

"Nothing can come of nothing": Systems of Exchange in Tate's *King Lear*

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In the dedication to his *King Lear* (1681), Nahum Tate recalls his first impression of William Shakespeare's original (1606): "a Heap of Jewels, unstrung and unpolisht, yet so dazling in their Disorder" (Dedication 295). Although some of Tate's language is appreciative, his resistance to Shakespearean "Disorder" reveals his editorial role. It was common practice for Restoration playwrights to bowdlerize and modernize Shakespeare to suit contemporary tastes. James Howard's adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (performed after 1662) rewrites Shakespeare's ending and allows the two lovers to survive. John Dryden and William Davenant's revision of *The Tempest* (1667) expands the cast list, enabling a slew of romantic pairings, with even a fairy lover for Ariel. In his *King Lear*, arguably the most successful of these adaptations, Tate fashions a romance between Cordelia and Edgar and permits Lear and Cordelia to live and reign at the end of the play. Not merely clarifications or additions, these radical plot alterations allow Tate to reveal and revise two latent systems of exchange, which originate in Shakespeare's text. These systems of exchange, motivated by Cordelia's refusal to participate in the linguistic contest and, in Tate's play, her refusal to be given away in an arranged marriage, will be the focus of this article, as they are traced to their counterparts in Restoration cultural norms.

In 1681, Tate was just at the beginning of a fruitful literary career, though his talent for adaptation already had been established. Shortly before he wrote his *King Lear*, Tate had staged an ill-timed revision of Shakespeare's *Richard I*, entitled *The Sicilian Usurper* (1680). The play survived for only two performances due to its politically sensitive subject matter—Henry Bolingbroke's usurpation of the throne—and its presentation during

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the Exclusion Crisis, the contestation of James II's impending succession.¹ Along with *King Lear*, Tate's later *Ingratitude of a Commonwealth* (1682), an adaptation of *Coriolanus*, was staged to counter Tory criticism and affirm his royalist leanings.² Tate's adaptations were not limited to Shakespeare. His *Cuckolds-Haven* (1685) was based on the Ben Jonson, George Chapman, and John Marston drama *Eastward Ho!*, and he later adapted John Webster's *White Devil* as *Injur'd Love* (1707). *King Lear* remains his best-known adaptation, and he is still celebrated for his libretto to Henry Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* (1689) and his *New Version of the Psalms of David* (from 1694).

Despite his literary successes, which culminated in his appointment as poet laureate in 1692, Tate was treated with derision by many of his contemporaries, including Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. Swift's *Tale of a Tub* (1704) ridicules Tate in the dedicatory section: "There is another call'd Nahum Tate, who is ready to make Oath that he has caused many Rheams of Verse to be published, whereof both himself and his Bookseller (if lawfully required) can still produce authentick Copies, and therefore wonders why the World is pleased to make such a Secret of it" (23). Swift's contention, that Tate's "Rheams of Verse" are never publicly discussed, implies that Tate's writings are unpopular and impermanent.³ Longer and more incisive than Swift's, Pope's criticism of Tate appears in his "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (1735):

The bard whom pilfered pastorals renown,
Who turns a Persian tale for half a crown,
Just writes to make his barrenness appear,
And strains from hard-bound brains, eight lines a year;
He, who still wanting, though he lives on theft,
Steals much, spends little, yet has nothing left:
And he, who now to sense, now nonsense leaning,
Means not, but blunders round about a meaning:
And he, whose fustian's so sublimely bad,
It is not poetry, but prose run mad:

1. I would like to thank Fiona Ritchie, Peter Sabor, and the anonymous reviewer at *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* for their helpful feedback on earlier versions of this article.

The performances were stopped before Tate could receive the authorial benefit given on the third night, and thus he was unable to profit from the play. See McGirr 75-79 and Álvarez-Recio.

2. See Hopkins.

3. See Swift 335 n. 19.

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All these, my modest satire bad translate,
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Pope initially criticizes Tate's fame for revision, which, in his opinion, stems from Tate's lack of originality: "he lives on theft" since he can only write "eight lines a year." Like Swift, Pope affirms the poor quality of Tate's work through escalating insults—"nonsense," "blunders," "sublimely bad"—concluding with the well-known declaration: "It is not poetry, but prose run mad."

Notwithstanding these verbal barbs, Tate was well-regarded during the Restoration and eighteenth century. In fact, Tate's *King Lear* was preferred to Shakespeare's even through the early decades of the nineteenth century,⁴ and Samuel Johnson was among Tate's many supporters. In his notes on Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Johnson condemns Shakespeare's original tragic ending: "Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of chronicles" (704).⁵ Johnson expounds against vice rewarded because he contends that humans, as rational beings, believe in justice. It comes as no surprise, then, that Johnson favors Tate's revision: "In the present case the publick has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor" (Johnson 704). While Johnson does not explicitly commend Tate's *King Lear* here, his description of Shakespeare's "shocking" ending and his emphasis on the theatrical popularity of Tate's play have motivated, in part, recent reassessments of Tate's play. Many new critical perspectives have yielded surprising results. Doris Adler observes that Tate's changes improve the play in staged performances and that many of his revisions are still in use (53-54). John Rempel argues that Tate often elucidates character motivations from Shakespeare, particularly in his characterizations of Edmund and Regan (59-60). And Peter Womack's

4. Due to the madness of King George III, *King Lear* was not performed with any regularity from 1788 until after his death in 1820. The original ending of *King Lear* was restored in an 1823 staging, and the fool was reintroduced in 1834. "Since then," according to Harold Bloom, "*King Lear* has mostly been performed in its original version" (99).

5. In his allusion "to the faith of chronicles," Johnson points out that Tate's ending is more historically accurate than Shakespeare's: in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae* (c.1135), Cordelia and Lear do defeat Goneril and Regan and recover the throne. Later reworkings of the story also restore Lear to the throne. See Foakes.

claim that "Tate has made the play [Shakespeare's *King Lear*] newly *purposeful*" is a useful starting point for this article (98).

Tate imbues Shakespeare's play with "purpose" through his allusions to contemporary political events. In the early 1680s, Charles II was facing heavy pressure from Parliament to exclude his Catholic brother, James II, from the throne. Despite petitioning in favor of his illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth, and later William of Orange, Charles II withheld repeated Whig-influenced attempts to pass an Exclusion Bill in Parliament. Partly owing to an influx of anti-Cromwell propaganda, the Bill was defeated in 1681 when it was sent to the House of Lords.⁶ In that same year, Tate premiered his *King Lear*, a play centering on the problem of royal succession, as a confirmation of his royalist leanings.⁷ Tate's political commentary appears as early as the prologue, which concludes with the line "*In vain our Poets Preach, whilst Church-men Plot*" (Prologue l.24), a reference to the discovery of the Popish Plot in 1678 and the Exclusion Crisis in the 1680s.⁸ And while the war in Shakespeare's original is cast as a foreign invasion—"domestic and particular broils / Are not the question here" (Shakespeare 5.1.30-31)⁹—in Tate's revision, the war is a domestic revolution, alluding to the possibility of a second English Civil War.

Although Tate's *King Lear* is clearly influenced by contemporary events, in general Tate's revisions extend beyond political timeliness and make actions in Shakespeare more explicit. Tate intended "to rectify what was wanting in the Regularity and Probability of the Tale" (Tate, Dedication, 295). One of Tate's main clarifications is his overt characterization of Lear as a "choleric" king to better explain Cordelia's disinheritance. Before Lear divides his kingdom, his noble friends Kent and Gloster emphasize Lear's hot temper in nearly interchangeable speeches. After Kent complains, "I grieve to see him / With such wild starts of passion hourly seiz'd, / As renders Majesty beneath it self," Gloster echoes, "Alas! 'tis the Infirmary of his Age, / Yet has his Temper ever been unfixed, / Chol'rick and suddain" (1.1.50-55). These speeches are supplemented by Lear's own acknowledgment of his irascibility: "'Tis said that I am Chol'rick, judge me Gods, / Is there not

6. See Seaward.

7. Earlier critics have also read the play as support for Charles II during the Exclusion Crisis; the English civil war that replaces Cordelia's French-backed invasion makes explicit the "consequences of the wilful disturbance of proper succession" (Hardman 913). See also Maguire 30 and Dobson 80-81.

8. See Clark, ed., *King Lear*, n. 513.

9. I have chosen to use R.A. Foakes' edition of *King Lear* because Foakes highlights disparities between the Quarto and Folio versions within the actual text. Tate uses both versions (but mainly the Folio version) in his adaptation. See Massai.

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cause?" (1.1.117-18). Tate also makes additions to Shakespeare's play, for example, by politicizing the blind Gloucester. Shakespeare briefly mentions that public awareness of Gloucester's blinding weakens support for Goneril and Reagan: "Where he arrives he moves / All hearts against us" (4.5.12-13). But in Tate's revision, Gloucester actively campaigns against Lear's older daughters.

The most significant alteration in Tate's *King Lear* is the romance between Edgar and Cordelia. Tate uses the romance as an explanation for "*Cordelia's* Indifference and her Father's Passion in the first Scene" (Tate, Dedication 395). Yet the romance is more than a clarification; it also projects prevalent social norms.¹⁰ Especially through Cordelia, Tate exposes and revises two latent systems of exchange present in Shakespeare's text. These systems, linked to language and marriage, are both motivated by property acquisition. In the linguistic contest scene, Cordelia is the key participant in both exchanges, as she refuses to use the flattery necessary to gain her inheritance and participate in her father's planned marriage transaction. Tate's revision of the balance between these two systems culminates in the final coronation scene and reflects concurrent cultural shifts in attitudes towards marriage and emerging functions of language.

Companionate Marriage

The marriage transaction within *King Lear* has its roots in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century cultural norms. From Lawrence Stone to Robert B. Shoemaker, cultural historians have described early modern parenting practices as "paternal absolutism." Arguing that children were often unable to orchestrate their own romantic or "companionate" marriages, Stone posits that "Almost all children until the end of the sixteenth century were so conditioned by their upbringing and so financially helpless that they acquiesced without much objection in the matches contrived for them by their parents" (178, 180).¹¹ While other historians seek to mitigate this overwhelming sense of parental control,¹² they do concede that parental permission was

10. Jean I. Marsden argues that in the Restoration "Shakespearean women were radically revised to reflect social ideals, thus affecting the portrayal of subject matter, character, and genre in almost every play" (43).

11. Juan Luis Vives' influential conduct manual on the "Instruction of a Christian Woman" (1523) evinces this expected obedience to "paternal absolutism": "it becometh not a maid to talk where her father and mother be in communication about her marriage, but to leave all that care and charge wholly unto them which love her as well as her self doth" (111).

12. Linda A. Pollock disputes "The claim put forward by many historians that children were totally regulated prior to the 18th century and unregulated thereafter," arguing that it "is far too clear cut and rigid" (*Forgotten Children* 270). In her case study of

generally a key factor in most early modern marriages. On the other hand, a number of recent studies have challenged the assertion that children and especially women in early modern England functioned as pawns in familial or patriarchal interest schemes. Bruce W. Young disputes Stone's claim that "at least until the mid-seventeenth century, marriages were not based on mutual affection," arguing that companionate motives were the guiding forces of most marriages, even before the late seventeenth century: "The evidence is strong that what Stone calls 'companionate marriage' was not a new feature of life in the later 1600s and 1700s but had long existed" (44). Marriages based on mutual affection were much more common in the lower and middle classes, and the previous neglect of these social groups is often blamed on the smaller amount of surviving documentation.¹³

Cordelia, as the daughter of a king, is clearly a member of the upper class, in which "arranged marriages were still common" (Shoemaker 93).¹⁴ The matrimonial coercion of high-ranking children has often been read through a gendered lens and redirected into concern for the subjugation of aristocratic women.¹⁵ Mary S. Hartman explicitly differentiates between the treatment of low- and high-ranking women: "More privileged and protected than their humbler sisters, these young women were also less independent; and their training emphasized modesty, obedience, and submission to future husbands" (51). Women in the early seventeenth century did not have rights; if they were unmarried, their fathers had complete control, and if they were married, control was in the hands of their husbands. Several cultural historians have argued further that, as women were exchanged in marriage, they were used as means of strengthening male relationships through their dowries and ties to property.¹⁶ Shakespeare's Cordelia behaves in an expected and perhaps exemplary fashion as she is guided by her father in her choice of a husband even after she is disinherited. (It was very rare for

the marriage of Lady Grace Mildmay, Pollack reveals that, with the bride, "there is no record of parental coercion nor of her dissent," although the groom would only receive his inheritance if he went through with the marriage: "his father told him if he did not marry with me, he should never bring any other woman into his house" (*With Faith and Physic* 7-8, 32).

13. Pollock also criticizes Stone's neglect of marriage behavior and trends in the lower and middling ranks (*Forgotten Children* 70).

14. See also Shoemaker 92. Stone argues that "Authoritarian control by parents over the marriages of their children inevitably lasted longest in the richest and most aristocratic circles, where the property, power and status stakes were highest" (184).

15. Randolph Trumbach posits that "Parents were also capable of making a daughter's portion depend on her obedience" (102).

16. See Hutson 2-3, 224; Lévi-Strauss 480; and Newman 106.

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seventeenth-century women of high social ranking to consent to marriage with a favored suitor without parental blessing.¹⁷) Tate's Cordelia, on the other hand, agrees to marry Edgar before she receives her father's blessing, signaling a movement away from marriage dictated by paternal interest.

Cordelia's extended and clearly romantic courtship in Tate's *King Lear* can be read as a reflection of changing social attitudes towards marriage. Both Stone and Randolph Trumbach argue that by the end of the seventeenth century, the gender inequality implicit in the institution of marriage had shifted. One of the reasons Stone gives for this shift is a religious one: "Protestant moral theology, with its stress on 'holy matrimony' slowly forced a modification of this extreme position [child coercion], which was only maintained in its pure state through the seventeenth century in the highest ranks of the aristocracy where the stakes of property and power were largest" (190).¹⁸ Trumbach, conversely, ties the rise of the "companionate" marriage to egalitarian principles: "Romantic rather than arranged marriages became the ideal and the practice, and after marriage husband and wife expected to be each others' constant companion" (3). The movement towards companionate marriage is encapsulated by the central thesis of Ruth Perry's *Novel Relations*—"that loyalty to the new conjugal family undermined the claims of the consanguineal family" (2).¹⁹ In Tate's *King Lear*, Cordelia's allegiance to Edgar instead of her father anticipates Perry's delineated kinship shift.²⁰ No longer the foils they were in Shakespeare's play, Edgar and Cordelia are now twinned through mirrored patterns of disinheritance and redemption, possibly reflecting the growing neoclas-

17. Ralph Houlbrooke, in his anthology of primary source material, gives the example of aristocratic Lady Elizabeth Livingston. Lady Elizabeth's diary of 1669 demonstrates that despite her love of a favored suitor, "he never could persuade [her] to steal a marriage with him" because she would "think it a crime ever to marry without the consent of both his parents and [hers]" (30).

18. According to Stone, among the other factors responsible for the shift were: an increasing number of clergymen who would marry anyone for a fee; new legal developments benefiting women who received marriage settlements and pin money; and last, but not least, vast technological and social changes, which included better transportation and increased female control of finances (33, 325, 330, 333).

19. Though the period covered by Perry's enquiry is later than the appearance of Tate's *King Lear*, her language best epitomizes this movement.

20. While many critics argue that there was a shift towards companionate marriage by the end of the seventeenth century, this opinion is not unanimous. Susan Staves, for one, disagrees with the "more liberal analysis" of Trumbach and Stone, arguing that "both historians have succumbed to a bourgeois illusion that there can be a clear separation between, on the one hand, a public and economic sphere, and, on the other, a private domestic sphere of true feeling and personal authenticity" (222-23).

sical interest in symmetry. Edgar's new (literal and figurative) closeness to Cordelia necessitates an expanded, gender-neutral conception of human exchange since Edgar is traded as well.²¹ Above all, the courtship of Cordelia and Edgar in Tate's *King Lear* demonstrates the changing marriage dynamic from the early to the late seventeenth century.

In both Shakespeare's and Tate's plays, Cordelia is presented as an enticing marital object for two suitors. Her allure comes from the combination of her personal attributes and her presumed inheritance. Cordelia's first suitor in both versions, the Duke of Burgundy, links the two qualities implicitly. After Lear tells Burgundy that Cordelia is disinherited and tests Burgundy's remaining desire for her, Burgundy answers: "Royal king, / Give but that portion which yourself propos'd, / And here I take Cordelia by the hand, / Duchess of Burgundy" (Shakespeare 1.1.243-46). Lear refuses to give Cordelia her inheritance, and accordingly, Burgundy withdraws as her suitor. Shakespeare's Cordelia is pleased with Burgundy's departure, which reflects his mercenary motives: "Since that respects of fortune are his love, / I shall not be his wife" (1.1.250-51). In Shakespeare's play, Cordelia's other offer comes from the king of France who is able to overlook her poverty and treasure her virtue: "'tis strange that from their cold'st neglect / My love should kindle to inflam'd respect" (1.1.256-57). While the resulting exchange is not grounded in male bonding or property, Cordelia's virtue is a valuable commodity, and Lear oversees their pairing.

Tate's scene between Cordelia, Lear, and Burgundy is almost identical to Shakespeare's, but it contains a few alterations. When Burgundy claims Cordelia, he now asks: "Pardon me, Royal *Lear*, I but demand / The Dow'r your Self propos'd, and here I take / *Cordelia* by the Hand Dutchess of *Burgundy*" (Tate 1.1.199-201). Burgundy's words more clearly highlight that this is a transaction taking place, and he takes an active role in negotiation—"I but demand" replaces "Give but"—just as "portion" is replaced with "Dow'r." And when Burgundy finally abandons Cordelia (in a more explicit manner than in Shakespeare's original), he blames Lear: "Then Sir be pleas'd to charge the breach / Of our Alliance on your own Will / Not my Inconstancy" (1.1.185-87). Lear's refusal to give Cordelia her rightful dowry is clearly shown as the cause of their failed "Alliance," in this case, family connections achieved through female exchange. Tate's Edgar,

21. In the same vein as Stone and Pollock (see above), Trumbach argues that parental control was not necessarily limited to daughters: "A father therefore had the power to induce his son to consent to the son's being made, in turn, a life tenant of the estate in exchange for a present income. This, however, is to make it sound unduly like a contest of wills, for fathers and sons were usually quite ready to resettle the estates when the son reached his majority or married" (73).

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Cordelia's second suitor, takes on a role similar to that of Shakespeare's king of France since he is willing to marry her despite her poverty: "O heav'nly Maid that are thy self thy Dow'r" (1.1.205). But here Tate also diverges from Shakespeare: instead of accepting Edgar's offer, Cordelia refuses to take part in a one-sided marital transaction: "When, *Edgar*, I permitted your Addresses, / I was the darling Daughter of a King, / Nor can I now forget my royal Birth, / And live dependent on my Lover's Fortune. / I cannot to so low a fate submit" (1.1.213-17). After invoking her formerly high status as "Daughter of a King," Cordelia rejects Edgar's proposal because she refuses to be "dependent" on Edgar's "Fortune." She calls this a "low ... fate," not because Edgar is unworthy but because she is unwilling to enter into an unequal marriage, with virtue as her sole currency.

Cordelia, however, reverses her refusal after Edgar also becomes disinherited. Edgar's rescue of Cordelia from ruffians reveals his own inner virtue and probably motivates her acceptance. Significantly, the economic dimension of their relationship has vanished, and their mutual love mirrors the emerging conjugal model. Edgar initially laments his outcast status, indicating that he equates love and wealth to some extent: Cordelia would not accept him when he was rich—"When in my prosp'rous State rich *Gloster's* Heir, / You silenc'd my Pretences" (Tate 3.4.84-85)—so he believes Cordelia will reject him when he is poor—"what Reception must Love's Language find / From these bare Limbs and Beggars humble Weeds?" (3.4.87-88). Edgar mistakenly believes that Cordelia values money more than (or at least as much as) love. Cordelia, however, prioritizes virtue above riches and accepts him: "These hallow'd Rags of Thine, and naked Vertue, / ... / To me are dearer than the richest Pomp / Of purple Monarchs" (3.4.97, 100-01). Now the lovers are economic equals since they both have nothing. Their penniless love-bond signals a movement towards companionate and romantic marriage; Cordelia agrees to be Edgar's wife while *both* of them are completely divested of inheritance and class status. Significantly, Cordelia's acceptance of the impoverished Edgar takes place without her father's permission, and Edgar's own "dowerless" state aligns Cordelia with Shakespeare's king of France, suggesting that the virtuous Edgar is exchanged as well.

Edgar, like Cordelia, becomes an object of exchange in the final scene of *King Lear* as Tate reconciles a romantic version of marriage with filial obedience. After Lear's kingdom is restored, Lear links Edgar and Cordelia in intended matrimony: "But, *Edgar*, I defer thy Joys too long: / Thou serv'dst distress *Cordelia*; take her Crown'd: / Th'imperial Grace fresh Blooming on her Brow; / Nay, *Gloster*, Thou hast here a Father's Right; / Thy helping Hand t'heap Blessings on their Heads" (Tate 5.6.136-40). Edgar ostensibly

has agency in this final scene while Cordelia does not; she again appears to be the sole object of the marital exchange since he is the one who will "take her." But Cordelia is crowned queen *before* she marries Edgar, and their marriage is endorsed because Edgar "serv'dst distrest *Cordelia*." This shows that Cordelia is not entirely powerless and that Edgar, too, is exchanged as a virtuous commodity. This is confirmed by the fact that the marriage is orchestrated by two fathers—Lear and Gloster, who along with Lear has "a Father's Right"—and not a father and a suitor—as in the potential marriages of the first act. Parental authorization completes Cordelia's and Edgar's earlier romantic vows, revealing the hybridized focus of Tate's system of female exchange on romantic love complemented by filial obedience.

Performative Language

In the final scene of the play, Lear's commands to Edgar to "take" the "Crown" hint at the significance of performative language within the marriage transaction. The importance of language is first revealed within the linguistic contest scene in both plays, as Lear's daughters trade flattery for pieces of the kingdom. This exchange is guided by Lear's belief that words create and cement bonds. Lear's conception of language is performative: he believes that language, in its utterance, can actually perform an action. Such language does not "describe" or "report" or constate anything at all" and is "not 'true or false;'" instead, with performative language "the utterance of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as saying something" (Austin 5).²² This type of language achieved new prominence during the Parliamentary restoration of Charles II on May 8, 1660:

We, therefore, the Lords and Commons now assembled in Parliament, ... heartily, joyfully, and unanimously acknowledge and proclaim; that ... the Imperial Crown of the Realm of *England*, and of all the Kingdoms, Dominions and Rights belonging to the same, did, by inherent Birthright, and lawful and undoubted Succession, descend and come to His Most Excellent Majesty *Charles* the Second, as being lineally, justly and lawfully next Heir of the Blood Royal of this Realm; and that, by the Goodness and Providence of Almighty God, he is, of *England, Scotland, France, and Ireland*, the most potent, mighty and undoubted King ("House of Commons Journal" 16)

22. Examples of performative speech include wedding vows, christenings, promises, and bets.

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The parliamentary declaration is much more than a public announcement. It not only confirms Charles II's status as king of England, but is itself a king-making tool that "unanimously acknowledge[s] and proclaim[s]" that Charles II "is, of *England, Scotland, France, and Ireland*, the most potent, mighty and undoubted King." The self-made authority of this proclamation is the most culturally significant demonstration of the power and pervasiveness of performative language during the Restoration.

Correspondingly, performativity and kingship were closely linked throughout the reign of Charles II. Charles II's biographer Ronald Hutton emphasizes the "staged" nature of Charles II's coronation: "'Staged' is the appropriate verb, as historical precedent was studied and developed to produce royal pageantry of breath-taking splendour" (Hutton 164). Historians argue that this performative kingship was, for Charles II, "the manufacture of a form of legitimization" (Sawday 171). Paula R. Backscheider, in her study of the performative nature of Charles II's politics, argues that Charles II "made London a national theater and used it in a variety of ways," such as Parliamentary proclamation, "to help secure his throne and establish his interpretation of the monarchy" (2). Perhaps mindful of this enlarged national consciousness, Tate expands Shakespeare's notion of linguistic performativity to emphasize its royal importance and king-making function.

The significance of performative language is revealed early in both versions of the play: Lear's high value of performative language explains the credit he gives to his daughters' responses during the linguistic contest. Lear believes that his daughters' words of love are performative promises that, in the act of their declaration, create and reveal the states of their hearts. But such exchanged language has a potentially negative value. According to Peggy Phelan:

... the inauguration of language is simultaneous with the inauguration of desire, a desire which is always painful because it cannot be satisfied. The potential mitigation of this pain is also dependent upon language; one must seek a cure from the wound of words *in* other words—in the words of the other ... But this mitigation of pain is always deferred by the *promise* of relief (Austin's performative), as against relief itself, because the other's words substitute for other words in an endless *mise-en-abyme* of metaphorical exchange. Thus the linguistic economy, like the financial economy, is a ledger of substitutions ... One is always offering what one does not have because what one wants is what one does not have ... Exchanging what one does not have for what one desires (and therefore does not have) puts us in the realm of the negative (164-65)

Phelan's starting point is the link between language and desire. Language is portrayed as a means to satisfy desire (caused by words): "one must seek a cure from the wound of words *in* other words." But this exchange spirals out of control—"the other's words substitute for other words in an endless *mise-en-abyme* of metaphorical exchange"—demonstrating that "the linguistic economy, like the financial economy, is a ledger of substitutions." At the root of this system of substitutions is emptiness: "One is always offering what one does not have because what one wants is what one does not have ... Exchanging what one does not have for what one desires (and therefore does not have) puts us in the realm of the negative." Phelan's conception of the endless exchange of valueless language is the basis of an economy of performative language (Austin's "*promise*" that is continually deferred). Thus, Phelan's model can describe why Goneril and Regan enter into the exchange (they can make extravagant empty promises) and why Cordelia does not (recognizing the worthlessness of the exchange, she refuses to participate in it). Nor does this theory of performative language in any way diminish the more common reading of Cordelia's silence as emblematic of paradoxical female virtue: "the woman is commanded to speak, to prove her virtue; yet to speak is to negate virtuousness" (Jardine 109). Cordelia's refusal to participate in this linguistic economy could be read both as an unwillingness to transgress gender norms and as an awareness of the negative value of her performative speech.²³ The potentially valueless nature of the language exchange allows Goneril and Regan to lie and Cordelia's "nothing" to be interpreted literally.

In both versions of *King Lear*, performative language can be read as the basis for Lear's linguistic contest. Lear's assumption of parallelism between speech and merit leads to his language competition: "Which of you shall we say doth love us most, / That we our largest bounty may extend / Where nature doth with merit challenge" (Shakespeare 1.1.52-54). Lear naively expects that his daughters' speeches will accurately express their "nature[s]." In Shakespeare's version, Cordelia does not understand Lear's equation of "nature" and love-speech and hence, chooses not to participate in this performative exchange since her "love's / More ponderous than [her] tongue" (1.1.77-78). So when Lear asks Cordelia "what can you say to draw / A third more opulent than your sisters? Speak" (1.1.85-86), Cordelia's famous answer—"Nothing, my lord" (1.1.87)—need not be construed as her inability to match the flattery of her sisters. Instead, it should be read as

23. Some previous scholars have linked Cordelia's negative to theories of performative language, but Phelan's conception of a performative economy truly illuminates the nature of the language exchange in *King Lear*. For earlier readings of performative language within Shakespeare's *King Lear*, see Robinson 71-72 and Schalkwyk 111-12.

her unwillingness to take part in an empty exchange of words, as the value of speech is literally "nothing." In this sense, Lear's response—"nothing will come of nothing. Speak again" (1.1.90)—is deceptive. Goneril's and Reagan's "nothings" secure their vast inheritances. While Lear's language exchange is grounded in his belief in linguistic performativity, his system falls apart because it fails to take into account the potentially empty value of language.

There are other parts of Shakespeare's play that highlight Lear's royal use of the performative. The most prominent comes shortly after Lear's disinheritation of Cordelia: "Here I disclaim all my paternal care, / ... / And as a stranger to my heart and me / Hold thee from this for ever" (Shakespeare 1.1.114, 116-17). Lear's vow is an actual performative act; by *declaring* that Cordelia is a stranger, Lear effectively disowns her. Because of his faith in performative language, Lear believes that his disinheritation of Cordelia is irreversible. This explains Lear's anger at Kent's attempted father-daughter reconciliation: "Hear me, recreant, on thine allegiance, hear me: / That thou hast sought to make us break our vows, / Which we durst never yet, and with strained pride / To come betwixt our sentences and our power, / Which nor our nature, nor our place can bear" (1.1.168-72). Lear is furious that Kent tries to make him "break our vows," treating him as an intruder "betwixt our sentences and our power"—which, in a system of performative language, is a non-existent space. Kent's attempted dismantling of Lear's performative system can be interpreted as the cause of his banishment. Additionally, Lear's performative language reappears in his negotiations regarding the size of his private army. Lear reads the number of soldiers each of his daughters offers as a reflection of her affection. When Regan's offer is shown to be half of Goneril's, Lear turns to Goneril and says: "I'll go with thee; / Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty, / And thou art twice her love" (2.2.447-49). These offers can be read as performative speech since Lear sees Goneril's and Regan's soldier proposals as guarantees. Like their declarations of love in the linguistic contest, however, these ultimately prove to be empty.

Tate makes very few alterations to these "performative language" scenes, with one large exception. As Tate provides an explanation for Cordelia's reticence, he makes explicit Cordelia's motivations for her "Nothing, my lord." Before the linguistic contest, Cordelia reveals in a soliloquy that she wants her father to disinherit her so that she can avoid being exchanged in marriage: "Now comes my Trial, how am I distrest, / That must with cold speech tempt the chol'rick King / Rather to leave me Dowerless, than condemn me / To loath'd Embraces!" (Tate 1.1.92-95). Despite her intended sabotage, Cordelia makes a clear distinction between language and reality, highlighting the misuse of performative language: "Now must my Love

in words fall short of theirs / As much as it exceeds in Truth—Nothing my Lord” (1.1.100-01). Ironically, performative language, the device that is such a divisive force in Shakespeare’s original (and in the first part of Tate’s play), is the means by which Cordelia and Lear are reunited. When Cordelia and Lear reconcile towards the end of Tate’s play, Lear’s language of contrition performs his repentance. His self-effacing speech is so pitiful that it forces Cordelia to exclaim, “O pity, Sir, a bleeding Heart, and cease / This killing Language” (4.5.52-53). And later, when Lear declares to Kent and Cordelia “You are the onely Pair that I e’er wrong’d” (5.4.47), Cordelia again protests against the sorrowful power of Lear’s words: “This language, Sir, adds yet to our Affliction” (5.4.53).

The key discrepancy between Tate’s play and Shakespeare’s is that in the former, performative language is linked to royal restoration. Tate’s Lear recovers from his madness—a recovery which is ambiguously brief, at best, in Shakespeare’s original. In a short dialogue between Lear, Cordelia, and the doctor, Lear’s return to sanity is hailed as a “restoration”:

GENTLEMAN:

Be comforted, good Madam, for the Violence
Of his Distemper’s past; we’ll lead him in
Nor trouble him, till he is better Settled.
Wilt please you, Sir, walk into freer Air.

LEAR:

You must bear with me, I am Old and foolish.

CORDELIA:

The Gods restore you. (Tate 4.5.55-60)

Cordelia’s language confirms the doubly restorative nature of Tate’s revision, as Lear’s mind and the rightful succession are preserved. Cordelia will be the next sovereign, and Lear crowns her by using performative language. The transformation of Cordelia into a queen transpires in only a few short lines: “*Cordelia* then shall be a Queen, mark that: / *Cordelia* shall be Queen; Winds catch the Sound / And bear it on your rosie Wings to Heav’n. / *Cordelia* is a Queen” (5.6.108-11). Lear’s final proclamation of Cordelia’s queenly status shifts the verb tense from the future (“shall be”) to the present (“is”), demonstrating the transformative power of performative language. The queen-making quality of Lear’s language, along with this “second Birth of Empire” through “the King’s blest Restauration [sic]” (5.6.118-19), gestures towards the Parliamentary restoration of Charles II. Lear’s language actually makes Cordelia the queen, which is confirmed

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soon afterwards in his announcement of Cordelia's forthcoming nuptials to Edgar: "Thou serv'dst distrest *Cordelia*; take her Crown'd / Th'imperial Grace fresh Blooming on her Brow" (5.6.137-38). As performative language queens Cordelia, it also authorizes her marriage to Edgar, uniting the language and marriage exchanges in a positive inversion of the linguistic contest scene from act 1.

Tate's *King Lear* thus emphasizes female and linguistic exchanges of the original text, mainly those within the climactic linguistic contest. Through his additions to the text, Tate highlights these transactions: Cordelia's partnership with France, based on "inflamed respect" (Shakespeare 1.1.257), is replaced with her romantic marriage to Edgar, and Lear's exclusion of Cordelia is reversed when he queens her. These alterations, which reflect the significance of companionate marriage and performative features of kingship, show that Tate has created a *King Lear* not only cognizant of Shakespeare's implicit systems of exchange, but one truly belonging to the long eighteenth century. Tate's *King Lear*, which commemorates the restoration of a king, would remain a fixture on the eighteenth-century stage, only to be replaced by Shakespeare's version in the early decades of the nineteenth century, fittingly and ironically after the death of a mad king.

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