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“True” History and Political Theory: The Problematic Orthodoxy of *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*

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THE ANONYMOUS *Troublesome Raigne of King John* was performed by the Queen’s Men probably during the height of the Armada crisis; it appeared in print in 1591. The play’s few critics unanimously conclude that it is essentially a work of propaganda, a monument to Tudor orthodoxy and its principal buttress, obedience doctrine.¹ Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, recent historians of the Queen’s Men, add to the critical consensus their belief that *Troublesome Raigne*, like other Queen’s

¹See, for example, Virginia Mason Carr in *The Drama As Propaganda: A Study of The Troublesome Raigne of King John* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur Universität Salzburg, 1974) who writes that the play: (1) upholds “the doctrine of non-resistance throughout, that under no circumstances is it right to rebel against the king” (164); (2) is “intensely nationalistic,” even jingoistic (166); and, (3) is “not at all lacking when it comes to promoting the most important Tudor doctrines” (171), that is, obedience, conservatism, and nationalism. Carr situates *Troublesome Raigne* among other contemporary didactic histories, including *Gorboduc* (1562) and Bale’s *King Johan* (1538, rev. 1547, 1560). For Carr, the unifying principle of the drama is its “Protestant spirit” (118), and, although Carr admits that John “simply does not measure up to the Tudor ideals of kingship, and [that] his death is in many ways the best solution to England’s dilemma” (170), she reminds readers that “the Elizabethans had made John into a type of Henry VIII” whose vigorous resistance to the Pope transformed him into “a Protestant Martyr-hero” (105).

J. W. Sider, in the introduction to his edition of the play (*Troublesome raigne of John, King of England* [New York: Garland, 1979]), remarks on the rehabilitation of John’s medieval reputation in *Troublesome Raigne* and its indebtedness to John Foxe’s characterization of the king in *Actes and Monuments* (1563) and in Richard Grafton’s *Chronicle at Large* (1568, 1569). Sider also sees the play as explicitly didactic and propagandistic: “The play has two obvious historical functions: King John’s career exemplifies the course that Elizabethans should pursue in 1591; his death and unfinished work become a cause for the spectators” (lix). Sider considers the play “one of many propaganda pieces written in those especially anxious years just before and after the Armada. Like many of them it comments on current events by making clear and obvious historical analogues; but it also invites the Elizabethan audience to help resolve the conflict in which King John was martyred” (lxii), i.e. the unfinished work of reforming the church.

Douglas C. Wixson remarks that in the *Troublesome Raigne* “political propaganda appears on the stage, a moralization of history in which John is again a Christian hero fighting against the papal threat to England”. “Calm Words Folded Up in Smoke”: Propaganda and Spectator Response in Shakespeare’s *King John*,” *Shakespeare Studies* 14 (1981): 113. Wixson suggests that the broad comedy in the Bastard’s exchanges with the Friar (1.2) clumsily but effectively underscores the play’s anti-clerical, anti-Catholic bias.

Men's plays, attempts to convey "true" history, i.e., history consistent with official Tudor political and religious policy.² The formation of the company and the composition of its repertoire, they argue, represented an effort, orchestrated by the earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham, to bring the theater "back into the service of a Protestant ideology which could also be identified with the 'truth' of Tudor history" (33). The company's principal target was Christopher Marlowe, whose anti- or un-Christian portraits, particularly of Faustus and Tamburlaine, threatened the company's own efforts to effect the proper use of Protestant history and the moral benefits of orthodox Protestant theater.

The critical tendency to regard *Troublesome Raigne* as mere propaganda takes "Tudor orthodoxy" for granted and presumes that the play's ideological position and its historiography of King John's reign are likewise stable or undiluted, but this is not so. The play's propagandizing, while certainly genuine, exists alongside an interrogation of the nature of authority; consequently, the play participates in and extends discussions of the nature of political power and the relationship between governor and governed generated by Reformation politics and articulated in contemporary political theory. This essay challenges modern criticism of *Troublesome Raigne* by directing attention to two neglected aspects of the play: the first deals with interrelated structural and historiographical tensions which, I argue, interfere with its usefulness as Tudor propaganda; the second explores the play's hitherto overlooked organizational unity. *Troublesome Raigne* is, in fact, built around four thematically linked episodes in which key characters dispute inheritance rights or challenge legitimate authority and risk riot, war, and civil unrest to pursue extralegal or illegitimate claims. Through these episodes, *Troublesome Raigne* enacts ways both orthodox Tudor obedience doctrine and its nemesis, resistance theory, might be (and often were) manipulated to justify competing political, territorial, and sovereign claims. *Troublesome Raigne*, as a consequence and perhaps unintentionally, registers the culture's growing tolerance of challenges to traditional arbitral processes and willingness to locate arguments that justified alternative, non-traditional claims of authority.

Structurally, *Troublesome Raigne* occupies a transitional space between early Tudor chronicle play, which relied for its shape on the morality tradition, and the history play, best exemplified in Shakespeare's two tetralogies. David Bevington's analysis of Christopher Marlowe's contemporaneous *Edward II* (1592) provides a useful point of departure for discussion of *Troublesome Raigne* because the structural tensions he identifies embedded in the transitional morality/chronicle helps to disclose the

²The Queen's Men's "true" plays also included *The True Tragedy of Richard III* and *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*. Scott McMillin and Sally-Beth MacLean, *The Queen's Men and Their Plays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 32–33.

fissures in the play's supposed orthodoxy.³ The traditional morality structure within which Marlowe (and *Troublesome Raigne's* author) labored demanded separation of "the godly and the profane," "the reward [of] each according to his merit," and the punishment of vice. In order to make King Edward an English Everyman, Marlowe needed to pit a "meek but worthy king" against "his depraved persecutor[s]," a structural demand difficult to reconcile with the "factual material," covering twenty-three years of Edward's life, found in Marlowe's key source, Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Unsatisfied with the morality structure's "plain interpretation of right and wrong," Marlowe instead solves his structural problem by providing complex motivations that account for the changes his characters undergo. As a result, "his characters occupy two spheres, human complexity and moral abstraction. The complexity appears chiefly in the exposition...whereas moral causality leading to a restoration of order," another demand of the morality tradition, "figures increasingly in the play's continuation and denouement." In the first half of the play, Edward's complex relationship with Gaveston motivates the justifiable indignation of the Queen and Young Mortimer; in this way, Marlowe satisfies the structural need for the separation of "godly and profane" and for the punishment of vice. In the play's second half, the profligate king is transformed into a repentant and besieged figure victimized by wicked and ambitious oppressors. The king falls, repents, learns from his error, and is finally avenged by his son; the play's ending, therefore, makes the required moral statement.⁴

The similarities between *Troublesome Raigne* and *Edward II* are striking. *Troublesome Raigne* also falls into two parts: in the first half of the play, the nobles are justifiably motivated to rebellion by John's murder of his own nephew, Arthur, the lawful heir to the English throne; in the second half, John becomes a besieged victim betrayed by ambitious nobles whose rebellion is "justified" by the treasonous arguments of corrupt churchmen. Like Marlowe, the playwright manipulates the morality structure to make appropriate moral lessons: King John repents, is murdered, and is likewise avenged by his son and heir. If Marlowe was the Queen's Men's particular target, the author of *Troublesome Raigne* may have had explicit reasons for following Marlowe's lead. However, by shaping King John with both "human complexity," and "moral abstraction," he succeeds in presenting the king as a more complex and hence more ambiguous figure than would presumably have been called for by the propagandistic demands of Tudor orthodoxy. To be useful to the Queen's Men, the playwright ought to have dramatized a particular version of King John's reign, something he chooses not to do.

³David Bevington, *Mankind to Marlowe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

⁴*Ibid.*, 235, 236, 244.

John Bale's frank distortion of John's history in his *King Johan* (1538?), it would seem, better serves the purposes of "truth" from an orthodox Tudor point of view than does *Troublesome Raigne*.⁵ As an unapologetic propagandist, Bale, as Robert Potter has noted, "dramatizes events not primarily in the interests of reconstructing the past but with the idea of illuminating the present," and, of course, justifying the Henrician Reformation.⁶ Unlike *Troublesome Raigne's* author, Bale very selectively dramatizes only John's dispute with the Papacy and omits all references to his tyranny, the murder of his nephew, Arthur, and his nobles' rebellion. Instead, Bale exploits the moral tradition, placing the helpless "Widow England" at the center of a cosmic contest between Good (King John) and Evil (the Church).⁷ In the play's second half, Imperial Majesty, an obvious abstraction of Henry VIII, rebukes John's antagonists and then pardons the repentant Nobility, Clergy, and Civil Order after they pledge unconditional fealty to their king. Bale's reliance on morality structure and manipulation of both King John's and Henry VIII's history allows "Imperial Majesty [i.e. Henry VIII] [to succeed], where King John failed, in carrying out the necessary reformation" of the English Church. Bale never mentions Henry VIII's divorce or its connection to his quarrel with Rome; instead, Bale's monarch "ordains the Reformation with impersonal objectivity."⁸

By following Marlowe's and not Bale's structure, the playwright jettisons the morality's simplified didacticism and thus creates an ambiguous and complex King John. By attempting to write "true" chronicle history, that is, to reconcile the factual material found in his sources—Holinshed and Polydore Vergil—he dramatizes both John-the-Tyrant and John-the-Victim. The author, as a result (and intentionally or not), juxtaposes contradictory, even paradoxical, views of John's character and reign. Annabel Patterson writes of the "multivocality" of Holinshed's *Chronicles* and concludes that the Chroniclers' efforts at "indifferent" or unbiased historiography were intended to allow individual readers to draw their own conclusions from the material. This strategy is at least in part conventionally self-protective, but also symptomatic of what she sees as the period's growing gesture towards individualism.⁹ I would suggest that *Troublesome Raigne's* author, in attempting to record "true" history, borrows and deploys, perhaps unintentionally, a similar strategy. Despite the play's association with the Queen's Men and its overt propagandizing, the play's

⁵John Bale, *King Johan* (1538?), in *The Dramatic Writings of John Bale*, ed. John S. Farmer (Guildford, U.K.: Charles W. Traylen, 1966), 171–294.

⁶Robert Potter, *The English Morality Play* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 101.

⁷*Ibid.*, 96

⁸*Ibid.*, 102, 103

⁹Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's Chronicles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 3–72.

transitional form, the conflicting accounts of the life of King John it represents, and the ways key episodes in the play intersect with equally unstable contemporary political theory make it impossible to conclude that the play is as ideologically stable as its critics have suggested, that it is no more than a mouthpiece of Tudor orthodoxy.

A more productive approach in the analysis of *Troublesome Raigne* begins with considerations of ways it deploys issues central to contemporary political theory. The rival claims depicted in *Troublesome Raigne*, between King John and his nephew Arthur, his nobles and the church, betray ideological competition which invites an analysis of the underlying justifications, that is, the underlying, contradictory theories of the nature of the relationship between governor and governed that support those competing claims.

Essentially, obedience doctrine and resistance theory present arguments justifying or condemning competing jurisdictional claims. Both discourses justified “radical” political action, were highly volatile, and were adapted, much as King John’s story was, as needed, by Protestants and Catholics alike.¹⁰ The fluidity of their uses calls into question the stability of “Tudor orthodoxy” itself. Obedience doctrine, the pillar of Tudor orthodoxy, in fact begins as Papal “resistance” theory, that is, as justification for resistance against the Pope’s traditional jurisdictional authority. The separation of, or at least the questioning of, the relationship between, ecclesiastical and secular jurisdiction is present at the inception of Reformation political thought. Certainly, the Pope’s refusal to grant Henry VIII’s divorce from Queen Katherine rankled precisely because the decision insinuates that Papal authority was *prima facie* superior to Henry’s in England. To free himself from Roman “domination,” and to justify seizure of church property, Henry employs resistance theory which argues for the divine and scriptural institution of kingship and asserts the Church’s “usurpation” of royal ecclesiastical power.¹¹ Later, of course, the Supremacy requires Henry to enshrine obedience doctrine in order to prevent resistance against his actions by his own Catholic subjects. Tracts justifying resistance to royal *secular* authority arise in England in response to the accession of the Catholic Queen Mary Tudor and were written by some of the same English Protestants who, under her Protestant brother King Edward, had argued vigorously on behalf of obedience doctrine. The arguments, again, rest on questions of jurisdiction: as a Catholic loyal to

¹⁰Political theory quickly shifted application in the sixteenth century. Peter Holmes, *Resistance and Compromise: The Political Thought of the Elizabethan Catholics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) has remarked upon the “ease with which religious leaders transferred from one of these political theories to another,” 3.

¹¹See Henry’s arguments especially in William Tyndale’s *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1525), Edward Foxe’s *De vera differentia* (1534), and Bishop Stephen Gardiner’s *De vera obedientia* (1535).

the Pope, Mary can be branded both a heretic and a tyrant; she can be justifiably resisted, even assassinated.¹²

Contemporary political theory is put into play in *Troublesome Raigne* in a number of important scenes.¹³ For example, the monks who assassinate King John justify their actions with the language of resistance to tyrants, and Arthur and Hubert debate the moral limits of absolute obedience.¹⁴ However, I will focus here on four thematically linked episodes in the play in which legitimate or traditional authority is challenged and the brutal competition for property, territory, or jurisdiction uses as justification legal, dynastic, or religious arguments in much the same manner as contemporary political theory defended or condemned the actions of Protestant or Papist princes. These episodes are the Fauconbridge Northamptonshire riot, the siege of the town of Angiers, the Papal excommunication and interdict, and the baronial rebellion and French invasion.

The Fauconbridge episode begins with a description of a riot in Northamptonshire. Most critics focus on the failure of *Troublesome Raigne's* author to exploit similarities between King John's disputed inheritance of the English crown and the feud that erupts between Fauconbridge's sons.¹⁵ In Shakespeare's *King John*, John and Arthur's situation closely parallels Philip and Robert Fauconbridge's: individuals in each

¹²For anti-Marian resistance theories see especially John Ponet's *Shorte Treatise of Politike Power* (1556), Christopher Goodman's *How Superior Powers Ought to Be Obeyed* (1558), and John Knox's *Appellation* (1558).

¹³All citations are to *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, ed. Geoffrey Bullough (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 4:72–151 (hereafter *TR*).

¹⁴Ponet allowed private men to commit tyrannicide in extreme cases (*Shorte Treatise*, 111). The monk and abbot's conspiracy to poison John is couched in the language of "extremity." Believing themselves under mortal attack, any retaliation is, in their eyes, justifiable. The abbot even declares that the monk has been moved to tyrannicide by God himself: "O blessed Monke! I see God moves thy mind to free this land from tyrants slavery" (2.917–18). Arthur believes he is lawfully the king, his uncle a usurping tyrant. John is, therefore, effectively ordering Hubert to commit regicide. Hubert insists that as a mere subject, he must obey his king's command, but Arthur appeals to Hubert's conscience to resist John's unjust order. Hubert's refusal to murder Arthur, then, conforms to the tenets of passive disobedience, not strict Tudor obedience doctrine. See Scene 12, 2.1314–1452.

¹⁵See, for example, Carr, *Drama As Propaganda*: "The author of *TR* [*sic*] missed an opportunity to emphasize the parallels between the royal family and the Fauconbridge family in his play," 80. See also Guy Hamel, "King John and *Troublesome Raigne*: A Reexamination," in *King John: New Perspectives*, ed. Deborah Curren-Acquino (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989) 43; Brian Boyd, "King John and *Troublesome Raigne*: Sources, Structure, Sequence," *Philological Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (1995): 46–47; Adrien Bonjour, "The Road to Swinstead Abbey," *ELR* 18 (1951): 253–74 and 266–69; L. A. Beaurline, *King John* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 200.

The differences between the episodes are often used to establish the textual priority of either *Troublesome Raigne* or Shakespeare's *King John*. If, for example, Shakespeare used *Troublesome Raigne* as his source, it seems clear that Shakespeare effectively employed the scene to intensify the similarities between Philip's and John's claims. However, we must then ask why the author of *Troublesome Raigne* included (that is to say invented) this scene? On the other hand, if Shakespeare's play is the source of *Troublesome Raigne*, we must suppose

pair are rival claimants to an inheritance that hinges on primogeniture and legitimacy. It becomes clear that just as Robert Fauconbridge has a better claim than his bastard brother, so has Arthur over his usurping uncle.¹⁶ The Fauconbridge episode only seems unexploited in *Troublesome Raigne* because comparison to *King John* inevitably isolates and disengages it from other episodes in the play that also dramatize the characters’ willingness to break the peace in the defense of “illegal” claims. In *Troublesome Raigne*, the Northamptonshire riot provides a model for the next three episodes of civil disruption, each of which has more serious, international consequences; John’s questionable disposition of the Fauconbridge claim foreshadows the disasters to come. His later actions will pit him against his citizens, the Church, and his nobles, causing siege, excommunication, and civil war; the stakes for John and for England are much higher than mere administration of the Fauconbridge Northamptonshire estate.

Robert Fauconbridge provokes a riot in Northamptonshire because he is unsatisfied with a lawful decision made by traditional, legitimate authority. He justifies his resistance on moral and ethical grounds, challenging the laws and traditions that would make his illegitimate elder brother his father’s heir. Robert is also surely interested in the wealth and status that accompany the Fauconbridge estates, and so his contest with his brother is clearly also a competition for property. The “riot” suggests that the conflict spread well beyond familial/domestic contention; certainly the brothers solicited the assistance of supporters. The subsequent breakdown of order in Northamptonshire necessitates the intervention of “officialdom” in the person of “Thomas Nidigate, Shrieve of Northamptonshire” (*TR*, 1.81–82).

Robert claims to be Sir Robert’s “lawful heire” (*TR*, 1.103); Philip counters that, according to “Englands auncient Lawe” (*TR*, 1.105), i.e. the law of primogeniture, he is undoubtedly the legal heir.¹⁷ For King John, then, the case is “plaine” (*TR*, 1.109); if Philip is Robert’s elder

either that in including this scene, *Troublesome Raigne*’s author was merely parroting his predecessor without really understanding how the scene was *supposed* to function (as some critics have suggested), or we must ask why *Troublesome Raigne*’s author so significantly modified the scene. See Boyd, “*King John* and *Troublesome Raigne*,” 46–52 for a fuller exploration of these questions.

¹⁶In *Troublesome Raigne*, on the other hand, parallels are de-emphasized. For example, Philip’s bastardy is far less obvious or certain: he is born only six weeks premature, his mother insists he is legitimate. Moreover both “the world reputes him lawfull heire,” and his father “in his life did count him so” (*TR*, 1.122). By contrast, in *King John* Philip is fourteen weeks premature, and his father has disowned him as a bastard: Beaurline, *King John*, 1.1.113ff (hereafter *KJ*). All citations are to this edition.

¹⁷According to William Blackstone’s *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1773), the rules of inheritance are clear: “I. The first rule is, that inheritances shall lineally descend to the issue of the person last actually seised, *in infinitum*; but shall never lineally ascend. II. A second general rule or canon is, that the male issue shall be admitted before the female. III. A third rule, or canon of descent, is this; that, where there are two or more males in equal degree, the eldest only shall inherit.” Blackstone, *Commentaries*, 2:208, 212–14; quoted in

brother, he must be Sir Robert's heir. Robert asserts, however, that Philip is illegitimate, despite both their mother's denials and their deceased father's belief in Philip's legitimacy (*TR*, 1.121). But all of Robert's evidence is circumstantial: King Richard "lay often" at his father's house while Sir Robert was away; Philip was delivered six weeks premature; he resembles King Richard in "features, actions, and his lineaments" (*TR*, 1.169).

John's response is not, as might be expected given the evidence, to award the inheritance to the legal heir, Philip. Instead, he orders Lady Fauconbridge and Philip to disclose Philip's true paternity, and "as *they* say, so shall thy living passe" (*TR*, 1.213, emphasis added). Robert, incredulous, cries:

My Lord, herein I chalenge you of wrong,
To give away my right, and put the doome
Unto themselves. (*TR*, 1.214–16)

John's response inhibits, rather than advances, justice, and Robert properly accuses John of "giving away" his right. One might argue that, Solomon-like, John foresees the eventual outcome (i.e. Philip's intuited "admission" of bastardy), but, given the structure of later episodes and John's lawless actions, here he is simply superseding the law by nullifying a decision made by the lower Northamptonshire court. In this episode, John rules by whim, the action of a tyrant. Philip is Sir Robert's heir, and John should have instantly confirmed him so.

The legal tangle is further complicated because Philip is allegedly not his *father's* illegitimate son, but rather the result of his mother's adultery. In Shakespeare's *King John*, the king follows English law and declares in favor of the Bastard Philip, regardless of the circumstances of his conception: "My mother's son [i.e. Richard Lionheart] did get your father's heir; / Your father's heir must have your father's land" (*KJ*, 1.1.128–29). But in *Troublesome Raigne*, John ignores English law and is not responsible for satisfying the rival claims of the rioting Northamptonshire brothers. Instead he allows "each of the parties to decide for himself. Philip confesses his illegitimacy rather than deny that the blood of a king (Richard I) flows in his veins."¹⁸ Having appealed their case to the highest law of the land—the king's own court—the brothers receive no legal judgement. The case is settled peacefully only because Philip voluntarily renounces his *legal* claim, an action rendered possible by the royal court's unchallenged acceptance of his preposterous trance-induced "testimony." The Fauconbridge estate consequently reverts to Robert, the next oldest son.

Paul S. Clarkson and Clyde T. Warren, *The Law of Property in Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1942), 207 n.70.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 214 n. 116.

The second episode, the scene before Angiers, parallels the Fauconbridge conflict on several points. First, as in Northamptonshire, rival claimants incite civil unrest and disturb the peace. There are even echoes in the language used by the Sheriff of Northamptonshire—who complains that the Fauconbridge brothers, “in seeking to right their own wrongs without cause of Law, or order of Justice...unlawfully assembled themselves in mutinous manner” (*TR*, 1.77–79)—and the citizens of Angiers—who protest that the Plantagenet dispute has “fill[ed] the world with brawles and mutinies” (*TR*, 1.742). Second, like the Fauconbridges, the quarreling Plantagenets place their feud before a “higher” authority, in this case before “the people” from whom they appear to require validation. The people then repeat John’s behavior: they demand “proof,” but refuse to make a choice, telling the kings to decide among themselves.¹⁹ Third, despite all the chivalric show and bluster, the dispute is settled extralegally. The Angiers episode not only echoes the Fauconbridge conflict but also enacts the situation of Protestant cities like Magdeburg in Germany whose elders refused to surrender its secular or ecclesiastical autonomy to either the Holy Roman Emperor, the Roman Catholic Church, or the Protestant leaders of the Schmalkaldic League. Magdeburg’s independence, like Angiers’, was defensible in part because of the competition among the rival claims for authority over it. Since none of the warring factions could exercise unchallenged sovereignty over the town, Magdeburg, like Angiers, was able to resist all claimants.²⁰

¹⁹The citizens “answere not as men lawles, but to the behoofe of him that proves lawfull” (*TR*, 1.631–32), and until the claimants “have proved one right, [they] acknowledge none right” (*TR*, 1.644–45).

²⁰German Protestant resistance theory culminated in the *Confession of Magdeburg* (1550), a tract written collaboratively by a number of that city’s elders. Cynthia Schoenberger, “The Confession of Magdeburg and the Lutheran Doctrine of Resistance” (Unpub. Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1972) records that Magdeburg had been among the first subscribers of the Schmalkaldic League, joining in 1546. After the defeat of Muhlberg in 1547, Magdeburg “was practically the only center of resistance left” and became a magnet for militant Protestant refugees (111). The Emperor promised the city and its property to the Duke of Saxony in return for its defeat. In 1550 the siege of Magdeburg began in earnest.

The city’s “disobedience” was both religious and civil. It had refused the appointment of a new Roman Catholic archbishop in 1545; the City Council, from that point on, took control of religious and civic government. Consequently, “the city was being governed in a more or less republican fashion, by a popularly elected council, and was fiercely determined not to surrender and thereby lose its newly-found self-government” to the Emperor (109). The marriage of militant reform religion and institutions of self-government, as articulated in the *Confession*, is a recognizable feature of later English resistance theories.

The *Confession* is considered a highly influential document in the history of early modern political thought. *Ibid.*, 158–71. See also Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 2:270ff; J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), 105–6; Robert M. Kingdon, “Calvinism and resistance theory, 1550–1580,” in *The Cambridge History of Political Thought*, ed. J. H. Burns (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 200–203.

Constance, widow of John's elder brother Geoffrey, disputes the legality of King Richard's bequest of the crown of England to his brother John; however, John's *de facto* possession of the Crown, ratified by his barons, negates Arthur's *de jure* rights.²¹ Arthur appeals, as did Robert Fauconbridge, to a higher authority, in this case King Philip of France. The French king brings his army before the gates of Angiers "To barre [John's]...false supposed clayme" (*TR*, 1.600) to the English throne. John, however, insists that the citizens "offer [him] alleageance, / Fealtie and homage, as true liege men ought" (*TR*, 1.609–10).

Angiers' citizens offer a rather unconventional response to the kings' demands: they will admit the lawful king only after the contending parties legally resolve their competing claims. After a brief skirmish, each side claims victory. To end the stalemate, the Bastard proposes the international equivalent of the Northamptonshire riot: the English and French should unite their forces and destroy the town. Horrified by the Bastard's "solution," Angiers' citizens offer an alternative: knit your forces together, not in war, but in marriage; the "lasting bond of love" (*TR*, 1.746) (swiftly broken in the next scene) best serves "the common good" (*TR*, 1.761). Angiers will open its gates to accept the happy couple, Prince Lewes Dauphin of France and the Lady Blanche, Queen Elinor's niece. After the wedding, the citizens suggest, the kings "may so deale with *Arthur* Duke of *Britaine*, / Who is but yong, and yet unmeete to raigne" (*TR*, 1.758–59).

The siege of Angiers exposes a pragmatic attitude in the play inconsistent with the nationalistic, jingoist reading, and inconsistent with what Carr believes to be the play's embrace of "John's *de facto* right to the throne."²² The town's stubborn refusal to yield to either John's *de facto* or Arthur's *de jure* right until the claimants decide among themselves who is lawfully king recalls the response of the impatient inhabitants of

²¹Her complaint raises two important issues: first, English law forbade a monarch from bequeathing the crown as if it were personal property; thus, King Richard's will is suspect. Second, according to the laws of primogeniture, Arthur, as John's elder brother's son, is lawful king of England.

Carr, *Drama As Propaganda*, points out that Richard Lionheart's will, which barred Arthur in favor of John, was ratified by the barons' "election" of John as king of England; however, "the legality of this action was questionable" (80). Clarkson and Warren, *The Law of Property*, state "it was the law of England that the inheritance of real estate, in accordance with the established rule of descent, could not be defeated by devising the land, as such, by will to another" (210).

Much has been made of Richard's bequest in *King John* criticism. Henry VIII ordered that his children should succeed him in order: first Edward, then Mary, then Elizabeth. However, the Duke of Northumberland manipulated Edward VI into naming Lady Jane Grey his successor, thus overthrowing "both his father's will and the Statute of Succession." May Mattsson, *Five Plays About King John* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1977), 28. Northumberland's plan failed and Queen Jane went to the block. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

²²Carr, *Drama As Propaganda*, 165.

Northamptonshire to the battling Fauconbridge brothers. Like the citizens of Northamptonshire, the sensible inhabitants of Angiers act only when the internecine struggles directly threaten to disrupt their civic stability. The elders of Angiers express an antipathy for either claimant and offer an alternative resolution. The town in essence participates in the power struggle—is given a voice in the dispute—and its voice is practical, distant, and distinct from the warring aristocratic factions.

The third episode, King John's quarrel with the pope's legate, Cardinal Pandulph, also erupts in civil unrest. This conflict most closely enacts some of the jurisdictional disputes that lay at the heart of arguments supporting obedience and resistance theory, hence its exploitability by both Protestant propagandists like John Bale and Catholic polemicists like Cardinal Allen whose *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England* (1588) used King John's defiance of the papal legate and resulting excommunication and interdict to explain and justify Queen Elizabeth's excommunication, and to condemn the murder of her Catholic cousin, Queen Mary Stuart.²³ John attempts to circumvent the pope's ecclesiastical jurisdiction by refusing the appointment of Stephen Langton as archbishop of Canterbury. What ensues is a power struggle between church and state that mirrors the wars of religion that consumed Europe for much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The source of the struggle in *Troublesome Raigne* resides, once again, in John's tendency to operate outside the law.

John's conflict with the church in *Troublesome Raigne* is usually regarded as an affirmation of the orthodox Tudor position which offered John as the flawed but righteous predecessor of Henry VIII—"a Protestant martyr-hero"; indeed, the play makes that comparison explicit.²⁴ Although the play makes an effort to exonerate John and to condemn the machinations of the papal legate, the characters' interactions expose as well the interplay of power politics and the struggle for international dominance. John's quarrel with the church in fact echoes the Fauconbridge and Plantagenet disputes. The conflicts in Fauconbridge v. Fauconbridge, Plantagenet v. Plantagenet, and England v. Rome center on determining who has lawful "title" to possess and administer property, whether the

²³John Cardinal Allen, *An Admonition to the Nobility and People of England* (1588), *English Recusant Literature*, 74 (Facsimile repr.; Menston: Scolar Press, 1971).

²⁴Carr's study reviews the critical position on the anti-clericalism in the play. Irving Ribner, for example, argued that the "purpose" of *Troublesome Raigne* was "to argue the doctrine of royal supremacy against the claims of the Catholics. The play affirms strongly and directly that no Pope may deprive a king of his crown and that a king is responsible only to God"; quoted in Carr, *Drama As Propaganda*, 99. In the judgement of S. C. Sen Gupta, Shakespeare's rehandling of the religious material supplied the "defect" in *Troublesome Raigne*, giving Shakespeare's play "much greater cohesion" (quoted in *ibid.*, 100). Both Ribner's and Sen Gupta's comments assume that an emphasis on religion is a dramaturgical defect and that Shakespeare's de-emphasis constitutes dramatic improvement.

Fauconbridge estate, English holdings in France, or church property on English soil. We should recall that papal jurisdictional claims were at the heart of the English supremacy; Henry VIII's use of *praemunire* makes that clear. John's greed for the church's lands and wealth, material possessions to which he feels entitled, discloses his desire for "title" or, in Tudor terms, supremacy. As it was for Henry VIII and other covetous Protestant princes, the religious jurisdictional contest was fused and perhaps even subordinated to rival property claims.

Cardinal Pandulph's opening speech also echoes the language of the sheriff of Northamptonshire and the citizens of Angiers. He asks why John has "disturbe[d] the quiet of the Church, and disanull[ed] the election of *Stephen Langton*, whom his Holines hath elected Archbishop of *Canterburie*" (*TR*, 1.972–74). John's responses are linked to both the Fauconbridge and Plantagenet episodes first because he threatens violence and appeals his case to a higher, in this case divine, authority. As many Protestant princes had done, John claims ecclesiastical jurisdiction directly from God:

as I am King, so wil I raigne next under God, supream head both over spirituall and temrall: and hee that contradicts me in this, Ile make him hoppe headlesse. (*TR*, 1.980–83)

Second, John couches his rejection of papal jurisdictional claims in terms of disputed inheritance and legitimacy of title: "If the Pope will bee King in *England*, let him winne it with the sword, I know noother title he can alleage to mine inheritance" (1.989–91). Pandulph then repeats Arthur's actions and appeals to France to enforce the Church's authority. John is excommunicated and accursed, his subjects discharged

of all dutie and fealtie that they doo owe to [John], and pardon and forgivenes of sinne to those of them whatsoever which shall carrie armes against [John], or murder [him].... (*TR*, 1.996–99)

Pandulph dissolves English subjects' duty to obey their lawful prince, exactly the action taken by Cardinal Allen against Queen Elizabeth, a move that Protestant princes complained allowed the Roman Church to intrude unlawfully into domestic secular affairs and thus undermine secular sovereignty. Pandulph, in addition, dissolves the oath of peace sworn between King Philip and King John before Angiers at the marriage of Blanche and Lewes, thus legitimizing a French invasion.

John swears to take possession of church lands ("no more but all they have" [*TR*, 1.1024–25]), which betrays his resentment both of the church's land holdings in England as well as its ecclesiastical jurisdiction within his realm. John orders the Bastard to "Ransack the Abbeyes, Cloysters, Pories, / Convert their coyne unto my souldiers use" (*TR*, 1.1007–

8), and declares that any Englishman who appeals to Rome for redress will "be judge a traitor to the State, / And suffer as an enemy to *England*" (*TR*, 1.1012–13).²⁵ This declaration effectively stifles all opposition to John's will; no Englishman may, after this point, resist the king in either Arthur's or the church's name without risking a charge of treason, since Arthur has appealed to France and the French have backed Pandulph. The question of religious piety hardly figures into the equation at all. John nationalizes church assets to finance a war that defends his "inheritance." He also rewrites the law to enforce and legitimate his antipapal policy, precisely the actions undertaken by Henry VIII in the 1530s.

The fourth episode of disputed jurisdiction foregrounds Franco-Roman opportunism and John's relationship with his barons. We might term this dispute England v. England, or perhaps Election v. Divine Right. Jurisdiction over England itself is contested in the barons' revolt, and so it echoes Fauconbridge v. Fauconbridge since violence erupts over rival claims. The Fauconbridges' quarrel over inheritance rights, that is, the rights lawfully to administer the Fauconbridge estates; John and his barons' dispute is similarly jurisdictional since what is contested is the seat of sovereignty. John claims it rests in himself as anointed monarch, but the barons maintain their authority as "electors." Most interesting is the play's representation of "the people" in this contest. They do not obediently line up behind their king as one might expect them to do in a play touted as a mouthpiece of Tudor orthodoxy: instead, they resist both John and Arthur at Angiers; they rally behind Lewes' invasion;²⁶ and a common English monk acts as John's assassin.

After John's excommunication and the French military defeat that accompanies Arthur's capture, the French seem prepared to withdraw, that is, until Pandulph reminds Lewes that the English crown can be his: "Arthur is safe," (i.e. John's prisoner), so, Pandulph urges,

²⁵It is an argument similar to those used to suppress English Catholics. Elizabethan fears of a Catholic pretender (specifically Mary Stuart) escalate during the period. The 1559 Act of Supremacy condemned all appeals to foreign powers as treason, the particular "foreign power" being, of course, Rome (see Sider, *Troublesome raigne*, lx). In an Act of 1563, Elizabeth's power was extended "over all estates and subjects within her dominions whereby any one upholding the authority or jurisdiction of the Pope would incur penalties of *Praemunire*," a treasonable offence. Henry Birt, *The Elizabethan Settlement* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), 537–38. To frustrate Mary Stuart's claim to the English crown, and following on the heels of Elizabeth's excommunication (1570) the Succession Act of 1571 specified that "any person ... who during the Queen's life should lay claim to the crown... (shall be) incapable of succeeding to the crown after the Queen's decease" (quoted in Mattsson, *Five Plays*, 43). The Act of 1585 registers pre-Armada fears of a Catholic coup to depose or assassinate Elizabeth and replace her with Mary: "every such person... being in any wise assenting or privy to the same (assassination) shall be... excluded and disabled for ever to have or to claim... the said crown of this realm" (quoted in *ibid.*, 43).

²⁶Both the coastal towns and the "citie Rochester" (*TR*, 2.517) willingly yield before Lewes, and even London after brief resistance accepts him (*TR*, 2.522; 2.526–30).

let *John* alone with him,
 Thy title next is fairest to *Englands* Crown:
 Now stirre thy Father to begin with *John*.
 The Pope sayes I, and so is *Albion* thine. (*TR*, 1.1172–75)

Pandulph is confident John will eliminate Arthur, thus making way for Lewes. Since John is excommunicate, France can invade England with the church's blessing. The church's goals—the deposition of a heretical king and reassertion of its customary authority (as ultimate arbiter) in European politics—would be met and France would, in doing the church's work, be rewarded with the English crown. The French and papal decision resembles both the Fauconbridge and Plantagenet cases as well as the English jurisdictional dispute with Rome: all parties are willing to disturb the peace or wage war to defend extralegal claims.

But the Franco-Papal alliance is mooted once John recants. Pandulph demands that the French stop the war “For all is done the Pope would wish thee doo” (*TR*, 2.664); however, Lewes retorts: “al's not done that *Lewes* came to do” (*TR*, 2.665). The French, indeed, seem positively astonished and affronted by papal manipulations that a moment before they were eager to exploit. Melun responds to Pandulph's demands with antipapal language remarkably similar to John's:

It can be nought but usurpation
 In thee, the Pope, and all the Church of *Rome*,
 Thus to insult on Kings of Christendome,
 Now with a word to make them carie armes,
 Then with a word to make them leve their armes.
 This must not be: Prince *Lewes* keep thine owne,
 Let Pope and Popelings curse their bellyes full. (*TR*, 2.676–81)

Melun here asserts that the papacy has usurped secular authority from Europe's princes, one of the earliest justifications offered by Protestant princes for resistance against papal authority.

When the French and their allies, the English nobles, refuse to obey Pandulph's command, *they* are promptly excommunicated (*TR*, 2.700–701). The French finally withdraw only after the English lords (learning of French plans to murder them) desert, that is, when they realize they cannot hold their position in England without English baronial collaboration. French opportunism is revealed in their refusal to obey the legate, their planned betrayal of the barons, and their politic utterance of the language of resistance. Indeed, this about-face and redeployment of resistance discourse accurately reflects the uses to which it was put by both Catholics and Protestants, English and Continental, since the beginning of the Reformation.

The barons justify their rebellion against King John with a long and legitimate list of grievances that they believe threatens their customary

rights and privileges. They argue that John owes his crown to "election" under feudal custom; consequently, they are within their rights to divest him of the crown and to bestow it on Lewes. Salisbury declares:

Our purpose, to conclude that with a word,
Is to invest [Lewes] *as we may devise*,
King of *our* Countrey in the tyrants stead (*TR*, 2.441–43,
emphasis added)

The barons assume the power to bestow kingship of *their* country upon a candidate of *their* choosing. Their actions register the anxieties of their caste and respond to inroads made in the late sixteenth century by corporatizing absolutism; they demand, in effect, that England be run in their, and not in the king's, interests.

The barons' armies execute a successful domestic uprising; wherever Lewes lands "all places yeeld" (*TR*, 2.644) before him. And even after John's reconciliation with the pope, the barons refuse to desert Lewes. It is only after they learn of Lewes' treachery—his plan to murder all of them as traitors as soon as he is crowned king—that they recant (*TR*, 2.774) and seek John's forgiveness; they march to Swinstead and immediately crown John's son Henry king "In spight of *Lewes* and the power of *Fraunce*" (*TR*, 2.1120). Although Melun's dying speech exhorts the English nobles in fairly orthodox ways to abandon their unnatural rebellion against "Mother" England, and both Pembroke and Salisbury heed Melun's advice, it seems clear it is only after the nobles understand they can gain no advantage in supporting the French that they end the rebellion, rebuff the invasion, and transfer their allegiance to the dying John and his heir.²⁷

It may have been the playwright's and the Queen's Men's intention to salvage John's medieval reputation and to turn him into a Protestant martyr, victimized by the church and murdered by traitorous monks. The play's comic anti-Catholic scenes and Pandulph's duplicitous behavior support such a conclusion and certainly would have done so in performance. However, the playwright's decision to include the less savory aspects of John's career, to represent his rants and dissemblings, forces readers also to regard the tyrannical practices (civil war, invasion, infanticide, interdict) undertaken to sustain his illegitimate claim to the throne. Even the play's closing scene invites a paradoxical reading: if we grant that the playwright, in his pursuit of the "truth," needed to stage John's murder at Swinstead Abbey, we must still question his wisdom in doing so. John has ravaged the monasteries, openly defied the pope, incurred interdiction for Catholics in his realm, yet seeks his last comfort from a priest.

²⁷Sider notes the prevalence of "policy" as a "moral norm" in *Troublesome Raigne*: the nobles cry "tyranny" against John to advance their own ambitions and use "Arthur's death as a pretext for deposing their King," *Troublesome raigne*, lvi.

The abbot and monk pay with their lives for murdering John, and the Bastard is given patriotic closing words, but audiences are left with the uncompromising spectacle of King John dead inside an abbey forgiven by a Catholic cardinal and reconciled to Rome. *Troublesome Raigne* is a far more complex and unstable text than has been previously understood; it, and the remainder of the Queen's Men's "propagandistic" works, are worthy of critical reconsideration. The playwright's efforts at "truth" antagonize the play's supposed orthodoxy and the play's frank enactment of contemporary political theory undermines its value as propaganda.