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KING JOHN

EDITED BY BARBARA A. MOWAT AND PAUL WERSTINE
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SHAKESPEARE

The Life and Death of
KING JOHN

BY
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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From the Director of the Library

For over thirty-five years, the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare has provided accurate and accessible texts of the plays and poems to students, teachers, and hundreds of thousands of other interested readers. Today, in an age often impatient with the past, the passion for Shakespeare continues to grow. No author speaks more powerfully to the human condition, in all its variety, than this actor/playwright from a minor sixteenth-century English village.

Over three decades, much has changed in the way Shakespeare's works are edited, performed, studied, and taught. It is time to replace the earlier Folger Shakespeare with an entirely new version, one that incorporates the best and most current thinking concerning both the texts and their interpretation. Professors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine are uniquely qualified to produce this New Folger Shakespeare for a new generation of readers. The Library is grateful for the learning, clarity, and imagination they have brought to this ambitious project.

**Werner Gundersheimer, Director
The Folger Shakespeare Library**

Editors' Preface

In recent years, ways of dealing with Shakespeare's texts and with the interpretation of his plays have been undergoing significant change. This edition, while retaining many of the features that have always made the Folger Shakespeare so attractive to the general reader, at the same time reflects these current ways of thinking about Shakespeare. For example, modern readers, actors, and teachers have become interested in the differences between, on the one hand, the early forms in which Shakespeare's plays were first published and, on the other hand, the forms in which editors through the centuries have presented them. In response to this interest, we have based our edition on what we consider the best early printed version of a particular play (explaining our rationale in a section called "An Introduction to This Text") and have marked our changes in the text—unobtrusively, we hope, but in such a way that the curious reader can be aware that a change has been made and can consult the "Textual Notes" to discover what appeared in the early printed version.

Current ways of looking at the plays are reflected in our brief prefaces, in many of the commentary notes, in the annotated lists of "Further Reading," and especially in each play's "Modern Perspective," an essay written by an outstanding scholar who brings to the reader his or her fresh assessment of the play in the light of today's interests and concerns.

As in the Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare, which this edition replaces, we include explanatory notes designed to help make Shakespeare's language clearer to a modern reader, and we place the notes on the page facing the text that they explain. We also follow the earlier edition in including illustra-

tions—of objects, of clothing, of mythological figures—from books and manuscripts in the Folger Library collection. We provide fresh accounts of the life of Shakespeare, of the publishing of his plays, and of the theaters in which his plays were performed, as well as an introduction to the text itself. We also include a section called “Reading Shakespeare’s Language,” in which we try to help readers learn to “break the code” of Elizabethan poetic language.

For each section of each volume, we are indebted to a host of generous experts and fellow scholars. The “Reading Shakespeare’s Language” sections, for example, could not have been written had not Arthur King, of Brigham Young University, and Randall Robinson, author of *Unlocking Shakespeare’s Language*, led the way in untangling Shakespearean language puzzles and shared their insights and methodologies generously with us. “Shakespeare’s Life” profited by the careful reading given it by the late S. Schoenbaum, “Shakespeare’s Theater” was read and strengthened by Andrew Gurr and John Astington, and “The Publication of Shakespeare’s Plays” is indebted to the comments of Peter W. M. Blayney. We, as editors, take sole responsibility for any errors in our editions.

We are grateful to the authors of the “Modern Perspectives”; to Gail Kern Paster for her unfailing interest and advice; to Leeds Barroll and David Bevington for their generous encouragement; to the Huntington and Newberry Libraries for fellowship support; to King’s College for the grants it has provided to Paul Werstine; to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, which provided him with a Research Time Stipend for 1990–91; to Deborah Curren-Aquino for helpful suggestions about the text and commentary; to R. J. Shroyer of the University of Western Ontario for essential computer support; to the Folger Institute’s

Center for Shakespeare Studies for its sponsorship of a workshop on "Shakespeare's Texts for Students and Teachers" (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by Richard Knowles of the University of Wisconsin), a workshop from which we learned an enormous amount about what is wanted by college and high-school teachers of Shakespeare today; to Alice Falk for her expert copyediting; and especially to Steve Llano, our production editor at Pocket Books, whose expertise and attention to detail are essential to this project. Among the texts we consulted, we found A. R. Braunmuller's Oxford *King John* (1989) and R. L. Smallwood's New Penguin *King John* (1974) particularly helpful.

Our biggest debt is to the Folger Shakespeare Library—to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Library, who made possible our edition; to Deborah Curren-Aquino, who provides extensive editorial and production support; to Jean Miller, the Library's former Art Curator, who combs the Library holdings for illustrations, and to Julie Ainsworth, Head of the Photography Department, who carefully photographs them; to Peggy O'Brien, former Director of Education at the Folger and now Director of Education Programs at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, who gave us expert advice about the needs being expressed by Shakespeare teachers and students (and to Martha Christian and other "master teachers" who used our texts in manuscript in their classrooms); to Allan Shnerson and Mary Bloodworth for their expert computer support; to the staff of the Academic Programs Division, especially Rachel Kunkle (whose help is crucial), Mary Tonkinson, Kathleen Lynch, Carol Brobeck, Toni Krieger, Liz Pohland, Owen Williams, and Lisa Meyers; and, finally, to the generously supportive staff of the Library's Reading Room.

Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine



Territories under the dominion of the English monarch in the early years of John's reign.

Stephen Llano, based on William Shepherd, *Historical Atlas*, 8th ed. (1956).

Shakespeare's *King John*

Like most of Shakespeare's history plays, *King John* presents a struggle for the crown of England. In this play, however, the struggle is located much further back in English history than is usual in Shakespeare's plays, and, perhaps for this reason, it is waged with a strikingly cold-blooded brutality. Most of the contestants for the throne are the descendants of King Henry II and Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine. The couple's eldest son, King Richard I or Richard Coeur de Lion, has already been killed before the play begins. The Duke of Austria, presented in the play as Richard's killer, enters wearing as a trophy the lion's skin taken from his victim. The play explains that Richard Coeur de Lion came by the skin and by his name when he ripped out the heart of a lion sent to attack him.

Richard's royal kin who compete to occupy the throne he vacated possess none of Coeur de Lion's legendary heroism; but John, the late Richard's younger brother, who holds the English crown when the play opens, lacks none of Richard's savagery. John's opponent is a boy, Arthur, the son of another of John's elder brothers now deceased. Arthur's cause has been taken up by the King of France and by the fierce-looking Austria, but nonetheless the boy falls into King John's hands among the spoils of victory that King John enjoys when he defeats France and Austria on the battlefield. No sooner has King John captured Arthur than he plots to torture his nephew and thereby put the boy's life at risk. But Arthur's capture fails to secure the throne for King John. Instead, it merely provides the opportunity for Louis, the Dauphin of France, to lay claim to King John's crown—a claim supported by King John's outraged nobles, whom Louis

schemes to reward for their assistance with a savage treachery to match King John's against Arthur.

While there are no royal heroes in *King John*, the play finds its hero in the Bastard, Sir Richard Plantagenet, an illegitimate son of Richard Coeur de Lion, who is identified as the Bastard's father in the first place by the Bastard's remarkable physical resemblance to him. By avenging his father through beheading the Duke of Austria in battle, the Bastard adds a chapter to his father's legendary career. Certainly the Bastard has an appetite for warfare and is impatient with any cessation of hostilities: "Cry havoc, kings!" he exclaims. "Back to the stained field, / You equal potents, fiery-kindled spirits. / Then let confusion of one part confirm / The other's peace. Till then, blows, blood, and death!" His bloodlust aside, the Bastard is given many attractive features—a trenchant irony that he directs against all kinds of pretension, and a strict conscience that threatens to drive him from his allegiance to King John once the Bastard learns of the plot against Arthur.

After you have read the play, we invite you to turn to the essay printed at the back of this book, "*King John: A Modern Perspective*," written by Dr. Deborah T. Curren-Aquino, a leading scholar of this play.

Reading Shakespeare's Language: *King John*

For many people today, reading Shakespeare's language can be a problem—but it is a problem that can be solved. Those who have studied Latin (or even French or German or Spanish), and those who are used to reading poetry, will have little difficulty understanding the lan-

guage of Shakespeare's poetic drama. Others, though, need to develop the skills of untangling unusual sentence structures and of recognizing and understanding poetic compressions, omissions, and wordplay. And even those skilled in reading unusual sentence structures may have occasional trouble with Shakespeare's words. Four hundred years of "static" intervene between his speaking and our hearing. Most of his immense vocabulary is still in use, but a few of his words are not, and, worse, some of his words now have meanings quite different from those they had in the sixteenth century. In the theater, most of these difficulties are solved for us by actors who study the language and articulate it for us so that the essential meaning is heard—or, when combined with stage action, is at least *felt*. When reading on one's own, one must do what each actor does: go over the lines (often with a dictionary close at hand) until the puzzles are solved and the lines yield up their poetry and the characters speak in words and phrases that are, suddenly, rewarding and wonderfully memorable.

Shakespeare's Words

As you begin to read the opening scenes of a play by Shakespeare, you may notice occasional unfamiliar words. Some are unfamiliar simply because we no longer use them. In the opening scenes of *King John*, for example, you will find the words "sooth" (i.e., truth), "holp" (i.e., helped), "Zounds" (i.e., by Christ's [or God's] wounds"), and "peisèd" (i.e., balanced). Words of this kind are explained in notes to the text and will become familiar the more of Shakespeare's plays you read.

In *King John*, as in all of Shakespeare's writing, the more problematic are the words that we still use but that we use with a different meaning. In the opening

scenes of *King John*, for example, the word *embassy* has the meaning of "message," *warned* is used where we would say "summoned," *fronts* is used where we would say "foreheads," and *likes* where we would say "pleases." Such words will be explained in the notes to the text, but they, too, will become familiar as you continue to read Shakespeare's language.

Some words are strange not because of the "static" introduced by changes in language over the past centuries but because these are words that Shakespeare is using to build dramatic worlds that have their own space, time, and history. *King John* tells the story of a battle for the English crown in the early thirteenth century, a time when much of the land that makes up present-day France was controlled by the monarch of England. It centers on the challenge to the reigning English king, John, by his nephew, Arthur, supported by King Philip of France. The play quickly establishes the geography of John's dominions, with references to such "dominations" as "Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine" (2.1.183, 1.1.11). It also sets the terms for Arthur's claim against John with charges that John's is a "borrowed majesty," that he "sways usurpingly" his "several titles" (1.1.4, 13), and that, by taking the English throne, he has "cut off the sequence of posterity, / Outfaced infant state, and done a rape / Upon the maiden virtue of the crown" (2.1.96-98). The earlier history lying behind the play is established with references to "Plantagenet" (1.1.9), to "Geoffrey . . . [John's] elder brother born" (2.1.104), and to "King Richard Coeur de Lion" and the legend of the "aweless lion [who] could not . . . keep his princely heart from Richard's hand" (1.1.261, 274-75).

An additional language world comes into the play with the character who soon becomes known as the Bastard. Philip Faulconbridge, who elects to abandon his legitimacy and announce himself as the bastard son

of Richard Coeur de Lion, speaks a language filled with allusions to legend and literature ("Colbrand the Giant," "Philip Sparrow," "Basilisco"), with words that reflect ordinary material life ("half-faced groat," "eel-skins stuffed," "absey-book"), with proverbs ("truth is truth," "have is have," "You are the hare of whom the proverb goes, / Whose valor plucks dead lions by the beard"), and with witty repartee and commentary. (In response to the Citizen's speech proposing a marriage between Louis, the Dauphin of France, and John's niece Blanche, for example, the Bastard comments: "Zounds, I was never so bethumped with words / Since I first called my brother's father Dad" [2.1.487-88].) The Bastard's language serves not only to characterize this unusually vital character but also to enrich a language world that is otherwise relatively one-dimensional. Unusual words that build the play's dramatic worlds will be explained in notes to the text.

Shakespeare's Sentences

In an English sentence, meaning is quite dependent on the place given each word. "The dog bit the boy" and "The boy bit the dog" mean very different things, even though the individual words are the same. Because English places such importance on the positions of words in sentences, on the way words are arranged, unusual arrangements can puzzle a reader. Shakespeare frequently shifts his sentences away from "normal" English arrangements—often to create the rhythm he seeks, sometimes to use a line's poetic rhythm to emphasize a particular word, sometimes to give a character his or her own speech patterns or to allow the character to speak in a special way. When we attend a good performance of the play, the actors will have

worked out the sentence structures and will articulate the sentences so that the meaning is clear. In reading for yourself, do as the actor does. That is, when you become puzzled by a character's speech, check to see if words are being presented in an unusual sequence.

Shakespeare often, for example, rearranges subjects and verbs (i.e., instead of "He goes" we find "Goes he"). In *King John*, when Chatillion says "Thus, after greeting, speaks the King of France" (1.1.2), he is using such a construction. So is King John when he says "Here have we war for war" (1.1.19). The "normal" order would be "The King of France speaks" and "We have war for war." Shakespeare also frequently places the object before the subject and verb (i.e., instead of "I hit him," we might find "Him I hit"). King John's command "An honorable conduct let him have" (1.1.29) is an example of such an inversion, as is Robert Faulconbridge's "Th' advantage of his absence took the King" (1.1.105). The "normal" order would be "Let him have an honorable conduct" and "The King took th' advantage of his absence."

Inversions are not the only unusual sentence structures in Shakespeare's language. Often in his sentences words that would normally appear together are separated from each other. Again, this is often done to create a particular rhythm or to stress a particular word. Take, for example, Chatillion's "Philip of France, in right and true behalf / Of thy deceased brother Geoffrey's son, / Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim / To this fair island" (1.1.7-10). Here, the phrase "in right and true behalf of thy deceased brother Geoffrey's son, Arthur Plantagenet" separates subject ("Philip of France") from verb ("lays"). Or take Chatillion's description of King John's troops:

*And all th' unsettled humors of the land—
Rash, inconsiderate, fiery voluntaries,*

With ladies' faces and fierce dragons' spleens—
Have sold their fortunes at their native homes,
Bearing their birthrights proudly on their backs,
To make a hazard of new fortunes here.

(2.1.66–71)

In this sentence the subject ("all th' unsettled humors of the land") and verb ("Have sold") are separated from each other by two lines standing in apposition to the subject. In those two intervening lines the bare appositive ("voluntaries") is modified by a series of adjectives that precede it ("Rash, inconsiderate, fiery") and by the adjective phrase that follows it ("With ladies' faces and fierce dragons' spleens"). In order to create for yourself sentences that seem more like the English of everyday speech, you may wish to rearrange the words, putting together the word clusters ("Philip of France lays most lawful claim" and "all th' unsettled humors of the land have sold their fortunes"). You will usually find that the sentence will gain in clarity but will lose its rhythm or shift its emphasis.

Sometimes, rather than separating basic sentence elements, Shakespeare simply holds them back, delaying them until other material to which he wants to give greater emphasis has been presented. Shakespeare puts this kind of construction in the mouth of the Bastard as he abandons his rights as heir to Sir Robert Faulconbridge's lands, dissociating himself entirely from Faulconbridge and from Faulconbridge's son:

an if my brother had my shape
And I had his, Sir Robert's his like him,
And if my legs were two such riding-rods,
My arms such eel-skins stuffed, my face so thin
That in mine ear I durst not stick a rose,
Lest men should say "Look where three-farthings
goes,"

And, to his shape, were heir to all this land,
Would I might never stir from off this place,
I would give it every foot to have this face.

(1.1.141-50)

Holding back the essential sentence elements, the subject and the verb ("I would give"), the Bastard first provides an extensive catalogue of the meager physical features that characterize both the late Sir Robert and his son Robert Faulconbridge (tiny "arms" like "eel-skins stuffed," and thin "legs" like "riding-rods"). This prolonged contemptuous description provides the grounds for his final declaration in the last two lines of his speech: that is, if I am not telling the truth, may I never move from where I stand—the truth being that I would give every foot of this land in order to have the face that I have.

Finally, in many of Shakespeare's plays, sentences are sometimes complicated not because of unusual structures or interruptions but because Shakespeare omits words and parts of words that English sentences normally require. (In conversation, we, too, often omit words. We say, "Heard from him yet?" and our hearer supplies the missing "Have you.") Frequent reading of Shakespeare—and of other poets—trains us to supply the words missing from elliptical speeches. This play provides some examples in its very first scene, where King John and his mother, Queen Eleanor, have an exchange so laconic that it may alert an audience to their anxiety about John's ambiguous right to the throne. After Queen Eleanor rebukes John for going immediately to war rather than negotiating with France, John says, using the royal "we," "Our strong possession and our right for us." Queen Eleanor's response matches her son's in its abruptness: "Your strong possession much more than your right" (1.1.39-40). John's

line can be expanded as follows: "My strong possession of the throne and my right to the throne are both on my side." And the meaning of Queen Eleanor's elliptical speech is immediately clear: "You will prevail only because you have 'strong possession,' for your right to the throne is not strong." The terseness of this conversation—which depends in part on the familiarity of various proverbs ("possession is nine points of the law," "possession is stronger than an ill charter," etc.)—suggests that John's right to rule is so uncertain that it will not bear extensive discussion, even between himself and his mother.

Shakespearean Wordplay

Shakespeare plays with language so often and so variously that entire books are written on the topic. Here we will mention only two kinds of wordplay, puns and metaphors. Puns in *King John* sometimes play on the multiple meanings of a single word and sometimes on the different meanings of words that sound the same. In the play's first scene, for example, Robert Faulconbridge invokes his father's will, the legal document that names him as heir, as his authority for challenging his brother Philip: "Shall then my father's will be of no force / To dispossess that child which is not his?" Philip, later to be called "the Bastard," replies, "Of no more force to dispossess me, sir, / Than was his will to get me, as I think" (1.1.133–36). Philip's response repeats Robert's use of the word *will*, but puns on the word's meaning of "intention" (with possible wordplay on such other meanings as "carnal desire" and "penis"). In the same scene, when King John wants to know why Robert claims land that by the law of primogeniture should belong to Philip, Philip responds: "Because he hath a