

***King John and The Troublesome Raigne*¹**

Michael Egan

The date of *King John*'s composition is both hotly debated among scholars and inextricably bound up with the vexing question of its relationship with *The Troublesome Raigne of John King of England*, an anonymous but profoundly similar historical drama. The only hard information we have is that *The Troublesome Play*, as it is sometimes wryly called, enjoyed considerable theatrical success ca. 1590, was published anonymously in 1591, and then reprinted in 1611 and 1622 under Shakespeare's name. Most editors reject these later editions as spurious on grounds of the play's mediocre quality and stylistic dissimilarity to Shakespeare generally.

Shakespeare's acknowledged *Life and Death of King John* was first published in the 1623 Folio (F1) in a crude and unedited text that seems to have been taken from its author's uncorrected manuscript or "foul papers."² The play's earliest known performance was given at Covent Garden, London, in 1737.

Anything more than the above is speculation, inference, and deduction, though some of it is well founded. For instance, a document dated January 12, 1669, suggests that *King John* may have been among the plays staged by the King's Men at Blackfriars, some time between 1608 and 1642, though probably after 1623.³ Braunmuller finds possible echoes of *King John* in *Captain Thomas Stukely* (1595), which may derive from Peele; John Bodenham's (attributed) *Belvedere* (1600); Thomas Heywood's 2 *Edward IV* (1600); and Thomas Deloney's *The Death of King John Poisoned by a Friar* (1602).⁴ But all these claims seem too tenuous for any kind of certainty.

In addition, many of the accepted verities about *King John* continue to be in radical transition. It is often asserted for example that the play must have been generally known by the late 1590s because Anthony Munday's *Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* (ca. 1598) apparently contains a reference to it. A dumb show features major characters from John's reign including Hubert, described as "thou fatal keeper of poor babes" (signatures D3^v, F4). Among others, L.A. Beaurline⁵ and E.A.J. Honigmann⁶ claim that in Holinshed "Arthur appears as a young soldier aged sixteen or seventeen," and on this basis contend that the phrase alludes to Shakespeare's play since it uniquely portrays Prince Arthur as a boy, whereas in other versions, including the chronicles, he is a young man.

But aside from the fact that a boy is not a babe, the assertion itself is not true. The second edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1587), the major source for all Elizabethan accounts of King John, describes Arthur as "but a child...but a babe to speake of." Holinshed's first edition (1577) does not describe his reign at all. In fact, Holinshed is much closer to Munday than Shakespeare and more probably where Munday found his language and portrayal.

An additional complication is that in 1598 the Elizabethan cleric and schoolmaster, Francis

¹ From Michael Egan: 'Shakespeare's Hand in The Troublesome Raigne of Joh King of England/And Why He Wasn't Arrested in 1601 (Westshore Press 2021) pp.9-46.

² Neil Freeman (ed.): *The Applause First Folio of Shakespeare in Modern Type* (Folio Scripts, 2001) 305-326

³ Irwin Smith, *Shakespeare's Blackfriars Playhouse: Its History and Its Design* (London: Owen, 1966), 503-4

⁴ A.R. Braunmuller (ed.): *The Life and Death of King John* (OUP 1989), 79-80

⁵ L.A. Beaurline (ed.): *King John* (CUP 1990), 3

⁶ E.A.J. Honigmann (ed.): *King John* (Methuen & Co., 1954), lxxiii note, and 171

Meres, claimed in his *Palladis Tamia* that

As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy, witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Love Labours Lost*, his *Love Labours Won*, his *Midsummer's Night Dream*, & his *Merchant of Venice*; for tragedy, his *Richard the 2*, *Richard the 3*, *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus*, and his *Romeo and Juliet*.⁷

The *King John* referred to is invariably taken to be the one published in 1623, though there is no clear warrant for this assumption: as we've noted, Shakespeare's play never appeared in quarto, and its earliest recorded performance dates from the eighteenth century. In fact, Meres' reference is almost certainly to *The Troublesome Raigne*, a claim elaborated below.

It is also true, though almost never perceived as a difficulty, that Meres's catalog is problematic in a number of other ways, including that puzzling reference to *Love Labours Won*, which some scholars conjecture to be early versions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, or *Much Ado about Nothing*, or *As You Like It*. An unscribed *Loves Labour Won* is listed in a stationer's account book dated 1603, but along with other mysterious Shakespeare titles, including "*Knak to Know a Knave*" and "*Knak to Know an Honest Man*."⁸ As these uncertainties indicate, we really have no idea what Meres had in mind, nor to which of Shakespeare's works *Love Labours Won* actually refers, if any.

Meres also gets Shakespeare's known titles slightly but significantly wrong—*Love Labour's Lost*, *Midsummer's Night Dream* and so forth. He also fails to mention other works certainly well known by this time, including the *Henry VI* plays. These inaccuracies and omissions suggest that at least some of Meres's data were not derived at first hand, or from a faulty memory, and all of them thus less than reliable.⁹

Meres's most significant inaccuracy, for our purposes, is his recording of *Titus Andronicus* as Shakespeare's unaided work, although we now know that it was almost certainly co-authored with George Peele.¹⁰ Using a wide variety of textual and stylometric devices, Brian Vickers demonstrates Peele's creative presence in at least four scenes, including the whole of Act 1 (a single scene), 2.1, 2.2 and 4.1. Commonsense suggests he may have contributed much more—collaboration, as I have suggested, implies at the very least extended discussion, planning, feedback and even mutual editing.

The likelihood that Peele was one of Shakespeare's co-authors in the early 1590s has profound implications for *The Troublesome Raigne*, since the play was certainly well known when Meres put his catalog together. Published three years ahead of *Titus* and seven before *Palladis Tamia*, it has been conclusively attributed to Peele, both by Vickers and the editors of the *Authorship*

⁷ *Palladis tamia Wits treasury being the second part of Wits commonwealth*. By Francis Meres Maister of Artes of both vniuersities (Text Creation Partnership, 2011-12) 282. A photographic reproduction of the original may be found at <http://uvic.ca/shakespeare/Library/SLTnoframes/life/meres.html>

⁸<http://www.shakespearedocumented.org/exhibition/document/loves-labors-won-listed-fragment-Stationer's-account-book>

⁹ See Don Cameron Allen, ed., *Francis Meres's Treatise, "Poetrie" A Critical Edition* (Urbana: U of Illinois Press, 1933) 31-50

¹⁰ Brian Vickers: *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (OUP 2002) 148-243.

Companion.¹¹

The rub, however, is that *The Troublesome Raigne*'s plotting, characterization, and general political orientation are so similar to Shakespeare's acknowledged drama that there are really only three explanatory options available:

1. *King John* is the original, and Peele stole from Shakespeare. This position is taken by an important school of critics.
2. *The Troublesome Raigne* is the original and Shakespeare stole from Peele. This is the view of another influential critical school, including the editors of *The Authorship Companion*, who claim that *King John* "demonstrably steals" from *The Troublesome Raigne*.¹² Other critics, more politely, designate it as a "source play."
3. Peele and Shakespeare collaborated on *The Troublesome Raigne* and Shakespeare later rewrote it as *King John*. This hypothesis, never previously advanced, is the one I explore below.

Meres's 1598 reference might thus be to *The Troublesome Raigne* and not Shakespeare's canonical history, unavailable, as we've noted, for another 25 years. But this conclusion, also drawn by Eric Sams,¹³ leaves the actual composition date of *King John* wide open.

The Contemporary Evidence

In strong support of a Shakespeare-Peele collaboration, we may note too that as late as 1623 everyone connected with the theater and publishing appears to have accepted that Shakespeare wrote *The Troublesome Raigne*, or at least was closely enough identified with it to claim possession after Peele's death in 1596. The play was extremely popular for more than thirty years, judging by its original title page and two subsequent editions, both of which, as we've seen, describe Shakespeare as the author. While these attributions are not conclusive, since literary imposture was common enough, their publishers were respectable businessmen frequently associated with Shakespeare and unlikely to engage in piracy.

Not all uncertain attributions are forgeries. Valentine Simmes, who handled the 1611 edition ("Written by W. Sh."), also published the first three quartos of *Richard II* (1597, 1598), as well as the quartos of *Richard III* (1597), *2 Henry IV* (1600), and *Much Ado about Nothing* (1600). Augustine Matthews, responsible for the 1622 text ("Written by W. Shakespeare"), later published the second quarto of *Othello* (1630). As Frank Kermode pointedly notes in this context, there was no "demurrer from any quarter" when the Jacobean editions of *The Troublesome Raigne* were published under Shakespeare's name.¹⁴

What seems really decisive, however, is that on November 8, 1623, Isaac Jaggard and Edward Blount, representing the syndicate preparing the first edition of Shakespeare's plays, registered sixteen new titles with the Stationer's Office, "as are not formerly entered to other men."¹⁵ In

¹¹ Brian Vickers: "The Troublesome Raigne, George Peele, and the Date of *King John*." In Brian Boyd, ed., *Words that Count* (U of Delaware Press, 2004); Gary Taylor, *Authorship Companion*, 21, 521

¹² *Authorship Companion*, 21

¹³ Eric Sams: *The Real Shakespeare: Retrieving the Early Years 1564-1594* (Yale UP 1995) 147

¹⁴ Frank Kermode: *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) 1288. See also Sams, *The Real Shakespeare*, 128

¹⁵ Braunmuller, 19

other words, they legally claimed sixteen previously unpublished Shakespeare dramas with the intention of including them in F1. The revealing fact is that *King John* was not among them. The inference is clear. All those who were in a position to know, including Shakespeare's friends, editors, professional associates, and competitors, agreed that the play had already been published by him, that is, "formerly entered" on his behalf. As we've seen, however, before 1623 the only available *King John* was *The Troublesome Raigne*.¹⁶

We may add that Jaggard, Blount, and their associates were exceptionally scrupulous when handling doubtful cases, excluding from the First Folio *Pericles*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Richard II, Part One* (discussed more fully below), and the now-lost *Cardenio*, *Loves Labours Won* and *Knak to Know a Knave*. *Pericles* in particular, published under Shakespeare's name in 1609, had been registered by Blount himself the previous year, yet they still left it out.¹⁷ Had there been any doubts about *King John* it too might have been omitted without commercial damage to the final enterprise. Despite the unedited form of its manuscript, however, they still kept it in.

We may note finally that if *King John* were in fact, a Shakespeare original "not formerly entered to other men," there was nothing to stop its 1623 registration along with the sixteen they did enter. Their implicit claim that *The Troublesome Raigne* was indeed by Shakespeare thus means that either they and the publishers of F1 were uncharacteristically and gratuitously fraudulent, or everyone concerned believed that the FI text was incontrovertibly the final version of a work he had originally written or helped to write.

Even the best scholars have reacted to these facts with some consternation. The scrupulous E.K Chambers, for example, unwilling on stylistic grounds to accept Shakespeare's part in *The Troublesome Raigne*, nonetheless observes that by 1623 both it and *King John* "were regarded as commercially identical,"¹⁸ meaning that Shakespeare's executors held the copyright to *The Troublesome Raigne* and its rewrite. This inference is now generally accepted, even by those who continue to maintain, despite what it implies, that the anonymous work follows *King John*.

E.A.J. Honnigman, for example, followed by Harold Bloom and others, evades the issue in an ambiguous footnote, claiming that "apparently," meaning there is no additional evidence, that "the existence of a bad quarto conferred copyright privileges on a derivative play."¹⁹

But this cannot be right, since the copyright referred to supposedly legitimated *King John*, not *The Troublesome Raigne*, the play he suggests must be the "derived...bad quarto." Likewise Peter Alexander, who first proposed that *The Troublesome Raigne* might be the debtor play, reluctantly concedes that

¹⁶ A third play, John Bale's *King Johan* (1536-9), not published until 1838, has little connection with either *King John* or *The Troublesome Raigne*. Ponderously didactic, *King Johan* is remembered chiefly for its virulent anti-Catholicism—it was written and performed at the time of Henry VIII's break with Rome—and the subject matter it distantly shares with the two later plays. Without them it would be completely forgotten. As Bullough notes, "Shakespeare can hardly have known this work." (Geoffrey Bullough, (ed.): *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Vol. 4, *King John* (Columbia UP, 1962) 3-4.)

¹⁷ Chambers, *William Shakespeare* (OUP, 1930) Vol. 1, 518

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 365

¹⁹ Honnigman, lxxiii. Note the unproved assumption that *TR* derives from *KJ*.

For *King John* there is no entry of any kind in the Stationer's Register before its inclusion in the First Folio. Heminge and Condell treated the publication of *The Troublesome Raigne* as authorizing the printing of *King John*, a claim which could hardly have been maintained had *The Troublesome Raigne* been an original play by an author other than Shakespeare.²⁰

The clear and irresistible inference is that in its day *The Troublesome Raigne* was believed to be Shakespeare's, a conclusion resisted by modern scholars only because the drama's verse, if not its plot, seems so unlike what we find in *King John* or anywhere else in the *Complete Works*. Until now, however, no one has considered the possibility that *The Troublesome Raigne* might have been a collaboration between Peele and the young Shakespeare, who later rewrote it alone. Yet this hypothesis accounts not only for everything known about the publication and performance histories of both dramas but, more important, their contrasting stylistic qualities, plot convergences and narrative contradictions. It also extends by one the list of Peele's and Shakespeare's known collaborations.

Moved principally by a reluctance to connect Shakespeare in any way with *The Troublesome Raigne*, which is poetically second-rate but excellently planned and devised, a large and powerful school maintains that the play must have been composed after *King John* by an anonymous plagiarist. This accounts neatly for the two works' narrative overlaps and differences, preserves the originality of Shakespeare's plot and characterization—apparently stolen by Anonymous, who nevertheless left behind the poetry, that is, he ran off with the casket but abandoned the jewels. It also of course, absolutely rules out Shakespeare's involvement with a lesser work whose stylistic manner resembles nothing else he wrote.

If this view is right, however, the accepted chronology of Shakespeare's works has to be completely revised. It also blows apart Marlowe scholarship and much else in Elizabethan studies, since it would mean that *King John* was written and frequently acted before 1591 (allowing Anonymous at least half a year, and in practice much longer, to secure a copy, rewrite it, then publish his new version). If *The Troublesome Raigne* itself was actually performed, as all the evidence confirms and none refutes, we must push our dates back further still, claiming *King John* as one of Shakespeare's earliest dramas, if not his very first.

But this also turns everything we know about his stylistic evolution on its head and implies, further, that *King John* would have had to be famous enough—that is, played many times through the mid-1580s—to make the whole enterprise worth Anonymous's plagiaristic efforts. The improbable scenario is that a popular, pre-Armada chronicle, *King John*, was rewritten as an even more popular but poetically inferior post-Armada play, *The Troublesome Raigne*, which had an identical plot, characters, historical analysis and theme. This outrageous and inferior imitation was then published repeatedly as late as 1622 to capitalize not on its own success but that of its predecessor.

Unsurprisingly, there is no objective support for this bizarre reasoning; in fact, quite the reverse. Nothing except critical fantasy suggests that the publication of *The Troublesome Raigne* was anything less than a legitimate business venture, while claims that it was generated merely to exploit the forgotten and undocumented esteem of Shakespeare's *King John* imply a level of conscious deceit on the part of its writer, publisher, and printer unequivocally contradicted by everything else we know about it and those associated with its publication. Like subsequent publishers of *The Troublesome Raigne*, Sampson Clarke was well respected and his imprint

²⁰ Peter Alexander: *Shakespeare* (OUP, 1964) 170-1

perfectly normal, as Dover Wilson notes.²¹

All the evidence indicates too, as we've seen, that while *The Troublesome Raigne* was often staged, *King John* was probably never performed during Shakespeare's lifetime. Braunmuller among others notes that the F1 text "shows comparatively little evidence of theatre use,"²² a conclusion supported by the fact that the first two acts, as they are now usually designated, are confusingly headed *Actus Primus*, *Scena Primus*, and *Scena Secunda*, while "Actus Secundus" comprises what are evidently the first 74 lines of act 3, scene 1.

Elsewhere, stage directions imperfectly relate to or follow the spoken lines referring to them. At one point, for example, drums are heard by the actors before they are sounded, again suggesting a text never actually performed:

The interruption of their churlish drums
Cuts off more circumstance. They are at hand.
Drum beats (2.1.76-77)

The few Elizabethan promptbooks we possess, that is, the actual scripts used in performance and thus annotated by stage managers, clearly indicate that offstage sound effects, such as the drumbeats of approaching troops, of course precede the onstage speeches reacting to them.²³

Beaurline, Honigmann, and Greg²⁴ also note the inconsistencies and confusions in *King John's* stage directions and speech heads. Elinor of Aquitaine, for instance, is variously labeled *Queene Elinor*, *Elinor*, *Eleanour*, *Queene*, *Elea.*, *Elin*, *Eli*, *Qu.*, *Mo*, (that is, Queen Mother), *Qu.*, and *Old Qu*. The French king is called *Philip*, *King of France*, *France*, *Fra*, *King*, and *Lewis* (incorrectly, twice). These discrepancies, usually regularized by modern editors, would also have been quickly corrected by a stage manager. It seems more than likely then that the F1 text was never performed.

In contrast, the title page of *The Troublesome Raigne* records performances "sundry times" by the Queen's Men, a prominent company that declined rapidly after the death in 1588 of its principal comedian, Richard Tarleton. Credible evidence associates Shakespeare with the Queen's Men and Tarleton, whose jests are quoted in *Hamlet* Q1 (1603), and who may have been the original of Yorick.²⁵ Like Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* (1587-88), *The Troublesome Raigne* was published in two parts, with an opening address to its audience referring directly to that spectacularly successful drama, implying that it was a kind of English equivalent:

You that with friendly grace of smoothed brow
Have entertained the *Scythian Tamburlaine*,
And given applause unto an Infidel:
Vouchsafe to welcome (with like cutesie)

²¹ John Dover Wilson (ed), *King John*, xviii.

²² Braunmuller, 23

²³ For example, the manuscript of *Richard II, Part One*, reproduced by W. P. Frijlinck, ed., (Malone Society, 1929), 93-4, where "dromes" sound three or four lines before the words "how now what dromes are these?"

²⁴ Beaurline, 184, Honigmann, xxxiv, W.W. Greg: *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare* (OUP, 1951), 155

²⁵ Eric Sams: "Taboo or not Taboo? The Text, Dating and Authorship of *Hamlet*, 1589-1603" (*Hamlet Studies* 10.1-2 (Summer-Winter, 1988): 38).

A warlike Christian and your countryman. (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.1)

These details, together with the fact that Elizabethan plays were rarely if ever published in the year they were first acted, all point to the conclusion that the *Troublesome Raigne* was originally written and staged 1588-90.²⁶ It enjoyed considerable success before publication by a bankrupt company seeking to wring a few last pennies from its assets, an inference borne out by the fact that the Queen's Men also sold a dozen other plays about this time.²⁷

An objective look at *The Troublesome Raigne's* style and content confirms it as one of the so-called Armada plays composed and enthusiastically received during the excitement, national fervor, and anti-Catholic sentiment sweeping England after its victory over the Spanish fleet in 1588. There are close similarities between the fates of Philip of Spain's fleet and Philip of France's unsuccessful invasion, while many of its episodes and characters are deeply hostile to Catholicism. Apart from the ruthless Cardinal Pandulph, the papal legate responsible for the resumption of war between France and England, recently at peace, and who otherwise provokes all kinds of mischief, we see "faire Alice," a "fausen [wriggling] Nunne" hidden in a friar's money chest. We also hear a priest smarmily declare, "*Amor vincit omnia*" when he is discovered in the closet of a second lecherous nun, and later we are shown the king perfidiously murdered by a monk enraged at his treatment of the Catholic church.²⁸

An earlier *King John* is not impossible, of course, though the hypothesis raises a great number of other difficulties, many of which have never been addressed. First, where would the author of *The Troulesome Raigne* get the sole version of Shakespeare's unpublished fair copy (unavailable, as we've seen, even to the editors of F1) so that he could follow it, as Dover Wilson demonstrates, so immaculately?²⁹ *The Troublesome Raigne* is unlikely to have been assembled from memory or notes taken during a performance or even performances—it matches *King John* too exactly in structure, overall design, speech and scenic sequence, characters and characterization (particularly invented figures like Chatillion and of course The Bastard). Stage directions, of course unspoken in performance, are also literally reproduced, that is, copied. In a critical review of Honigmann's edition, Alice Walker also shrewdly observes that Essex is not addressed by name in *King John*. His coincident inclusion in *The Troublesome Raigne* therefore—assuming it to be the later play—means that Anonymous must have had Shakespeare's manuscript before him.

There are also several identical or near-identical lines, many of them quite trivial. But their very triviality confirms the intimate connection, since few are vivid with the images or striking turns of phrase one can imagine jumping off the stage to implant themselves in a hearer's memory. On the contrary, most are poetically dull, mere narrative fact, precisely the sort of functional statement a rewriter or editor working from a text would retain. Compare

of Ireland, Poitiers, Anjow, Torain, Maine (*The Troublesome Raigne*, I.33—34)

To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine (*King John*, 1.1.11)

Next them a Bastard of the Kings deceast (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.490)

With them a bastard of the king's deceas'd (*King John*, 2.1.65)

²⁶ Robert Adger Law: "On the Date of King John," *Studies in Philology* 54 (1957) 120

²⁷ E.K. Chambers: *The Elizabethan Stage* (OUP, 1923) 4, 382-6

²⁸ *The Troublesome Raigne*, I.1266, 1249-63, II. 869-929

²⁹ Wilson (ed.): *King John*, xxxii

And thirtie thousand markes of stipend coyne (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.842)
Full thirty thousand markes of English coin (*King John*, 2.1.530)

Which in S. Maries Chappel presently (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.857)
For at Saint Mary's Chapel presently (*King John*, 2.1.538)

As these and other examples show, if *The Troublesome Raigne* were indeed written later than *King John*, its author must have had a copy of Shakespeare's work at his elbow. It bears emphasizing that complete manuscripts, in the form of promptbooks, were both rare and jealously guarded by the theater companies owning them. Actors possessed their own lines and cues and nothing more, as Shakespeare shows in *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, 3.1, when Quince and his friends rehearse their performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. No company was likely to hand over its single precious copy—especially of a smash hit—to a lesser dramatist so that he could work up an inferior version for sale under the impression that it was the original author's (one of Honigmann's wilder assertions³⁰). If Shakespeare and his associates wished to capitalize on *King John*'s popularity, why not just publish the real thing and keep the profits themselves? It is perfectly true, as Braunmuller³¹ and others have pointed out, that various forms of unpublished plays could and did exist—an author's private copy (his draft version, or foul papers) and perhaps a fair copy or oral transcript, even a combination of all three. Yet the probability of any of these falling into the hands of a rival dramatist by theft or carelessness seems so remote we can safely discount it (though this is precisely one of the speculative claims made by Beaurline³²). Certainly there is no record of such a thing actually happening, in this case or any other, and no reason to think that if it did the victim would not have loudly complained. Literary theft was as much disliked then as now.³³

The likeliest possibility then, supported by an examination of both texts, is that *The Troublesome Raigne* was written before *King John* and that the drama published in the First Folio represents a reworking of its scenes, characters and episodes. It is often said that Shakespeare tones down the play's anti-Catholicism, but this overstates the matter. What he does is omit *The Troublesome Raigne*'s semi-comic allegations of priestly dissoluteness, leaving in place its far more serious charges of political interference and influence. In so doing he fleshes out both personality and motivation, displaying a strong editorial hand on the earlier text.

Dating *King John*

Textual details corroborate a date no earlier than 1594 for *King John*, a claim now stylometrically confirmed by *The Authorship Companion*.³⁴ Additional evidence supports this. In *The Troublesome Raigne*, the Bastard is recognized as Richard I's son because of his handsome features, but in the canonical play his physique, or "large composition" (1.1.88), is much more greatly emphasized. This is done especially in contrast to his brother Robert, who has legs like "riding rods," arms like "eel-skins stuff'd," and a face as thin as "three farthings" (1.1.140-3). These descriptions are quite specific, and obviously neither would nor could have been included unless Shake-

³⁰ Honigmann, lxxiii

³¹ Braunmuller, 20

³² Beaurline, 209

³³ Sams, *The Real Shakespeare*, 180-1; Vickers, "Counterfeiting" *Shakespeare*, 87-9, and *Shakespeare Co-Author*, 522-7

³⁴ Taylor and Egan, 521-2 et seq.

speare had in mind particular actors—in the case of the Bastard, the Chamberlain’s Men’s leading heroic figure, Ricahrd Burbage, “a large man with a bluff manner,” and, in that of Robert Faulconbridge, John Sincklo or Sinckler,

a tall, thin-faced fellow, whose comical figure Shakespeare exploits agan and again as Pinch, Holofernes, the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*, Slender, Aguecheek and so on.³⁵

But Shakespeare did not join the Chamberlain’s Men until 1594, indeed, could not have. The company was only founded in that year, after the reopening of the theaters following a long hiatus due to the plague.

There is another compelling piece of evidence which, in my view, has never been given the weight it deserves. In *King John* 3.3.59-68, Hubert is urged to kill young Arthur. Yet when he comes to do it we learn that the royal command has radically altered. Hubert now bears with him a written warrant to spare Arthur’s life and merely—if that is the word—blind him (4.1.37-42). This startling anomaly goes completely unexplained. We never see nor hear of John’s countermanding order. Later—an apparent reversal similarly unaccounted for—he is again shown calling for the young prince’s death.

Everything is satisfactorily explicated, however, if we recognize that Shakespeare was working from *The Troublesome Raigne* and, as the F1 text suggests, hadn’t yet finished his revision. We must conclude then that *King John* was written sometime after 1591. In the earlier play, John, following Holinshed, instructs Hubert in writing to blind his rival, sufficient to disable him as king. For plot purposes, the blunder does not matter, which is why it has largely gone unremarked: the scenes’s interest resides almost wholly in Hubert’s Macbethian psychomathia, his decision to spare Arthur, and then lie about it to the king.

An additional small but significant textual pointer is F1’s redundant stage direction, *Enter a Sheriffe* (1.1.44), a character who then does and says nothing. Most modern editors, reluctant to delete but quick to add, conjecturally supply “and whispers Essex in the ear,” partly by analogy with *The Troublesome Raigne* (see below), and partly because Essex then announces the arrival of the Faulconbridge brothers requesting settlement of their inheritance dispute.

Sidney Thomas, however, demonstrates that the meaningless Folio stage direction is actually what survives of a much longer sequence in *The Troublesome Raigne*, where the Sheriff of Northamptonshire enters, “whispers in the ear” of the Earl of Salisbury (immediately sent off by King John on another mission), and then makes a longish speech of his own describing the Faulconbridge matter.³⁶

It is worth observing, too, that in *King John* Essex is never on stage again. Most modern productions thus give his part to Lord Bigot, a character absent from the first scene but later a visible English lord. I think it more than likely that this was Shakespeare’s intention, which he either overlooked or never got around to correcting. The substitution is in fact made later in the play, *King John*, 4.3.10 s.d; cf. *The Troublesome Raigne* II.26 s.d. Either way, the obvious conclusion is that *The Troublesome Raigne* must be the earlier work; little is gained by elaborating

³⁵ Wilson, *King John*, lii

³⁶ Sidney Thomas: “‘Enter a Sheriffe’: Shakespeare’s *King John* and *The Troublesome Raigne*” (Shakespeare Quarterly 37 (1986) 98-100) and the same author’s “‘Enter a Sheriffe’: A Shakespearean Ghost” (Shakespeare Quarterly 38 (1987) 130, responding to criticism of his earlier note.

the Sheriff's otherwise silent part, while the action is gratuitously slowed by retaining it. Shakespeare's changes in *King John*, cutting the Sheriff/Salisbury business and giving a short speech to someone else, are marked improvements on the clunky original.

Set in the context of Shakespeare's development as a whole, *King John*, and especially the ambiguous figure of the Bastard, dates more probably from 1594-1597, the years everyone recognizes were pivotal for him. Among earlier scholars, Bullough and Kermode agree that "*Richard II* (written 1594-1595), marks a new beginning which embodies the growing complexity of the dramatist's mind and art...and the new interpretation given to politics."³⁷

Recent stylometrical analyses, including a wide range of data in the *Authorship Companion*, confirms this period for *King John*. The play is "firmly placed" after *Richard III* and *Love's Labor's Lost*, and is roughly contemporaneous with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard II*.³⁸ Vickers also cites a variety of numerical tests based on vocabulary and metrical counts, assigning the play to 1594-7. Among these are tabulated chronologies revealing high verbal and rhythmic correlations between *King John* and plays Shakespeare is known, from performance and publication dates, to have written during these years.³⁹

The four-year span 1594-7, however, is too broad for our needs. Precisely dating *King John* requires the sharper focus of verse and phrase parallels, stylistic and thematic affinities, and other points of contact with related works, all of which suggest that it is a close companion of *Richard II*, a play known to have been completed some time in 1595. Scholars derive this date from its stage and publication history and the fact that Samuel Daniel's *The Civil Wars* was entered in the Stationer's Register on October 11, 1594, and released the following year. Unmistakable traces of Daniel's language and usages in Shakespeare's play, such as the unusual spellings *Bullingbrooke* and *Herford*, found nowhere else, suggest that *Richard II* must have been written or at least finished after 1594 but no later than 1597, when it was first published.⁴⁰ This gives 1595 for the play's completion and 1596 for its London debut: as we've seen, new dramas, especially popular ones, were rarely published while still fresh upon the stage.

However, *King John* and *Richard II* clearly derive from the same creative period—even Honigmann describes them as "twin plays," noting that the lion-skin, a stage property perhaps introduced by Shakespeare, features also in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-6) which "belongs to the same years."⁴¹ Both are written entirely in verse, omit secondary plots paralleling the action, and feature baronial uprisings against the king.

Bullough compares the "fanciful word play" in both dramas,⁴² and indeed a number of verse and verbal echoes connect *King John* and *Richard II*. Perhaps the most striking is Pembroke's des-

³⁷ Bullough 3. 356; Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), 13-17.

³⁸ See especially Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane: "The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare Works," 519-22 and *passim*

³⁹ W. Fischer and K. Wentersdorf, eds.: "Shakespearean Chronology and the Metrical Tests," in *Shakespeare-Studien: Festschrift für Heinrich Mutschmann* (Elwert Verlag, 1951) 161-193; Macdonald P. Jackson, *Studies in Attribution: Middleton and Shakespeare* (Universität Salzburg, 1979); and Ants Oras, *Pause Patterns in Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama. An Experiment in Prosody* (U of Florida P, 1960)

⁴⁰ See Robert Metcalf Smith: *Froissart and the English Chronicle Play* (Columbia UP, 1915) 145-154; and George Logan: "Lucan-Daniel-Shakespeare: New Light on the Relations Between *The Civil Wars* and *Richard II*," *Shakespeare Studies* 9 (1976) 121-140

⁴¹ Honigmann, *King John*, xvii, 28n

⁴² Bullough, 4.23

cription of how young Arthur, freshly killed, will find “his little kingdom in a forced grave” (*King John*, 4.2.98), recalling Richard’s lament after his capture at Flint about exchanging his “large kingdom for a little grave / A little, little grave, an obscure grave” (*Richard II*, 3,3.153-4).

Everything, including the stylometric evidence, thus points to 1594-5 for *King John*’s composition, its verse, characterization, and other formal features suggesting that it probably preceded *Richard II*. It is a good play, but noticeably more experimental than its author’s tragic handling of the deposed monarch whose fall ushered in the catastrophic Wars of the Roses. The scene in which Arthur leaps from the walls to his death, for example, is theatrically powerful but notoriously difficult to perform—the jump must be credibly fatal but not from a point so high as to actually hurt the actor—while Richard’s politically suicidal descent “like glist’ring Phaeton” into Flint’s base court is a moment of exalted historical tragedy.

King John represents an assay for Shakespeare’s evolving narrative strategies following the watershed years 1592-4. As Tillyard says, “though the play is a wonderful affair, full of promise and new life, as a whole it is uncertain of itself,”⁴³ which is what we would expect of an experimental work. A sculptor might call it a *moquette*, a Renaissance painter a cartoon, a trying out of angles, details and possibilities. Though not Shakespeare’s best work, it may be one of his most important, bridging the gap between his two historical tetralogies, that is, his early manner and his middle period. More specifically, it is an anticipation of *Richard II*, very different in its intent and purpose from *Richard II, Part One*. *King John* is a technical trial-run, a far cruder and less accomplished work than *Richard II*, and perhaps for just these reasons set aside unfinished. It seems very possible that the unpolished MS was recovered from the playwright’s papers after his death in 1616 by Heminge and Condell, who, as noted, published it unedited in F1. This would account both for its apparent dependence on *The Troublesome Raigne* and its inconsistencies—the blinding/assassination of Arthur, discrepant speech-heads, misplaced stage directions, and so forth. It would also explain why the play was never published or performed during its author’s lifetime.

Sources for the Play

Getting the relationship right between *King John* and *The Troublesome Raigne* clarifies many other contentious issues, including the ongoing debate about Shakespeare’s sources. If *King John* came first, *The Troublesome Raigne* is obviously eliminated as a source—no one finds it remarkable that another dramatist would steal wholesale from Shakespeare—and is for this reason often ignored. But if *King John* were the later play, then as Braunmuller says,

the existence of *The Troublesome Raigne* makes nearly impossible any direct or sustained analysis of how Shakespeare handled his main historical source, Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, since that “source” may have largely and already been dramatized for him. Although Shakespeare has details from Holinshed not in *The Troublesome Raigne*, his treatment of Holinshed generally parallels that in the anonymous play, and Shakespeare’s “handling of his source” then becomes one dramatist’s reworking of another’s play rather than a dramatist’s reworking of a chronicle history.⁴⁴

The conundrum appears unresolvable. However, if Shakespeare were at least part-author of *The Troublesome Raigne*, as I suggest, all the difficulties bedeviling the record are quickly and easily dispatched. In *King John* he revisited an earlier work, fundamentally trusting his own research but adding and/or correcting details based on his subsequent reading, theatrical experience, and analysis. Finally he strips away almost all of his co-author’s contributions—especially the lesser

⁴³ E.M.W Tillyard: *Shakespeare’s History Plays* (Chatto & Windus, 1961) 233

⁴⁴ Braunmuller, p. 18

verse and crude scenes of monastic lechery and murder—to produce a powerful new version reflecting his own political emphases and of course poetry. Though not entirely successful, the play apparently gave him the confidence and impetus to deal with the ambiguously tragic deposition of Richard II and create that sustained examination of heroic leadership we call the *Henriad*.

This is more than speculation. For example, Shakespeare seized upon the following isolated reference in the cacophonous welter of Holinshed’s fragmented narrative:

The same yere [1199], Philip bastard sonne to king Richard, to whom his father had giuen the castell and honor of Coinacke, killed the vicount Limoges, in reuenge of his father’s death, who was slaine (as yee haue heard) in besieging the castell of Chalus Cheuerall.⁴⁵

This becomes that strikingly characteristic opening scene, where the themes of legitimacy and inheritance are exemplified and reviewed. Later the reference is developed into the revenge miniplot, in some ways like *Hamlet*, where a princely son, who is himself his father’s revived spirit, avenges his father’s unjust killing by slaying the worthless slayer.

The word “bastard” leapt from Holinshed’s page for Shakespeare, and upon its associations he built the analogous structures of political justice and injustice, of John’s and Arthur’s competing claims to the throne, and indeed the drama’s overarching exploration of the whole question of legal power and legal possession. The dangerously intelligent Cardinal Pandulph is another distinctively Shakespearean figure composited from a variety of Holinshed’s hints and touches describing a series of papal delegates dispatched to England over the years.

Indeed, the bedrock of both *The Troublesome Raigne* and *King John* is Holinshed. Most of the story springs from this source, including its emphasis on English nationalism, John’s struggle to retain his Angevin empire, the challenge to his legitimacy posed by Arthur, his battle with and submission to the Roman church, the treachery of his nobles and their on-again, off-again alliance with France, the almost successful invasion of England by the Dauphin, and finally John’s murder and excruciating death by poison at Swinstead Abbey. Holinshed also articulates what could be called Shakespeare’s political theme, the importance of unity in the face of a common foe.⁴⁶

The commualtie also grew into factions, some fauoring, & some cursing the king, as they bare affection. The cleargie was likewise at dissention, so that nothing preuailed but malice and spice, which brought forth and spread abroad the fruits of disobedience to all good lawes and orders, greatlie to the disquieting of the whole state. So that herein we have a perfect view of the perplexed state of princes, cheeflien when they are overswaied with forren & prophane power, and not able to assure themselues of their subiects allegiance and loialtie.⁴⁷

Among the bizarre events Shakespeare included are the appearance of the five moons, which is given symbolic resonance, and the strange story of Peter the Prophet.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Raphael Holinshed: *Holinshed’s Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (6 vols., Johnson et al, 1807-8) 3.278

⁴⁶ *The Troublesome Raigne*, II, 1187-1198, *King John*, 5.7.110-118

⁴⁷ Holinshed, 3.299

⁴⁸ Holinshed, 3.282, 311

Evidence that Shakespeare revisited Holinshed when reworking *The Troublesome Raigne* may also be found in the many small touches and corrections he apparently later brought to *King John*. For instance, the earlier play contains no mention of Lewis's embassy to the English lords ahead of his military invasion,⁴⁹ though it is noted in *King John*, 4.3.15-19. Similarly, the audience learns from a dying speech by the half-French, half-English lord Melune of the Dauphin's planned treachery against these same nobles, whereas in *The Troublesome Raigne* we're given its fictional dramatisation.⁵⁰ Likewise in the earlier play, following Holinshed, Arthur's supposed murder drives the English lords into an alliance with the Dauphin, whereas in the more politically nuanced *King John* they join him beforehand from a sense (mistaken, as it turns out) of collective safety. It is a subtler, more considered and complex set of motivations expressing "the infection of the time" (*King John*, 5.2.20).

As part of his case for the priority of *King John* and the dependence on it of *The Troublesome Raigne*, Honigmann provides strong evidence for Shakespeare's having consulted John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, otherwise *The Book of Martyrs*.⁵¹ Ironically, Honigmann successfully demonstrates only the reverse of his thesis. His best evidence—"the case for Foxe as a source becomes watertight"⁵²—is a reference in *King John* to "Swinsted Abbey" as the site of John's death.⁵³ All other possible sources, including Holinshed and Matthew Paris, whom Holinshed cites, give "Swineshead" or, in a variant spelling, "Sueneshead." Honigmann is also notably silent about that fact that *The Troublesome Raigne* II. 876 refers to "Swinestead Abbey," a small but significantly different spelling with a more antique ring.

King John additionally employs several other expressions and incidental references obviously derived from Foxe, some quite consequential. For example, in *The Troublesome Raigne*, Peter of Pomfret's politically dangerous prophecy that the king will be forced to resign his crown before Ascension Day is announced to John's face. In *King John*, however, following *The Book of Martyrs*,⁵⁴ it is first published abroad and becomes the reason Peter is brought to court—a more developed and persuasive version of the story. Other echoes from Foxe noted by Honigmann include "yield up," and "take again" in reference to the crown,⁵⁵ the word "burst" to describe the effects of poison on the bowels,⁵⁶ and "meddling," "juggling," and "revenue," in connection with the Roman church.⁵⁷

We may note also in this context a study by John Klause recording a great number of parallels between the poetry of Robert Southwell (1561-1595) and Shakespeare's play. A Jesuit and a martyr hanged at Tyburn in February, 1595, Southwell clearly had an influence on some of Shakespeare's language in *King John*, though none of it suggests secret Catholic sympathies on the playwright's part.⁵⁸

⁴⁹ Holinshed, 3.329

⁵⁰ *King John*, 5.4.10-48, following Holinshed, 3.334; *The Troublesome Raigne*, II.586-624

⁵¹ John Foxe: *Book of Martyrs* (John Day, 1563).

⁵² Honigmann, xx

⁵³ Foxe, 256, *King John*, 5.3,8

⁵⁴ Foxe, 252-3

⁵⁵ Honigmann, xiii-xiv, Foxe, 253, *King John*, 5.1.1-2

⁵⁶ Honigmann, xiii-xiv, Foxe, 256, *King John*, 5.6.30

⁵⁷ Honigmann, xiii-xiv Foxe 250, 253, *King John*, 3.1.163,169

⁵⁸ John Klause: "New Sources for Shakespeare's *King John*: The Writings of Robert Southwell," *Studies in Philology* 97 (Fall 2001) 401-427

Finally, there is some evidence that around 1594 Shakespeare consulted the *Wakefield Chronicle*, an unpublished Latin history, the only possible place he could have discovered that Eleanor of Aquitaine died on April 1, 1204. Among other things, this confirms his scrupulous research, scholarship, and unusual erudition.

Peele and Shakespeare

The idea that *The Troublesome Raigne* might be a co-authored work is not new, though the suggestion has fallen out of favor in recent years, and is broached neither by Vickers nor the contributors to *The Authorship Companion*. In 1725 Alexander Pope judged it to be a collaboration between Shakespeare and William Rowley; later, F. G. Fleay suggested that Marlowe devised the Author's Plot and Lodge, Greene, and Peele wrote the verse.⁵⁹ No one seems to have considered the possibility that Shakespeare himself might have been the outliner, that is, creator the Author's Plot, a hypothesis that accounts for all the mysteries surrounding this play and its revision as *King John*. Peele contributed the verse, and the play enjoyed considerable success. After his death, Shakespeare returned to his own libretto and rewrote the story, with corrections and additions as he thought fit, leaving it unfinished in the form we now have it.

The point generally agreed, and I of course concur, is that Shakespeare cannot have been the *Raigne's* versifier in any important way. There is too little in common between its poetry and *King John*. Exceptions to this opinion include Eric Sams⁶⁰ and W.J. Courthorpe, who in the nineteenth century argued that Shakespeare was indeed responsible for the whole thing.⁶¹ At the same time, the few echoes of Shakespeare's language that we do find in *The Troublesome Raigne* confirm the likelihood that he must have been associated in some way with its writing. These data are insufficient, however, to support the case that it is some kind of early draft or bad quarto, a critical category that in any event no longer has much currency. More decisively, "bad quarto" hall-marks are missing, especially coincidences of dialogue, whether mangled or not.⁶² But this now leaves open only two options: either Shakespeare stole the plot for *King John* from *The Troublesome Raigne*, or he was, early on, the librettist for a more established playwright.

The second alternative is more probable, especially because Shakespeare's later dependence on the anonymous work is so different in kind and manner from his dazzling recreations of, for example, *King Lear* and *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth*. In those cases the originals are roughly appropriated and squeezed of their juice, the remainder contemptuously discarded like so much pulp. *King John*, by contrast, is a straight remodeling job, updated and refurbished in the light of its author's theatrical experience and perhaps with a different and more educated audience in mind. Shakespeare was frankly too good an historian, too self-conscious an analyst—too great a writer—to cravenly steal another's work (which is what "source study" in the case of *The Troublesome Raigne* often amounts to). But the plot and construction were his own work to which he rightly felt entitled.

These judgments are supported by Vickers's analysis identifying George Peele as the author of most of the *Raigne's* verse, spelled out in "*The Troublesome Raigne, George Peele, and the date of King John*" (2004). Basing his analysis on the refined techniques of modern stylometrics

⁵⁹ Bullough, 4.4

⁶⁰ Sams, *The Real Shakespeare*, 146-153

⁶¹ W.J. Courthorpe: "On the Authority of Some of the Early Plays Assigned to Shakespeare and Their Relationship to the Development of His Genius," in *A History of English Poetry* vol. 4, Appendix. (Macmillan, 1895-1910)

⁶² Kenneth Muir: "Source Problems in the Histories" *Shakespeare-Jahrbuch*, 96 (1960) 60

supplementing the research of earlier scholars, especially H. Dugdale Sykes, Rupert Taylor, and R. F. Hill, Vickers records literally dozens of word and phrase parallels between *The Troublesome Raigne* and Peele's dramas and poems.⁶³ Among the most notable are:

With moornefull tunes in stole of dismall hue (*The Arraynement of Paris*, 610-11)
And clad this Land in stole of dismall hieu [hue] (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.5)

My word is past, I am well agreeede (Peele, *Edward I*, 1656)
My word is past, receive your boone my Lords (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.1.567)

Hang in the aire for fowles to feed upon (*Edward I*, 2066)
And leave thy bodie to the fowles for food (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.1056)

As Vickers ruefully notes, however, verse and line analogies are never decisive in resolving questions of authorial attribution, although without them a successful argument can never be made. He thus produces additional stylistic evidence showing the many ways Peele's literary manner closely resembles that of the author of *The Troublesome Raigne*. His discussion includes cognate preferences for the rhetorical device *ploke* (the repetition of a word with other words intervening, e.g. "Come, night, come," and other forms of symmetrical phrasing; a liking for the vocative followed by an imperative; excessive indulgence in multiple alliteration; and a strong tendency on the part of characters to self-address. Cumulatively these constitute Peele's technical profile and an unanswerable case for his contribution to *The Troublesome Raigne*.

Perhaps most persuasive is Vickers's compilation of data and statistics demonstrating the same inordinate preference for and use of alliteration on the part of Peele and the author of *The Troublesome Raigne*. He notes not only the coincidence of matching alliterative phrases—"mounting minde" (*The Battle of Alcazar*, 1320, *Edward I*, 177, *The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.261), "damned deede" (*The Battle of Alcazar*, 852, *Edward I*, 2526, *The Troublesome Raigne*, I.1380, 1718, II.37)—but also his distinctive predilection for alliterative word pairs combining a verb and a noun, again often the same ones: for example, "to wreak wrongs" (*The Battle of Alcazar*, 306, 1302, *The Troublesome Raigne* I.1420).

Vickers's argument is then clinched by showing that Peele's liking for triple, quadruple, and even quintuple alliterative strings, frequently combining consonants—"Should shine discreet desire and lawless lust" (*Edward I*, 2517); "That they may march in number like sea sands" (*David and Bethsabe*, 1228)—appears also in *The Troublesome Raigne*: "Harmful and harsh, hells horror to be heard" (*The Troublesome Raigne*, I.345); "To sound the tromp that causeth hell triumph" (*The Troublesome Raigne*, 1.1374).

These data notwithstanding, it is clear that Peele could never have designed the *Raigne*'s plot. The story is frankly too coherent, too steady in its political focus and supported by an atypically—although distinctively Shakespearean—cynical conception of men, women, and their motives. Peele's amiable genius was anecdotal and episodic, "non-dramatic," as even his loyal editors acknowledge, while "compared with the creations of Shakespeare and Marlowe, [his] characters seem to be mere sketches."⁶⁴ The plays that he both plotted and versified possess a "generalized chivalric-ethical colouring," as Vickers expresses it, wholly absent from *The Troublesome Raigne*.⁶⁵ His history plays in particular, e.g., *The Battle of Alcazar* (1589) and *Edward I* (1591), are really "not history" at all in the traditional Elizabethan sense, but "characteristically loose...the

⁶³ C. T. Prouty, (ed.): *The Life and Works of George Peele*, 3 vols. (Yale UP, 1970)

⁶⁴ Frank S. Hook and John Yoklavich (eds.): *The Dramatic Works of George Peele* (Yale UP, 1961), 2.47-8

⁶⁵ *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, 177

stuff of balladry.”⁶⁶ Compared to Shakespeare and even Marlowe, they are weak in concept and execution, “marked throughout by a shallowness of political and historical sense.”⁶⁷ Like *The Old Wife’s Tale* (1590) and *David and Bethsabe* (1587-88), his work is generally—quoting from the miscellany of critical opinions assembled by Vickers in support of his case for Peele’s lifeless hand in *Titus Andromcuis* 1.1—“discursive, haphazard,...repetitious and mechan-ical,” an “incoherent succession of heterogeneous episodes.”⁶⁸

This is not the place to disparage Peele, nor is that my intention. He wrote successfully for his stage and audience and was a reasonably popular dramatist—and he did work with Shakespeare. His narrative manner and stylistic habits, however, are simply not and never could be his collaborator’s, a more gifted and *engagé* poet who “never forgets that he is writing a history play depicting great political forces locked in deadly combat.”⁶⁹ With the exception of the awkwardly interpolated monastic scenes, whose vulgarity and crude anti-Catholicism are typical of Peele—compare, e.g., the Robin Hood sequences in *Edward I*—Shakespeare’s is plainly the dramatic temperament controlling *The Troublesome Raigne*’s overall plot and thematic concerns. No other Elizabethan playwright, not even Marlowe, conceives, plans, and executes like the designer of *King John*, that is, of *The Troublesome Raigne*.

Conclusion

Someone other than Peele obviously devised *The Troublesome Raigne*’s plot and its characters’ illustrative behaviors, that is, the narrative outline on which he hung the loose calfskin of his verse. But as Beaurhne and many others have observed, no dramatist of the time save Shakespeare and perhaps Marlowe—who is excluded for reasons historical and literary—possessed “the combinative and structural powers” displayed in *The Troublesome Raigne*.⁷⁰ This view is supported by Simmons, who argues similarly that

Of the known contemporary dramatists, only Shakespeare and Marlowe show the structural powers for handling such sprawling events from the chronicles.⁷¹

Given the above, it strikes me as remarkable that literary critics and historians have never drawn the conclusions advanced in this discussion. Dover Wilson even goes so far as to claim that *The Troublesome Raigne* is “in some ways better than *King John*...Indeed, the play possesses all the ingredients of historical drama except dramatic life.”⁷²

Tillyard wholeheartedly agrees, and yet continues to ignore what plainly stands before him:

In construction, *The Troublesome Raigne* is better balanced than *King John*...Things happen evenly and in good proportion, though its language is queer and fitful...The masterly construction is quite at odds with the heterogeneous execution.⁷³

Instead, in a groundless revision of everything we know about Shakespeare and Elizabethan theatre history, he conjures up an imaginary ur-*King John*, now lost, that Anonymous used as his

⁶⁶ Leonard R. N. Ashley, *George Peele* (Twayne, 1970) 101-11)

⁶⁷ Hook and Yoklavich, 2.16

⁶⁸ *Shakespeare, Co-Author*, 458-9

⁶⁹ Hook and Yoklavich, 2.16

⁷⁰ Beaurline, 197

⁷¹ J.L. Simmons: “Shakespeare’s *King John* and its Source: Coherence, Pattern, and Vision ” *Tulane Studies in English* 17 (1969) 54.

⁷² Wilson, *King John*, pp. xix, xxxix

⁷³ Tillyard, 215-16

source and Shakespeare consulted later.

For Shakespeare to conceive and Peele to write *Troublesome Raigne*, however, would be neither anachronistic nor unrepresentative of the Elizabethan theater. It was indeed quite common for one writer to map out or design what was known as the “Author’s Plot,” or detailed story, and for another, or even a series of others, to provide the actual verse. Somewhat less than a “treatment,” in Hollywood parlance, the Author’s Plot functioned as a kind of written story-board or move-by-move visualization. Methods of work and contributions would surely have been as flexible and various as the projects and personalities involved. What we know for certain is that before anyone began composing lines and speeches, at least in a sustained kind of way, the basic narrative was assembled in a detailed scenic outline together with a close understanding of the chief characters, the gist of their decisive speeches and revelations together with important exits, entrances, and other stage directions.

The relationship was analogous to that between architect and builder, and may even have included drafts of important speeches, accounting for the apparently anachronistic Shakespearean lines and phrases in *The Troublesome Raigne*. Some of the play’s speeches have a distinctly Bardic ring, such as John’s dying lament:

How have I livd but by another’s losse?
What have I lovd, but wrack of others weale?
When have I vowd, and not infringd mine oath?
Where have I done a deed deserving well?
How, what, when and where have I bestowd a day
That tended not to some notorious ill? (*The Troublesome Raigne*, II. 1056-1061)

The value of supposing that Shakespeare was the principal deviser of *The Troublesome Raigne*’s Author’s Plot (omitting the monastic scenes, as he later did himself), is that the hypothesis makes sense of all the facts, especially the way that in both plays England is the subtle hero of the action. Shakespeare alone among his contemporaries manages successfully and repeatedly to insinuate this dimension without intruding upon his story or its characters—Shakespeare alone, that is, and the anonymous author of *The Troublesome Raigne*. What we have is a kind of large-scale example of what Muriel St. Clare Byrne requires for “quality” parallels in attribution studies: convergences of both thought and format. The elimination of other plot-constructing candidates—Marlowe, Peele, Greene, Kyd, Lyly, and so forth—also satisfies her demand for “negative checks.”⁷⁴

The convergence with Shakespeare is indeed so singular that refusing to recognize his distinctive presence in the *The Troublesome Raigne*’s narrative verges on the perverse, a subset of Bardolotry. It is notable that scholars acknowledge the excellence of the *Raigne*’s construction when claiming that it is later than *King John*, but when Shakespeare becomes the debtor this is “brushed aside,” as Honigmann puts it,⁷⁵ and it morphs into “a terrible play.”⁷⁶ Bullough confusingly asserts in this context that while Shakespeare “undoubtedly consulted Holinshed, Foxe, etc...he preferred to follow the unhistorical medley of *The Raigne* rather than make a new plot.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Muriel St. Clare Byrne: “Bibliographic Clues in Collaborate Plays,” *Library*, 4th series 13 (1932) 24).

⁷⁵ Honigmann, xix

⁷⁶ Chambers, *William Shakespeare*, 1.367

⁷⁷ Bullough, p. 22 and note.

Viewed thus, *King John*'s algorithms become indecipherable. But if we allow Shakespeare's hand in both dramas we find, in addition to familiar characters, situations and political concerns, a double-layered process of composition explaining all its apparent anomalies. Shakespeare researched and designed the plot in association with Peele around 1587 and perhaps contributed the odd phrase, line, or speech. Some years later, probably in 1594, he updated and revised his own work by way of an experiment, then put it aside and began to write *Richard II*.

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