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The Peaceable King, or the Lord Mendall: A Lost Jack Cade Play and its 1623 Revival

The lost play The Peaceable King, or The Lord Mendall was recorded by Sir Henry Herbert in 1623 as an old play revived by Prince Charles's Men. Its title indicates that it was about Henry VI and Jack Cade, and like Shakespeare's Henry VI, Part 2, it may have explored the clash between a peace-loving king and a popular rebellion. Its revival in 1623 may have had a political subtext, since at this time King James too was known as a 'peaceable king' and was facing open hostility from a portion of the populace that objected to his pacific foreign policy.

Among the many lost plays known only from the office-book of Sir Henry Herbert, master of the revels, is the curiously-titled *The Peaceable King, or the Lord Mendall*. Herbert licensed the play on 19 August 1623, for Prince Charles's Men at the Red Bull. The entry reads as follows:

For the Princes servants of the Rede Bull — An oulde <play called the> Peacable Kinge or the lord Mendall former<ly allowed of by Sir> George Bucke & likewise by mee & because <itt was free from adition> or reformation I tooke no fee this 19th Aug^t. <1623>¹

Herbert's comments restrict the play's date of composition to 1606–22, the period of Sir George Buc's tenure as Herbert's predecessor,² and he clearly believed that the players had left it unaltered since its original licensing.³ Beyond these facts, G.E. Bentley concluded, 'nothing is known of the subject' of the play.⁴ Its title, however, in fact suggests a very specific subject — the Jack Cade rebellion — and as a result it raises fascinating, if unanswerable, questions about why Prince Charles's Men chose to revive such a play at a time when the peaceable nature of King James was a source of popular discontent.

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The Early English Books Online Text Creation Partnership database (EEBO-TCP) is proving to be a powerful tool for researchers intrigued by lost plays such as this one, as it enables users to search for words and phrases within over 25,000 texts from the early modern era.⁵ The database reveals that the primary title, *The Peaceable King*, was something of a cliché, appearing in numerous contemporary texts; it is especially often applied to Solomon (who was ‘a Type of the mirrour of perfection, Jesus Christ’, wrote Edward Topsell, ‘for he was the King of peace, or a peaceable King’),⁶ and to Edgar, who was typically referred to by chroniclers as ‘the peaceable king Edgar’,⁷ but was also applied to other kings and is thus of no help by itself in determining the play’s subject.⁸ The alternative title, *The Lord Mendall*, however, has a very clear meaning: it almost certainly refers to Jack Cade, leader of the peasant revolt of 1450. Early modern chroniclers frequently note that Cade went by the name ‘Mend-all’: for example, Raphael Holinshed reports that ‘his name was John Cade, or (of some) John Mend-all’; John Stow says ‘he was named of some *John amend all*’; and John Trussel says that he styled himself ‘Captaine *Mend-all*’.⁹ There are, to be sure, other uses of the name ‘mend-all’ in early modern texts: the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that it was a nickname for one who mends things,¹⁰ and EEBO-TCP searches for ‘mend all’ or ‘Mendall’ reveal that the nickname (sometimes appearing as ‘Master Mend-all’) is given to characters in several works.¹¹ But the only ‘Mend-all’ who appears in the context of a peaceable king is Cade, for Henry VI was remembered as a pious and peace-loving monarch: in the words of Edward Hall, he was ‘a man of a meke spirite, and of a symple witte, preferring peace before warre, reste before businesse, honestie before profite and quietnesse before labour’ and ‘studied onely for the health of his soule’.¹²

If *The Peaceable King* was about Henry and Cade, Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 2* may offer some hints as to its content, because Shakespeare dramatizes the clash between Henry’s peaceable nature and Cade’s anarchic violence. Henry proposes to end the rebellion with negotiation rather than force:

I’ll send some holy bishop to entreat,
 For God forbid so many simple souls
 Should perish by the sword. And I myself,
 Rather than bloody war shall cut them short,
 Will parley with Jack Cade their general. (4.4.8–12)¹³

Buckingham and Clifford duly visit Cade and his army, carrying the king’s offer of ‘free pardon to them all / That will forsake thee and go home in peace’ (4.8.9–10). Although this pacifist tactic certainly contributes toward persuading

the peasants to abandon Cade, their dispersal is also a result of Buckingham and Clifford appealing to nostalgia for Henry's warlike father, 'Henry the Fifth, that made all France to quake' (17), so that Cade is left lamenting that 'the name of Henry the Fifth hailes them to an hundred mischiefs and makes them leave me desolate' (56–8). The peaceable tactics of Henry VI are thus insufficient on their own to defeat the insurrection, and even Henry is ultimately relieved when he is presented with 'the head of Cade ... / That living wrought me such exceeding trouble' (5.1.68–70). The title of the lost play suggests that it may have focused on this clash between a violent rebel and a king who favoured diplomacy over violence.¹⁴

If this was indeed the subject of *The Peaceable King*, the decision of Prince Charles's Men to revive the play in August 1623 raises intriguing questions, because another king frequently described with the word 'peaceable' was King James himself, whose predisposition toward diplomacy over war was a source of friction at this time. In 1618, when Samuel Garey praised James for enabling Britain to 'leade a peaceable and quiet life, free from forraine feares' and linked him to him Solomon's ideal of the 'pious, prudent, and peaceable king', he was referring to James's preference for negotiation in his responses to the looming crises in Europe.¹⁵ By 1623, after the election of James's son-in-law Frederick and daughter Elizabeth to the Bohemian throne and their subsequent deposition by an invading Habsburg army, many English Protestants believed they were living through a crisis point in an apocalyptic conflict with the Catholic powers. In parliament, in the pulpit, and in print, outraged voices expressed incredulity at James's pacific response: his refusal to aid Frederick and Elizabeth militarily and his plans for a diplomatic marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta.¹⁶ August 1623 was an especially bleak time for militant Protestants: Prince Charles was still in Madrid; only a month before the play was licensed, James and the privy council had agreed to abide by a marriage treaty formed with Spain, and rumours were swirling about its harsh terms;¹⁷ and on 9 August the 'miserable news' arrived that one of Frederick's key supporters, Christian of Brunswick, had suffered a catastrophic defeat at the Battle of Stadtlohn, information that produced dismay and disbelief from newsbook readers.¹⁸

In such a context, the very idea of a 'peaceable king' predisposed to diplomatic solutions was a politically fraught one. In 1621, the House of Commons used the phrase in a petition to James, expressing the hope

that seeing this inevitable necessity is fallen upon your Majesty, which no wisdom or providence of a peaceable and *pious* King can avoid, your *Majesty* would not omit this just *occasion*, speedily and effectually to take your Sword into your hand.¹⁹

In a speech to parliament in 1624, James himself used the term to defend his decisions:

It is true, that I, who have been all the Days of My Life a Peaceable King, and have had the Honour in my Titles and Impresses, to be stiled '*Rex Pacificus*,' should without Necessity imbroil Myself in War, is so far from My Nature, and from the Honour which I have had at Home and Abroad in endeavouring to avoid the Effusion of Christian Blood ... that, unless it be upon such a Necessity, that I may call it ... I should be loth to enter into it.²⁰

Outside of parliament, the pamphleteer Thomas Scott summed up neatly the contemporary debate over the value of James's peaceability:

I know some of you would answer me, King *James* was a peaceable Prince, and so loved to be at peace, and in amity with other Christian Princes: Yea, and it seemes your King himselfe, is much affected with the very name of Peace, alleading, that hee hath beene a peaceable King from his Cradle ... I must confesse, it is a happy thing for Christian, and Religious Kings, Princes, and States to be at peace, in unity, and amity one with another. But on the other side, it is as an unhappy and dangerous a thing to have league or amity with Romane-Catholique Kings, and Princes, who are, I say, sworne and profest enemies to God, and his Gospell.²¹

Attitudes such as Scott's reflect wider hostility among the populace in general, and James tried and failed to mute these criticisms with proclamations against hostile speech.²² Anger in the popular press occurred alongside physical violence in London. In 1621, a group of apprentices fought with the Spanish ambassador's servants in the street and a crowd tried to defend the boys when the authorities attempted to punish them; James subsequently condemned 'the inferiour and baser sort of people for acting many Insolencies of rude & savage barbarisme, which dayly are committed in the Streets' not only against foreign dignitaries but also against 'the whole Nobility and Gentry of our own Realmes'.²³ In September 1623, Londoners throwing stones besieged the Spanish ambassadors in their residence, and a brawl on Drury Lane left an English baker dead. These and other acts of violence were paralleled by outbursts of popular celebration in the streets

throughout that September, when false reports spread that Charles had returned from Spain without a bride. The sense that the populace was generally hostile to King James's preference for negotiation was strong, and the tension did not fully break until October, when Charles finally returned, brideless, from Madrid amid public joy.²⁴

The Peaceable King was thus revived at a time when the topic of a peace-loving king confronting violent hostility from the populace was extremely topical, so that if the play were about Henry and Cade, it may not have required any 'additions or reformatations' to enhance its contemporary parallels. Conceivably, the players deliberately revived the play in order to exploit its topicality, since it appeared at a similar time to a number of other plays with narratives that paralleled the events of the Bohemian Crisis, such as Phillip Massinger's *The Bondman* (King's Men, licensed 3 December 1623), Thomas Drue's *The Duchess of Suffolk* (Palsgrave's Men, licensed 2 January 1624), and, of course, Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (King's Men, licensed 12 June 1624).²⁵ Indeed, the company of Prince Charles's Men was no stranger to performing plays with anti-James material, intentionally or otherwise. In 1619 or 1620, the company offended the king by performing a play about a king who kills one of his sons and is then usurped by the second, in what James apparently interpreted as a satire on his relationship with Princes Henry and Charles.²⁶ More directly relevant to the subject matter of *The Peaceable King* was their masque *The World Tossed at Tennis*, apparently performed at a public theatre in 1620; for all its praise of 'a land of a most glorious peace' (880), the masque's court performance may have been abandoned because it required James to 'play along' with and thus publicly support a conclusion that proposes the 'absolute and complete man' to be both scholar and soldier and promotes Prince Charles as the exemplar of this model (865–71), ending with an unemployed soldier joyously leaving for 'the most glorious wars / That e'er famed Christian kingdom' (878–9).²⁷

Perhaps, then, the revival of *The Peaceable King* contributed to this tendency in the drama of the 1620s. This is not to say that a play about peasant rebellion would necessarily have been oppositional in its political stance. The plays on that subject from the 1590s — *Henry VI, Part 2* and *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* — are far from revolutionary in tone: as Richard Dutton puts it, they are 'effusively loyalist in their deprecations of riot and rebellion. Jack Cade is made to recognize the fickle and dangerous nature of the mob he has led, while Walworth [to whom *Jack Straw* wrongly attributes the killing of Straw] is treated as something of a folk hero'.²⁸ No doubt *The Peaceable King* echoed those earlier plays by portraying 'John Mend-all' and his mob as villainous. An interesting question for

a 1620s audience, however, would have been the extent to which the play depicted the tactics of the peaceable king as successful. As I noted above, pacifism alone does not save Shakespeare's Henry from Cade, and, given Shakespeare's ambivalent attitude toward the king who 'lost France, and made his England bleed' (*Henry V*, Epilogue, 12),²⁹ we can imagine that *The Peaceable King* too might have been sceptical toward the stance of its eponymous monarch, an attitude that would have been far more controversial in the 1620s than in it would have been in the post-Armada 1590s when Shakespeare was writing.

Without a surviving text, it is impossible to push such speculation any further. Nonetheless, the surprising amount of information about *The Peaceable King* that can be extracted from its revels license alone reminds us that the study of lost plays can flesh out our understanding of the subjects that appealed to audiences at particular times.³⁰ Reviving an old history play might seem an unfashionable choice for a playing company in 1623, but, as this study shows, there were compelling reasons to return the Lord Mendall to the stage.

Notes

This article arose out of work on the *Lost Plays Database*, a new collaborative project under the general editorship of Roslyn L. Knutson, David McInnis, and Matthew Steggle that is facilitating greater understanding of the lost plays of early modern England. Potential contributors to the project should visit its website at <http://www.lostplays.org>.

- 1 N.W. Bawcutt, *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels 1623–73* (Oxford, 1996), 142, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198122463.book.1>. The angle brackets indicate words cut from Craven Ord's transcript by J.O. Halliwell-Phillips and written in by him during the process of pasting them into his scrapbook (19–20, 124).
- 2 G.E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1941–68), 5.1393.
- 3 Bawcutt, *Control and Censorship*, 45.
- 4 Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 5.1393.
- 5 For an example of the use of EEBO-TCP to identify the subject matter of a lost play, see Matthew Steggle, 'A Lost Jacobean Tragedy: *Henry the Una* (c 1619)', *Early Theatre* 13.1 (2010), 65–81, <http://dx.doi.org/10.12745/et.13.1.833>. For a detailed description of the database, including its strengths and limitations, see Matthew Steggle, 'The Cruces of *Measure for Measure* and EEBO-TCP', *Review of English Studies* 65 (2014), 439–42, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/res/hgt120>.

- 6 Edward Topsell, *The House-Holder: or, Perfect Man*. ([London], 1609; STC 24125), 5.
- 7 See, for example, John Stow, *The Chronicles of England* (London, 1580; STC 23333), 201; Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 3 vols (London, 1599; STC 12626a), 1.7; William Camden, *Remaines of a Greater Worke* (London, 1605; STC 4521), 90.
- 8 This conclusion is based on a search for the keywords ‘peaceable king’ across all texts in the EEBO-TCP database published between 1473 and 1700, with the ‘variant spellings’ option turned on.
- 9 Raphael Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles* (London, 1587; STC 13569), 632; Stow, *Chronicles*, 652; John Trussel, *A Continuation of the Collection of the History of England* (London, 1636; STC 24297), 151; for other examples, see D. Allen Carroll, ‘Johannes Factotum and Jack Cade,’ *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989), 491, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2870614>.
- 10 ‘Mend, v.,’ *OED Online*.
- 11 This conclusion is based on a search for ‘mend-all’ and ‘Mendall’ across all texts in the EEBO-TCP database published between 1473 and 1700, with the ‘variant spellings’ option turned on. When entering the search terms, capitalization, hyphenation, and the presence or absence of quotation marks make no difference to the results. Examples of the nickname in use can be found in John Deacon, *Tobacco Tortured, or, the Filthie Fume of Tobacco Refined* (London, 1616; STC 6436), 96, 100, and Samuel Rowlands, ‘As Wise as John of Gotehams Calfe: or, This Fellow Brought his Hogges to a Faire Market,’ *A Paire of Spy-Knaves* (London, 1620; STC 21404), B4v. In William Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money*, the character of Vandalle is repeatedly referred to in error as ‘M. Mendall’; see *Englishmen for My Money*, ed. W.W. Greg (Oxford, 1912), l.1418 ff.
- 12 Edward Hall, *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London, 1548; STC 12722), Clv. On Henry’s reputation in the early modern era for piety and peace, see Ralph A. Griffiths, *The Reign of King Henry VI: The Exercise of Royal Authority, 1422–1461* (Berkeley, 1981), 1–8, and Roger Warren, ed., *Henry VI, Part Two* (Oxford, 2002), 28–9, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198130000.book.1>.
- 13 Act, scene, and line references are to *King Henry VI, Part 2*, ed. Ronald Knowles (London, 1999).
- 14 I have quoted *Henry VI, Part 2* from an edition based on the Folio text. The wording is rather different in the 1594 First Quarto edition of the play, entitled *The First Part of the Contention Betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster*, but the overall effect is the same. As in the Folio, Henry offers to ‘come and parley with their generall’, but he sounds more belligerent when dispatching Buckingham and

- Clifford, telling them to ‘gather / An Army up, and meete with the Rebels’ (Knowles, ed., *Henry VI, Part 2*, 400). His intentions, however, are apparently still peaceful, because Buckingham and Clifford tell Cade’s men that Henry ‘mildly hath his pardon sent to you’. The lords do not mention Henry V by name when winning over Cade’s men, but his presence is still implicit when they appeal to the rebels’ bellicose patriotism, telling them that if they want honour, ‘then haste to France that our forefathers wonne, / And winne againe that thing which now is lost’ (402).
- 15 Samuel Garey, *Great Britains Little Calendar* (London, 1618; STC 11597), 66–7.
 - 16 For an overview of these matters, see Thomas Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War, 1621–1624* (Cambridge, 1989), 12–20.
 - 17 Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *Prince Charles and the Spanish Marriage, 1617–1623: A Chapter of English History*, 2 vols (London, 1869), 1.361–6.
 - 18 Elisabeth Bourcier (ed.), *The Diary of Sir Simonds D’Ewes, 1622–1624* (Paris, 1974), 151; Jayne E.E. Boys, *London’s News Press and the Thirty Years War* (Woodbridge, 2011), 159–60; on the devastating impact of Christian’s defeat upon Frederick, see C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (London, 1944), 185.
 - 19 John Rushworth, ed., *Historical Collections* (London, 1659; Wing R2316), 41; on the background to this document, see J.R. Tanner, ed., *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I, A.D. 1603–1625* (Cambridge, 1930), 274.
 - 20 *Journal of the House of Lords, Beginning Anno Decimo Octavo, Jacobi Regni, 1620, Vol. III* (London, 1771; ESTC T166603), 250; on the background to this document, see Tanner, *Constitutional Documents*, 276.
 - 21 Thomas Scott, *Robert Earle of Essex His Ghost, Sent from Elizian: To the Nobility, Gentry, and Commualtie of England* (‘Paradise’ [i.e. London], 1624; STC 22804), 4.
 - 22 On the popular criticism of James’s foreign policy, and on his attempts at curbing it, see Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, 20–36.
 - 23 James F. Larkin and Paul L. Hughes (eds), *Stuart Royal Proclamations, Volume 1: Royal Proclamations of King James I, 1603–1625* (Oxford, 1973), 509, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198223726.book.1>. On the violent events leading up to the proclamation, see Joseph P. Ward, *Culture, Faith, and Philanthropy* (New York, 2013), 34–5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137065513>. See also Larkin and Hughes, *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, 509n1.
 - 24 Cogswell, *Blessed Revolution*, 48–50.
 - 25 For a book-length study of these plays, see Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics in 1623/24* (Cambridge, 1986).
 - 26 On the various theories about this incident, see David Nicol, *Middleton and Rowley: Forms of Collaboration in the Jacobean Playhouse* (Toronto, 2012), 132–4; Matthew

Steggle, 'King with His Two Sons,' *Lost Plays Database* (2012), http://www.lostplays.org/index.php/King_with_His_Two_Sons.

- 27 C.E. McGee, intro to *The World Tossed at Tennis*, Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (eds), *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* (Oxford, 2007), 1405–8, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199580538.book.1>. The masque is quoted from this edition. See also Nicol, *Middleton and Rowley*, 134–8.
- 28 Richard Dutton, *Mastering the Revels: The Regulation and Censorship of English Renaissance Drama* (Iowa City, 1991), 85, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697861.013.0022>.
- 29 Act, scene, and line references are to *King Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik (London, 1995), <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408159910.00000020>.
- 30 For a broader discussion of the value of studying lost plays, see David McInnis and Matthew Steggle, 'Nothing Will Come of *Nothing*? Or, What Can We Learn from Plays That Don't Exist?', David McInnis and Matthew Steggle (eds), *Lost Plays in Shakespeare's England* (Basingstoke, 2014), 1–16, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/9781137403971.0006>.

