

## Commodity Theme and Irony in *King John*

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An anonymous play, *The Troublesome Reign of King John* was published in two parts in 1591. It has a close affinity to Shakespeare's *King John*, and though much inferior in terms of the quality of poetry, it is better balanced in construction. As to the relationship between the two plays, I believe with most critics that Shakespeare's play is a revamping and condensation of the two-part play, in spite of E. A. J. Honigmann's opposing argument that *The Troublesome Reign* is a play derived from *King John*.<sup>11</sup> The reason for my point of view is that, as J. D. Wilson pointed out,<sup>29</sup> there are some obscurities in Shakespeare's play which can be elucidated only by reference to the anonymous play. But to explain the peculiar relationship between the two plays, I still think it necessary to investigate Shakespeare's play from the viewpoints of theme and irony in comparison with the source play.

What distinguishes *King John* most markedly from the anonymous play is, it seems to me, Shakespeare's emphasis on the commodity theme and his ironical attitude toward the politicians who repeatedly betray others for their own interest. I am interested in these aspects of the play particularly because they seem to produce its disunity.

Shakespeare's own attitude appears clearly in his treatment of King John and the Bastard. In *The Troublesome Reign*, John is the hero of

the nation, fighting against Rome and France to defend England and her freedom of religion, while in *King John*, he is a mere usurper bent on defending his crown instead of thinking of England, and his depraved character is rather ironically portrayed. This attitude of Shakespeare's toward John is evident from the beginning. In the opening scene of the play, Eleanor is alone with John after the French ambassador Chatillon has departed. She says to her son who is proud of his 'strong possession' and 'right':

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.

(I. i. 40-43)

Eleanor here secretly tells her son, as a moral sin pricking her conscience, that it is not his right but his power which keeps the crown. The author's ironical attitude toward the usurper is felt throughout the play; and this irony in the opening scene should especially be noticed because it controls the effects of later scenes.

It makes a great difference to the nature of the work whether John is the hero of the nation, as in *The Troublesome Reign*, or whether he is changed into a usurper and made the object of irony. What we should notice here is that Shakespeare's change of attitude toward John is in close connection with the changes he makes to the Bastard's character. In the second half of the play, Faulconbridge's character might be said to be almost the same as that in the anonymous play, in being a patriot, an upholder of the order of the country. But in the first half of the play, the Bastard's simple and rather serious character in the source play is

changed into a gay and satirical character.

In a world of usurpers or morally depraved politicians, comical characters often play an active part; typical examples would be the Hunchback in *Richard III* and Falstaff in *Henry IV*. As to the reason why the Bastard has been changed into a satirical character, I especially notice the play's similarity with *Richard III* from the viewpoints of theme and irony. As the nobles who are killed by the ironical Richard have committed sins of murder or perjury and feel some irony at seeing in their own fates the morality of nemesis, so in *King John* also, the politicians who commit treachery and perjury for their own interest, are satirized by the Bastard's soliloquy on commodity and treated ironically throughout the play. Shakespeare looks on and enjoys the base politicians' fates from a detached point of view as he does in *Richard III*; and that is why, it seems, he gives a satirical character to the Bastard as his mouthpiece.

First let us look at the Bastard's character in Shakespeare's play, in comparison with that in *The Troublesome Reign*. In the opening scene of the anonymous play, the Bastard, asking his father's name, says to his mother 'Let sonnes entreatie sway the mother now, / Or els she dies: Ile not infringe my vow' (Pt 1, sc i. 374 f.). This speech, becoming even a prince, gives us the impression that blood will always show. When told that his father is Richard Coeur de Lion, he resolves to avenge the murder of his father and says 'Ile act some wonders now I know my name . . . / Sit fast the proudest of my Fathers foes' (ibid. 417. 420). Shakespeare's Bastard is in a remarkable contrast with this serious character. On whether he has the same father as his brother Robert, he says, showing his satirical character, 'Of that I doubt, as all men's children may'; and comparing the thin face of Robert who demands his father's legacy, to a coin with an effigy in profile, wittily says 'A half-fac'd groat five hundred

pound a year!'

He is knighted as Coeur-de-Lion's bastard and when told by Eleanor to call her his grandam, utters the following humorous speech.

Madam, by chance, but not by truth; what though?  
 Something about, a little from the right,  
 In at the window, or else o'er the hatch;  
 Who dares not stir by day must walk by night;  
 And have is have, however men do catch.  
 Near or far off, well won is still well shot;  
 And I am I, howe'er I was begot.

(I. i. 169-175)

This speech about his bastardy contains an element of obscenity and a satire on society; this satirical analysis of his weakness reminds one of the Hunchback, who makes his own deformity a theme of humour.

When left alone, Shakespeare's Bastard daydreams of his life in 'worshipful society' and thinks it necessary to flatter to live in such a society.

... he is but a bastard to the time  
 That doth not smack of observation—  
 And so am I, whether I smack or no;  
 And not alone in habit and device,  
 Exterior form, outward accoutrement,  
 But from the inward motion to deliver  
 Sweet, sweet, sweet poison for the age's tooth;  
 Which, though I will not practise to deceive,  
 Yet, to avoid deceit, I mean to learn;  
 For it shall strew the footsteps of my rising.

(I. i. 207-216)

Here also his bastardy theme is comically treated. His humorous character appears markedly in the logic by which the theme and its satire on the world's snobbery develop to the line 'Sweet, sweet, sweet poison'. In fact, we feel, the author here takes every opportunity to establish the Bastard's satirical character. It is very significant that in the opening scene of the play which is full of treachery, a character like this should play an active part. Structurally speaking, it seems to me, the author is trying to establish him as a character who can suitably utter the 'commodity' soliloquy at the end of II. i.

The Bastard, who has thus been established as a satirical character in the first act, plays in due order the part of a commentator in the second act, and in aloofness comments satirically on the action of the play.

The Bastard of *The Troublesome Reign* burns with anger to see the Duke of Austria wearing his father's lion-skin and says 'A thousand furies kindle with revendge, / This hart' (Pt. 1, sc ii. 558f.). In contrast to this, Shakespeare's Bastard by satire exposes the Duke's cowardice.

You [Austria] are the hare of whom the proverb goes,  
Whose valour plucks dead lions by the beard;  
(II. i. 137 f.)

or

It [the lion's robe] lies as slightly on the back of him  
As great Alcides' shows upon an ass;  
(II. i. 143 f.)

Moreover, in *The Troublesome Reign*, Scene II, no fewer than 57 of the Bastard's 68 lines refer to his anger at the Duke of Austria; whereas in

*King John*, Act II, in the equivalent section, most of his 122 lines are satirical comments on other things and only 16 lines are on the Duke. Shakespeare's Bastard has an important role other than to avenge his father's death.

Foreigners are not the only target of his satire; as an onlooker he ridicules all the politicians including John for their pretensions or their bombastic speeches. This partly reflects the author's attitude toward them and should be noticed as showing that the first half of the play treats a theme other than the patriotism in the second half. Before the walls of Angiers, as the First Citizen says 'he that proves the king, / him will we prove royal', King John and the King of France each boastingly speak of 'Twice fifteen thousand hearts of England's breed' and 'As many and as well-born bloods as those'. But punctuating each of their speeches, the Bastard inserts his asides 'Bastards and else' and 'Some bastards too', respectively, to make the kings' solemn speeches ridiculous.

Then they fight each other elsewhere, and each of them sends messages to the city to boast of his fruits of battle. But Hubert, the representative of the citizens, seeing the fight as a draw, mockingly says 'Both are alike, and both alike we like' (II. i. 331). Soon the Bastard becomes conscious of irony in the situation.

By heaven, these scroyles of Angiers flout you, kings,  
 And stand securely on their battlements  
 As in a theatre, whence they gape and point  
 At your industrious scenes and acts of death.

(II. i. 373-376)

So the Bastard suggests the kings to unite their forces for a while, and

after destroying the city with artillery, to fight again with each other. But his 'wild policy' is surpassed by the proposal Hubert makes—the marriage of Lewis with Blanche, John's niece. The Bastard again mocks this speech because it is so high-flown.

Our ears are cudgell'd; not a word of his  
 But buffets better than a fist of France.  
 Zounds! I was never so bethump'd with words  
 Since I first call'd my brother's father dad.

(II. i. 464-467)

Faulconbridge flings himself on everyone, whoever he may be, if he speaks affectedly or bombastically. His ears are especially sensitive to flattering words that hide a false mind. Lewis is the target of his satire,<sup>3)</sup> apparently asking for Blanche's hand, though in fact for her dowry.

Soon John and France conclude the marriage and this elicits from the Bastard the famous soliloquy on 'commodity'. Before examining this speech, however, we must see how Shakespeare revised the source play concerning the Duke of Austria and the King of France, to heighten the ironical effects of their later perjury.

In *The Troublesome Reign*, the Duke takes no oath to defend Arthur's right, whereas in Shakespeare's play, he solemnly takes an oath with the kiss of religious fervour.

Upon thy cheek lay I this zealous kiss  
 As seal to this indenture of my love:  
 That to my home I will no more return  
 Till Angiers and the right thou hast in France,  
 Together with that pale, that white-fac'd shore,

Whose foot spurns back the ocean's roaring tides  
 And coops from other lands her islanders—

. . . .

(II. i. 19-25)

The oath that he will not return home till Arthur becomes the king of England, which has dramatic irony in it, is necessary to make conspicuous the irony of his later perjury. His digression from this to the theme of invincible England shows his stupidity; thereby the author both mocks him and introduces the patriotism theme.

But in relation to the commodity theme, the King of France is more important. In *The Troublesome Reign*, the king's oath to defend Arthur's right consists of only thirteen lines of banal remarks, while in Shakespeare's play it is no fewer than forty lines in all. What is especially noteworthy is the oath he takes before the walls of Angiers, which is in remarkable contrast to what is disposed of in only three lines in the anonymous play.

Lo, in this right hand, whose protection  
 Is most divinely vow'd upon the right  
 Of him it holds, stands young Plantagenet,  
 Son to the elder brother of this man,  
 And king o'er him and all that he enjoys;  
 For this down-trodden equity we tread  
 In warlike march these greens before your town,  
 Being no further enemy to you  
 Than the constraint of hospital zeal  
 In the relief of this oppressed child



Religiously provokes.

(II. i. 236-246)

So cries the King of France, holding Arthur's hand. The religious ardour, embedded in expressions such as 'most divinely', 'hospital zeal', and 'religiously', will necessarily make it ridiculous if he breaks his oath. Therefore, when the King betrays Arthur by accepting, after some hesitation, the conditions John offers about the marriage between Lewis and Blanche, he is satirized by the Bastard.

In his soliloquy on 'commodity' at the end of II. i, Faulconbridge's satire is directed first at John, for he, 'to stop Arthur's title in the whole/Hath willingly departed with a part.'<sup>40</sup> But the spearhead of his satire here is directed chiefly against the King of France.

And France, whose armour conscience buckled on,  
Whom zeal and charity brought to the field  
As God's own soldier, rounded in the ear  
With that same purpose-changer, that sly devil,  
That broker that still breaks the pate of faith,  
That daily break-vow, . . .  
That smooth-fac'd gentleman, tickling commodity,  
Commodity, the bias of the world—  
The world, who of itself is peised well,  
Made to run even upon even grounds,  
Till this advantage, this vile-drawing bias,  
This sway of motion, this commodity,  
Makes it take head from all indifferency,  
From all direction, purpose, course, intent—  
And this same bias, this commodity,

This bawd, this broker, this all-changing word,  
 Clapp'd on the outward eye of fickle France,  
 Hath drawn him from his own determin'd aid,  
 From a resolv'd and honourable war,  
 To a most base and vile-concluded peace . . .

(II. i. 564-569, 573-586)

The Bastard is astonished at the baseness of the politicians. In view of his role as a satirical commentator up to this point, the soliloquy is thoroughly in character; but it is also clear that he speaks here partly for Shakespeare.<sup>51</sup> Soon after this, Pandulph comes on stage, and the King of France is forced by him to break his pledge of amity with John again and fight with him. Indeed, considering that the play is full of betrayal and perjury, we can see how structurally important the soliloquy is. It not only satirizes the kings' compromise of expediency, but also, by pointing out to the audience the attitude to be adopted in the later development of the action, helps to tighten the structure of the play.

In the latter half of the soliloquy, however, the Bastard honestly admits that he himself has no power to resist commodity.

And why rail I on this commodity?  
 But for because he hath not woo'd me yet;  
 Not that I have the power to clutch my hand  
 When his fair angels would salute my palm,  
 But for my hand, as unattempted yet,  
 like a poor beggar railleth on the rich.  
 Well, whiles I am a beggar, I will rail  
 And say there is no sin but to be rich;  
 And being rich, my virtue then shall be

To say there is no vice but beggary.  
Since kings break faith upon commodity,  
Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee.

(II. i. 587-598)

Some of those critics who see in the Bastard the prototype of the ideal king, King Henry V, regard this speech as a kind of inverted hypocrisy, and discuss it separately from his character and intention.<sup>69</sup> Seeing that his 'Gain, be my lord, I will worship thee' is not reflected in his future actions, such an interpretation may be possible; but from the realistic character he has proved to be, his speech is in character. What should be noticed here is that in the latter half of the soliloquy also, he continues to satirize the kings' commodity. He says 'whiles I am a beggar, I will rail / And say there is no sin but to be rich, / And being rich, my virtue then shall be / To say there is no vice but beggary'. This is an extreme form of man's opportunism, and we feel here a caricature of the unprincipled kings. It is because 'kings break faith upon commodity' that he says he will worship gain. In *The Troublesome Reign*, there is a scene in which the Bastard plunders a monastery of money on John's orders, and in Shakespeare's play this takes place off-stage. But when he was writing Faulconbridge's 'When his fair angels would salute my palm', it seems to me, Shakespeare still had the intention of portraying the scene as a parody of the kings' commodity. He changed his mind later, probably because he did not want to deal too much with the religious problem; but I think the real reason is because he became aware that the comical Bastard is not harmonious with the patriotic character he intended for the person in the latter half of the play.<sup>71</sup>

Now, what matters is Faulconbridge's transformation. To John's

‘imprisoned angels / Set at liberty’, the Bastard setting out to the monastery, answers jokingly ‘Bell, book, and candle, shall not drive me back,/ When gold and silver beck me to come on’ (III.iii.12). But this is the last time that he shows this gaiety; when he next appears on stage in IV.iii, he has changed into a serious character. Seeing Arthur’s body before him, the Bastard says:

It is a damned and a bloody work;  
 The graceless action of a heavy hand,  
 If that it be the work of any hand.

(IV.iii.57-59)

Having got used to his satirical character, we did not know till now that he is a man who can feel such moral indignation. What is more, he wonders at the significance of the dead child who is taken up in Hubert’s arms.

How easy dost thou take all England up!  
 From forth this morsel of dead royalty  
 The life, the right, and truth of all this realm  
 Is fled to heaven; and England now is left  
 To tug and scramble, and to part by th’ teeth  
 The unowed interest of proud-swellng state.

(Ibid.142-147)

The Bastard is a choric character and this speech partly reflects Shakespeare’s point of view, as indeed did the soliloquy on commodity. In the final act, he is the embodiment of patriotism; he is the only person in the play who is not influenced by commodity, and retaining his loyalty to

John to the last, fights with Lewis to defend England.

Faulconbridge's transformation we have seen, as Julia C. Van de Water points out,<sup>89</sup> is really too sudden to be explained in terms of the development of his character; what happens is that a satirist is suddenly replaced with a patriot. But critics have persistently tried to explain his change psychologically.<sup>90</sup> To M. M. Reese, who is interested in the Bastard's growth, his gaiety in the first half of the play shows his inexperience; and this disappears once he has seen the reality of the political world.<sup>100</sup> We must note, however, that Shakespeare gave him a comical character in order to satirize through him the opportunism of the politicians. The Bastard of *The Troublesome Reign* is not so witty and starts as a simpler and more earnest character; so he can be changed more naturally into a patriot. From what we have seen, therefore, the disunity in Shakespeare's Bastard seems to be a result of his emphasis on the commodity theme; in other words, that theme and the patriotism theme are inharmoniously reflected in the person as a choric character.

What we should notice moreover is that Shakespeare's emphasis on the commodity theme, through his treatment of John, is also the cause of the disunity of the whole play. In *The Troublesome Reign* the king is portrayed as a national hero; but in *King John* he is changed into a usurper to be satirized in the commodity theme. And this satirical attitude of the author's toward John seems to be discordant with the patriotism theme in the last act.

After the Arthur scene (IV. i), John's fortune rapidly declines, and with it the author's ironical eyes are again directed toward the usurper. Having entrusted Arthur to Hubert to kill him, John, relieved of his anxiety, performs the second coronation ceremony and tries to assure himself of his nobles' loyalty.

Here once again we sit, once again crown'd,  
 And look'd upon, I hope, with cheerful eyes.

(IV. ii. 1-2)

To which, their answer is very satirical.

Pem. This once again, but that your Highness pleas'd,  
 Was once superfluous: you were crown'd before,  
 And that high royalty was ne'er pluck'd off,  
 The faiths of men ne'er stained with revolt;  
 Fresh expectation troubled not the land  
 With any long'd-for change or better state.

Sal. Therefore, to be possess'd with double pomp,  
 To guard a title that was rich before,  
 To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,  
 To throw a perfume on the violet,  
 To smooth the ice, or add another hue  
 Unto the rainbow, or with taper-light  
 To seek the beauteous eye of heaven to garnish,  
 Is wasteful and ridiculous excess.

. . . .

Pem. When workmen strive to do better than well,  
 They do confound their skill in covetousness;  
 And oftentimes excusing of a fault  
 Doth make the fault the worse by th' excuse,  
 As patches set upon a little breach  
 Discredit more in hiding of the fault  
 Than did the fault before it was so patch'd.

(IV. ii. 3-16, 28-34)

This long speech in the same tone to satirize the usurper's uneasiness is only for convenience apportioned between the two noblemen. Of course they express their individual sentiments; but the abrupt way that the formal speech construction appears suggests that their satire against John is also Shakespeare's. In *The Troublesome Reign*, the speech corresponding to this consists only of Pembroke's eight lines with no satire, whereas in *King John* the noble men are given no fewer than thirty-seven lines full of satire. This figure deserves special notice, seeing that their speeches occur in that last third of the play which has been condemned by critics as being too much condensed. Generally speaking, that John carries out a coronation for the second time is ridiculous enough in itself without Salisbury's comment; in addition the audience in this scene, having just seen John's cruel treatment of Arthur, ought to respond heartily to the noblemen's satirical speeches. Their speeches may be criticized for extravagance; but in their bitter irony, I think, there is a retributive balance with John's cruelty. The author's ironical attitude toward the usurper was already felt in Eleanor's speech (I. i. 40-43) and the Bastard's commodity soliloquy; and the ironical effect becomes most evident in this coronation scene. But this satirical attitude of Shakespeare's toward the king is, it seems, inconsistent with the patriotism theme in the last act, particularly with the closing lines in which the rebellion of the nobles against John is emphasized as the cause of England's woe. In fact, comparing the play with *The Troublesome Reign*, we find that Shakespeare's satirical attitude toward the base politicians not only produces inconsistency in the Bastard's character, but also through his treatment of John, disturbs the unity of the whole play.

In connection with this, I especially notice the technique of irony in the last third of the play. In this section, the fortunes of the politicians,

chiefly those of the usurper ruining himself, are ironically portrayed, and we feel the effects of revenge against the sins of those who live by commodity.

John believes Hubert's false report that Arthur is dead, and says 'We cannot hold mortality's hand' to the nobles who demand his nephew's liberation; and they angrily leave him. The king left alone remarks:

They burn in indignation. I repent.  
There is no sure foundation set on blood,  
No certain life achiev'd by others' death.

(IV. ii. 103-105)

This speech, which somewhat reminds us of Macbeth, also shows that John is not so introspective as the latter; instead of accepting the moral responsibility of his sin, he repents of the political result of it. This speech of John's is worth noticing because it shows his stature. Shakespeare did not intend, by depicting agony in his soul, to write a personal tragedy of the murderer who is tempted to evil; by keeping down the play to the political level, the author deprives John of greatness.

In the scene equivalent to this in *The Troublesome Reign*, John utters in no fewer than 35 lines, his anger against the rebellious nobles, his relief and uneasiness caused by Arthur's death, and his hopeless grief at his misfortune. In Shakespeare's play, however, when John utters the above-quoted three lines, he is interrupted by the messenger reporting the French army's invasion:

The copy of your speed is learn'd by them,  
For when you should be told they do prepare,  
The tidings comes that they are all arriv'd.

(IV. ii. 113-115)



As 'your speed' shows, speed originally is John's speciality, a symbol of his vitality. In the opening scene of the first act, he tells the departing Chatillon of his intention of a lightning invasion into France:

Bear mine [my defiance] to him, and so depart in peace;  
Be thou as lightning in the eyes of France;  
For ere thou canst report I will be there,  
The thunder of my cannon shall be heard.

(I. i. 23-26)

This speed and vitality of John's was not reduced in II. ii, where Arthur was captured; but here after the Arthur scene, he is beaten by the French army at his own game. Then the messenger tells him of his mother Eleanor's death. Hearing these dreadful items of news reported in rapid succession, John cries:

Withhold thy speed, dreadful occasion!  
O, make a league with me, till I have pleas'd  
My discontented peers! What! mother dead!

(IV. ii. 125-127)

But he has no time to be grieved at his mother's death, for the Bastard enters with Peter of Pomfret. John sends Philip after the rebellious nobles, shouting 'make haste; the better foot before'. After the messenger also has departed, the king is left alone again and repeats 'My mother dead!' heaving a sigh of grief. This time Hubert enters with the news about 'five moons'. The speed theme which has its origin in John's character, appears again in the latter half of the play, and with ironical

effects shows the process of the usurper's ruin.

The author's careless treatment of the last third of the play has often been criticized. E. M. W. Tillyard remarks:

Shakespeare huddles together and fails to motivate properly the events of the last third of his play.<sup>11)</sup>

It is possible that the author was forced to condense this portion, seeing that the first part of *The Troublesome Reign* corresponds to two-thirds of *King John* and the whole of the second part to only the last third.<sup>12)</sup> However, as John's 'Withhold thy speed, dreadful occasion!' suggests, Shakespeare's technique here is clearly an intentional one, and in connection with the commodity theme, has great significance in the structure of the play. The rapid development of the action, caused by the compression of this portion, makes sport of those politicians who repeatedly betray one another, showing the bitter effects of vengeance upon them.

In this section of the play, irony is produced first by the fact that because of Hubert's false report of Arthur's death, the nobles revolt and John repents, while the audience knows he is still alive. So, when the king knows his nephew is living, he immediately makes Hubert run after the nobles, saying 'I conjure thee but slowly; run more fast.' This is a race to overtake the situation as it changes rapidly. But it cannot be overtaken, for Arthur leaps down from the wall of the castle. Before his body, the nobles are swearing an oath of revenge to one another, when Hubert runs in crying 'Arthur doth live'. Here is irony, but the true situation is not grasped by the nobles either who do not trust the tears Hubert sheds on seeing the Prince's body.

In the face of England's crisis, when the rebel nobles flee to the

invading French army, the Bastard burning with patriotic spirit runs to the king; but the next scene depicts John giving the crown to, and taking it from Pandulph, to whom he says:

Now keep your holy word; go meet the French;  
 And from his Holiness use all your power  
 To stop their marches fore we are inflam'd.

(V. i. 5-7)

After the legate departs, the Bastard enters to report to John the rebel nobles' flight to the French and the invading army's easy march into England. The king's speech at the news 'Would not my lords return to me again / After they heard young Arthur was alive?' (V. i. 37f.) shows how he cannot keep up with the changes in the situation.

In the next scene (V. ii), is depicted the grief of Salisbury, who must 'step after a stranger' and fight with his countrymen. To deceive him and England's other rebellious nobles, Lewis promises a great reward to them; but ironically enough, unaware of the change in the situation and seeing Pandulph coming to make him lay down his arms, he says:

even there, methinks, an angel spake:  
 Look where the holy legate comes apace,  
 To give us warrant from the hand of heaven  
 And on our actions set the name of right  
 With holy breath.

(V. ii. 64-68)

It is Pandulph himself who encouraged Lewis to take up arms to lay claim to England's throne as his wife's right. Now that England is half-

conquered, the Dauphin will not lay down his arms and says to the legate 'Am I Rome's slave?'. Here is irony against both of them. By making use of God's name, the legate has manipulated the politicians and pursued worldly interests; and now he is mocked also by the Bastard, who calls him 'this halting legate.' As for the Dauphin, he does not worry at all about repeating treachery and perjury. To defend Arthur's right, he comes to Angiers with his father, and by marrying John's niece Blanche, betrays the prince. But again he becomes a turncoat and advises his father to obey Pandulph's command to abrogate his alliance with John. Encouraged by the legate, he invades England but ironically confronts him in the end.

And it is this Machiavellian treachery of his that ultimately defeats his purpose. Melun, before his death, reveals to Salisbury the Dauphin's secret oath that if the French win the day, he will cut off the English rebels' heads to recompense the pains they take. Lewis swore with the French nobles 'Even on the altar' where they swore to the English rebel nobles 'Dear amity and everlasting love.'<sup>13</sup> So, Salisbury, with the words 'Away, my friends! New flights!', returns to John with the others. And the Dauphin, who does not know the changes in the situation, ironically enough, in the midst of his boasting of the results of battle, hears together the 'foul shrewd news' of Melun's death, the return of the English rebellious nobles to their king, and the loss of the French supplies on the Goodwin Sands.

After his compromise by commodity with the King of France, John was pleased with his niece's marriage with Lewis, calling it 'this unlook'd-for, unprepared pomp' (II. i. 560); indeed, unexpected developments like this occur successively in the last third of the play. The tide of events has so far been changed slowly by the politicians' treachery; but because of the

author's condensation of this section, the development of action becomes rapid, and the characters cannot keep up with it. They repeatedly reveal expectations and are disappointed with the ironic results. How important in Shakespeare's conception such a technique is, is shown by the fact that the Bastard, the mouthpiece of the author, is made sport of by the change in the situation.

In the sixth scene, Philip and Hubert challenge each other in darkness. In view of England's confusion in the last act, the darkness is very symbolic. Hubert ran out to give the Bastard the 'black' news 'fitting to the night'.

Hub. The king, I fear, is poison'd by a monk;  
 I left him almost speechless and broke out  
 To acquaint you with this evil, that you might  
 The better arm you to the sudden time  
 Than if you had at leisure known of this.

. . . .

Bast. Who didst thou leave to tend his majesty?

Hub. Why, know you not? The lords are all come back,  
 And brought Prince Henry in their company;  
 At whose request the King hath pardon'd them,  
 And they are all about his Majesty.

Bast. Withhold thine indignation, mighty heaven,  
 And tempt us not to bear above our power!  
 I'll tell thee, Hubert, half my power this night,  
 Passing these flats, are taken by the tide—  
 These Lincoln Washes have devoured them;

(V. vi. 23-27, 32-41)

To James L. Calderwood, the first of Hubert's two above-mentioned speeches contains his oath to support the Bastard in anticipation of a struggle for power after the king's death. In the second of Faulconbridge's two speeches also, the same critic says, his impulse to desire the crown and his mind's working to suppress it are felt.<sup>14)</sup> Does the author here, however, really deal with such a problem? England is inflamed now, and what Hubert is anxious about is the effects of the king's death upon the war situation. So it is difficult to read in the mind of the Bastard, now the embodiment of patriotism, such workings as Calderwood says are there. What I notice here is still the confusion and irony caused by the rapid change in the situation. Hubert is surprised to find the Bastard ignorant of the rebel nobles' return to John, and says 'Why, know you not?'. But what we should notice is Faulconbridge's two lines 'Withhold thine indignation, mighty heaven / And tempt us not to bear above our power'. The reason why he utters these words, as is shown after 'I'll tell thee', is that he has lost half his power; but it must be grasped also in relation to the two items of news he hears from Hubert. The news that the king was poisoned is horrible; but that the rebel nobles have returned to John is a very happy piece of news because it contains the hope of saving England. But just before he hears this good news, he has lost half his army. This is unbearable to the Bastard, who is fighting as the prop of England; so he prays God not to 'tempt us not to bear above our power'.<sup>15)</sup> Here, also, I find that pattern of hope and disappointment which has repeatedly appeared since John was determined to kill Arthur.

It has been discussed whether Shakespeare meant Faulconbridge for one of great versions of the regal type. Those who deny this offer as counter-evidence the fact that he loses half his power in passing Lincoln Washes. The tendency of criticism to see the characteristics of an ideal

king in the Bastard is clearly going too far. But the loss of his army, like that of the French reinforcements cast away on the Goodwin Sands, is fortune's work or that of the divine will; and it is not intended to show his inability as a soldier. As might be expected of Coeur de Lion's bastard, Faulconbridge gallantly bids defiance to Lewis and by fighting bravely saves England's honour. But it is beyond his power to help his country out of the disorder in the last act.

The Bastard runs to John, within whom the poison as a 'fiend' is tyrannizing on his 'condemned' blood. As soon as the king's speech ends, as if he had been waiting impatiently for it, Faulconbridge tells him that the best part of his power is lost, and says:

The Dauphin is preparing hitherward,  
Where God He knows how we shall answer him;  
(V. vii. 59-60)

Ironically, hearing these 'dead news' the king breathes his last. In this accursed death, God may be said to punish him for his cruel treatment of Arthur. But the Bastard does not know that the situation has been changed by the English rebel nobles' return to allegiance and the loss of the French supplies.

After mourning for the dead king, Faulconbridge, as if he had no time to be grieved at the king's death, again cries 'Straight let us seek, or straight we shall be sought—The Dauphin rages at our very heels.' To which Salisbury says 'It seems you know not, then, so much as we,' and tells him that Pandulph is within *at rest*, having come from Lewis with such offers of peace as England may take with honour. The ironic effect here is evident; the Bastard cannot keep up with the changes in

the situation. The same might be said of all the politicians in the last third of the play. The irony is produced, as has been observed, by condensing the action. By this technique Shakespeare, it seems, depicts God's vengeance on the politicians for their perjury and treachery.

The play ends, like *The Troublesome Reign*, with the Bastard's patriotic speech:

Now these her [England's] princes are come home again,  
Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,  
If England to itself do rest but true.

(V. vii. 115-118)

To J. D. Wilson, this speech is the theme of the whole play.<sup>16)</sup> Seeing that the choric speech puts a conclusion to the play and that patriotism is stressed in the final act, the critic's interpretation seems indisputable. The Bastard at the end of the fourth act, though suspecting John to be the murderer of Arthur, hastens to him. Here is clearly the moral that in the hour of extreme national danger, the king, for all his crime and weakness, is the only possible rallying point. Nevertheless, Wilson seems to simplify the play, because as we have observed, the author takes so much interest in the commodity theme that disunity arises in the Bastard's character and in the whole structure of the play. The audience, immediately after the Arthur scene, whole-heartedly respond to Salisbury and Pembroke's satirical remarks against John, who had performed his second coronation. But in the final act, they know that their response was wrong, particularly from the Bastard's closing lines, quoted above, which point not to John but to the English rebel nobles as the cause of



England's woes. I really think, as E. K. Chambers once remarked,<sup>17)</sup> that the unity of the play is lost by the author's double purpose.

Shortly before *King John* was written, Shakespeare in *Richard III* depicted ironically the fates of the politicians punished by God for their sins of murder and perjury. The Hunchback, a bloody humorist, is meant as the Scourge of God; and his dupes, Clarence, Hastings and Buckingham, all feel irony before their deaths, by seeing in their fates the retributive justice of the mechanical balance, which is symbolized in 'Edward for Edward pays a dying debt' (IV. iv. 21). Buckingham, when led to execution, calls to the souls of those who were killed by injustice and says 'Even for revenge mock my destruction'. In fact mockery is vengeance in this play; that seems to be the reason why the Hunchback was given a mocking character. The ironist Shakespeare we feel in *Richard III*<sup>18)</sup> must have been interested in the fates of the politicians of *The Troublesome Reign*, all of whom more than once turn round except the Bastard. As a matter of fact, do we not see throughout *King John* the same ironic detachment of the author as that in *Richard III*? Those anomalies and inconsistencies in the text of *King John* which have been criticized, appear to be there, because the author in such an ironical attitude revised the anonymous play, where John was treated with sympathy as the hero of the nation. The patriotism in the play has mainly been noticed in relation to the political situation of Shakespeare's day. From what has been observed, however, it may be said that the author wrote this play with more interest in the commodity theme than in the theme of patriotism; his originality is in the theme and the irony accompanying it.

The last third of the play has often been condemned because it is so much compressed that the events are not properly motivated. It seems

mysterious to critics that the events there which are 'peculiarly fascinating for Elizabethans' should be dealt with so carelessly.<sup>19)</sup> But when I investigate the commodity theme and the irony in the play, Shakespeare in this section, it seems to me, is experimenting with a new technique of irony.

The fact that the anomalies in the play can be explained thus from the technical viewpoint may seem to Honigmann evidence to prove that *King John* is earlier than *The Troublesome Reign*. But I became by it more firmly convinced that the former is based on the latter. When Shakespeare was writing the play, his audience, by virtue of having recently seen the anonymous play, seems to have already been familiar with John's surrender of the crown and his second coronation. If this were not so, the author, though trying a new technique of irony, could not have treated those events so carelessly as to represent them abruptly and with no previous notice.

### Notes:

- 1) *The Troublesome Reign* does not seem to have the intention of the 'bad quartos' to reconstruct a popular play as accurately as possible; and so Honigmann believes its author to be a writer who 'strikes out his own and sees himself as an independent dramatist rather than as purloiner of someone else's lines' (*Shakespeare's Impact on his Contemporaries*, Macmillan, 1983, p. 57).
- 2) See *King John*, ed. J. D. Wilson (The New Shakespeare, paperback edition, 1969), p. xxxii.
- 3) II. i. 495-509.
- 4) The Bastard of *The Troublesome Reign*, in the scene equivalent to this, only says 'No less than five such provinces at once?'
- 5) Speaking of the satire on opportunism in the play, Constance also, unlike the Constance of *The Troublesome Reign*, is satirical in her invective against the King of France and the Duke of Austria. She says to the King who has formed a league with John:
 

... you are forsworn, forsworn;  
you came in arms to spill mine enemies' blood.

But now in arms you strengthen it with yours.

(III. i. 101-103)

Her satire on the Duke's cowardice and opportunism is severer.

Thou ever strong upon the stronger side!

Thou Fortune's champion that dost never fight

But when her humorous ladyship is by

To teach thee safety! Thou art perjurd too,

And sooth'st up greatness. What a fool art thou,

A ramping fool, to brag and stamp and swear

Upon my party!

(III. i. 117-123)

- 6) See H. C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, Vol. 1 (The University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 143; E. M. W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays*, (Chatto & Windus, 1960), p. 228. To Tillyard, the Bastard's 'Gain, be my lord, for I will worship thee' shows only 'the English fear of being too openly serious and righteous.'
- 7) Of Shakespeare's change of mind, I find another example in *Henry IV*, Part 1, where in spite of Hal's swearing to his father to 'redeem all this on Percy's head' (III. ii. 132), the author was forced to hide the Prince's victory over Hotspur from the King and his court, because otherwise, Hal's true greatness will be revealed, thus destroying the effect of surprise at his appearance as an ideal king at the end of Part 2. At the start, it seems, Shakespeare had intended *Henry IV* as a single play; but when writing it, he changed his mind and contemplated a sequel. (See Keiji Aoki, *Shakespeare's 'Henry IV' and 'Henry V': Hal's Heroic Character and the Sun-Cloud Theme*, Kyoto, 1973, pp. 1-38; Richard David, *Shakespeare in the Theatre*, Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 190f.).
- 8) Van de Water points out that the Bastard in the last two acts cannot be reconciled with his character in the first three acts, and says: Strangely enough, no one writing on this play has noticed - or admitted - that the two bear absolutely no relation to each other. No one element of the character of the first three acts survives in the Bastard of the concluding ones. Conversely, in the first part of the play there is not one hint of the moral strength, the devotion to duty, the deeply-felt patriotism, that characterize him at the end'. (Van de Water, 'The Bastard in *King John*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* XI, 2, 1960, p. 144).
- 9) To M. M. Reese, commodity in the play 'means something more than self-interest and expediency'; it is 'a means to effective action, the code of behaviour that a wise man will use if in public life he wants to get results'. (M. M. Reese, *The Cease of Majesty*, Edward Arnold, 1961, p. 285).

To S. C. Sen Gupta, the Bastard's intention to worship 'Gain' is related to his later patriotism, for he has the same interests as John, and his loyalty to the

king or patriotism can be said to be based on his self-interest. (Sen Gupta, *Shakespeare's Historical Plays*, Oxford University Press, 1964, pp.108, 110).

What is most important, however, is that Shakespeare does not intend, as these critics suppose he does, to say in the play that commodity is necessary to live in the political world. This is evident from the fact that in the play, commodity is satirized as something base by the Bastard, the author's mouthpiece, and that he tries to defend England without being influenced by it. His action in the second half of the play has no connection with commodity as 'purpose-changer' 'daily break-vow', 'drawing bias' which is stressed in his famous soliloquy. It is clear from his selfless loyalty shown in his speech '... my soul shall wait on thee [John] to heaven, / As it on earth has been thy servant still' (V. vii. 72f.).

- 10) M. M. Reese, *op. cit.*, p. 282f.
- 11) E. M. W. Tillyard, *op. cit.*, p. 215.
- 12) *Ibid.*
- 13) This is a mockery of God, and we feel His revenge on him in the course of events hereafter.
- 14) James L. Calderwood, 'Commodity and Honour in *King John*' in *Shakespeare: The Histories* ed., Eugene M. Waith, (Prentice-Hall, 1965), pp. 99f.
- 15) The words 'us' and 'our' in this speech show that the Bastard is speaking as a patriot fighting for England.
- 16) See Wilson ed., *op. cit.*, p. IX.
- 17) E. K. Chambers says:

What is the intellectual bearing of *King John*? Plainly it is conceived as a tragedy, but wherein does the tragedy consist? Is John himself the villain or the hero? Are we, as in *Richard the Third*, face to face with the Nemesis that waits upon wickedness in high places? And if so, why do many of the scenes, and in particular the closing lines, with their emphasis upon England's dissensions as the cause of England's woes, seem to strike another note, and to point out not John, but those who plot against John, as the workers of the tragic evil? One fears the answer is, that no answer can be given, and that the infirmity of double purpose here suggested is indeed inherent in the backboneless structure of the piece (E. K. Chambers, *Shakespeare: A Survey*, Doubleday, 1953) p. 99.

- 18) I believe the irony in *Richard III* is far more important than it is generally thought to be. It is no exaggeration to say that Shakespeare's success in the play is owing to his technique of irony in characterization and theme development. What we should notice is the relationship between the irony and the morality of nemesis.

In the opening soliloquy to the play, Richard tells us of his intention of rising through the arts of hypocrisy; and almost the whole play is a series of dramatic ironies. True, the ironic effects in this play owe much to his ironical comments

and jeering attitude toward his dupes. But the irony in the play must be grasped also in relation to the retribution theme, because it is not only often produced by the nemesis, but also conversely stresses the moral by its bitter effects.

Before he is killed, Clarence reminds his killers of the law of God which prohibits murder, but ironically he is told by them that his doom itself is retribution for violation of the very same law. The irony in his fate is produced by the morality of nemesis.

It is the same with Hastings. Shakespeare's way of dealing with this person alone shows how much he loved irony. The audience, already aware of his doom, feels bitter irony in his exaltation over the ruin of the queen's kinsmen and his plot to kill some people. But this attitude of his contradicts the oath he had made before King Edward. So he is punished by God, and the very same ruin he laughed at in others ironically falls on himself. Thus here also we can see clearly how irony is produced by nemesis and combines with the moral theme.

But it is in Buckingham's fate that the relationship between the irony and the moral theme can be most clearly seen. In conspiracy with Richard, he sends the queen's kinsmen and Hastings to the scaffold. In doing so, he breaks the oath of amity he made to King Edward. In the case of Buckingham, most ironical is that what he prayed 'in jest' for God falls 'in earnest' on his head. The moral of this play is compressed into his two lines 'Thus doth He force the swords of wicked men / To turn their own points in their master's bosoms.' Buckingham here feels irony by applying the law of retribution to his fate. As there is a balance between his sin and punishment, so there is also a balance of irony in his fate in the sense that he is mocked by Richard (V.i.112-125) as he mocked the citizens of London.

The close relationship between irony and nemesis in the play is further confirmed by the fact that the process of Richard's fall is shown by the effect of irony; the power of irony deserts him and the focus of the irony gradually shifts from the people deceived by him to himself. The change begins subtly in his 'What tongueless blocks were they!' in the court-yard scene, because these words show that in spite of his elaborate tricks, he has not succeeded as well as he had expected. Finally in his last soliloquy, the irony that has been turned upon himself waking up frightened by the dream, brings in the idea of revenging 'myself upon myself', making him conscious of his damnable sins for the first time. Considering the significance of irony in the play, this is very suggestive. The shift of the focus of the irony to himself signifies the beginning of God's punishment of him and his loss of competence as His instrument. In other words, it shows the turning-point of his fortune or England's.

But what we should notice here is the relationship between Richard's character

and the moral of the play. When we see how the irony which originates in Richard, combining with the moral theme, produces the effect of vengeance, we can truly confirm that he is the instrument of God. Generally speaking, the irony in the play may be said to be produced by grasping the characters' efforts and actions in the mechanical balance of retribution that is symbolized in 'Edward for Edward pays a dying debt.' This ironic effect is the same as that which is produced by Richard's intellectual mockery of his victims as when he compares Buckingham's zeal in asking for his reward to a mechanical thing like 'a Jack'. When sent to the scaffold, Buckingham says 'Even for revenge mock my destruction!' to the discontented souls of those who were killed by 'foul injustice'. Indeed mocking is taking revenge in this play, and from that we can see why Richard, the instrument of God's vengeance, is depicted as a mocking character. Some critics savour him separately from the moral issue. But considering the significance of irony in the play, it seems to me that in the *relationship* between his character and the moral theme, is the reason why we should appreciate his fascination.

Anyhow, I think, the characters in Shakespeare's histories must be grasped more symbolically in connection with the themes; and more attention should be paid to irony. The critical attitude of psychological realism alone may lead to an absurd interpretation. I realize this keenly when considering how badly Prince Hal has been misinterpreted. The Prince is not degraded or a disagreeable man. From the beginning he is the sun only hidden by a cloud; and the irony is directed against others who are not aware of his greatness. This is very suggestive if we consider that *Henry IV's* world is that of the usurper and those who helped his usurpation. Here is the irony of retribution again.

- 19) *King John*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (New Arden Shakespeare, 1954), Introduction, p. xxvii.

Quotations from Shakespeare, and line-references, are taken from Peter Alexander's *William Shakespeare, The Complete Works* (Collins, 1951).

Quotations from *The Troublesome Reign of King John* are from *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough.