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The Limits of Modernity in Shakespeare's King John

(SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM)

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Deborah Curren-Aquino, summing up fifty years of critical engagement with Shakespeare's *King John*, identifies a radical break with earlier views of the play in "the tendency in post 1940 scholarship to describe *John* as ambivalent, ambiguous, suspicious, sceptical, questioning and ideologically subversive".¹ The form and tone of *John*, in other words, are recognisably modern. Few critics have gone as far as Sigurd Burckhardt, who in the 1960s asserted that the play documented Shakespeare's own modernity, defined as the recognition that order, or "justice and truth at the heart of things", was of human, rather than divine, origin.² Burckhardt's position, though not his confidence that he could show that "when he wrote *King John*, or quite possibly in writing it, Shakespeare became a 'modern'", is echoed in Virginia Vaughan's claim of 1989 that the play "like Shakespeare's other history plays" depicts a crucial point in the inauguration of "the relativism of the modern age".³ But for the most part, writers on *John* have avoided such grand narratives of epistemological shifts, and found the play's modernity to be historically produced in a much more local way: as part of a Shakespearian negotiation with chronicle, source play, or the history play genre. What *John* is sceptical about, in other words, is other historical accounts of John's reign, especially regarding their relationship to what might still be termed Tudor ideology. For many critics, Shakespeare's *John* is in antagonistic relation to such "sources" as the anonymous Queen's Men's play *The Troublesome Reign of King John* and the 1587 *Holinshed*, interrogating the writing of history of which these two texts, and the history play as a genre, were part.

Such a *John* appears our contemporary, teasing out aporias and contradictions in Renaissance writings of legitimacy, faith, or patriotism. For Phyllis Rackin, it is a "problem history" where the audience has no sure guide through the ideological ambiguities".⁴ Larry Champion identifies it as "an open-ended chronicle play with historical process transformed into human process, stripped bare of Tudor providentialism and reduced to an individual self-interest that only in its best moments might be communally enlightened".⁵ Guy Hamel argues that Shakespeare's "assault on formulas [. . .] reveals itself in almost every departure from *The Troublesome Reign*".⁶ To situate Shakespeare's play in a sceptical relation to ideology or generic formulas is, of course, profoundly unsubversive of the continuing critical imperative to speak with the Bard. The modern Shakespeare, as Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out, must subvert only that which is no longer subversive. The *John* worthy of modern critics' engagement is produced by a common critical strategy, which is most clearly visible in the conclusion of one of the play's editors that "it would be a crippling limitation of the power of *King John* to tie it too closely to the situation of the 1590s".⁷ It is in its implication in the religious politics of the

period of the Spanish war that *John* is most clearly un-modern; it is part of the wartime anti-Catholic polemic, something which has been played down in order to produce a modernity which legitimates a continual critical return to the play, and to a lesser extent, to Shakespeare.

It is not surprising that there has been relatively little interest in *John's* brand of Protestant nationalism of late, for, as David Aers has pointed out, many influential contemporary critics of early modern writing "display a marked lack of interest in Christian traditions, Christian practices and Christian institutions".⁸ Mid-century critics, following E. M. W. Tillyard's characterisation of the play as "but Mildly Protestant in tone", stressed the "moderation" of the play's anti-Catholic sentiments, whilst identifying an assertion of Protestant nationalism.⁹ Recent critics have gone further, identifying a play-world where all religious utterances are just further examples of debased political rhetoric in a world with no consistent values, not even Protestant nationalism.¹⁰

But how debased is this rhetoric? Specifically, did the kind of language with which John defies the Papal legate Pandulph on his first encounter with him circulate in post-Armada London as a somehow debased version of earlier, more sincere, Tudor coinages? To stretch the 1980s monetary rhetoric further, I suggest that, on the contrary, play rhetoric directed against foreign Catholics wishing to overthrow an English monarch was on the gold standard during this period of war with Spain. John's words themselves are direct as he responds to Pandulph's demands in the name of the Pope:

Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the pope.
Tell him this tale; and from the mouth of England
Add thus more, that no Italian priest
Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;
But as we, under God, are supreme head,
So under Him that great supremacy,

Where we do reign, we will alone uphold
Without th' assistance of a mortal hand:
So tell the pope, all reverence set apart
To him and his usurp'd authority.¹¹

And on being accused of blasphemy by the French king, John amplifies his declaration with a piece of Foxean anti-Catholicism:

Though you and all the kings of Christendom
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,
Dreading the curse that money may buy out;
And by the merit of vild gold, dross, dust,
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,
Who in that sale sells pardon from himself,
Though you and all the rest so grossly led
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish,
Yet I alone, alone do me oppose
Against the pope, and count his friends my foes.

(3.1 88-97)

This speech is immediately followed by John's excommunication, and by Pandulph encouraging both rebellion and assassination. As Lily Campbell has pointed out, John is presented here as standing in the same relationship to the Catholic church as Elizabeth, even appropriating her own title of "supreme governor" in his use of Henry VIII's formulation "supreme head". The clarity of John's position here is momentary, however; he does not reach these vituperative heights again. Indeed, he resigns his crown to Pandulph later on. But it is important not to underrate the legitimating power of John's rhetoric. Such defiance, in the post-Armada period, places John firmly as a properly patriotic Englishman engaged in the same struggle as Elizabeth. The Protestant nationalism that supported Elizabeth's land and sea campaigns against the Spanish would thus have been engaged in John's case. Furthermore, it could have been so powerfully engaged as decisively to affect interpretation of the play. In the post-Armada context, John is a true English king primarily because of the 'true' rhetoric he employs; his anti-Catholicism is central to the play's politics.

King John is consensually dated to the period between 1587, when the second edition of Holinshed appeared, and 1598, when Francis Meres mentioned in print a Shakespearian *King John*, though it is impossible to know whether that play was the one first printed in 1623.¹³ It thus belongs within the core years of the Spanish war, and probably to the post-Armada period. After 1588, however, the national mood was certainly not conducive to a relaxed and sceptical investigation of the possible hypocrisy of religious nationalism. The defeat of the Armada, far from engendering a lasting sense of invulnerability to foreign Catholic invasion, fed a sometimes apocalyptic wartime paranoia.¹⁴ Even in 1588, the official London festivities to celebrate the victory were subsumed into the queen's thirtieth anniversary shows. Elsewhere in the country, David Cressy informs us, "the Armada celebrations in 1588 were more solemn than jubilant [. . .] the festivities were conducted in a minor key".¹⁵ London, though its strategic importance meant that it was carefully governed, had its share of hardship, and had to cope with returning soldiers threatening to loot Bartholomew Fair in 1589, and with royal demands for men, ships, and money at a time when the capital was also struggling with plague and dearth.¹⁶ Thousands were

conscripted in the early 1590s, and City trained bands were often mustered.¹⁷ In southern England there were general anti-invasion musters in 1590 and 1596. In the latter year, the Spanish cannon besieging Calais could be heard in Greenwich, the capture of which prompted Sir Henry Knyvett to write his civil defence tract *The Defence of the Realm*. The Spanish raided Cornwall in 1595, and sent another Armada in 1597.¹⁸

Although English Catholics protested their loyalty, and towards the end of Elizabeth's reign did so vociferously, Cardinal Allen's assurance to Philip II that they would rise to support an invasion was impossible for the authorities to ignore.¹⁹ The early 1590s saw the final addition to Elizabeth's anti-Catholic laws. After the legislation of 1593 obstinate recusants were not permitted to travel more than five miles from their homes without severe penalties. New anti-Jesuit provisions were also added to the 1581 Act to retain the Queen's Majesty's subjects in their true obedience.²⁰ Though these measures were moderated in committee, and were not applied completely rigorously, they do indicate that the government were worried about Catholic invasion preparations. The church, naturally, was hardly irenic at this time. Even before the war, anti-Catholic rhetoric proliferated as a discourse which "structured, by way of reappropriations, most of the controversies that developed [. . .] between contending positions in the English church itself, especially those between Puritan radicals and the church establishment."²¹ For the Protestant divine, anti-Roman polemic "was at once an expression of Protestant zeal and an implicit gesture of loyalty to a national church, the Protestantism of whose doctrine was generally acknowledged".²² Anti-Catholicism seems to have been one of the media through which the English church talked to itself; it functioned at least partly to legitimate what was being said.

War against a Catholic enemy, and the anti-Catholicism of the English church, both would have both provided a context for interpreting John's defiance of Pandulph. In addition, anyone familiar with recent historical accounts of John's reign would have expected to see him presented as a legitimate king undermined by circumstances and Catholic conspiracy. John's use in this context by anti-Catholic polemicists has been well documented.²³ Foxe's account in the *Acts and Monuments* limits itself to religious matters, and places John within the perspective of the struggle between the true church and antichrist. Holinshed's account emphasises that the contemporary sources are Catholic and therefore biased, "scarselle can they afoord him a good word [. . .] the occasion whereof [. . .] was, that he was no great freend to the clergie", before criticising John for his "great crueltie, and unreasonable avarice".²⁴ But Holinshed's John, like Foxe's, is a worthy pre-Protestant religious patriot. Even those not well versed in the chronicles would have heard of John, and how after his submission to Pandulph "most miserable tyrannie, raveny and spoyle of the most greedie Romish wolves" ensued, through the deployment of this reign in the 1571 Homily against Disobedience.²⁵ Anyone aware of these versions of the historical John would have come to the play expecting to see a proleptically Protestant king subverted by the Roman church. Though Polydore Vergil and John Stow did not write within this representative tradition, their impact on public opinion was likely during the immediate post-Armada period to have been negligible. John does appear in the *Huntington* plays of the later 1590s as a wicked

tyrant, but in these plays there is no attempt to address the political agenda of *King John*. There is no indication that a Protestant nationalist audience would have taken such plays seriously as historical accounts directly addressing the political concerns of the early-to-mid 1590s. Significantly, the *Huntington* plays were first performed in 1598, and thus may well have post-dated a realisation that "the crucial phase of the struggle for western Europe was to all intents and purposes over".²⁶

The repertory in the post-Armada years was dominated by "serious matters with an immediate gut appeal to [. . .] militarism", in the words of Andrew Gurr.²⁷ The growth of the English history play was due, according to David Bevington, to a need for relevant, but indirect, appeals to "war fever".²⁸ Anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiments were common across a range of plays. John's resistance to Pandulph in Shakespeare's drama would have functioned metonymically to link him to contemporary anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiment, and to the Protestant histories and other polemical deployments of the historical John's reign. The ubiquity and strength of anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic sentiment, furthermore, could well have operated so as to produce a strong cathexis for these sentiments and their utterer in the play, conditioning responses to, and interpretations of, it. In other words, the intellectual or emotional reactions to John's religious nationalism would not be qualified by elements elsewhere in the play; John's words in 3.1 would themselves qualify the responses to the rest of the play, including some of its ambiguities, suspicions, scepticisms and questions.

Recent critics read John's rhetoric very differently. For many, the religious nationalism of his speeches function not to mobilise anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish sentiment, but to indicate that such a rhetoric, and such a mobilisation, is more fully present elsewhere, in the *The Troublesome Reign*. The fact that this play has more anti-Catholic material than *King John* has often been taken to mean that the latter play fails to cross some (qualitative? quantitative?) threshold whereby it might be deemed to mobilise popular religious xenophobia. Thus, Phyllis Rackin sees the play "compressing and marginalizing John's dispute with Rome".²⁹ For M. M. Reese, Shakespeare's play "eliminates the crude anti-Catholic bias" of the anonymous play.³⁰ Robert Ornstein explains that "Shakespeare lacked the temperament to exploit religious prejudices and hysterias [. . .] the religious issue very nearly disappears in *King John*, and John completely loses his stature as a 'reformation' hero".³¹ John Blampied agrees that "Shakespeare neutralises the anti-Papal material, leaving John without a polemical base from which to borrow his authority".³²

For many, the result of this compression, and consequent neutralisation and marginalization, is a play which, in the words of Virginia Vaughan, presents "politics, not polemics".³³ As long ago as 1962 Geoffrey Bullough drew this distinction, stating that Shakespeare "turned away from [. . .] sectarian propaganda to emphasise more purely political motives".³⁴ Such a construction of Shakespeare's *John* (and, of course, *John's* Shakespeare) as drawing a distinction between real politics and un-sophisticated (and explicitly anti-Catholic) rabble-rousing has received much critical support, though earlier writers attribute it to a Shakespearian distaste for "bias" or "rant", or a preference for complexity over

simplicity, and later ones more to a textual refusal of the easy closure which a more foregrounded religious element would have allowed or perhaps necessitated.³⁵ The dominance of Christianity in Renaissance England is perhaps the most effective reminder of Renaissance difference; conveniently, Shakespeare manages to play down that difference and provide a transcendent scepticism for our age of suspicious reading.

As can be seen from Blanpied and Ornstein, the playing down of the religious element also means a John robbed of the legitimating power of religious nationalism. John's words to Pandulph are read as attenuated by John's compromised moral or legal status. Deborah Kehler states that "in the light of his false claim, John's use of divinity to serve his own ends is transparent", while for Philip Edwards "what seems an admirable quality of sturdy national courage is questioned by the moral quality of the speaker, and by his eventual fate in the play".³⁶ Responses to John's words are conditioned not by their deployment of a powerfully cathected sentiment, but by "character". Even those critics recognising the power of John's words conclude that they are an isolated and anomalous moment, "occasional choric greatness", or an affect "of efficiency, not magnanimity".³⁷ At best, for Larry Champion, the anti-Catholic John is just one of the "equally persuasive views of the usurper, the wouldbe murderer, the terror-stricken capitulator, the sufferer, the patriot, and the kingly defender of his nation".³⁸ Without a rousing crudely religious centre, the play's politics are nicely modern: "for character within the play, there is no clear royal authority. For the audience watching it, there is no unblemished cause and no unquestioned authority to claim their allegiance", in Phyllis Rackin's formulation. David Womersley, though he sees the play as clearly conservative in its conclusions, agrees that it "confronts the question of how one lives in a world without value".³⁹ Without wishing to play down the play's contradictions, I think that there is at least one value discernible.

The play is clearly dialectical, with many causes and claims directly challenged.⁴⁰ Falconbridge has long been read as a sceptical outsider, who has a complex relationship to the politics of "commodity" he describes, and perhaps practises.⁴¹ More recently, readings of the play as oppositional and enquiring have been strengthened by feminist revaluations of Eleanor and Constance as subversive voices.⁴² Equally clearly, John's involvement in Arthur's death may be perceived as moral weakness, just as Hubert's refusal to do the deed shows moral strength.⁴³ None of this, however, directly undermines John's "unblemished cause" of resisting Pandulph. Although he is criticised for much else within the play, the only voices raised against John's defiance are Pandulph's and those foreign kings' loyal to him, which is only to be expected, as they are the targets of John's ire.

The main reasons for the widespread critical perception of the play as modern in its politics are mentioned by Kehler and Edwards above: that John is illegitimate, that he is lacking in "moral quality", and that he later gives his crown, effectively, to the Pope. Of these, the "moral" argument is least persuasive. Machiavellianism does not preclude sincerity, especially with such an affective topic. Renaissance history plays often portray monarchs as complex, and attempt to manipulate audience

responses via this complexity. Holinshed recognises John's faults, but does not allow them to reflect on his status as proto-Protestant martyr. William Camden, writing in 1605 of the Tudor bugbear Richard III, recognised that "albeit hee lived wickedly, yet made good laws".⁴⁴ The other two points require more detailed engagement. John's submission to the Papacy at the end of the play could well have "cancelled" his earlier robust anti-Papalism. Through an analysis of the representative strategies used for John's cession I will argue that it may not have done so. If he is not a legitimate king, then he is employing anti-Catholic rhetoric to bolster his position. He need not be shown to believe his own words. If this were so, John's use of religious rhetoric is on a par as a cynical manipulation of language with Richard III's political use of witchcraft accusations in Shakespeare's play and the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III*.

John is not illegitimate just because his opponents say he is. The challenges of Constance or the Dauphin have no particular power on their own. Yet for many critics, whether or not they engage with *John's* "modernity", it is axiomatic that John is an illegitimate king, that he is a usurper in possession of the crown when the right lies with Arthur (and, some have added, the true kingliness with Falconbridge).⁴⁵ There are two cruces commonly adduced to support John's illegitimacy. Both can be read differently.

The first is a critical exchange in the play's first scene, where John and Eleanor discuss the implications of the French challenge just made on Arthur's behalf. Eleanor reproaches John for not dealing with the question sooner, as "This might have been prevented and made whole/With very easy arguments of love,/Which now the manage of two kingdoms must/With fearful-bloody issue arbitrate" (1.1.35-8). John replies "Our strong possession and our right for us", to which Eleanor retorts, "Your strong possession much more than your right,/Or else it must go wrong with you and me./So much my conscience whispers in your ear/Which none but heaven, and you and I, shall hear" (1.1.39-43). Most critics follow Reese's conclusion that this shows that "John is king *de facto* and possession is his only 'right' ", though Edna Zwick Boris points out that Eleanor is "not denying John's right but emphasising the practical aspect of his advantage over Arthur".⁴⁶ Nothing in Eleanor's speech indicates that John has no right, or that he is a usurper. Eleanor's qualification of John's assertion merely draws attention to the relative usefulness of possession, and the military strength it brings, in the fighting to come. Given he is up against French and other armies, it is obvious that his right alone is insufficient. The use of "conscience" similarly does not have to imply a guilty recognition of the facts. Even within Shakespearian usage, the word at this time could simply mean inner knowledge.⁴⁷ Eleanor does not wish others to hear because a public acknowledgement of the relative uselessness of John's right is inappropriate to the dignity of his court, especially just after he has been challenged by Chatillon.

Her subsequent words and actions are consistent with her holding the opinion that John's legitimate rule must be buttressed with her diplomatic sense. She refers to the will of Richard I, which in Holinshed plainly entitles John to the throne, in her confrontation with Arthur's mother: "I can produce/A will that

bars the title of thy son" (2.1.470-1). Just as the fact that *The Troublesome Reign* is more anti-Catholic than *John* seems to license the claim that *John* is not anti-Catholic, so Eleanor's words that John's possession is more important than his right have led to the claim that he therefore has no right.

The other key moment for John's illegitimacy, and for the play's exploration of the consequent instability of political legitimacy, is Falconbridge's reaction to Arthur's corpse at the end of the fourth act. Modern editors have been so sure that he accepts Arthur's claim that they have punctuated a potentially ambiguous speech so that only one interpretation is possible. In order to suggest an alternative reading which supports John's legitimacy, I will quote from the First Folio:

Bast. Go, beare him in thine armes:
I am amaz'd me thinkes, and loose my way
Among the thornes, and dangers of this world.
How easie dost thou take all *England* vp,
From forth this morcell of dead Royaltie?
The life, the right, and truth of all this Realme
Is fled to heauen: and *England* now is left
To tug and scramble, and to part by th teeth
The vn-owed interest of proud swelling State:
Now for the bare-pickt bone of Maiesty
Doth dogged warre bristle his angry crest,
And snarleth in the gentle eyes of peace:
Now Powers from home, and discontentes at home
Meet in one line: and vast confusion waites
As doth a Rauen on a sicke-falne beast,
The imminent decay of wrested pompe.
Now happy he, whose cloake and center can
Hold out this tempest. Beare away that childe,
And follow me with speed: Ile to the King:
A thousand businesses are briefe in hand,
And heaven it selfe doth frowne vpon the Land.⁴⁸

(4.3.139-55)

Editors of the recent Penguin, Oxford and Cambridge editions concur in seeing the fourth line as addressed to Hubert, who has now picked up Arthur as Falconbridge commanded, and in punctuating the passage so that "From forth . . ." begins a new sentence.⁴⁹ The clear interpretation is that, ironically, Hubert can lift all England as he lifts Arthur's corpse. Arthur is referred to as "England" at 2.1.91 and 202 by Philip of France. All the life, truth and right of England, which resided in Arthur, has fled (like *Astraea*) to heaven, and all that remains for the country left behind is a dogfight over the remaining in

bones of power. Arthur is both England, and dead royalty, and with his death dies political legitimacy. "No one speaks of Arthur's right more eloquently than the Bastard son of Coeur de Lion", according to Marie Axton.⁵⁰ For others, John's illegitimacy authorises views of the play's modernity, and Falconbridge's speech marks the point where he chooses to support a king whom he has just recognised as a usurper, making his own political meaning in a world where there is no guarantor of legitimate rule. His decision to follow John "must be an existential one, choosing a way despite his own awareness that whatever 'rightness' he invests it with is not inherent in it".⁵¹

It is possible, however, to read the speech differently. If the "thou" of the fourth line is not Hubert, but the heaven to which Arthur's soul has presumably fled, Arthur need not be acknowledged as rightful monarch at all. Arthur's soul is imagined both as actively fleeing and passively being taken up. Arthur's body, in a familiar metaphor, is a "realme" from which the ruler ("England", as Arthur is English) has gone. Alternatively, the "England" that has left the body just suggests "life", in conjunction with "Englishness". Either way, Arthur's right is to the realm of his own body. Falconbridge then shifts to the larger realm, also lacking a ruler, but for the different reason that "powers from home, and discontents at home" are in conflict. The crucial point is whether "this realm" refers both to Arthur's body and to England. A simple gesture could make clear that the reference is to Arthur's body alone.

Falconbridge is critical of John, but this need not impugn his legitimacy, as the terms he uses recall those used by the nobles disapproving of John's recrowning in 4.2. Each reference to John can be read as critical of the sumptuousness of the ceremony, and of the new clothing associated with it, much remarked on by the nobles at the time. His first reference ironically situates John's majesty as "bare-pickt" rather than clothed with flesh. "Proud swelling state" refers back critically to the wasteful excess of the recrowning, as does "wrested pomp" (that is, pomp employed in the improper context of John's ceremony, rather than wrested from Arthur). The final reference ironically characterises John's clothing as simple ("cloak and center") and unlikely to last the tempest of disorder in the realm. Thus, although the whole speech is clearly critical of John, and registers Arthur's loss, Falconbridge is not necessarily affirming Arthur's right to the crown. Falconbridge's words are difficult to understand, but an audience accepting John's legitimacy need not have understood him to challenge this right, and it is possible to imagine a performance which makes clear that John is legitimate King. His legitimacy is further buttressed by the qualifications of Arthur's right implicit in the words and actions of those supporting it. A claim supported by a man who carries on his back the spoils of a dead Richard I is not likely to have impressed an Elizabethan audience, even if they responded positively to the bemused and passive "boy" who at one point states "I would that I were laid low in my grave./I am not worth this coil that's made for me" (2.1.164-5).

John's legitimacy, however, raises the question of his cession of the crown to Pandolph, which happens just after the Falconbridge speech quoted above. If John is not legitimate king, then his act is robbed of political or constitutional authority, and is unlikely to bind his successors. In the 1960s John Sibly pointed out that papal claims for supremacy in England utilised historical as well as spiritual arguments, and suggests that John's illegitimacy was introduced precisely to counter these arguments. He begins

from the premise that technically, John was not a usurper until Arthur's death, as he could still have resigned the crown when Arthur reached his majority, and sees Falconbridge's words before the recrowning as recognising that John is now a usurper:

it is *immediately* after the 'flight to heaven' of any 'right' John may have had in the realm, that he 'surrenders' his crown. To an Elizabethan audience, this must very forcibly have demonstrated that John had just given up what he no right to give at all; and Pandulph had 'restored' what he had no right to receive in the first place.⁵²

The cession of the crown is merely an index of the current balance of power, and for a Protestant audience devalues a morally bankrupt and/or illegitimate John still further.⁵³ If a legitimate John is posited, the status of this humiliating submission, to the very man John had so strongly defied earlier, needs to be addressed.

The mere representation of John's submission need not have functioned simply to condemn him, despite the commonsense appeal of this position. The *Homily Against Rebellion* draws different conclusions. Here John's submission to Pandulph is the clearest example, in its awfulness, of the chaos into which rebellion throws the country. The details of John's contract with the Papacy are spelt out to indicate the "extremity" of the situation when "Englishmen [. . .] brought their souveraigne lorde and naturall countrey into this thraldome and subjection to a false forraigne usurper".⁵⁴ John's legitimacy emphasises the indignity of his submission. Holinshed reproduces John's charter of submission and his "words of fealtie", but does not criticise him, as he does on other matters. Foxe is slightly more difficult to interpret. A paragraph of the 1563 edition, omitted from the 1583 second edition, explains John's reasons for submitting as fear of the French king, and the perception that nothing else "could be found to avoid the present destruction both of his person and the realm also". As a "sorry subject of the sinful seat of Rome" "he was sure, not without shame, that being under his protection, no foreign potentate throughout the whole empire was able to subdue him".⁵⁵ The negativity of "shame" here may be Foxe's judgement on John, or John's own opinion of himself.

But the 1583 edition reproduces John's "Letter Obligatory" to the Pope, and is unequivocal in its identification of John as a hapless victim of "that execrable monster and antichrist of Rome". Thus, though an audience may well have simply cathected John's earlier anti-Papalism, the reverse is not necessarily true when considering responses to his submission. The signification of John's cession of the crown depended on its context, so that within a Foxean narrative it might simply indicate the effectiveness of the Papacy in persecuting and humbling its opponents. It is also important to recognise that John's cession of the crown in Shakespeare's play employs different dramatic strategies to his earlier confrontation, and that these strategies may well have directed an audience towards a response the final result of which would be to confirm John as legitimate.

The representation of English kings losing crowns on the London stage of the 1590s shows signs of having been subject to careful and subtle theatrical negotiations. Though recent critics have retreated from the once-commonplace conclusion that because the 1608 quarto of Shakespeare's *Richard II* was the first to feature his deposition it must have been censored, there is still the possibility that the first quarto of 1597, or the play as performed, was cut, or that Richard's abdication/deposition was somehow 'unwritable' at this period.⁵⁶ This 'unrepresented' 1590s deposition can be compared to those represented in Shakespeare's *Richard III* and *3 Henry VI*. The 1595 quarto of the latter presents Henry's resignation of his throne to the joint protectors Warwick and Clarence in a scene half the length of its 1623 First Folio equivalent, in which Henry accepts the arrangement so that "the people of this blessed land/May not be punished with my thwarting stars" (4.6.21-2). The 1590s quarto "underrepresents", rather than omits, Henry's deposition. In *Richard III* deposition is directly represented only in a stage direction in which Richard fights Richmond and is slain. Although the visitations Richard receives in his sleep before the battle can be argued to be a displaced representation of a deposing tribunal, to whose conclusions Richard involuntarily assents, the death of the king in this instance is underrepresented in that it is a *fait accompli*.

'Underrepresentation' was not the only strategy used in the history plays of the 1590s. The 1591 quarto of *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, which covers much of the same ground as Shakespeare's play, follows Foxe and the *Homily* in representing John's recrowning at Pandulph's hands. As with the two earlier texts, its principal strategy is to attempt to limit interpretation by presenting the deposition/abdication as primarily signifying John's helplessness in the face of Popish prelates' persecutions, the final wrong turning in a *Troublesome Reign*. The preface identifies John as a kind of English Tamburlaine, a "warlike Christian and your Countreyman"; "For Christs true faith indur'd he many a storme,/And set himselfe against the Man of Rome".⁵⁷ This John, as in Shakespeare's play, defies Pandulph on their first meeting, and orders Falconbridge to ransack the abbeys, though *The Troublesome Reign* shows the action where Shakespeare only alludes to it. John recrowns himself in front of his nobles, explaining that he does this not because he has been deposed, but because he is checking the "assured witnes of your loves" in a ceremony to bind the nobles to him, (*Troublesome Reign*, 1555).

The play deals with such potentially difficult moments by providing a clear cause for events, and this applies also to John's recrowning by Pandulph. He prepares to meet the legate by assessing his situation under the Papal interdict, recognising that his sins are too great for him successfully to banish Popery (though he looks forward to it happening), and resolving to "finely dissemble with the Pope" (2 *Troublesome Reign*, 275) as the realm's chaos is caused by Papal interference. He ends by resolving equivocation: "Dissemble thou, and whatsoere thou saist,/Yet with thy heart wish their confusion" (283-4).

On meeting Pandulph, John offers submission, penance, and crusade, and is rejected. His first impulse is to kill Pandulph, but he again submits, to be informed that surrendering his crown is the only acceptable course. John resolves to fight rather than do so. At that moment a messenger enters, telling that a large

French fleet has put the country into mutiny. On hearing this, John's resistance collapses. He later receives his crown back "as tenaunt to the Pope" (637), berates himself ("Shame be my share for yeelding to the Priest"), and in his last speech traces this act as increasing his troubles: "Since John did yeeld unto the Priest of Rome/Nor he nor his have prospred on the earth" (707, 1075-6).

The dramatic strategy of *The Troublesome Reign* is to try to contain the implications of John's submission to the Pope by inserting it into a master narrative, the course of the ancient struggle between Roman and native Christianity (Protestantism). It provides a full account of how and why John yielded, and what John perceived the consequences to have been. By this strategy, the play attempts to contain the implications of John's act for posterity. Because the causes of the deposition easily fit into the Foxean picture of the embattled proto-Protestant subverted by Papal wiles, to represent the deposition itself is not necessarily to provide a subversive undoing of John's status as proto-Protestant hero. This strategy might be called "directive representation": the deposition is shown, but attempts are made to limit an audience's perception of its meaning.

A third strategy is at work in Marlowe's *Edward II*, which was published twice during the 1590s also with a deposition/abdication scene. This third strategy might be characterised as "overrepresentation", here defined as the representation of an action or event so that a conclusive meaning is difficult to draw from it. It is not clear, for example, from Edward's abdication/deposition scene why he has given up the crown, whether he has a choice, or whether he is in a fit state to understand what he is doing. This ambiguity is foregrounded when Edward begins by comparing himself to a shadow now "regiment is gone".⁵⁸ He then asks if he must resign his crown as Mortimer will take it, is told that it will rather pass to his son, denies this, is asked again whether he will resign, gives his crown to Leicester, takes it back just until night, is asked again for it, refuses, gives it back to protect his son's right on a reminder from Leicester, calls upon another to take it from him, hands it over, and sends a handkerchief wet with his tears to queen Isabel. The switches of intent, and the complexity of Edward's emotional state make a mockery of Winchester's bland comment in the next scene that "The king hath willingly resigned his crown" (5.2.28). Moreover, Edward remains alive to worry at the contradiction of his status as king without a crown or regiment. Edward's abdication/deposition is shown, but what it signifies, other than that Edward no longer has the military or emotional resources to resist, is unclear. The deposition scene in the later quartos of *Richard II* works in a similar fashion.

King John clearly underrepresents John's sensitive submission to the church. Where *The Troublesome Reign* attempts to direct attention from the constitutional consequences by focusing on John's reasons for, and reactions to, his swearing fealty, *King John* takes only 65 lines (during which John also hears of the effects of Arthur's death upon the rebels) to cover the period between the first mention of the idea and Falconbridge's rejection of it as an "inglorious league". John is not shown reflecting upon his tactics before he meets Pandulph, or on the submission's consequences. Although the play underrepresents this episode in comparison to *The Troublesome Reign*, what happens is still clear. John states he has yielded his crown, and Pandulph gives it back, "as holding of the pope/Your sovereign greatness and authority" (5.1.3-4). Underrepresentation is not, however, non-representation, though Barbara Hodgdon has

recently pointed out that the play seeks to "suppress precisely those events that might divide or fracture audience response".⁵⁹ But the play can be read as recognising the problems even in underrepresenting John's submission, and that it attempts to contain the negative implications of this via overrepresentation. It does not follow the Foxean strategy of presenting the recrowning with minimal comment and leaving the reader to point the moral; rather, it makes it difficult to understand, and thus subject to recuperative qualification by John's easily intelligible speeches in 3.1.

Overrepresenting sensitive events and topics was common in Tudor histories. A. R. Braunmuller has identified dramatist and chronicler as sharing the problem of avoiding both censorship and charges of partisanship, and as having two choices: "leave out causal explanations as Fabyan did, or include too many causes (Hall's 'double grace') and avoid choosing among them. Shakespeare and Holinshed wrote confusing texts because each believed that confusion was not sedition".⁶⁰ Braunmuller's useful formulation of the available strategies is confirmed in Holinshed's preface to the reader: "I have in things doubtfull rather chosen to shew the diversitie of their writings, than by over-ruling them, and using a peremptory censure, to frame them to agree to my liking: leaving it nevertheless to each mans judgement, to controll them as he seeth cause".⁶¹

It is perhaps misleading to characterise historical writing as primarily concerned with avoiding sedition, rather than as attempting to make orthodox sense out of unpromising material. Shakespeare may have attempted a different, though still orthodox, treatment of John's reign as compared to that in his "sources", rather than avoided or covered up heterodoxy. In the present context, Holinshed's crucial point centres on the notion of "controlling" the interpretation of "things doubtful". Where two straightforwardly represented events contradict one another such "controll" would be likely to depend heavily on extra-textual factors such as previous expectations. Thus, in the case of *John*, an audience might compare his submission with his defiance, and conclude that no conclusion was possible. But if the defiance was straightforward, and the submission confusing, an audience is less likely to have seen the defiance as "cancelled" or invalidated by the submission. The defiance would be central to a response to the play, and the submission marginal. Though *John* underrepresents John's submission in comparison with other texts, the issues upon which an interpretation depend are overrepresented: the validity of a recrowning, whether John can give away his crown, and what significance such an action has.

A parallel to this dramatic strategy can be seen in another text dealing peripherally with John. Thomas Wilson, writing in 1600 of the state of England, states that it is "an absolute Imperiall Monarchy held neither of Pope, Emperor, nor any but of God alone, and so hath bene ever since the year of the World 2855, which was 1108 years before Christ".⁶² Wilson then engages with the supposed donation of Britain to the Papacy by the emperor Constantine, which he rebuts by pointing out that subsequent conquests extinguished Rome's right. The only other threat to this independent England is John's submission: "after this, K John did resign the Crowne to Pandolphus, the Pope's legate, and did receive it againe from him, to hold it of the Pope, paying yearly a certain Tribute; but then is easily answered

(though it be the Pops strongest clayme) that King John was but an usurper, and being distressed besides with the Barons' Warres, he was forced to do yt to have the Pope's help, but his act was never confirmed by the States of the Country and therefore frivolous".⁶³

This passage, written for private circulation and not printed until 1936, stresses the constitutional importance of an engagement with John's submission, though this is not a question Holinshed, Foxe or the *Homily* addressed. Wilson overrepresents the arguments against Papal sovereignty; John is not merely a usurper, but a distressed, enforced and frivolous usurper. The tactic here is not to provide one conclusive refutation, but to produce the impression that the cumulative force of all explanations is strong enough to show John's submission as irrelevant to the current situation. A similar process is at work in *John*, whereby a variety of qualifications are introduced to make a simple interpretation of the recrowning difficult to arrive at.

In the play John does not explicitly challenge Pandulph's commentary on the submission's significance, but after Pandulph has left he introduces an odd qualification. Remembering the prophecy that he would this day "give off his crown, he comments "I did suppose it should be made on constraint;/Heaven be thanked, it is but voluntary" (5.1.28-9). Given that one of the foci of *The Homily's* treatment of John's recrowning is on the indignity of the English king being forced to submit, this statement can be seen as an attempt by John to reiterate his independence of Pandulph, so that the recrowning is a tactic, a piece of equivocation meaning nothing to John. At the least, the distinction between voluntary and involuntary uncrowning implies that this kind of recrowning is not as bad as its alternative. This muddle can be read as either denoting John's personal muddle (he has lost the crown but tries to persuade himself he hasn't) or as a piece of obliquity for which there is no clear interpretation (though the implication is that the recrowning is not what Pandulph thinks it is). Falconbridge's prompt criticism of John's "inglorious league" (5.1.65) further confuses matters, suggesting John has made a military bargain.

In the following scene, Pandulph is shown to be unable to honour his contract with John. Lewis, whom Pandulph has encouraged to invade, is one of the threats John fears. His first words after the truncated recrowning ceremony are to enjoin Pandulph to go "to meet the French/And from his holiness use all your power/To stop their marches 'fore we are inflamed" (5.1.5-7). Not only is Pandulph unable to provide what John needs; he is also met with a forceful declaration of royal independence of the Papacy: "I am too highborn to be propertied,/To be a secondary at control,/Or useful serving-man and instrument/To any sovereign state throughout the world/[. . .] must I back/Because that John hath made his peace with Rome?/Am I Rome's slave?" (5.2.79-82, 95-7). Thus, although Pandulph clearly presents the recrowning as signifying John's subservience to the Pope, it is followed by an obscure distinction drawn by John, Falconbridge's perception that a purely political league has been made, and Lewis' declaration that he (and by implication, John) is royal and thus nobody's "slave". Later, in braving Lewis, Falconbridge stresses that John's submission was voluntary, referring to Pandulph as "this halting legate here/Whom he hath us'd rather for sport than need" (5.2.174-5).

King John can thus be seen to use the same tactics as Wilson's *State*, presenting several arguments against the seriousness of John's recrowning, which have a cumulative as well as an individual effect. It might even be said that much of the last third of the play is constructed to contradict Pandulph's claims of the significance of the recrowning, for only two scenes before John receives the crown back from Pandulph, he recrowns himself, and is criticised for so doing. In Act 4 John enters "once again crowned" (4.2.1). Though his nobles defer to John's right to do as he likes, the ceremony is presented, in the words of Pembroke as "superfluous: you were crowned before/And that high royalty was ne'er plucked off,/The faiths of men ne'er stained with revolt/Fresh expectation troubled not the land/With any longed-for change or better state" (4.2.4-8). Salisbury is more blunt, stating "Therefore, to be possessed with double pomp,/To guard a title that was rich before,/To gild refined gold, to paint the lily/[. . .] or with taper-light/To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,/Is wasteful and ridiculous excess" (4.2.9-11, 14-16). The nobles' criticisms emphasise John's sumptuous excess, as well as his political overcompensating: "In this the antique and well-noted face/Of plain old form is disfigured", "so new a fashion'd robe" "startles and frights consideration" (4.2.21-22, 27, 25). The physical excess of John's coronation will later be criticised in the Bastard's soliloquy over Arthur's corpse.

But just as prominent are the political arguments. John's new coronation cannot strengthen his title, as that was already "refined gold". He is trying to increase the light of the sun (himself) with a candle. Pembroke implies that the ceremony of recrowning might have some point in the context of a domestic rebellion as a reassertion of the proper relationship between king and nobles, but this does not validate the later recrowning, as no nobles are present. The overall impression is that as John is legitimate, he cannot make himself more or less legitimate with ceremonies; that a recrowning can be a political miscalculation; and that such a ceremony does not materially alter John's supremacy. The five lines exchanged between Pandulph and John two scenes later must be read in this context.

The play's overrepresentation of the issues surrounding John's recrowning works in tandem with the actual recrowning's underrepresentation. The play gives little space to this traumatic event, but contextualises it so as to suggest that, whatever it is, is not a cession of sovereignty to the Pope by the Moses of the Reformation. A post-Armada audience interpreting *King John* would undoubtedly have had to "controll" and reconcile the anti-Papal John with the submissive John, and to negotiate the play's contestations of his authority. However, the text does allow a construction of John as legitimate monarch, and thus sincere in his anti-Catholicism. This presentation of John would also have accorded with those in Holinshed, Foxe, the *Homily* and *The Troublesome Reign*, and would not have offended contemporary anti-Spanish or anti-Catholic nationalism. The model offered by critics identifying the play as "modern", in contrast, situates the play as against the grain of most influential historical accounts, the predominant "war fever" of the theatrical repertory, and the likely mood of wartime London. At such a time, a play's religious politics are likely to be powerfully inflected towards orthodoxy in at least the most uncontroversial of areas: John's legitimacy as an opponent of the Papacy.

To recognise this historical reading as possible, perhaps even likely, goes against the grain of post-Tillyard approaches to the history plays, which David Womersley characterises by critics' unwillingness "to believe that Shakespeare might have written in support of doctrines they find repugnant or risible" and a consequent locating of "a remarkable dramatic complexity"⁶⁴ in the plays. The reinvention of the history plays described from a different perspective by Womersley and Curren-Aquino has helped to continue Shakespeare's dominance of the Renaissance canon as continually relevant politically, something which happens surprisingly frequently by the traditional critical/polemical tactic of presenting Shakespeare, or his texts, as rising above the simplicity and polemic of contemporary "sources". I have attempted to show how it is possible to read *King John* as irrelevant to modern political concerns, and that in at least one important respect Shakespeare is not our "ambivalent, ambiguous, sceptical, questioning and ideologically subversive" contemporary.

Notes

- ¹ Deborah Curren-Aquino, *King John: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1994), p. xxvi.
- ² Sigurd Burckhardt, "King John: The Ordering of this Present Time", *ELH*, XXXIII (1966), p. 133.
- ³ Burckhardt, 134; Virginia Vaughan, "King John: A Study in Subversion and Containment", in *King John; New Perspectives*, ed. Deborah Curren-Aquino (London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1989), p. 62.
- ⁴ Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 66.
- ⁵ Larry Champion, "The Noise of Threatening Drum": *Dramatic Strategy and Political Ideology in Shakespeare and the English Chronicle Plays* (London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1990), p. 98.
- ⁶ Guy Hamel, "King John and *The Troublesome Reign*: A Reexamination", in Curren-Aquino (1989) p. 54.
- ⁷ Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets", in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1985), p. 29; *King John*, ed. Robert Smallwood (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 12.
- ⁸ David Aers, "A Whisper in the Ear of Early Modernists", *Culture and History 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. David Aers (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 195-6.
- ⁹ E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 220; see also M.M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty* (London: Arnold, 1961), p. 270; Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957: rev. edn, London:

Methuen, 1965), pp. 121-2; David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1968), p. 200.

¹⁰ This argument is developed thoroughly in Deborah Kehler, "'So Jest With Heaven': Deity in *King John*", in Curren-Aquino (1989) p. 101.

¹¹ *King John* ed E.A.J. Honigmann (London: Methuen, 1954), 3.1.75-86. Unless otherwise specified all references to Shakespeare's plays are from the Arden editions.

¹² Lily Campbell, *Shakespeare's Histories* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Publications, 1947; 3rd edn, London: Methuen, 1964), p. 154.

¹³ C.W. Heiatt, "Dating *King John*", *N&Q*, xxxv (1988), p. 463 dates the play to 1593/4; Roslyn Knutson, *The Repertory of Shakespeare's Company 1594-1613* (Fayetteville: Arkansas UP, 1991), p. 75 suggests 1596-97; L.A. Beaurline's edition of *King John* (Cambridge UP, 1990), p. 210 plumps for 1590; A.R. Braunmuller's edition (Oxford UP, 1989), p. 15 chooses 1595-96; Smallwood, p. 10 also supports 1593/4, and Honigmann, p. lviii 1590/1.

¹⁴ Carol Wiener, "The Beleagured Isle: A Study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Anti-Catholicism", *Past & Present*, LV (1971), pp. 52-3; R.B. Wernham, *After the Armada* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), pp. 453-60.

¹⁵ David Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), p. 119.

¹⁶ Peter Clark, "A Crisis Contained? The Condition of English Towns in the 1590s", in *The European Crisis of the 1590s* ed. Peter Clark (London: Allen & Unwin, 1985), p. 55.

¹⁷ Clark, p. 46.

¹⁸ R.B. Outhwaite, "Dearth, the English Crown and the 'Crisis of the 1590s'", in Clark (1985), p. 25; Henry Knyvett, *The Defence of the Realm* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906).

¹⁹ A. Pritchard, *Catholic Loyalty in Elizabethan England* (London: Scholar Press, 1979), pp. 6-8, 12.

²⁰ T.E. Hartley, *Elizabeth's Parliaments: Queen, Lords and Commons 1559-1601* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1992), pp. 98-101.

²¹ Donna Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Poetics of Protestant England* (Lexington: Kentucky UP, 1992), p. 4.

²² Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), p. 6.

- ²³ See Carole Levin, *Propaganda in the English Reformation: Heroic and Villainous Images of King John* (Lewiston/Queenston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).
- ²⁴ Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, Vol. II (London, 1807; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1965), pp. 339, 319.
- ²⁵ *Certain Sermons or Homilies (1547) and A Homily Against Disobedience And Wilful Rebellion (1570): A Critical Edition*, ed. Ronald Bond (Toronto and London: Toronto UP, 1987), p. 243.
- ²⁶ Wernham, p. 555.
- ²⁷ Andrew Gurr, *Play going in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987), p. 135.
- ²⁸ Bevington, p. 195.
- ²⁹ Rackin, p. 187.
- ³⁰ Reese, p. 270.
- ³¹ Robert Ornstein, *A Kingdom for a Stage* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1972), p. 88.
- ³² John Blanpied, *Time and the Artist in Shakespeare's English Histories* (London and Toronto: Associated UP, 1983), pp. 100-101. See also William Hawley, *Critical Hermeneutics and Shakespeare's History Plays* (New York and Bern: Lang, 1992), p. 70.
- ³³ Vaughan, 1989, p. 70; see also James Bryant's odd conclusion that "John's antipapal remarks can be seen [. . .] not as being derogatory to the Roman Catholic Church but as an expression of the Reformation position", *Tudor Drama and Religious Controversy* (Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1984), p. 133.
- ³⁴ *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), Vol. IV, p. 22.
- ³⁵ For the former stance, in addition to Bullough, Reece and Ornstein cited above, see Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), p. 108; Philip Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1979), p. 115, and Bevington, p. 198. For the latter position, see Hawley, p. 70; Champion, p. 96; Hamel, p. 55.
- ³⁶ Kehler, p. 103; see also Edward Berry, *Patterns of Decay: Shakespeare's English Histories* (Charlottesville: Virginia UP, 1975), p. 115.
- ³⁷ Reese, p. 275; Emrys Jones, *The Origins of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 239.

³⁸ Champion, p. 96.

³⁹ Rackin, p. 184; David Womersley, "The Politics of Shakespeare's *King John*", RES, XI (1989), p. 502. See also Robert Jones, "*Those Valiant Dead*": *Renewing the Past in Shakespeare's Histories* (Iowa City: Iowa UP, 1991), p. 60 and Beaurline, p. 51.

⁴⁰ Douglas Wixson, "'Calm words folded up in smoke': Propaganda and Spectator Response in Shakespeare's *King John*", *Shakespeare Studies*, 14 (1981), pp. 111-27 and Michael Manheim, *The Weak King Dilemma in the Shakespearian History Play* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1973), pp. 116-60.

⁴¹ Since at least James Calderwood's "Commodity and Honour in *King John*", UTQ, XXIX (1960), pp. 341-56.

⁴² Juliet Dusinberre, "King John and embarrassing women", *Shakespeare Survey*, 43 (1989), pp. 37-52; Carole Levin, "'I trust I may not trust thee': Women's Visions of the World in Shakespeare's *King John*", in *Ambiguous Realities: Women in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Carole Levin and J. Watson (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987), pp. 219-34; Rackin, pp. 146-200.

⁴³ A topic of interest since at least Adrien Bonjour's "The Road to Swinstead Abbey: A Study of the Sense and Structure of *King John*", ELH, XVIII (1951), pp. 253-74.

⁴⁴ William Camden, *Remains Concerning Britain*, ed. R. Dunn (Toronto and London: Toronto UP, 1984), p. 246.

⁴⁵ See John Elliott, "Shakespeare and the Double Image of *King John*", *Shakespeare Studies*, I (1965), p. 72; R Burkhart, "Obedience and Rebellion in Shakespeare's Early History Plays", *English Studies*, LV (1971); Kristian Smidt, *Unconformities in Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 73; John Loftis, *Renaissance Drama in England and Spain* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987), p. 74; Bonjour, p. 257; Reese, p. 263; Manheim, p. 131; Edwards, p. 115, Levin, 1987, p. 221; Hamilton, p. 43; Berry, p. 115; Bevington, p. 243; Honigmann, p. xxvii; Beaurline, p. 47; Hawley, p. 64; Hodgdon, p. 27; Robert Jones, p. 48; Rackin, p. 162; Kehler, p. 103; Dusinberre, p. 44.

⁴⁶ Reese, p. 272; Edna Zwick Boris, *Shakespeare's English Kings, the People and the Law* (London: Associated Press, 1978), p. 133.

⁴⁷ *Cymbeline*, 1.6.114-6.

⁴⁸ *Mr William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories and Tragedies*, facsimile prepared by H. Kökeritz (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1954), pp. 17-18.

⁴⁹ Honigmann's Arden edition is closest to the First Folio, substituting an exclamation mark for its question mark; his notes indicate that the 'England' of the fourth line refers to both Arthur and the country.

⁵⁰ Axton, p. 109.

⁵¹ Robert Jones, p. 60; see also Womersley, p. 502 and Smallwood, p. 38.

⁵² John Sibly, "The Anomalous case of King John", *ELH*, XXXIII (1966), p. 421.

⁵³ Emrys Jones, p. 256; Robert Jones, p. 57; Calderwood, p. 97; Bonjour, p. 264; Champion, p. 92.

⁵⁴ Bond, p. 243.

⁵⁵ *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. II (London: Seeley Burnside & Seeley, 1843), p. 332. I have checked that this passage is not present in the 1583 edition.

⁵⁶ J. Leeds Barroll, "A New History for Shakespeare and His Time", *SQ*, XXIX (1988), pp. 441-64.

⁵⁷ *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, ed. Bullough, "To the Gentlemen Readers", p. 72. All quotations from *The Troublesome Reign* are from this edition.

⁵⁸ *Edward the Second*, ed. W Moelwyn Merchant (London: Benn, 1967), 5.1.26.

⁵⁹ Hodgdon, p. 30.

⁶⁰ A.R. Braunmuller, "*King John* and Historiography", *ELH*, LV (1988), p. 318.

⁶¹ Holinshed, "Preface to the Reader". [*Chronicles*, Vol. II].

⁶² Thomas Wilson, *The State of England Anno Dom 1600*, ed. F. Fisher, *Camden Miscellany*, XVI (London, 1936), p. 1.

⁶³ Wilson, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Womersley, p. 499.

Source: "The Limits of Modernity in Shakespeare's *King John*," in *Shakespeare and History*, edited by Holger Klein and Rowland Wymer, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1996, pp. 91-118.