12-1-1993

Circumstances Attending the Fall of Shakespeare's King John and the Deposition of Richard II

Daniel Wright
Concordia University - Portland

Follow this and additional works at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean
Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation
Wright, Daniel (1993) "Circumstances Attending the Fall of Shakespeare's King John and the Deposition of Richard II," The Promethean: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 11.
Available at: http://commons.cu-portland.edu/promethean/vol2/iss1/11
Community were reunited. Whether you were rich or poor, famous or obscure, for a split second, the world came home with the East Berliners.

At the end of four and a half weeks, I was glad to return "home" to Birmingham. What had before felt so foreign to me here was now relatively familiar and very comforting. For nine months, Great Britain has been my home. But more than challenging my concept of what an apartment should look like or what food should taste like, this island has come to symbolize the ambiguity of perspective.

My time in Sweden, also, connected me with my heritage and my past. The people there now feel like family and the land a second home. But images of yet another home are fighting my consciousness for recognition. Nine months ago I accepted the challenge of adapting to a new physical place and culture. Now I am preparing to face the challenge of redefining what home is.

It is spring here now, and it is beautiful. But I have come a long way since the bleak rainy days of the English autumn, and I am ready to come home.
“Landlord of England art thou now, not king” (R2 III.i.113), suggests more that the old duke desires to admonish the young king and dissuade him from dissolute ways than it suggests that Gaunt believes Richard to have forfeited his prerogative to rule. These examples firmly establish that although crises of authority characterize both John and Richard’s kingdoms, each king principally arises from differing concepts of what makes a king legitimate in his authority.

John’s government, like Richard’s after him, is not only impaired by challenges to the monarch’s rule but typified by poor administration and ignoble deeds. Preoccupied by the defense of his throne from those who would wrest from him the throne he himself so ably stole, John consumes England in war and civil rebellion. He causes his subjects to bear the consequences of papal interdict and an assault by French forces, inspired by Rome, to remove the “arch heretic” from power. He acts impulsively, fails to secure good counsel, and provokes others to acts of cruelty and murder to sustain his misrule. By depriving Geoffrey’s son, Arthur, of the throne (as Richard deprives Bolingbroke of his inheritance), John, like Richard, violates the code of primogeniture and calls into question all that sustains order in the realm. As the bastard son of the throne by surrendering English territory to France to secure: John, like Richard, violates the code of primogeniture and calls into question all that sustains order in the realm. As the bastard son of the throne by surrendering English territory to France to serve John’s succession of the provinces of Volquessen, Tourain, Maine, Poictiers, and Anjou to the Dolphin, Constance is overjoyed; England is not yet bought:


Frustrated by the failed alliance, John resorts to murder to secure the throne. Though thwarted at first in his attempt to have Arthur put to death, John eventually succeeds—only to discover that Arthur, dead, is more dangerous to his throne than Arthur alive, for his death gives the Dolphin a claim to the English throne as the result of the latter’s marriage to John’s niece. John’s repentance, then, is insincere; only when England faces invasion and conquest by France does he regret his complicity in Arthur’s death. John, then, in his own peculiar way, pre­­cedes Richard in his crime of “selling” England in order to possess a measure of security which he otherwise is too weak to acquire. Accordingly, when Rome crushes the alliance which would preserve John’s cession of the provinces of Volquessen, Tourain, Maine, Poictiers, and Anjou to the Dolphin, Constance is overjoyed; England is not yet bought:

King Philip. Thou shalt not need. England, I will fall from thee.

Constance. O fair return of banish’d majesty!

Eleanor. O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

(KJ III.i.319-22)

And with her golden hand hath pluck’d down France
To tread down fair respect of sovereignty;
And made his majesty a bond to theirs.
France is a bond to Fortune and King John.
That strumpet Fortune, that usurping John!

John, then, in his own peculiar way, precedes Richard in his crime of “selling” England in order to possess a measure of security which he otherwise is too weak to acquire. Accordingly, when Rome crushes the alliance which would preserve John’s cession of the provinces of Volquessen, Tourain, Maine, Poictiers, and Anjou to the Dolphin, Constance is overjoyed; England is not yet bought:

King Philip. Thou shalt not need. England, I will fall from thee.

Constance. O fair return of banish’d majesty!

Eleanor. O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

(KJ III.i.319-22)

Frustrated by the failed alliance, John resorts to murder to secure the throne. Though thwarted at first in his attempt to have Arthur put to death, John eventually succeeds—only to discover that Arthur, dead, is more dangerous to his throne than Arthur alive, for his death gives the Dolphin a claim to the English throne as the result of the latter’s marriage to John’s niece. John’s repentance, then, is insincere; only when England faces invasion and conquest by France does he regret his complicity in Arthur’s death. John, then, in his own peculiar way, precedes Richard in his crime of “selling” England in order to possess a measure of security which he otherwise is too weak to acquire. Accordingly, when Rome crushes the alliance which would preserve John’s cession of the provinces of Volquessen, Tourain, Maine, Poictiers, and Anjou to the Dolphin, Constance is overjoyed; England is not yet bought:

King Philip. Thou shalt not need. England, I will fall from thee.

Constance. O fair return of banish’d majesty!

Eleanor. O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

(KJ III.i.319-22)

Frustrated by the failed alliance, John resorts to murder to secure the throne. Though thwarted at first in his attempt to have Arthur put to death, John eventually succeeds—only to discover that Arthur, dead, is more dangerous to his throne than Arthur alive, for his death gives the Dolphin a claim to the English throne as the result of the latter’s marriage to John’s niece. John’s repentance, then, is insincere; only when England faces invasion and conquest by France does he regret his complicity in Arthur’s death. John, then, in his own peculiar way, precedes Richard in his crime of “selling” England in order to possess a measure of security which he otherwise is too weak to acquire. Accordingly, when Rome crushes the alliance which would preserve John’s cession of the provinces of Volquessen, Tourain, Maine, Poictiers, and Anjou to the Dolphin, Constance is overjoyed; England is not yet bought:

King Philip. Thou shalt not need. England, I will fall from thee.

Constance. O fair return of banish’d majesty!

Eleanor. O foul revolt of French inconstancy!

(KJ III.i.319-22)