disempowerment and his personally empowered response to it.

In his final moments, Richard masters the tension between constancy and fury and maintains that balance unto death. Boyle writes that autarchic self-hood “realises some of its finest dramatic moments in death-scenes architected to show an assertion of the dying figure’s identity and will.”70 That is precisely what occurs in Shakespeare’s play. Richard the “wise man” drinks death like water, defending himself with violence drawn from Seneca:

Villain, thy own hand yields thy death’s instrument.  
[Seizes a Servant’s weapon and kills him with it.]  
Go thou, and fill another room in hell!  
[Kills another Servant.] Here Exton strikes him down.  
That hand shall burn in never-quenching fire  
That staggers thus my person.

(105–9)

“My person,” he says, remarkably self-possessed. He claims that Exton “Hath with the King’s blood stained the King’s own land” (110). Richard’s appeal to his kingship would seem to undermine claims of his Neostoic tra-
jectory, but Stoics do not reject kingship. They reject tyrants and usurpers, categories in which the newly crowned Henry IV arguably falls. In this last act of resistance, Richard finally remains, as Lodge would write in his translation of Seneca's essay on constancy, "always like himselfe in good and euill fortune, not to esteeme any thing his except it bee himself."71

The critical orthodoxy about Shakespeare's Richard II holds that Richard stands for a sacralized form of kingship which the play consistently undermines. Richard's supposedly unified identity thus dissolves in Act Four, leaving only fragments. Meanwhile, Bolingbroke stands for, among other modern concepts, resistance to the tyranny of divine right. As a result, most who believe Richard II was played on the eve of the Essex rebellion assume that Bolingbroke reflected Essex's sense of himself. This set of assumptions leads Siemon, for example, to argue that at the end of the play, "Richard incoherently laments coherence lost, even as new forms of order were taking shape."72 These "new forms of order," Siemon argues, make up a nascent republicanism that would inform the English Civil War, not to mention modern political thought. The shift I have described in the play, however, complicates and even reverses these critical assumptions. Yes, Richard attempts to stand for divine right, but he also fails to do so convincingly, and he himself articulates the failure of that political theology when he begins to speak reflexively. To call Richard "incoherent" in the last two acts overlooks the self-speech he suddenly and resolutely begins to use. Richard becomes the voice of resistance, now that Bolingbroke has become king. Indeed, Richard's appropriation of the Stoic idiom of disempowerment rhetorically forces Henry IV into the role of usurper-tyrant. If the play anticipates later forms of thought, Richard, not Bolingbroke, finally acts as their chief spokesperson.

This essay has argued that Shakespeare engages with larger political and philosophical questions in and through the formal features of Richard II, primarily its reflexive pronouns but also the other forms that make it deeply, albeit complexly, Senecan. Besides its political intrigue of a deposed king, its appropriation of hot-button Neostoic issues such as tyranny and resistance, and its surprisingly Senecan structure and verse style, the play exploits the grammatical, cultural richness of "my self" to dramatize empowered responses to disempowerment. This verbal, formal exchange radically shifts pervasive attitudes toward the play. In an outstanding survey of the play's critical history, Jeremy Lopez discerns in that history a desire for "political efficacy" that is "somehow inherent within the text." That is, scholars want the play to have mattered, so that it can matter still. And who can blame them? In a separate section, Lopez argues that the play's "relentless and explicit insistence upon the presence (which is not to say the power) of form . . . provide[s] us with a continually lively sense of the strangeness of literary, theatrical, and political history."73 Shakespeare's use of "my self" demonstrates that Lopez unnecessarily disqualifies form as a reservoir of power,
because the play’s poetic efficacy constitutes its political efficacy. In other words, the play does not stop being a resistance play when Richard becomes an abject, highly stylized figure of sympathy. Rather, its resistance reaches new intensity once the erstwhile tyrannical Richard begins to speak like that “bard of tyranny,” Seneca.74

Notes
1. 3.2.83, 4.1.203, 238, 247, 248, 259, 262, 275; 5.5.4, 23. References come from King Richard II, ed. Charles Forker (London: Arden, 2002). Interjections in square brackets come from corresponding lines in Mr. William Shakespares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, 1623.


4. David Norbrook has observed that “critics who have drawn heavily on Kantorowicz have...inherited a set of assumptions,” the most predominant of which is that “Richard is a ‘unified’ figure in the first part of the play.” See “The Emperor’s New Body? Richard II, Ernst Kantorowicz, and the Politics of Shakespeare Criticism,” Textual Practice 10, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 342, 348. See also the recent Representations issue commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of The King’s Two Bodies, especially Richard Halpern, “The King’s Two Buckets: Kantorowicz, Richard II, and Fiscal Trauerspiel,” Representations 106 (2009): 67–76 and Lorna Hutson, “Imagining Justice: Kantorowicz and Shakespeare,” Representations 106 (2009): 118–42. Marie Axton’s seminal account offers a helpful perspective: “‘The king’s two bodies’ was never a fact, nor did it ever attain the status of orthodoxy; it remained a controversial idea.” See The Queen’s Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), x.


13. Renaissance Tragedy, 70. See also Miola, Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy, 53.


17. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Seneca His Tenne Tragedies (London, 1581), 45.


20. Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy, 76. Cf. T. S. Eliot’s claim that “in the plays of Seneca, the drama is all in the word, and the word has no further reality behind it. . . . the centre of value is shifted from what the personage says to the way in which he says it.” See Elizabethan Essays (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), 54.

21. Christopher Marlowe, Tamburlaine the Great (London, 1590), sig A7v–A8r.
22. Tragic Seneca, 175.
23. Cornelia, trans. Thomas Kyd (London, 1594), sig. C1v. The term “Neo-
Senecan” refers to drama specifically imitating Seneca’s tragedies, while “Neosto-
icism” typically encompasses a broader range of writing and thinking, often including
Neo-Senecan plays.
24. Samuel Daniel, Delia and Rosamond augmented Cleopatra (London, 1594),
sig. M3v.
25. Those five include the three Henry VI plays, Richard III, and Titus Andronicus.
26. On Shakespeare and Stoicism, see Braden, Renaissance Tragedy, esp. 153–
223; Miola, Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy; Geoffrey Miles, Shakespeare and
the Constant Romans (London: Clarendon Press, 1996); Boyle, Tragic Seneca, esp.
147–212.
27. Martin Dzelzains, “Shakespeare and Political Thought,” in A Companion to
28. The Tragedy of King Richard the Third (London, 1597), sig. L4v–Mr.
29. See Richard Tuck, Philosophy and Government, 1572–1651 (Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1993), 105–8; Alexandra Gajda, The Earl of Essex and
“Neo-stoic doctrine [which Essex followed] commanded the individual to weather
foul political storms through ‘constancie’ and fortitude” (161).
31. Sixe Booke of Politicke or Ciuitie Doctrine, trans. William Jones (London,
1594), 11.
33. Mr. William Shakespere’s Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, sig. kkv.
35. The Worke of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, 660. Latin text from Moral Essays, with
Putnam’s Sons, 1928), 1.64.
36. The First Fowre Booke of the Ciuite Warres (London, 1595), 25r. See also
John Pitcher, “Daniel, Samuel (1562/3–1619),” ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harri-
son, Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
37. Daniel, The First Fowre Booke of the Ciuite Warres, 11r. He describes the
abandoned Richard: “Thy selfe of all, besides thy selfe bereft” (23r).
38. The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second (Lon-
don, 1594), sig. B4v–Cr.
39. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, eds., Thomas of Woodstock, or, Richard the
Second, Part One, The Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press,
2002), 1.3.78–82.
40. Miola, Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy, 53. See also Thomas G. Rosen-
meyer, Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology (Berkeley: University of California
41. On language and the self, see Sylvia Adamson, “Questions of Identity in
Renaissance Drama: New Historicism Meets Old Philology,” Shakespeare Quarterly

43. *OED* s.vv. “ourselves,” “ourself.”

44. Tamburlaine the Great, sig. D4v.

45. Two Booke Of Constancie, 13–14. Before Flint Castle Bolingbroke assures York that he “oppose[s] not myself [my selfe] / Against” the heavens’ will (3.3.18–19). Despite his claims not to seek more than his inheritance, his request that “King Richard and myself [my selfe] should meet” threatens Richard with a robust reflexive sense of self.

46. Gaunt’s advice to his son (1.3.275–93) articulates textbook Stoicism, and his famous “sceptred isle” speech ends with the claim that England “Hath made a shameful conquest of itself” (2.1.66). In his dialogue with Richard, he plays on his own name even as he wittily accuses Richard of being “landlord of England” but “not king” (113). By having the duke claim that his “misery makes sport to mock itself” (85), Shakespeare highlights Richard’s contrasting inability to mock himself. Moments after Gaunt dies, Northumberland says “His tongue is now a stringless instrument,” recalling the tongueless Stoic hero. In another well-known moment, York tells Richard that if he disinherits Bolingbroke then he may as well “be not thyself” (2.1.198), and later he reminisces to Bolingbroke about the time “brave Gaunt, thy father and myself [my selfe] / Rescued the Black Prince” (2.3.100–101). Northumberland says “myself [my selfe] will go” to Ravenspur to “make high majesty look like itself” (2.1.298, 295).


48. Ibid., 105.

49. The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, sig. E2v.

50. Kantorowicz states that “the image of the twinned nature of a king ... was most genuinely Shakespeare’s own and proper vision,” but he neglects, as Anselm Haverkamp argues, the “dialectic” that “threatens to break up the ontological oneness by playing off the two natures against each other.” Kantorowicz overlooks that Richard cannot achieve a kind of hypostasis as king because, as we have seen, the parts that compose his kingly identity create imbalance rather than stability. Following Kantorowicz, Grady rejects the idea that Richard possesses an Enlightenment self; he claims instead that Richard demonstrates a “Montaignean” subjectivity. But the Enlightenment self and the Montaignean self share a common philosophical ingredient: Stoicism. See The King’s Two Bodies, 25; Anselm Haverkamp, “Richard II, Bracton, and the End of Political Theology,” *Law and Literature* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 2004): 320; Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 94–103. On Stoicism and modernity, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

51. Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, 11. Scholars have long disputed the non-appearance of the deposition scene in the early Quartos. Many have argued

52. The so-called Meisei Folio, which contains marginalia from an early seventeenth century reader, confirms the play’s Senecan currency. The reader’s notations carry a remarkably Stoic cast, as when he comments that “Reuenge of Inuries done by princes is not to be taken by subjectes but to be remitted to heauen” and that “we must yeeld to necessitie.” See The First Folio of Shakespeare: A Transcript of Contemporary Marginalia in a Copy of the Kodama Memorial Library of Meisei University, ed. Akihiro Yamada (Tokyo: Yushodo Press, 1998), 105–11.

53. The Troublesome Raigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, 14r.

54. Two booke of constancie, 9; Sixe booke of politickes or civill doctrine, trans. William Jones (London, 1594), 198.

55. Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology, 48.


58. Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne, 94.


60. The King’s Two Bodies, 39.


62. See note 16.

63. See Hillman, Self-Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern English Drama, 109: Richard’s “new condition” after deposition is “multiple and fragmentary identities, in violent contrast with his former presumption of unitary selfhood.”

65. Reydams-Schils observes that the Stoic “is expected to hone the skill of talking to herself.” See The Roman Stoics, 18.

66. Two Bookes of Constancie, 57.
67. The Idea of the Self, 32.
68. Sixe Bookes of Politickes, 58.
69. Two Bookes of Constancie, 13.

70. Tragic Seneca, 174. At this point in the text, the Meise Folio’s reader notes the “different and deceiving thoughts of men in this Inconstant and deceivable world” and that “No contentment [is] constant in this world.” See The First Folio of Shakespeare, 111.


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