

# A Lockean Analysis of the Problem of Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Shakespeare's King John

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## Abstract

This article examines the representation of authority, political power, and legitimacy in William Shakespeare's *King John* by establishing connections to John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*. To this end, the study argues that these themes have similarities in both works. *King John* enables an opportunity to examine the dynamics of political power and ambition, as the king's legitimacy to the English throne is questionable when assessed from Locke's perspective of political philosophy. Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* provides a theoretical framework for the principles of political authority and its legitimacy, facilitating the potential of opposition against the King. Locke's concepts regarding property rights, consent, and the social contract established a significant influence on political philosophy in the Enlightenment era. Therefore, the study examines Locke's ideas related to the political discourse to compare them to Shakespeare's *King John*. Finally, the study suggests a parallel between the play and Locke's work through indicating their similarities through a thorough evaluation of both works.

**Keywords:** John Locke, Shakespeare, King John, political philosophy, government, social contract.

## SHAKESPEARE'İN KRAL JOHN OYUNUNDA EGEMENLİK VE MEŞRUIYET PROBLEMİNİN LOCKEÇU ANALİZİ

## Öz

Bu makale, William Shakespeare'in *Kral John* oyununda otorite, siyasi güç ve meşruiyetin temsilini, John Locke'un *Hükümet Üzerine İkinci İnceleme* eseriyle bağlantılar kurarak incelemektedir. Bu amaçla, çalışmada bu temaların her iki eserde de benzerlikler taşıdığı ileri sürülmektedir. *Kral John*, kralın İngiliz tahtına olan meşruiyetinin Locke'un siyaset felsefesi perspektifinden değerlendirildiğinde sorgulanabilir olduğu bir siyasi güç ve hırs dinamiklerini inceleme fırsatı sunar. Locke'un *Hükümet Üzerine İkinci İnceleme* eseri, siyasi otoritenin ilkeleri ve meşruiyeti için teorik bir çerçeve sağlar ve krala karşı muhalefet potansiyelini kolaylaştırır. Locke'un mülkiyet hakları, rıza ve toplumsal sözleşme ile ilgili kavramları, Aydınlanma döneminde siyaset felsefesi üzerinde önemli bir etki yaratmıştır. Bu nedenle, çalışma, Locke'un siyasi söylemle ilgili fikirlerini inceleyerek bunları Shakespeare'in *Kral John* eseriyle karşılaştırmaktadır. Son olarak, çalışma, her iki

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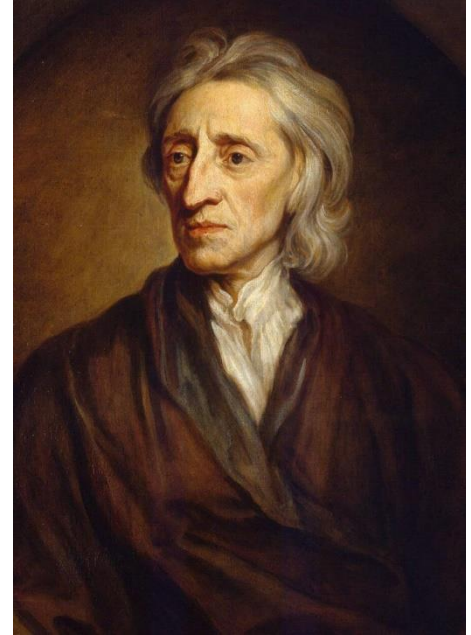
eserin kapsamlı bir değerlendirmesi yoluyla oyun ve Locke'un eseri arasında bir paralellik önererek benzerliklerini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar sözcükler:** John Locke, Shakespeare, Kral John, siyaset felsefesi, hükümet, toplumsal sözleşme.

## INTRODUCTION

John Locke (1632-1704) was highly knowledgeable with respect to the topics of liberal democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. His political solutions were not only relevant to his own time but also applicable to past, and the present day (Andrew, 2015, pp. 16-18). The events of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, along with religious conflicts, established the foundation for the emergence of liberalism, and the dominance of rationality (Davis, 2012, p. 466). This emphasized the importance of individual rights, and liberties. Locke's emphasis on natural law, and moral equality has contributed to the concept of liberal democracy which was founded on the social contract (Reichel, 2013, p. 104). Liberalism has maintained a considerable influence within different domains from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has affected the preservation of intellectual liberty, the freedom of expression, and the protection of personal possessions. Furthermore, in regard to the principles of democracy and human rights, liberalism has functioned as a source for political discourse in the Western world (Evren, 2021, pp. 968-9).

Widerquist and McCall remark that, for Locke, the individuals within the state of nature have basic moral privileges, including the right to self-defence and to administer punishment to those who violate their rights (2018, p. 66). The conflicts and challenges present in the state of nature are enough to drive individuals to agree to a social contract (Widerquist and McCall, 2018, p. 66; Tarlton, 2004, p. 269). This capacity, however, includes the ability to resist oppressive governments and to use the freedom to consent to political association as the basis for creating new communities after overthrowing tyranny (Tarlton, 2004, p. 269). However, as Venezia states, since the law of nature is an eternal one, it sets "a standard to which civil law must conform" (2019, p. 227). Within the state of nature, as Ward puts forth, an individual possesses the inborn ability to punish another person without the approval of "any political or religious institution" through "the natural executive power of the law of nature" (2005, p. 723). Thus, such an executive power is "the source of government" (Ward, 2005, p. 723).



John Locke

Parallel to this, Shakespeare's *The Life and Death of King John* can be associated with John Locke's the state of nature, the social contract, and the dissolution of the government. While Locke defines the state of nature before the formation of the state, the social contract and the understanding of legitimate government, these concepts also manifest themselves in King John's reign and the

political turmoil of the period (Armitage, 2004, pp. 602-604). King John's reign is characterized by a struggle for power and legitimacy, while the conflicts between nobles and commoners reflect the search for equality and freedom in the state of nature. Royal rights and foreign invasions are linked to Locke's understanding of the state in terms of sovereignty and territorial integrity and reflect the struggles for sovereignty of the period. Relations with the papacy, on the other hand, show the conflict between religious and political power and the freedom of conscience of individuals in a way comparable to Locke's ideas (Bates, 2012, pp. 98-99). In this way, the relationship between Shakespeare's play and Locke's ideas provides an understanding of the political and philosophical ideas of the period and offers a new perspective on both fields of study.

### **1. LOCKE'S STATE OF NATURE, THE STATE OF WAR, AND THE POLITICAL SOCIETY**

John Locke (1632-1704) in his *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) explains the state of nature in which the individual may enjoy complete freedom and equality "as a rational maxim of natural law" (Hunt Jr., 2016, p. 550). In this state, everyone has the right to act as they wish and manage their possessions within the confines of the "law of nature" (Locke, 1980, p. 9). Therefore, individuals may have the right to act against those who violate this law to uphold the security and welfare of the entire population (p. 10). Individuals, however, put safety and peace at risk if they violate the social compact in the law of nature (Graf, 2018, pp. 565-565; Forde, 2001, pp.397-398). This state, however, does not mean an uncontrolled license (Bates, 2012, p. 101). The law of nature controls all individuals in the state of nature, and everyone is required to adhere to it. Regarding the equality and independence of all individuals, no one should impose harm on another person's life, health, freedom, or possessions (Locke, 1980, p. 9). In such a case, consent must be based on reason; hence "there are limits to the" power it can establish (Corbett, 2009, p. 21).

Related to this, Locke contends, "Everyone... ought... to preserve the rest of mankind" (1980, p. 9). In the state of nature, power is based on mutual adherence to natural law, with a primary aim of preserving humanity (Bates, 2012, pp. 101-102). Therefore, Locke justifies self-defence, likening a violator to "a wolf or a lion", as unreasonable actions threaten others and can be resisted (1980, p. 14). Acquiring power through force is a declaration of war, as it threatens personal freedom and preservation, as anyone who tries to dominate another is declaring a state of war against that person (Graf, 2018, p. 567-568; Davis, 2012, pp. 468-470; Locke, 1980, p. 14). To avoid such a possibility of war, Locke emphasizes the crucial role of "communication among human beings" (Guyer, 1999, p. 118).

By the state of nature Locke means, "Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth, with authority to judge between them" (1980, p. 15), characterized by peace and equality under natural law (Glasgow, 2015, pp. 369-370). However, the state of war is defined by "force, or a declared design of force, upon the person of another" in case there is no higher authority "on earth" to turn to for resolution (Locke, 1980, p. 15). The state of war continues until a legitimate authority intervenes or the violator seeks peace (Bates, 2012, p. 106). Locke also discusses on familial and political organizations in which parental authority does not grant dominion over a child's property or actions (Brubaker, 2012, pp. 214-215). That "princes" get their

titles from their fathers is enough to show that fathers have a natural right to lead, because they are usually the ones in charge of the government. Therefore, Locke examines the validity of deriving monarchical rule from paternal authority (1980, p. 41-42). He explores various social constructs, distinguishing familial relationships from political organizations in each of which, in times of problematic issues, one is “to listen to the voice of reason” (Wolterstorff, 1999, p. 184). Although everyone is born with certain rights and freedoms, including the ability to judge and implement laws, when forming political societies, individuals transfer some of these rights to an authority to resolve disputes and establish order, as it “is a moral law discoverable by reason” (Schneewind, 1999, p. 201). Locke explains that a political society exists only where every individual has relinquished their natural power to the community (1980, p. 46). This transfer is not giving up freedom but generating an agreement to protect the rights and properties of the community. Locke criticizes absolute monarchy, as it contradicts the idea of a civil society (Evren, 2021, p. 969; Woolhouse, 1999, p. 147). He believes that a true civil or political society must have a shared authority that everyone can use to resolve disputes and protect their rights. He maintains that “absolute monarchy” conflicts with civil society and thus cannot be recognized as a legitimate form of government (Locke, 1980, p. 47). His criticism applies to any government that does not protect individual rights, likening those situations to a state of nature, not a civil society.

### **1.1. The beginning, and ends of the political society, and the power structure**

Locke believes that reason, and politics have been connected to one another, as his works present the idea that “political theorizing was an exercise in practical reasoning” (Ashcraft, 1999, p. 226). Locke suggests that people naturally come together to form governments through agreements because they prefer living in society and want to avoid the problems of living alone. Locke, therefore, stresses on the role of consent and agreement in generating political societies. The act and essence of forming a “political society” is the agreement of several free individuals, who are capable of forming a majority, to unite and integrate “into such a society” (Locke, 1980, p. 52). In examining why people leave the freedom of the state of nature to form governments, Locke asks why individuals would choose to give up their independence: “why will [man] part with his freedom? why will he give up this empire, and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power?” (1980, p. 65). Related to those questions, Locke suggests that the state of nature is insecure and dangerous. People form societies and governments to create a safer and more stable life, especially to protect their possessions, as he points out that one of the main goals is “the preservation of their property” (1980, p. 65). While individuals lose some personal freedoms, they gain collective security and order in return. Locke argues that when people form a government, they do not give up their rights or accept arbitrary control. The duty of the government is to make and enforce laws fairly, judge cases independently, and use its power only to uphold the law and protect the community. These efforts are all aimed at maintaining peace, safety, and the welfare of everyone.

Locke distinguishes between “Paternal, Political, and Despotical Power”, as he defines paternal power arising from the duty and natural inclination of parents to nurture and guide their children until they reach reason. Political power arises when individuals in a state of nature submit their natural rights for the common good of life, liberty, and property. Locke stresses that this power

is a trust assigned to the rulers by the governed, primarily through agreement and consent, with the purpose of creating and enforcing laws to protect society (1980, p. 89). Despotical power, for Locke, is “absolute and arbitrary”, permitting one person to take another’s life at will (1980, p. 89). It arises in a state of war when one person subjugates another due to their actions. Unlike paternal and political power, despotical power is punitive and emerges from a violation of natural law. Locke asserts that the extent to which “paternal power” falls short of magisterial power is the same extent to which “despotical” surpasses it. He also remarks that “absolute dominion”, regardless of how it is established, is not only distinct from one form of “civil society” but is also as incompatible with it “as slavery is with property” (1980, pp. 90-91).

### **1.2. The dissolution of a government and the idea of resistance**

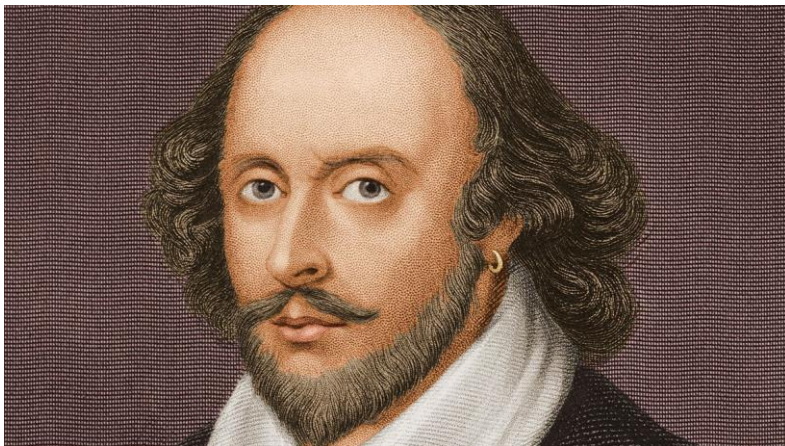
For “the Dissolution of Government” Locke examines the dynamics contributing to a breakdown of a government while emphasizing the distinction between the dissolution of society and the government itself. The sense of communal unity is susceptible to dissolution, particularly through foreign conquest or internal discord. However, there, the role of the legislation is crucial, as it is the “soul” of a government and altering or dissolving the legislative may lead to the “dissolution and death” of the society itself (1980, p. 107). Therefore, any alteration of the legislative body, whether through usurpation, obstruction, or corruption, removes the essence and unity of society. Locke warns against the potential for a ruler to disrupt this harmony by altering the legislative for personal gain or imposing arbitrary rule, thereby severing the social contract with the people (1980, p. 109). The ruler, from Locke’s perspective, stands for “the purpose of securing to each member of society his life, liberty, and estate” (Goldstein, 2001, pp. 313-314).

Locke, however, contends that people are naturally resistant to altering established governments. Nevertheless, he accepts that mistreatment or tyranny can provoke a justified response, as “people are not so easily got out of their old forms, as some are apt to suggest” (1980, p. 112). Yet, when subjected to ongoing abuses, they may be willing to relieve “themselves of a burden that” weighs heavily on them whenever the opportunity arises (Locke, 1980, p. 113). Thus, the stability of a government is subject to its adherence to and safeguarding of the rights and possessions of people. Locke argues that when rulers themselves become aggressors, they essentially oppose the people and are in a state of rebellion against the society that appointed them. However, the dissolution of government is neither swift nor common, as it necessitates a “long train of abuses, prevarications and artifices, all tending the same way” (1980, p. 113), making the complaints and the mismanagement of the government apparent. He emphasizes that the right of people to resist or reconstitute the government is a safeguard for their liberties, not an encouragement of anarchy. This doctrine serves to provide a means for people to protect themselves against tyranny, not to incite another rebellion. In cases of dispute or uncertainty, the collective body of the people serves as the appropriate mediator when the law is unclear or questionable, particularly in crucial public matters (Locke, 1980, p. 122). Regarding the potential disputes between the “prince” (and/or the ruler) and the people, Locke argues that “if the prince, or whoever they be in the administration, decline that way of determination, the appeal then lies nowhere but to heaven” (1980, p. 123). He implies that when solutions are unattainable, one should turn to the greater principles of justice and natural

rights, emphasizing that these foundational laws should prevail. Locke concludes with the importance of the social contract and the long-lasting authority held by the community. He explains that the authority each person granted to the society upon joining it cannot return to individuals so long as the society exists; instead, it always resides within the community (Locke, 1980, p. 124).

## 2. "LAY ASIDE THE SWORD / WHICH SWAYS USURPINGLY...TITLES": LEGITIMATE VS. USURPED RULER IN *KING JOHN*

Shakespeare, through his history plays, and tragedies, represents the connection between religious and political power; how tradition, law, and personality contribute to political legitimacy; the reasons for opposing those in authority; and, broadly, the criteria for morally and practically assessing a country's history (Klause, 2001, p. 402). Also, primarily based on the male lineage, the concept of identity was highly influential in the "English chronicle histories" of the sixteenth century, and they served as among the main sources for Shakespeare's English history plays (Saeger, 2001, p. 6; Sağıroğlu, 2017, p. 1555). *King John* is no exception, as the play begins with a common theme of the history plays: a contested right to the crown (Jackson, 2006, p. 85; Archer, et al., 2012, p. 519). Among many other analogies, Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* supplies "a justification for active resistance to the illegitimate authority of the king" (Ashcraft, 1999, p. 227). Such a resistance to illegitimacy is the case even at the beginning of Shakespeare's *King John*.



William Shakespeare

The central theme of the play revolves around the struggle for power and legitimacy among different classes, individuals, and nations. Philip the Bastard enters the scene in Act One, asserting his loyalty to the king and opposing aristocratic recognition against rivals like Robert Faulconbridge (Anderson, 2004, p. 35). His arrival coincides with King John's conflict with France, representing the

intertwining of personal and national claims to legitimacy. In the opening lines of Act I, Chatillion of France says, "speaks the King of France / ... / the Borrowed majesty, of England here" (I.i.2-4) which present the questioning of King John's sovereignty by France. The representation of disputed authority and the pursuit of rightful governance in this context coincides with Locke's concepts outlined in the *Second Treatise of Government*. In this work, Locke asserts that legitimate political power must be established through the consent of the governed and the protection of natural rights (Locke, 1980, pp. 9-10).

*King John*, however, is pressured to acknowledge the claim of young Arthur, Geoffrey's son, to the crown, and Philip II of France contributes to this pressure (Cox, 2016, p. 614; Griffiths, 2020, p. 79). Related to the establishment of authority, Locke asserts, "men being, as has been said, by

nature, all free, equal, and independent” to emphasize that political subjugation requires consent, as individuals establish “one body politic, wherein the majority have a right to act and conclude the rest” (Locke, 1980, p. 52). Also, the challenge of France to King John’s rule: “Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim / to this fair island... / ... / Desiring thee to lay aside the sword/ which sways usurpingly these several titles ...” (I.i.10-13) represents a dispute over the legitimacy of sovereignty. The French demand for young Arthur is consistent with Locke’s concept that political authority is derived from the consensual agreement of the people. For Locke, individuals are bound by the law of nature, which dictates, “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions” (Locke, 1980, p. 9). Philip of France stands for Arthur’s “liberty” and “possessions”, as King John harms them. The French urge to set aside the sword, symbolizing authoritarian rule, strengthens Locke’s claim that legitimate political authority is founded upon a social contract and mutual consent (Locke, 1980, p. 89), as King John has “a disturbing power to transform established ideas and forms of political organization” (Evans, 2009, p. 1). The presented conflict may illustrate the struggle between unjustly acquired power and legitimate sovereignty, and it presents Locke’s assertion that legitimate political authority must be just and acquired through the consent of the governed ones (Locke, 1980, pp. 51-52). Both Shakespeare’s representation of *King John* and Locke’s work, in this sense, address the concept of political legitimacy and the effects that arise from its misuse.

However, King John’s response to the French challenge “Here have we war for war and blood for blood, / Controlment for controlment: so, answer France” (I.i.19-20) represents Locke’s discussion on the state of war, as when one party intends to harm another, a state of war ensues (Locke, 1980, p. 14). For Locke, “The state of war is a state of enmity and destruction”, and when someone declares an intention to harm another’s life, it “puts him in a state of war” (Locke, 1980, p. 14). Hence, King John’s calling for war and exerting dominance symbolize a condition of warfare in which mutual agreement and laws of nature are disregarded in favour of force and hostility which contribute to both the “political and dramatic function in the play” (Evans, 2009, p. 3). Locke justifies resistance to tyranny, which takes place, “when the Governor...makes not the law, but his will, the rule, and his commands and actions are not directed to the preservation of the properties of his people, but the satisfaction of his own ambition...” (Locke, 1980, p. 101). Therefore, King John acts in accord with his personal interests (Ashcraft, 1999, p. 228), as he disregards the “political system headed by a monarch” who cares public good above all (Cox, 2016, p. 609).

Philip Faulconbridge’s (the Bastard) claim to the Faulconbridge estate: “I suppose, to Robert Faulconbridge, / A soldier, by the honour-giving hand / Of Coeur de Lion knighted in the field” (I.i.53-55), and “for the certain knowledge of that truth / I put you o’er to heaven and to my mother. / Of that I doubt, as all men’s children may” (I.i.62-64), and his decision to forsake his claim in favour of knighthood: “Brother, take you my land. I’ll take my chance. / ... / .../ Madam, I’ll follow you unto the death” (I.i.155-58) have parallels with Locke’s views on property and personal rights, in that, property is a personal right (Locke, 1980, p. 65). Locke’s concept of property rights symbolizes his emphasis on the rights of the individual (Forde, 2009, p. 430). Under the preservation of the authority, property becomes a personal right, and if one takes the other “under his power”, then, he

may “take away [the other’s] property” (Dilts, 2012, p. 65). Related to Faulconbridge, Tillyard remarks that “Shakespeare conceived him ...passionately and gifted him with [an] unbreakable individuality” (1946, p. 229). The Bastard’s decision to surrender his land in exchange for a title exemplifies the act of voluntarily leaving certain privileges in favour of perceived higher advantages within the context of politics. Faulconbridge’s search for property, however, contradicts with Locke’s idea of property, as “Locke sets forth a natural right to acquire property by work” (Faulkner, 2001, p. 7). On the other hand, the political system of the play weakens the impact of Faulconbridge, whose birth outside of marriage challenges the male-dominated rules of the play’s world (Anderson, 2004, p. 36).

Queen Eleanor’s reflections on the political situation: “... the manage of two kingdoms must / With fearful bloody issue arbitrate” (I.i.37-38) emphasize Locke’s perspective on the state of war and peace because in the absence of a common judge with authority, people live in a state of nature, which may escalate into a state of war (Locke, 1980, p. 15). Two of the mothers, Queen Eleanor and Constance, are political rivals. Eleanor, King John’s mother, and Constance, who aspires to be queen or regent through her late husband Geoffrey (John’s older brother), position their son Arthur as a contender for the throne (Valls-Russell, 2017, p. 89). The third mother, Lady Falconbridge, was Richard the Lionheart’s mistress and is the mother of his illegitimate child, the Bastard. The dynamics of family loyalty intertwine with matters of succession (Schwarz, 2003, p. 239). Therefore, the dispute over the Faulconbridge inheritance: “Upon his deathbed he by will bequeathed / His lands to me, and took it on his death / That this my mother’s son was none of his... (I.i.112-14) may be compared with Locke’s views on property and legitimacy, as Locke argues that property rights are a crucial reason for individuals to enter into political society (Locke, 1980, p. 65). For Locke, the child’s “relationship with his father is not ...a political relationship” (Klausen, 2007, p. 763). Therefore, the dispute between Robert and Philip Faulconbridge over their inheritance represents the desire to secure property, which, in Locke’s view, necessitates a structured society and governance to uphold such rights. As for his relation to the society, the Bastard realizes that he belongs in his era, but this feeling does not mean he is totally involved in it (I.i.205-216). Even though he fits well into his time, he also feels disconnected from it. Within this framework, the difference between belonging, and alienation may suggest Locke’s idea that individuals can be part of a democratic community while maintaining uncertainty about the legitimacy and validity of its institutions (Locke, 1980, pp. 9-11). Hence, the Bastard enables a way to examine the complex correlation between personal identity, and state power.

In Act 2, the Dauphin’s assertion, “And to rebuke the usurpation / Of thy unnatural uncle, English John” (II.i.9-10), challenges John’s authority, akin to Locke’s criticism of absolute monarchy and inherited sovereignty. King John’s refusal of Arthur’s right to the throne can be viewed as an example of Lockean usurpation. The concept involves seizing control without rightful authority, which can result in tyranny and destabilize the existing governmental structure (Locke, 1980, pp. 100-101). For a government to operate efficiently, leaders must be chosen through a process generated with the consent of the people. Without agreement, usurpers such as King John in this case, or their offspring, are unable to assert a valid right to govern. It highlights the significance of



legal and ethical leadership in preserving the stability and integrity of a government's framework (pp. 100-101). Furthermore, King John's declaration, "Peace be to France, if France in peace permit / Our just and lineal entrance to our own" (II.i.85-86), and his subsequent lines through to "Which owe the crown that thou o'ermasterest?" (II.i.100-105) exemplifies the doubtful character of his governance because the conversation questions King John's authority, raising doubts about the legitimacy of his rule by claiming that he seized power (Erdem Ayyıldız, 2019, p. 1042-43). This charge suggests that John's rule is seen as illegitimate and involves a betrayal of family trust. On the other hand, John proclaims his legitimate right to the throne to bring out his hope of peaceful collaboration and regaining what he believes is properly his. The lines (II.i.100-105) suggest a feeling of entitlement and superiority, which could provoke resistance to his leadership. Therefore, such interactions illustrate the complex interactions of power, legitimacy, and resistance in the play, where John's authority is both questioned and reaffirmed.

The preparation for war, with Austria proclaiming, "The peace of heaven is theirs that lift their swords / In such a just and charitable war" (II.i.35-36), has parallels with Locke's statement: "For where there is no law, there is no freedom" (Locke, 1980, p. 46), as when natural rights are violated, a state of war ensues (Locke, 1980, p. 14). For Locke, the "natural rights [are] at the core of his political philosophy" (Seagrave, 2011, p. 326). This is also represented when King Philip declares, "England, impatient of your just demands, / Hath put himself in arms" (II.i.55-56), signifying the readiness of the French king and his supporters to engage in a battle with England to restore what they regard as the correct social and political structure. However, England is represented to go through difficult times with self-centred leadership, fighting inside the country, and dealing with other countries, but also enjoys short periods of success with peace, growth, and economic prosperity (Watson, 1990, p. 123). Therefore, King Philip's and King John's pronouncements about their claims and the safeguarding of rights under their sovereignties reflect Locke's perspectives on political power and governance.

However, the dialogue between the Citizen and the Kings about recognizing the true king represents Locke's consent of the governed as essential for legitimate rule (Locke, 1980, p. 52). The citizen's declaration, "Till you compound whose right is worthiest, / We for the worthiest hold the right from both" (II.i.290-91), emphasizes Locke's idea that political legitimacy is derived from a lawful claim and popular acceptance, not merely from force or inheritance. Similarly, the citizen's later assertion, "A greater power than we denies all this, / And till it be undoubted, we do lock / Our former scruple in our strong-barred gates" (II.i.385-387), also reflects the Lockean principle that authority must be substantiated and acknowledged by the people. The increasing conflict, however, between King John and King Philip over their rights and territories represents Locke's idea that when peaceful negotiations fail and natural rights are threatened, societies may get into a state of war (Locke, 1980, p. 14), as may be exemplified by King John's speech, "Whose passage, vexed with thy impediment, / Shall leave his native channel and o'erswell / With course disturbed even thy confining shores" (II.i.350-352). However, as Cox (2016, p. 622) remarks, Philip the Bastard convinces John and Lewis to pause their feud and jointly focus their fury on taking Angiers, implying they can reignite their quarrel after the city's defeat: "...Fortune shall cull forth / Out of

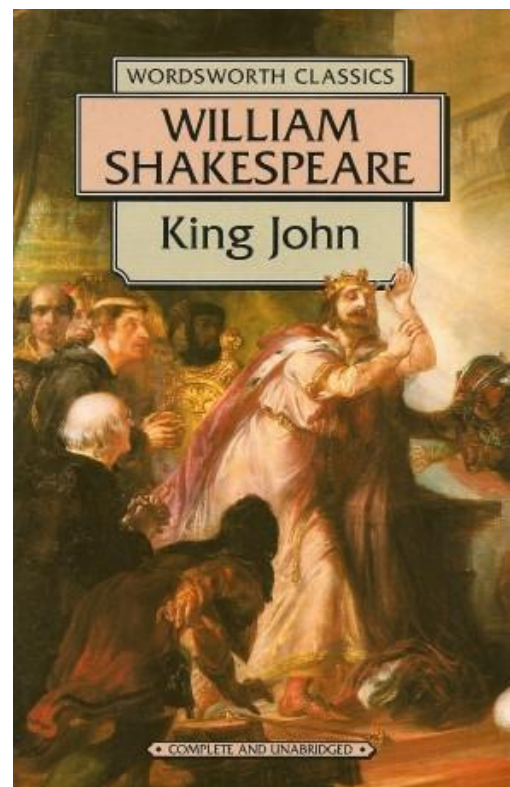
one side her happy minion, / To whom in favor she shall give the day, / And kiss him with a glorious victory" (II.i.387-394).

In Act 3, the fragility of political alliances and their impact on individuals is further represented. Challenge to absolute monarchy is represented through King John's interaction with Pandulph and his subsequent defiance of the Pope's authority, as he states, "So, under Him, that great supremacy / Where we do reign, we will alone uphold / Without th' assistance of a mortal hand" (III.i.160-162). This statement may represent Locke's criticism of absolute monarchy, as it epitomizes the struggle between ecclesiastical power and the sovereignty of the state to emphasize the tension between religious authority and political autonomy. Locke supposes that in case the governed people are involved in illegal activities, or if only a few are affected but it seems like the situation could harm everyone, including their laws, property, freedoms, and even religion, it is hard to imagine they would not try to stop the unfair authoritative treatment they are facing (1980, p. 106; Milton, 1999, p. 23). As King John says,

Though you and all the kings of Christendom  
Are led so grossly by this meddling priest,  
Dreading the curse that money may buy out,  
And by the merit of vile gold, dross, dust,  
Purchase corrupted pardon of a man,  
Who in that sale sells pardon from himself;  
Though you and all the rest, so grossly led,  
This juggling witchcraft with revenue cherish,  
Yet I alone, alone do me oppose  
Against the Pope and count his friends my foes."  
(III.i.88-98)

King John's criticism of the Pope's control over the government and exposure of corruption within the Catholic Church may also represent a Lockean resistance, as King John alleges that the Pope is using the promise of forgiveness in return for money to influence rulers, emphasizing the moral decline inside the Church. King John resists the Pope's authority while other monarchs comply, representing the conflict between secular rule and ecclesiastical influence.

In Act 4, the tension between Hubert's duty and his conscience comes to the fore as he prepares to blind Arthur: "Heat me these irons hot; and look thou stand within the arras" (IV.i.1). Locke is concerned about the limits of authority and the responsibilities of those in power. For Locke, if authority fails due to errors of judgment, then power returns to the society, and at such a point, individuals possess the authority to act as the ultimate authority (1980, p. 124). Hubert later relents, "I have sworn to do it; And with hot irons must I burn them out" (IV.i.65) which may represent the moral autonomy of individuals within the structures of power. Therefore, Hubert's struggle between following royal orders and his moral compass, especially in his interactions with Arthur, is a representation of Locke's emphasis on ethical decision-making. Arthur's innocence and his plea, "Must you with hot irons burn out both mine eyes?" (IV.i.40), challenge Hubert's sense of duty,



prompting him to make a choice based on conscience rather than blind obedience, reflecting Locke's view on reason and morality guiding actions, as he states that anyone who uses force unlawfully, without legal cause, enters a state of war with those they employ force against (Altunsoy, 2017, pp. 362-63). At such a point, all existing relationships are broken, additional rights are dismissed, and individuals possess the right to protect themselves and resist the aggressor (Locke, p. 116). In this sense, the king becomes an "aggressor", as he acts "without law". Related to this, Sobehrad remarks that John had violated the innocence of the crown throughout the play, as he led to the emergence of the state of war (2017, p. 12). Hubert shows resistance and detachment from the king's authority. The king's authority is shaken because of his self-interested actions. This is the case in many historical plays in which events are selected and interpreted based on the flawed decisions and actions of humans, rather than their connection to divine (Cox, 2016, p. 609). However, for Locke when rules are no longer followed, tyranny emerges. If someone in charge goes beyond their allowed power and uses force to harm others against the law, they stop being a lawful leader. In such cases, they can be opposed like anyone else who unjustly uses force against someone's rights (Locke, 1980, p. 103).

King John's misuse of power and the Lords' response to Arthur's supposed death: "This is the man should do the bloody deed" (IV.ii.70), echo Locke's concerns over the abuse of authority, as John's power is represented to be unlimited. Related to this, Locke remarks that the main purpose individuals unite in society is to protect their possessions. They create and authorize a legislative body to pass laws and set regulations to protect the property of all individuals in society. These rules act as challenges and rules designed to limit the influence and limit the power of each person in the community (Locke, p. 111). Therefore, Locke's philosophy emphasizes the use of power for the common good, and this scene reflects the consequences of using authority for personal gains. From a Lockean perspective, under such circumstances, when the monarch transforms into a tyrant, resistance becomes a necessity. The challenge lies in explaining the process of this transformation and providing a rationale for opposing tyranny (Ashcraft, 1999, p. 227). However, the death of Arthur is a "pivotal moment in the dramatic structure of" the play, as deception and manipulation by King John are central to this scene, particularly in his handling of the situation related to Arthur's fate (Miller, 2016, p. 209). This reflects Locke's concerns about the integrity and honesty required in governance, as the king acts in accordance with "not for the good of those, who are under it, but for his own private separate advantage" (1980, p. 101).

King John contradicts with the Lockean law of nature since "no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions" (Locke, 1980, p. 9). John's self-interested actions lead to loss of trust since the ruler is expected to preserve the natural right which is, from a Lockean perspective, "vital for practical politics" (Reno, 2009, p. 642). As Locke indicates, a ruler cannot have "a distinct and separate interest from the good of the community" (1980, p. 85). If the legislative body violates the fundamental principle of society by attempting to seize absolute authority over the lives, freedoms, and properties of the people, they are declaring war on the people, whether driven by ambition, fear or corruption (Locke, p. 111). Similar to such a view, the lords change sides because of Arthur's death, showing Locke's idea that good government needs trust. Their decision to go to

the Dauphin, saying "Away, toward Bury, to the Dauphin there" (IV.iii.120), shows that trust to the authority is broken. In this case, Arthur's death provides a reason for the baron's rebellion (Groves, 2004, p. 279). When a ruler becomes a tyrant, they move from being a "public" figure to a "private" one. In this private role, they lack the "right" to use force against the people. Instead, the people have the right to defend themselves and resist the actions of a tyrant with force, as is the case in Act 4 and 5 (Ashcraft, 1999, p. 230). Therefore, by the time the individuals have the right to resist, political power may get into trouble (Marden, 2006, p. 59). Act 4 ends with the Bastard's lines with Hubert carrying Arthur's body (IV.iii.147-167) as he relates chaos to uncertainty, and instability. The lines serve as a criticism on the chaotic situation in England. He starts by feeling amazed and disoriented in the middle of chaos, feeling he is lost "among the thorns and dangers of this world" (IV.iii.149). The Bastard considers the fragile nature of England's stability, expressing regret over how easily the nation's destiny can be altered without a powerful central authority. He illustrates the power struggle between rival factions, detailing the disintegration of the "unow'd interest of proud swelling state" (IV.iii.155). War is approaching as a menacing force that disturbs peace and stability (Ağır, 2013, p. 213). The lines emphasize the Bastard's awareness of the political and social turmoil in England, illustrating themes of instability, power conflicts, and the fragility of authority, as well as emphasizing his practical strategy for dealing with the chaotic era.

In Act 5, King John's peace with the Pope and the Bastard's criticism, "Shall a beardless boy, A cockered silken wanton, brave our fields?" (V.i.70), may represent Locke's ideas on leadership and the need for strength and public support in governance because they illustrate the concept that a ruler's authority and legitimacy are influenced by the perceptions and consent of the people. However, Louis the Dauphin's claim to the English throne and the lords' support, despite internal conflicts, reflect Locke's concepts of rightful succession and the governed's consent. Salisbury's line, "That I must draw this metal from my side" (V.ii.15), echoes Locke's view on rebellion against a failing government, as it signifies the legitimate right of people to resist or change their rulers if those rulers fail to protect their rights and serve their interests. Salisbury presents an example of the rhetoric which sets forth "the need to rebel against John" (Pierce, 1971, p. 128). Locke argued that when a ruler breaches the contract by failing to uphold justice and protect the people, rebellion is a justified response. Salisbury's statement symbolizes this critical moment of choosing between continued loyalty to a failing ruler and the moral obligation to seek a more just and effective leadership. The play ends as such: "This England never did, nor never shall, / Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror, / But when it first did help to wound itself. / Now these her princes are come home again / Come the three corners of the world in arms / And we shall shock them! Nought shall make us rue / If England to itself do rest but true" (V.vii.112-118). The ending lines generate an atmosphere of patriotism and determination, and England's enduring history of resisting foreign conquest. The end of the play provides a patriotic atmosphere, and it emphasizes the significance of collaboration and self-rule. In this sense, the end of the play is consistent with Locke's belief in the potential of a unified community to sustain its independence and defy any possible external influence. Therefore, from a Lockean perspective, the play investigates both the personal assertions of authority, and the

united will of a country to uphold its founding principles and preserve its independence (Locke, 1980, pp. 78-79).

Using force against people without authority, and going against the trust placed in him, is like being at war with the governed. In such a situation, the people have the right to bring back their own government and can do so forcefully (Locke, 1980, p. 80-81). The last line also emphasizes the importance of internal unity and integrity to indicate that if England stays faithful to itself, it will conquer any external danger. Therefore, the lines cover themes of national identity, resilience, unity, and the repercussions of internal conflict when confronted with external obstacles. Such are the ideas that align with Locke's emphasis on the enduring strength of a nation, as Locke advocates for the preservation of a community's fundamental principles and collective identity against external domination. Locke (p. 112) supposes that when people are treated badly and unfairly, as is the case in the play because of "John's ill rule and doubtful title", they will be willing to get rid of such a heavy burden whenever they have the chance (Hunt, 2000, p. 388).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this article has analyzed Shakespeare's *King John* from a Lockean viewpoint to reveal, and present the relationship among the structures of power, authority, and government through a close-reading of both Locke's and Shakespeare's works. In this context, Locke's political philosophy examines human nature, the social contract, and the dissolution of governments whereas, Shakespeare presents King John's rule through considering political themes such as sovereignty, legitimacy, and individual rights. In this way, the representation of political turmoil, moral issues, and the pursuit of power within the play coincides with Locke's emphasis on reason, consent, and the preservation of natural rights. The problems arising from the struggle between duty and personal sentences, authority, and moral principles, as represented by Hubert, reflect Locke's perspective that leadership has to act according to principles of justice and the welfare of society.

The play also addresses the themes of rebellion, succession of power, and the impact of the governed on the results of politics. These themes correlate with Locke's theory of the social contract according to which the legitimacy of a government is derived from the consent of the governed. Locke's belief in the liberty of individuals to reject oppressive regimes, and pursue justice is shown through the lords renouncing their loyalty and claiming their rights against dictatorial tyranny. The end of the play emphasises the importance of internal cohesion and integrity against the external obstacles. Such an emphasis reflects Locke's argument for preserving fundamental principles and collective identity against external manipulation. Therefore, Locke's concept of a society based on rationality, agreement, and the protection of inherent rights is represented in *King John*.

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