

## Understanding Shakespeare's King John and Magna Carta in the Light of New Historicism<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Being one of the history plays of William Shakespeare, *The Life and Death of King John* tells the life and important political matters of King John (1166-1216). In this play, Shakespeare basically relates the political issues of King John to Queen Elizabeth I. Political matters such as the threat of invasion by a foreign country, divine right of kings; papal excommunication and legitimacy discussions constitute the main themes of the play. However, Shakespeare does not mention a word of Magna Carta throughout the play. In this regard, it is critical to figure out and explain the reason why Shakespeare did not mention Magna Carta in his *The Life and Death of King John*, owing to the importance of Magna Carta in the history of England. In this respect, the analysis of *The Life and Death of King John* in the light of new historicism helps us to understand both how Shakespeare related the periods of Queen Elizabeth and King John; and the reason why Shakespeare did not mention Magna Carta in his play.

**Keywords:** Shakespeare, New Historicism, Magna Carta, Elizabethan Drama.

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Being one of the most important playwrights of all times, William Shakespeare wrote and staged great number of plays about English history. *The Life and Death of King John* is one of those history plays and estimated to have been written around 1593 or 1594, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the last member of the Tudor family. It is fact that, from the literary standpoint, it is not considered among the greatest plays of William Shakespeare. In this play, he basically relates the political issues of King John to Queen Elizabeth I. Political matters such as the threat of invasion by a foreign country, divine right of kings; papal excommunication and legitimacy discussions constitute the main themes of the play. However, Shakespeare does not mention a word of Magna Carta throughout the play. In this regard, it is critical to figure out and explain the reason why Shakespeare did not mention Magna Carta in his *The Life and Death of King John*, owing to the importance of Magna Carta in the history of England. Because, King John is considered to be one of the most significant kings in English history, since he sealed the ‘Magna Carta Libertatum’ or the ‘Great Charter of Liberties’ in 1215. It was a great constitutional and democratic moment and “expressed a deal between church and state, barons and king, city merchants and royalty, wives and husbands, commoners and nobles. It was the proud product of rebellion” (Linebaugh, 2008:7). Today, British people are proud of having such a document in their history and they preferred Magna Carta as the best choice for a national day according to the result of a poll realized in England, in May 2006 (bbc.co.uk). Magna Carta is contemplated as the symbol of democracy and human rights in England today. So, why did not Shakespeare mention this important event in his recount? This article aims at analysing *the Life and Death of King John* in its historical perspective to understand the reason of Shakespeare for not mentioning Magna Carta in his play, and as such it is important to know the life of King John as a historical person, the political atmosphere of Renaissance England and the synopsis of Shakespeare’s play respectively.

## King John as a Historical Person

John, the fifth son of King Henry II, became the King of England in 1199, in the wake of the death of his brother Richard I. Although his nephew Arthur, the son of Richard I, was the heir to the throne, John maintained his kingship until his death in 1216. Arthur claiming his royal descent went to France in search of help. For this reason, Philip II of France declared war against England and Arthur turned out against John in England. Arresting Arthur, King John ordered the murder of his nephew in 1203 (McLynn, 2007: 387). The murder of Arthur caused new uprisings by the feudal lords in England. Besides the throne struggle between John and his nephew Arthur, papal excommunication was another significant event during the reign of King John. The main argument between the papacy and King John commenced with the appointment of Stephen Langton as the Archbishop of Canterbury by Pope Innocent III. King John objected to the assignment of Langton. This conflict between King John and Pope Innocent III ended with the excommunication of King John in 1209 (McLynn, 2007: 378). King John, who had been in a difficult situation both politically and militarily, had to accept the terms of Pope Innocent III in order to raise the interdiction. "And on 15 May, in the presence of the nuncio, Pandulf, surrendered his kingdoms of England and Ireland to the Pope to receive them back as fiefs of the Roman see" (Rothwell, 2004: 297). The Barons under the leadership of Robert Fitzwalter were not happy with the policies of King John and dissatisfied with the high taxes and wars. They renounced their loyalty to King John and attacked Northampton in 1215 (Pillai, 2015: 29). The First Barons' War between the uprising barons and King John ended with the sealing of the *Great Charter of Magna Carta* by King John on 15 June 1215. This *Great Charter of Magna Carta* is still believed to be the foundation stone or symbol of human rights and democracy by the modern people. King John who had been defeated

in the end of the First Barons' War was exiled from England and died in 1216 as John Lackland.

When the barons rebelled and captured London, it was May 1215. They declared their disloyalty to King John. They went further and a month later:

in June King John and the barons faced each other in armed camps at Runnymede. The parchment charter of sixty-three chapters of liberties to the 'freemen of England' was sealed, and homage renewed viva voce. The charter protected the interests of the church, the feudal aristocracy, the merchants, the Jews, and it acknowledged commoners (Linebaugh, 2008: 28).

Peter Linebaugh underlines the fact that this great charter assumed a commons.

Its provisions revealed the oppression of women, the aspirations of the bourgeoisie, the mixture of greed and power in the tyranny, an independent ecology of the commons, and the famous chapter 39 from which habeas corpus, prohibition of torture, trial by jury, and the rule of law are derived. "No freeman shall be arrested or imprisoned or dispossessed or outlawed or exiled or any way victimized, neither will we attack him or send anyone to attack him, except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land." The next chapter simply stated, "To no one will we sell, to no one will we refuse or delay right or justice" (Linebaugh, 2008: 28-29).

In order to realize the importance of Magna Carta in terms of woman rights we shall simply look at chapter seven and eight. Chapter seven guarantees that a widow may have her marriage portion and inheritance at once and without trouble and chapter eight says 'No widow shall be forced to marry so long as she wishes to live without a husband.' It is clear that Magna Carta had an important role in the development of women rights and the emancipation of feminist ideas, too. Today, from the standpoint of the people in our age, it is possible to say that the sealing of Magna Carta was one of the most im-

portant political activities of King John. Taking this fact into account, it would be useful to remember the synopsis of *the Life and Death of King John*.

### **A Synopsis of *The Life and Death of King John***

The play starts with the entrance of the messenger of the King Philip of France into the court of King John. He demands King John to abdicate his kingship in favour of Arthur, the son of his elder brother Geoffrey. King Philip of France believes that Arthur is the rightful heir of the English throne. However, King John refuses this demand and is threatened with war by King Philip of France. Then, two brothers suddenly come into the court with a controversial issue to be solved by King John. One of the brothers claims that they are not from the same fathers. Then their mother comes there and she confesses in front of King John and his mother Eleanor the fact that the father of one of his sons is Richard the Lionhearted. Eleanor loves the Bastard because of the contingency of his being her grandson. So, she advises the Bastard to leave his lands to his younger brother and join her army with the name Bastard of Richard the Lionhearted. Both King Philip of France and King John come in front of Angiers, an English town, and ask its citizens whom they endorse as the king of England. The citizens state that they support the rightful king. The two armies fight with each other but no side dominates the other. Therefore, the citizens of Angiers cannot decide who to choose. Then the Bastard proposes that the two kings unite against Angiers to conquer the city and then going on fighting with each other again. The kings accept this proposal and decide to attack Angiers. But at that very moment, the citizens of Angiers make a proposal of marriage between King Philip's son and King John's niece as a method of solution between the two kings. They accept the proposal and Philip's son Louis and John's niece Blanche marry. John reinforces his ties with France with this marriage. Therefore, Arthur and his mother Constance become displeased due to the

changed mind of Philip.

John not only fights with a claim of illegitimacy about his kingship, but also copes with the Pope who excommunicates him and causes his death at the end of the play. John reacts against the Pope and dislikes to be ruled by a distant person. As a result of this, the Pope gets in touch with King Philip of France and demands him to break his relations with King John. Pope, King Philip, uprising barons and Arthur all fight against King John. Barons change their side at the end of the play and apologize to King John. But, King John dies at the end of the play because he is poisoned by the men of the Pope.

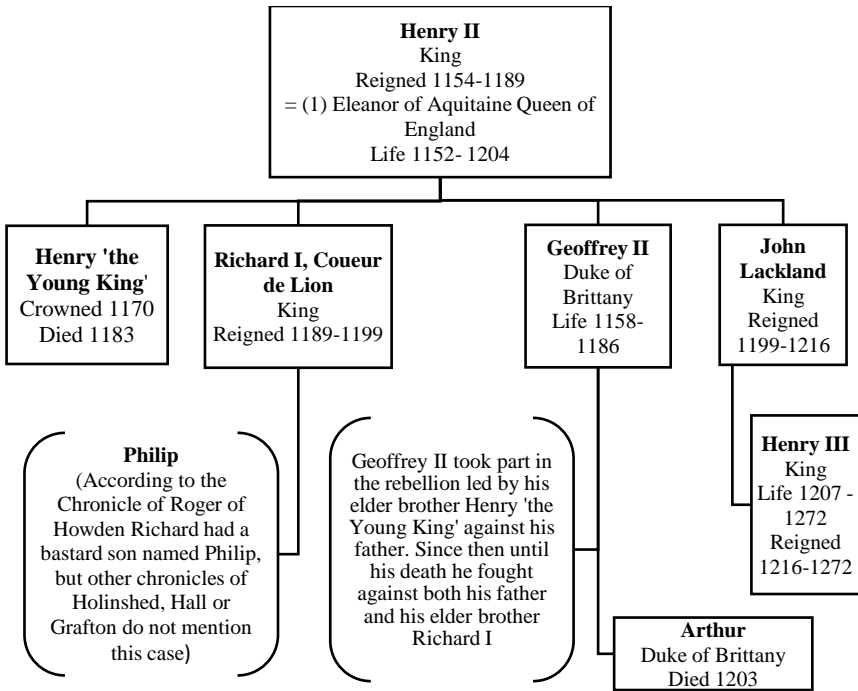
Although Shakespeare does not mention a word of Magna Carta in *The Life and Death of King John*, it is still quite valuable in terms of enlightening the political understanding of Magna Carta in Renaissance England.

### **New Historicist Analysis of *The Life and Death of King John***

In order to understand the political climate during the reign of King John, it is crucial to know the relations between John and his brothers, Henry the Young King, Richard the Lionhearted, Geoffrey the Duke of Brittany and their father King Henry II as well as political relations between England and France (see fig. 1). Because, during the reign of King John, English dominance prevailed in the majority of French territory of our time. For instance, English possession in France involved Normandy, Maine, Touraine, Brittany, Anjou and Poitiers. Furthermore, when Henry II married Lady Eleanor, former Queen of France, her dowry, Aquitaine joined to English territories. Queen Eleanor (1122-1204), one of the strongest woman figures in the world history, bore two daughters when she was the Queen of France and eight children when she was the Queen of England (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 2016).

There was a rivalry between the two kings, Louis VII of France and Henry II of England. During the reign of Louis VII, France lost great

**Figure 1.** Family Tree of the House of Angevins



part of her land to England. However, his son Philip II aimed at gaining Angevin possessions back to France and followed an aggressive policy against England. Besides the intrigues and political rivalry with France, Henry II had to suppress his rebellious sons in order to protect his throne. In 1170, Henry II tried to divide his lands among his sons. But his policy by keeping the real authority in his hand and favouring his youngest son John caused dissatisfaction among his other children and in 1173 his older sons Henry, Richard and Geoffrey rebelled against their father but could not be successful. Henry II forgave his three sons, but he did not his wife. Therefore, Eleanor who had supported her three rebellious sons against King Henry II, was kept in custody until the death of Henry II. Their second attempt was in 1181,

but Henry ‘the Young King’ died in 1183 (Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2016). When Geoffrey died in 1186, he had a son Arthur, Duke of Brittany. Richard I as the oldest living son of Henry II acquired the support of Philip II of France. Then defeated his father and usurped his throne in 1189. After his death, his younger brother John became the King of England in 1199. But his nephew Arthur, son of his elder brother Geoffrey, opposed to John’s ascendance to the throne and claimed that he was the best heir to the throne of England.

In his play, Shakespeare tries to propagate the policies of Elizabeth I by telling the same political issues from King John’s perspective. That is to say, Shakespeare tries to correlate the life of Queen Elizabeth I with the life of King John in the play, in terms of their legitimacy, struggle with the papacy, throne struggle and war with foreign countries. When King John is analysed from a new historicist perspective, it appears that one can see four clear messages in the play.

The first message is about the threat of invasion by foreign countries. When England is weak or in turbulence, the threat of invasion by external forces increases. There are countries that are looking for the opportunities to weaken England by either invading directly or collaborating with the rebels inside. There were the threats of invasion by Spain in Elizabethan Era and by France in John’s Reign. Queen Mary of Scots was a Catholic and the rival of Elizabeth I for the throne. However, having revealed the Babington Plot, Elizabeth I executed its organizer, Queen Mary of Scots. Spanish King Philip II, who was also Catholic and strong ties with Mary, decided to invade England by his famous naval force called ‘Spanish Armada’ which was believed to be unbeatable in those years. England’s second but first most influential Protestant ruler, Queen Elizabeth was in a great struggle with Catholics during her reign and her defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588 brought an enormous prestige to her. Similar to Elizabethan period, England was under the threat of French invasion owing to English expansion in France both by marriage of John’s mother Queen Eleanor



and by war. Rivalry between Louis VII and Henry II went on during King John's time. French Kings sought for opportunities to weaken England by supporting rebels or making collaboration with the Pope against England during her hard times. Similar to the threat of Spanish invasion in Elizabethan age, the French prepares a very big army for the invasion of England in *King John*. A messenger who comes near to King John describes the power of French army as follows: "Messenger. From France to England. Never such a power / For any foreign preparation / Was levied in the body of a land" (4.2.110-112) Elizabethan audience used to live with the threat of Spanish invasion during the late sixteenth century. Although Elizabeth defeated the Spanish Navy in 1588, this did not change the balance of power in the sea (Doran, 2001: 55). On account of this, the fear of invasion in Shakespeare's *King John* might have been understandable for the Renaissance audience because of the similarity. In *King John* Bastard explains the fear of people he saw during his travel:

Bastard. But as I travelled hither through the land,  
I find the people strangely fantasied,  
Possessed with rumours, full of idle dreams,  
Not knowing what they fear, but full of fear. (4.2.143-146)

In the play the source of fear is the invasion menace of France. A few lines later Bastard says "The French, my lord; men's mouths are full of it" (4.2.162). Through this big invasion threat of France, Shakespeare successfully makes connection between the Elizabethan era and King John's period in terms of invasion threat.

Second message in the play is that other countries interfere with the internal affairs of England. In the play King Philip of France sends a messenger to King John to leave the throne for the favour of his nephew Arthur. The play starts with this scene in which France interferes with England and declares Arthur as the rightful heir. Chatillion is the messenger of King Philip of France.

Chatillion. Philip of France, in right and true behalf  
 Of thy deceased brother Geffrey's son,  
 Arthur Plantagenet, lays most lawful claim  
 To this fair island and the territories,  
 To Ireland, Poitiers, Anjou, Touraine, Maine,  
 Desiring thee to lay aside the sword  
 Which sways usurpingly these several titles,  
 And put the same into young Arthur's hand,  
 Thy nephew and right royal sovereign.  
 K. John. What follows if we disallow of this?

Chatillion. The proud control of fierce and bloody war,  
 To enforce these rights so forcibly withheld (1.1.7-18).

Here, Shakespeare exaggerates the French interference by a messenger. According to Grafton's *Chronicle* Philip II of France pledges help to Arthur against his uncle King John but do not send a messenger to King John. "King Philip taking homage of Arthur for the Duchye of Normandie and all other the possessions of king lohn beyond the sea, promised him helpe against king lohn" (1809, vol. 1: 231). Similar to the French interference, King Philip of Spain interferes with the internal affairs of England during the reign of Elizabeth I. King Philip wishes England join the Catholic League again. On account of this he makes a marriage proposal to Queen Elizabeth of England. Elizabeth does not accept this.

Thirdly, the play underlines the importance that a ruler has to secure the throne against the rivals. When a king does not secure his throne by terminating his rivals for the throne there is a risky situation which can cause a political turbulence and be employed by foreign powers. Arthur, son of King John's elder brother Geoffrey claimed the throne and got the support of France. According to the dynastic rules, elder brother's offspring has the right of getting the throne. For this reason John's claim for the throne was weaker than Arthur's. Similarly, Elizabeth's claim for the throne was weaker than her rival Queen Mary of Scots for many people because she was be-

lieved to be illegitimate and she was Protestant. Queen Mary of Scots, on the other hand was the granddaughter of Margaret Tudor who was the elder sister of Henry VIII. Therefore both John's and Elizabeth's claim to the throne were weaker than their rivals. In spite of their weaker claims, both John and Elizabeth ruled England until their death. In order to exterminate the threat for their crown both John and Elizabeth executed their rivals and secured their throne. In Shakespeare's play, King John does not kill Arthur. However, at first John orders him to be executed by Hubert, for he sees Arthur as the only rival for his throne.

King John. Do not I know thou wouldst?  
 Good Hubert, Hubert, Hubert, throw thine eye  
 On yon young boy: I'll tell thee what, my friend,  
 He is a very serpent in my way;  
 And whereso'er this foot of mine doth tread,  
 He lies before me: dost thou understand me?  
 Thou art his keeper (3.3.168-174).

But Hubert cannot kill Arthur for his innocence. At this point, John confronts with the fear of reaction of his people. We understand this reaction from a dialogue between Hubert and King John:

Hubert. Old men and beldams in the streets  
 Do prophesy upon it dangerously:  
 Young Arthur's death is common in their mouths:  
 And when they talk of him, they shake their heads  
 And whisper one another in the ear; (4.2.185-189)

On the one side the fear of French invasion, on the other the fear of uprising of his people, John steps back and feels regretful for the result of his decision. He accuses Hubert for this crime: "Thy hand hath murder'd him: I had a mighty cause / To wish him dead, but thou hadst none to kill him." (4.2.205-206). However, when Hubert confesses that he has not murdered the young prince, King John gets re-

laxed and orders Hubert to inform the Lords that Arthur is alive: “Doth Arthur live? O, haste thee to the peers, / Throw this report on their incensed rage, / And make them tame to their obedience!” (4.2.260-262). However Arthur leaps down from the Castle and dies. According to Holinshed the death of Arthur was mysterious.

But now touching the maner in verie deed of the end of this Arthur, writers make sundrie reports. Neuerthelesse certeine it is, that in the yeare next insuing, he was removed from Falais vnto the castle or tower of Rouen, out of the which there was not any that would confesses that ever he saw him go alive. Some have written that as he assaied to have escaped out of prison, and proving to clime over the walls of the castle, he fell into the river of Saine, and so was drowned. Other write, that through very grief and languor he pined away, and died of natural sicknesses. But some affirm, that king Iohn secretly caused him to be murdered and made away, so as it is not thoroughly agreed upon, in what sort he finished his days (1808, vol. 6: 165).

Different from the rumours mentioned in Holinshed’s chronicle, in Shakespeare’s play although Hubert does not obey it, King John orders the execution of Arthur. When King John sees the reaction of the citizens for the murder of Arthur, he fears an uprising. Similarly, Elizabeth I imprisons her rival Queen Mary of Scots to secure her position. Then, she faces the rising of the Northern earls who believe Queen Mary of Scots as the real heir of the throne. In Shakespeare’s tale although King John seems to be the murderer of his nephew initially, in the later scene we learn that Arthur dies accidentally by his own hand. By the same token, Elizabeth I seem to be the murderer of Queen Mary of Scots. Mary writes a letter to Babington for the assassination of Elizabeth and this letter prepares her tragic end.

Both Queen Elizabeth I and King John rejected being ruled by a distant person, the Pope. For this reason, it is possible to conclude that both of them were brave and respectful rulers of England. Accordingly both of them were excommunicated by the Pope. Queen

Elizabeth I chose to become a Protestant leader and the head of the Anglican Church. For this reason, her practices like executing Queen Mary of Scots caused a great crisis among the papacy and in the Catholic World. On account of this, she was excommunicated by the Pope. John did not have good relations with the papacy, either. Selection of the Archbishop became a great problem in England during the reign of John. The Monks and King John wanted different candidates to be the new Archbishop, but Pope Innocent III selected a different, third person, Stephan Langton in 1207 whom John refused and banished. This finally caused a series of problems between the papacy and England. In the end, Pope Innocent III excommunicated King John in 1209. This also strengthened the position of rebels and France against England.

In Shakespeare's play, John is poisoned by the Cardinal and all rebellious barons apologize to King John in the end. Shakespeare who underlines a correlation between the political matters of King John and Queen Elizabeth gives a clear message; If England can overcome the problems of herself, than no one can dare to give any harm. When every citizen or noble people of England support the ruler, than no other country or the papacy can give any harm to England. In Shakespeare's time Magna Carta was thought as a Charter which shows the weakness of King John.

Finallie, when the king measuring his owne strength with the barons, perceived that he was not able to resist them, he consented to subscribe and seale to such articles concerning the liberties demanded, in forme for the most part as is contened in the two charters Magna Charta, and Charta de Foresta. (Holinshed, 1807, vol. 2: 185)

Shakespeare does not mention Magna Carta in his play, because it shows the weakness of the king. According to Holinshed, King John measured his power with his barons, but he could not resist them. However in Shakespeare's play rebelling barons who support French King change their side and request King John to forgive them: "Hu-

bert. Why, know you not? The lords are all come back, / And brought Prince Henry in their company, / At whose request the Icing hath pardoned them, / And they are all about his majesty” (5.6.33-36). Here the message of the play is that when the nobles of England are united around their king, they can successfully defend their country against any kind of foreign menace. When the date of composition of *King John* is taken into account as the mid-1590s which is just after the victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588 and the renewal of the bull of excommunication against Queen Elizabeth I by Pope Sixtus V in the same year, the message of the play becomes more meaningful for the Elizabethan audience.

### **Shakespeare’s King John as part of Tudor Propaganda**

Shakespeare wrote *King John* during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Queen Elizabeth was really interested in theatrical activities and the theatre was the strongest mass communication tool in those years. Although the printing press had been invented by John Gutenberg nearly a century before Shakespeare’s time, there were not any newspapers printed in England in those years. Theatre companies like the Queen’s Men or later The Lord Chamberlain’s Men and The Admiral’s Men were under strict control of the Queen. These companies played regularly in London and trouped through England to reach more audiences. Because of the censorship mechanism Shakespeare and other playwrights had to write plays in accordance with the political interest of the Tudor family, otherwise their plays would be censored by the Monarchy or in some cases as in the Essex rebellion ‘the players, called before the lord chief justice’ (Milling, 2004: 356). This is a good example to understand the position of theatre on the political manipulations and to see the monarchic pressure over the playwrights and actors.

Queen’s Men as a play company ‘was consolidated under royal authority to “perform useful fictions” on behalf of the Government, such

as the airing of anti-Spanish sentiments in *The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London* and anti-Catholic propaganda in *The Troublesome Reign of John*' (Walsh, 2009: 31). For this reason, politicians in Britain attempted to employ the theatre effectively.

It is obvious that in his history plays Shakespeare generally served the political interests of the reigning monarchy. Being a unique means of manipulating the public opinion and able to manage the perceptions of the English society, Shakespeare served the political purposes of the monarchy by altering and distorting some real life realities. Here the purpose was to influence the political or religious opinion of the audiences.

Ralph Turner states that 'according to Tudor propaganda, tyranny, though evil, cannot excuse rebellion; and to avoid chaos, obedience to the ruler must be English subjects' highest obligation. This point of view coloured the picture that historians painted of all rebellions, including the baronial rising against King John to win Magna Carta.' (2014: 137) and he maintains 'Shakespeare's history plays spread the Tudor propagandists' message of the wickedness of rebellion against an anointed and crowned king, and his drama *The Life and Death of King John* makes no mention of the Charter (2014: 138).

When James VI of Scotland came south to become King James I of England (1603–25) on the death of Elizabeth I, he brought with him notions of divine-right monarchy that combined with Tudor authoritarianism to threaten Parliament's role in the kingdom's governance. James I had authored a defence of divine-right monarchy, titled *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, meaning by a 'free monarchy' one unrestrained by such rival bodies as Parliament. James argued that his authority came directly from God, to whom he was solely responsible (Turner, 2014:145).

It was the reason that the kings in the Medieval and Early Modern England saw the Great Charter as a threat for their throne. So, Shakespeare did not mention Magna Carta in his play *The Life and Death of King John* and he also made some alterations about the historical

realities of King John's life. For example, in Shakespeare's account King John exerts his authority over the country and at the end of the play uprising barons regret their rebellious actions:

Hubert: Why, know you not? the lords are all come back,  
 And brought Prince Henry in their company  
 At whose request the King hath pardoned them,  
 And they are all about his majesty (5.6.32-36).

However in reality those barons were the actors of a strong rebel against the King John and they forced the King John to sign Magna Carta. But here Hubert says that the King has pardoned them. This expression shows that Shakespeare exaggerates the authority of the King John.

Although he does not mention Magna Carta in the play, he stresses the conflict between King John and the Pope very well. Given that the Queen Elizabeth was a protestant ruler of England, it is not difficult to guess or conclude that she was in conflict with the papacy. In a dialogue with Cardinal Pandulph, King John explains his idea about the papacy clearly:

*K. John.* What earthly name to interrogatories  
 Can task the free breath of a sacred king?  
 Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name  
 So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,  
 To charge me to an answer, as the Pope:  
 Tell him this tale, and from the mouth of England  
 Add thus much more, that no Italian priest  
 Shall tithe or toll in our dominions;  
 But as we, under heaven, are supreme head  
 So under Him that great supremacy,  
 Where we do reign, we will alone uphold,  
 Without th' assistance of a mortal hand:  
 So tell the Pope, all reverence set apart  
 To him and his usurped authority (3.1.147 -160).



Here Shakespeare wants to make connection between the Queen Elizabeth and the King John in terms of their conflict with the papacy. King John underlines the freedom of England; he refuses giving tax to Italians any more. By saying so King John emphasizes the nationalistic feelings of English people and adds that an English king is enough to rule England. King John does not respect to Pope Innocent, as he believes that the Pope usurps the authority in England.

As we briefly overview the Shakespeare's King John, it is possible to state that the political conditions of Elizabethan England did not allow Shakespeare to mention the Magna Carta in his King John. Although it was a historical document which arranged the social rules and determined the rights of everyone in England from the king to barons, from women to the commons, Magna Carta was the result of a rebellion. For this reason and its restrictive chapters, kings in the medieval and the early modern England did not like Magna Carta. On the contrary they tried to emphasize the divine right concept and most of the time they were not voluntary to work with a parliament. Under these conditions it was difficult and dangerous for Shakespeare to mention Magna Carta in his play.

## **Shakespeare'in Kral John'u ve Magna Carta'yı Yeni Tarihselcilik Işığında Anlamak**

**Özet:** Shakespeare'in tarihi oyunlarından biri olan *Kral John'un Yaşamı ve Ölümü*'nde, Kral John'un (1166-1216) hayatı ve bu dönemin önemli meseleleri anlatılır. Bu oyunda, Shakespeare genel olarak Kral John ile Kraliçe I. Elizabeth zamanında yaşanan siyasi meseleler arasında ilişki kurar. Yabancı bir ülke tarafından istila edilme tehlikesi, kralların ilahi hakları, papa tarafından aforoz edilme ve meşruiyet tartışmaları gibi siyasi meseleler oyunun genel temalarını oluşturmaktadır. Buna karşılık Shakespeare oyun boyunca Magna Carta'dan neredeyse hiç söz etmez. Bu bakımdan, Magna Carta'nın İngiltere tarihinin-

deki önemine bağlı olarak, Shakespeare'in *Kral John'un Yaşamı ve Ölümü* isimli oyununda Magna Carta'dan hiç söz etmemesinin arka planını anlamak ve açıklamak da ayrıca önemlidir. Bu çerçevede *Kral John'un Hayatı ve Ölümü* isimli oyunun yeni tarihselcilik ışığında analiz edilmesi, hem Shakespeare'in Kraliçe Elizabeth ile Kral John dönemleri arasında hangi açılardan ilişki kurduğunu anlamamızı hem de Magna Carta'dan bahsetmeyişinin nedeninin anlaşılmasına yardımcı olmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Shakespeare, Yeni Tarihselcilik, Magna Carta, Elizabeth Tiyatrosu.

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