

3-2018

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## Recommended Citation

Eppich-Harris, Marcia, "Hubert's Encounters with the Succession in Shakespeare's King John" (2018). *Department of English*. 10.  
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## Hubert's Encounters with the Succession in Shakespeare's *King John*

Marcia Eppich-Harris, *Marian University*

In the 2016 novel *Gunpowder Percy*, author and Shakespeare scholar Grace Tiffany imagines the history-making death scene of Elizabeth I in which James VI of Scotland is declared to be the successor to the English throne. In the scene, Elizabeth is unable to speak as she lies in bed. Robert Cecil, the Queen's chief advisor, kneels close to the Queen's bedside, telling her that he would list names of possible candidates to succeed her. She did not need to speak, he tells her, but only to touch her forehead when he comes to the person on the list that she would like to choose. Cecil names Isabella, Archduchess of Flanders; the Duke of Parma; Henry of France; and then finally James Stuart, King of Scotland. Slowly, the Queen's hand comes to rest on her forehead when James is named. The other members of the Privy Council show a mixed reaction, one flying off to curry favor with James, others moving forward to lean over the dying queen, but all accept the Queen's decision. Yet in Tiffany's version, the Queen, herself, never moves – instead, while kneeling by Elizabeth, Cecil places his own hand under Elizabeth's mattress to move the Queen's arm when he comes to James. It works. In fooling his powerful colleagues, Cecil, not the Queen, assures that James will be the next monarch of the realm (86-9).

Tiffany's story is a fictionalization of Elizabeth's death scene, but it uses elements of the oft-cited account reported in Robert Cary, Early of Monmouth's, *Memoirs*, in which Elizabeth was said to have touched her forehead to indicate James should succeed her.<sup>1</sup> Robert Cecil's influence in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign is also well-documented, as is his father's influence earlier in Elizabeth's reign. Robert Cecil corresponded with James for two years before Elizabeth died, both directly and through intermediaries, and this correspondence is believed to have had a direct impact upon James's accession.<sup>2</sup> Tiffany's scene takes Cecil's influence a step further, supporting the idea that, at least in imaginative literature,

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<sup>1</sup> See *Memoirs of Robert Cary, Earl of Monmouth*, Edited by G.H. Powell.

<sup>2</sup> See Alexander Courtney's "The Scottish King and the English Court: The Secret Correspondence of James IV, 1601-3."

one person can make *the* difference in the succession of a monarch. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Shakespeare uses a historical figure, Hubert de Burgh, as a character who makes a difference in monarchical succession. In *King John*, Hubert is put into a position to impact the succession of England twice: first, at Angiers after King Philip's appeal for the elective voice of one citizen, and second, in the prison scene with Arthur. Unlike Tiffany's Cecil, Hubert's influence is not quite so direct, but I do think it is intentional and deserves scholarly attention.

In several of Shakespeare's early-career plays, he spills a great deal of ink contemplating the idea of monarchy and questions of succession, legitimacy, and rivalries, which many scholars claim shows Shakespeare's interest in and deliberation about the future of the British monarchy in the latter part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the Wars of the Roses plays, Warwick throws his support alternately behind the Yorks and the Lancasters, earning the nickname, "King maker." In *Titus Andronicus*, Titus "elects" Saturninus to be Emperor when his brother, Bassianus, openly campaigns against him. In *Richard II*, York's decision to declare himself neutral all but hands the throne to Bolingbroke. All these individuals make a strong impact on not only the events in the plays, but also the idea that individuals can make choices that have an impact on the succession. In *King John* scholarship, however, the role of Hubert has been neglected in this train of individuals who, even implicitly, hand power to Kings.

Perhaps one reason for Hubert's failure to be dubbed a "King maker" is because of the dispute over whether or not the roles of the Citizen of Angiers and Hubert are one and the same. In 1936, J.D. Wilson argued that these characters – Citizen and Hubert – were meant to be combined.<sup>3</sup> Theatrical productions, like the Stratford Festival of Canada's 2014 *King John*, often combine the characters Citizen and Hubert, and the Folger archives document the combination in *King John* as far back as 1857.<sup>4</sup> A scholarly debate sprang out of Wilson's claims, and for several decades, the question of whether Hubert and the Citizen are one and the

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<sup>3</sup> See J.D. Wilson, *King John*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1936, xlv-xlvii.

<sup>4</sup> Cast listings for more than a decade worth of performances documented on Internet Shakespeare Editions do not list a separate Citizen in the dramatis personae. But even more compelling than this omission is the fact that precedent for doubling Hubert as the Citizen can also be found in the Folger's archive of Promptbooks for *King John* in PROMPT John 1, starring J.B. Booth as John, from the year 1857. In this rehearsal copy, the speech prefix "Cit." is crossed out, and "H," for Hubert, is written in the margin.

same character was one of the principle preoccupations in *King John* studies. Such scholars as E.A.J. Honigsmann (1954), William Matchett (1966), and R.L. Smallwood (1974) argued for combining the characters and did so in their editions of the play.<sup>5</sup> Then, in the opposing camp, A.R. Braunmuller (1986, 1989) argued that combining the Citizen and Hubert cannot be justified, regardless of potential errors in the Folio text.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the debate has never been unequivocally resolved.

I rehearse the 81-year-old discussion here only to make the point that in current *King John* scholarship, writers mostly decide for themselves whether Hubert is or is not the Citizen and usually make a simple footnote out of the controversy. This “*King John*, as-you-like-it” attitude subtly undermines the power that a combined-character Hubert can wield in the play. Like Tiffany's version of Robert Cecil, Shakespeare's Hubert (if combined with the Citizen of Angiers) has a misunderstood impact on the succession controversy in the play. In current scholarship attention paid to specific characters falls mostly on the Bastard or John, who together make up about 36% of the play's lines, and who are certainly more colorful characters than Hubert. We should pay attention to Hubert, however, because he makes practical attempts to resolve the royal claim dispute in terms beneficial to John, although at first glance, it may not always appear that John profits from Hubert's actions.

Hubert's encounters with John and Arthur and the question of the succession mirror the political preoccupation with the English succession in the 1580s-1590s, as Elizabeth's lack of heir continued to ramp up anxiety in the nation. In 1596, around the time that *John* was written, Robert Parson's book, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of England*, discusses the Elizabethan succession crisis and the prospects of elective monarchy, arguing that no King could be legitimate without the consent of the people: “...except the *Admission of the Common-wealth be joyned to Succession, it [succession] is not sufficient to make a lawful King.*”<sup>7</sup> The implication is that no King can be fully legitimate if the King's subjects, common and noble alike, do not recognize him as such, or, as in the case of Richard II, revoke that

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<sup>5</sup>I will be using E.A.J. Honigsmann, *King John*, Arden Series (1954; repr., London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2007) for citations.

<sup>6</sup>See A.R. Braunmuller "Who Is Hubert? Speech-headings in *King John*, Act II"

<sup>7</sup>Robert Parsons, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England*. (original emphasis)

recognition through deposition. Many examples in the English monarchy alone, Parson argues, show that bloodline hereditary monarchy is a human, rather than divine, construct. In fact, some of the most successful Kings of England, he notes, were those who were not in the direct monarchical blood line. He mentions Henry IV as a good King, despite Bolingbroke's usurpation and the resulting rebellion and seditious attempts to remove the first two Lancastrian Kings from the throne. However, Parson states that the hereditary succession failed to produce a good heir in Henry VI. Other examples of bad Kings are outlined in the cases of Edward II and Richard II, both hereditary monarchs; whereas Henry VII, a conqueror with essentially no bloodline ties, was not only an effective King, but also was the founder of the great Tudor dynasty. Parson takes aim at the historic King John many times, calling his government "evil" and the King himself "odious" (Parsons 45). Yet, he goes on to say that the succession crisis between John and Arthur was an example of God's support of the people's right to election: "And albeit this *Arthur* did seek to remedy the matter by War, yet it seemed that God did more defend this Election of the Commonwealth than the right Title of *Arthur* by Succession for that *Arthur* was overcome, and taken by King John" (Parsons 155). The issue should not have been so easily solved with Arthur's death, Parson notes, because Arthur had two sisters who, by English law, should have succeeded before John. However, the will of the people, despite John's despicable character, was that he remain King and as Parson writes, "...of this [matter of the sisters] small account seemed to be made at that day" (155). Robert Lane connects Parson's argument to Shakespeare's *King John* with the observation that in 2.1: "Not only is the citizens' opinion as to the rightful prince treated as within their competence, at least initially it is portrayed as integral to the royal title" (475). At 2.1.201 of *King John*, Hubert is "warn'd...to the walls"<sup>8</sup> to give his opinion, speaking for the town. When King Philip of France asks Hubert to determine who is the rightful King, Lane states, "... the consent of the public becomes the foundation for legitimate rule" (478)

Seeking this "consent of the public" surprises those familiar with Machiavelli's claim that a prince's power depends more on fear than love,

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<sup>8</sup>The *OED* cites this line from *King John* in its use of "warn'd" meaning "to summons," but the connotation of "warn," meaning, "to be on one's guard, or beware," implies the threat within the summons.

and above all else, that he should avoid hatred (130-133). In *King John*, Shakespeare serves us a King poorly skilled in Machiavellian manipulation and creates a drama elucidating the inherent frustration of attempted republican consensus. "Citizen Hubert" has the task of responding to the summons of France's King, but he does not resolve the issue here. Instead, Hubert plays out the power struggle with equivocating maneuvers. Hubert's ambivalence illustrates Frank Barlow's claim about the historical choice between John and Arthur in the late 12<sup>th</sup>-century – that "there could be no enthusiasm for either claimant," since "[Arthur] was counted a foreigner by the Anglo-Norman baronage," while "John was generally despised" (305). Despite his reluctance to directly name the King of England, Hubert makes a shallow and temporary peace between the English and French with the proposal to marry John's niece, Blanche, to Lewis, the Dolphin. This attempt at peace fundamentally benefits John in that Hubert implicitly acknowledges John as King. However, that title comes with a major price, as David Evett points out, "the proposal to end the conflict will have rescued John from the uncertainties of war with France and extended (if not insured) his reign – albeit at the cost of most of the English territory in France" (48). Nonetheless, the marital resolution establishes John as Hubert's choice for King of England, and Arthur and his mother Constance are left out of the negotiations entirely. By eschewing Arthur and negotiating solely with the French and John, Hubert implies that there is no other rightful heir to the English throne. The proposed peace does not hold, however, as Pandulph's papal interference means that the French and English will fight again. Yet John retains the throne: the French are defeated, Arthur is captured, and almost instantly, Hubert becomes more intimately connected to the security of John's throne, as John enlists Hubert's help to keep Arthur prisoner.

Once Arthur is prisoner, the question of what must be done with him becomes John's newest problem. Many scholars point out that the imprisonment of Arthur mirrors the events of the imprisonment of Mary Queen of Scots.<sup>9</sup> While David Womersley writes, "Shakespeare seems less concerned to have his play read as an analysis of specific contemporary events than to feed off the topicality inherent in his subject and thereby

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<sup>9</sup> See Lane, "The Sequence of Posterity"; David Womersley, "The Politics of Shakespeare's *King John*"; and Lily Campbell, "The Troublesome Reign of King John."

engender nothing more definite than an *atmosphere* of contemporary pertinence,” (499) it may also be true that recusant and secret Catholics anxious for a sympathetic successor to the throne had the executed Mary in their thoughts when viewing the scene of Arthur’s intended blinding. Peter Lake compares Arthur and Mary, saying that the case of Arthur and John was the precedent for Mary’s barred claim – both Arthur and Mary were foreign-born claimants who were rejected for their foreignness (Lake 184). That said, Lake also argues “at the time no one had regarded Arthur as the heir apparent [...] King John had been acknowledged as the legitimate king, chosen by his brother, elected and acclaimed by his subjects and initially accepted even by the kings of Scotland and of France” (185). Here, Lake makes John’s succession seem like a non-issue, compared to Shakespeare’s version. Controversial or not, historically, Henry VIII used John’s succession, bequeathed by Richard I, as a guide for making his own succession line clear in his will and The Third Act of Succession (1543), creating a parallel between the Tudors and the Angevin Kings. The Third Succession Act (1543) re-established Mary Tudor and Elizabeth’s places in the succession after their half-brother Edward VI. Nonetheless, Edward attempted to bypass his half-sisters and selected Lady Jane Grey to succeed him (Cannon). Yet, Edward’s council chose to ignore him, giving preference to Henry VIII’s wishes to pass the throne to Mary Tudor. At the end of Mary I’s reign, she reluctantly acknowledged Elizabeth as her heir, having hoped both to produce an heir herself and to keep the country Catholic. Meanwhile, Catholic northerners’ belief that Mary Stuart was the legitimate heir to the English crown did not abate, and as with Arthur, plots were laid to place Mary on the throne through conspiracies against Elizabeth. Imprisoned by Elizabeth, Mary, like Arthur, had a single guardian in charge of her captivity, George Talbot, sixth Earl of Shrewsbury. She was kept prisoner for about twenty years, and may have been so indefinitely, yet her execution was demanded by the Privy Council and Parliament after the Babington Plot of 1586 to murder Elizabeth was discovered.<sup>10</sup> In the case of Arthur, Coggeshall’s *Chronicle* reports that “Some of John’s counsellors [...] told the King that so long as Arthur remained unharmed in Falaise, John would not be safe, and that the only way to remove the danger would be to blind and emasculate the boy” (qtd. Ellis 15).

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<sup>10</sup> See G.R. Batho’s “The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots.”

In Shakespeare's play, John's desire to eliminate Arthur as a threat comes from John alone and is conveyed solely to Hubert. The only other potential conspirator would be Eleanor, who takes Arthur aside, while John enlists Hubert's help. Yet, Arthur's demise is predicted both by Constance and by Pandulph, who induce Lewis to seek the throne of England for himself through his wife's lineage. In Act 3, scene 3, Pandulph stirs Lewis's ambition to seek the crown of England, citing Arthur's assumed fate: "when [John] shall hear of your approach, / If that young Arthur be not gone already, / Even at that news he dies" (3.3.162-4). Clearly, no one trusts John to keep Arthur alive – not Constance, not Pandulph, not even the nobles, who, after John's second coronation, beg for the enfranchisement of Arthur even though they suspect he's already dead. What is so surprising, in fact, is that Hubert, as John's proxy, does *not* kill Arthur, despite popular belief that he will, not to mention the echoes of Mary Stuart's execution for early modern Catholics.

If we are to take Hubert at his word, even the audience is convinced that he will act in accordance with John's desire to neutralize Arthur as a threat. Unlike in *Richard III*, when Buckingham hesitates at the King's order to execute his nearest rivals – the princes in the tower – Hubert, in Act 3, responds almost immediately that he will enact John's will. John says, "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" (3.2.69-71). Hubert asserts that he will keep Arthur close so that "he shall not offend your majesty" (3.2.75). But Hubert's reassurance is insufficient for John. His single-word response – "Death" (3.2.76) – signals a confirmation of the seriousness of Hubert's role in the succession crisis. Hubert responds, "My lord?" (3.2.76) and John says, "A grave" (3.2.76). John's clipped commands leave no room for interpretation, and caught in the discomfort of a direct order from the King he has implicitly supported, Hubert replies, "He (Arthur) shall not live" (3.2.76). John delights at Hubert's response, proclaiming, "I could be merry now. Hubert, I love thee" (3.2.77). Later, in Act 4, scene 1, Hubert is to put out Arthur's eyes with hot irons – a slightly different plan from John's desire to put Arthur in the grave, but one that would make it impossible for Arthur to be King. Yet, Hubert cannot bring himself to do it. He can no more burn out Arthur's eyes than he can kill him. Hubert isn't that sort of character – he's an equivocator, not a murderer – and try as he might, he



cannot escape Arthur's "innocent prate" (4.1.25) nor his argument against Hubert's intentions. Hubert realizes that he must "be sudden and dispatch," (4.1.27) but before he can act, Hubert admits in an aside, "His words do take possession of my bosom" (4.1.32), igniting Hubert's conscience against the foul act. He shows Arthur the written order to burn out his eyes, but even with this act, it starts to become clear that Hubert cannot follow through.

Similarly, though in captivity, Mary Stuart enjoyed the compassion of her prison guard, George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. According to Anka Muhlstein, Talbot "was loath to be strict with a woman who might some day be his queen. [...] To the Council, therefore, Shrewsbury too often seemed to be championing the Scottish queen's interests, and he was regularly criticized on that account" (246). Mary was kept alive so long because Elizabeth did not want to set a precedent for executing monarchs. In a speech to Parliament, Elizabeth stated, "I am not so void of judgment as not to see mine own peril; nor yet so ignorant as not to know it were in nature a foolish course to cherish a sword to cut mine own throat; not so careless as not to weigh that my life daily is in hazard" (qtd. Muhlstein 268). Only Mary's letter to Anthony Babington, approving of Elizabeth's murder and her own ascension to the throne, could move Elizabeth to finally relent to the long-anticipated execution, but even after Mary was convicted, Elizabeth was still reluctant to sign the death warrant (Muhlstein 268). Muhlstein states that Elizabeth "attributed her reluctance to concern for her reputation. 'What will they not now say when it shall be spread that, for the safety of her life, a maiden queen could be content to spill the blood even of her own kinswoman?'" (268). It took three months of Elizabeth's deliberation before she finally signed Mary's death warrant on February 1, 1587, under pressure from both Parliament and her subjects. On February 8, Mary was executed. Muhlstein reports that Elizabeth "collapsed in hysterics. She had always intended to review her fatal decision, she sobbed. She wept unceasingly, would not eat, lay awake all night and refused to see her ministers for several days. It was her way of demonstrating her absolute refusal to take responsibility for having beheaded her 'dear sister'" (277-8).

In the case of *King John*, Hubert's leniency with Arthur is comparable to Talbot's with Mary, and his reluctance to sternly confine

her. Hubert's emotions plague him, as well, and his fondness for Arthur makes him unable to perform his grisly duty. Hubert's reluctance also mirrors Elizabeth's doubts and her notorious indecisiveness. With his intended victim weeping before his eyes, Hubert says in an aside that Arthur's tears "[turn] despiteous torture out of door!" (4.1.34). He tries to rally himself to the task, (aside) "I must be brief, lest resolution drop / Out at mine eyes in tender womanish tears" (4.1.35-6). Hubert asserts that he will do what John commands, as if saying it aloud can bolster him to the task. But when Arthur asks, "Have you the heart?" (4.1.41), that question, and Hubert's eventual, unspoken answer – no, he does not – is the crux of this scene. Few henchmen display the brazen lack of conscience that, for instance, the murderer of Macduff's family does in *Macbeth*. In *Richard III*, even hardened characters like James Tyrrel and his subordinates, Dighton and Forrest, discover they have consciences after coordinating the killing of the little princes in *Richard III*.<sup>11</sup> Hubert, being more humane, finds his conscience acting upon him *before* he is to assault Arthur. Hubert attempts to relieve himself of sole responsibility by calling forth the executioners, but Arthur knows his best chance to save his life is to appeal to Hubert's pity alone. He asks not to be bound and promises he will "sit as quiet as a lamb; / I will not sit, nor winch, nor speak a word" (4.1.79-80). Hubert dismisses the co-conspirators and

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<sup>11</sup>Tyrrel's description in Act 4, scene 3, shows both his regret, and the killers':

The tyrannous and bloody deed is done –  
 The most arch of piteous massacre  
 That ever yet this land was guilty of.  
 Dighton and Forrest, whom I did suborn  
 To do this ruthless piece of butchery,  
 Although they were fleshed villains, bloody dogs,  
 Melted with tenderness and mild compassion  
 Wept like two children in their deaths' sad story.  
 'O thus,' quoth Dighton, 'lay those tender babes';  
 'Thus, thus,' quoth Forrest, 'girdling one another  
 Within their alabaster innocent arms:  
 Their lips were four red roses on a stalk,  
 And in their summer beauty kiss'd each other.  
 A book of prayers on their pillow lay;  
 'Which once', quoth Forrest, 'almost changed my mind.  
 But O, the devil' – there the villain stopped,  
 When Dighton thus told on, 'We smotherèd  
 The most replenishèd sweet work of nature,  
 That from the prime creation e'er she framed.'  
 Hence both are gone, with conscience and remorse.  
 They could not speak, and so I left them both,  
 To bring this tidings to the bloody king. (4.3.1-22)

*Richard III, The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd Edition (New York: Norton, 2008), 603-4.

naturally, Arthur breaks his promise almost immediately, continuing to sue for his life. While Arthur is not successful at winning the crown at the wall of Angiers with the support of a King, he has no problem wearing down Hubert when he's speaking for himself and the object is his life.

In this private encounter with Arthur, Hubert makes another implicit choice between John and his young rival. What's interesting, though, is that in choosing to spare Arthur's life, and his eyes, Hubert actually supports John once again, although it may not seem so at first glance. However, Coggeshall's *Chronicle* tells us that in sparing Arthur's life, Hubert is actually looking out for John:

But Hubert, the King's chamberlain, wishing to preserve the honour and reputation of the King, *and anticipating the royal forgiveness*, preserved the young prince unharmed, thinking that the lord King would forthwith repent of having issued such an order and would always afterwards hate the man who had dared to comply with so savage a command. For he [Hubert] believed that the order had been given more out of sudden rage than from considerations of equity and justice. (qtd. Ellis 15-6)

In the play, Hubert does not outwardly anticipate this forgiveness until the next scene in which he reports the sight of five moons and that the people are stirred up with rumors of Arthur's death:

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;  
And he that speaks doth gripe the hearer's wrist,  
Whilst he that hears makes fearful action,  
With wrinkled brows, with nods, with rolling eyes. (4.2.185-92)

When Hubert tells John of the unnatural moon imagery and the people talking about Arthur in the streets, it works John into a frenzy and starts to work upon him in such a way that fear begins to form in his heart:

Why seek'st thou to possess me with these fears?  
Why urgest thou so oft young Arthur's death?  
Thy hand hath murd' red him: I had a mighty cause  
To wish him dead, but thou had none to kill him. (4.2.203-6)

Through Hubert's conjuration of unnatural imagery and behavior in the streets, he guides John toward facing his conscience and encourages the formation of regret. John's fear of the people, including the barons, and their response to Arthur's death, combines with Hubert's rhetoric to complete John's distress. The fear John shows illustrates the concept that the people must continually affirm the monarch if he is to remain in power. Should John believe that his absolute monarchy would deter the people from seizing his power, like Macbeth, he might feel that he lived a "charmed life" and could not be touched. However, John's panic shows that the people certainly do have power, and that power is symbolically illustrated by Hubert in the play.

John becomes hysterical when Hubert reports that Arthur is dead, although at the time, Arthur still lives. His reaction mirrors Elizabeth's after the execution of Mary. John blames Hubert for Arthur's death, just as Elizabeth blamed her Council for Mary's execution. John deflects responsibility, by accusing Hubert of being an inferior servant:

It is the curse of kings to be attended  
By slaves that take their humours for a warrant  
To break within the bloody house of life,  
And on the winking of authority  
To understand a law, to know the meaning  
Of dangerous majesty, when perchance it frowns  
More upon humour than advis'd respect. (4.2.208-14)

Shakespeare uses the effect of Coggeshall's observation, that John would regret ordering Hubert to murder Arthur, to great effect in this speech. Yet John mischaracterizes his command as closer to his father, Henry II's famous line, "Will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?" rather than what it is – a direct order. After John's censorious rebuke, having teased out the reaction that he was looking for, Hubert admits that Arthur is actually still alive, and states that, "Within this bosom never ent'red yet / The dreadful motion of a murderous thought" (4.2.254-5). Hubert's assurance that he actually reprieved Arthur, as Coggeshall predicts, leads to John's relief that Arthur is still alive. Without anticipating forgiveness, as Coggeshall's *Chronicle* claims, Hubert would not have risked confessing that Arthur still lived. And John does ask his forgiveness:

Forgive the comment that my passion made  
Upon thy feature; for my rage was blind,

And foul imaginary eyes of blood

Presented thee more hideous than thou art. (4.2.263-6)

He asks Hubert not to answer, but to make haste to the “angry lords” and reveal that Arthur is alive. Yet in the next scene, Arthur ends the succession question once and for all, jumping off the castle walls, in an apparent escape attempt.<sup>12</sup> The barons find Arthur and immediately blame John – and Hubert. Hubert enters expecting to share good news, that Arthur lives, but is instead confronted with his corpse.

Hubert’s role greatly diminishes once the succession controversy is ended with Arthur’s death. Hubert’s diminished role verifies that Shakespeare developed his character around resolving the claim dispute between John and Arthur. Once that dispute is settled, Hubert has little else to do in the play. We see Hubert only in two other scenes after he carries Arthur’s body off stage – first, briefly when John’s forces are battling Lewis, and then again when Hubert reports to the Bastard that John has been poisoned by a monk. Hubert is not at John’s side when he dies, just as he is not at Arthur’s side when he attempts to escape and perishes. Hubert says he will weep for Arthur, but for John, there is no mention of weeping. Hubert says his news is “Black, fearful, comfortless, and horrible,” but compared to Hubert’s weeping when he must burn out Arthur’s eyes and when he learns of Arthur’s death, there is a notable lack of tears with John. At the end of the play, as Prince Henry ascends the throne without any disputes, Hubert is nowhere to be found, despite the fact that Hubert de Burgh, the real-life namesake of the character, becomes one of the most powerful men in England during the reign of Henry III (Ellis 170-182). However, the function that Shakespeare gives

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<sup>12</sup> According to Ellis, it’s more likely that the historical John quietly had Arthur murdered some time later. See Ellis, *Hubert de Burgh*, 16. *Internet Shakespeare Editions* also discusses Arthur’s death:

The exact circumstances of Arthur’s death are still unknown. He was certainly kept prisoner at Falaise under Hubert de Burgh, but how he died is uncertain. Many theories of his death were documented, most of which claimed that John either murdered his nephew himself or ordered him to be killed. Ralph of Coggeshall supplied the story taken up by Shakespeare that Hubert de Burgh was ordered to blind and castrate Arthur, but instead chose to announce that he was dead. An equally colorful story was described in a poem by William the Breton, who claimed that John ran his nephew through with a sword during a solitary boat ride on the Seine. Perhaps the most convincing story is recorded in the annals of the Cistercian Abbey of Margam. This detailed account claims that John had kept Arthur in the castle of Rouen and murdered him in a drunken rage one evening, tying a heavy stone to his body and throwing it into the Seine.

See Historical Notes on *King John*,

[http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Jn\\_HistoricalNotes/section/Prince%20Arthur/#tln-30](http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Jn_HistoricalNotes/section/Prince%20Arthur/#tln-30)

Hubert in *King John*, his role as judge between the two potential Kings, is finally, unequivocally, over. While Arthur's death results in the end of the succession dispute, Hubert's participation in the crisis shows Shakespeare's musings on the power of a single individual's influence on monarchical politics and how encounters with power can reveal sources of influence that might otherwise be ignored. Despite his equivocation, Hubert is forced to make choices that shape the outcomes of the play, even in subtle ways.

*King John* shows up late in Grace Tiffany's novel, *Gunpowder Percy*, too. The main character, Thomas Percy, goes to the Globe Theatre regularly to watch Shakespeare's plays, and he is especially fond of the histories. On one such day, just as he and his co-conspirators have laid the foundation for the Gunpowder Plot to assassinate Members of Parliament, King James, and his entire family, Thomas watches *King John*. Tiffany makes particular note of Thomas's reaction to Hubert and Arthur's prison scene, because Thomas would like to save two-year-old Prince Charles from the attack on his father in order to raise Charles in the Catholic faith and install him as their new King. Regarding the scene in which Hubert nearly harms Arthur, Tiffany writes, "Thomas saw all this, rapt on the bench in Southwark. [...] He thought long on what the play meant about present-day England, as though it were not a history play but an allegory" (Tiffany 191). It may very well be that Shakespeare's history plays were allegories of their time. While the succession crisis of Elizabeth's reign would not be resolved for several years, Shakespeare shows with *King John* that the actions of one person, and the affirmation of the subjects, do make a difference in terms of succession. Like Parson's *Conference* suggests, the succession crisis of Elizabeth's age felt democratic underpinnings, and as Shakespeare mulls the succession in his histories, the voices of the people symbolically become more than just a whisper.

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