

THE DATING OF BALE'S *KING JOHN*: A Re-Examination

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Introduction

Recent scholarship has tended to confuse some of the issues surrounding the dating of *King John* as well as details concerning the external evidence of performance. What follows is an attempt to offer some clarity to the topic. In addition, a number of specific passages shall be re-examined in their historical context, which, while not radically altering the accepted dating for the play, may help narrow the field. In sum, while we cannot say for certain when *King John* was originally written, it is doubtful that it existed much before 1536. The A-text was probably prepared in 1537, and not 1538–1539 as has been argued. The B-text represents a much later, post 1558 context, but we are safe in concluding that the Elizabethan revisions were rather minor: the play as a whole should be regarded as Henrician. While theories about a 1540s recension of the play cannot be disproved, they are unlikely.

There are six issues related to the dating of *King John*: 1) the state of the manuscript; 2) Bale's autograph (B-text); 3) the A-text; 4) possible revisions of the play in the 1540s; 5) the original composition of the play; and 6) the external evidence (see FIG. 1).

The Manuscript

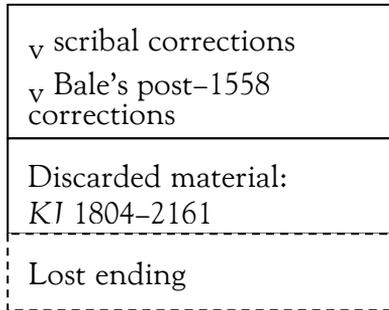
Concerning the manuscript of *King John*, J.H. Pafford's original work on the matter was replaced by Barry Adam's thorough edition.¹ Peter Happé included *King John* in his *The Complete Plays of John Bale*, and this remains the most complete and accessible to the modern reader. A facsimile of the manuscript is available, and this coupled with Happé's description is the best way to sort through the rather complicated critical-text issues.² Twenty folio leaves (written on both sides) are in the hand of an unknown scribe (Scribe A), who made some minor corrections over his text. After 1558 Bale revised the A-text by adding an act division, interpolating a few passages in the margins, and inserting a small sheet and a full quarto page. Bale's revision eventually became so cumbersome that mid-way through

FIG. 1: The Dating of *King John*

Original composition: pre-1536?



A-text: Scribal hand



1540s Recension?



B-text: Bale's revision (after 1558)

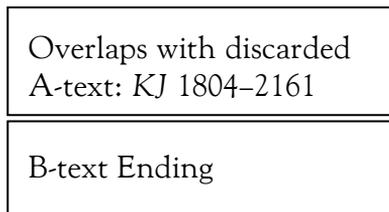
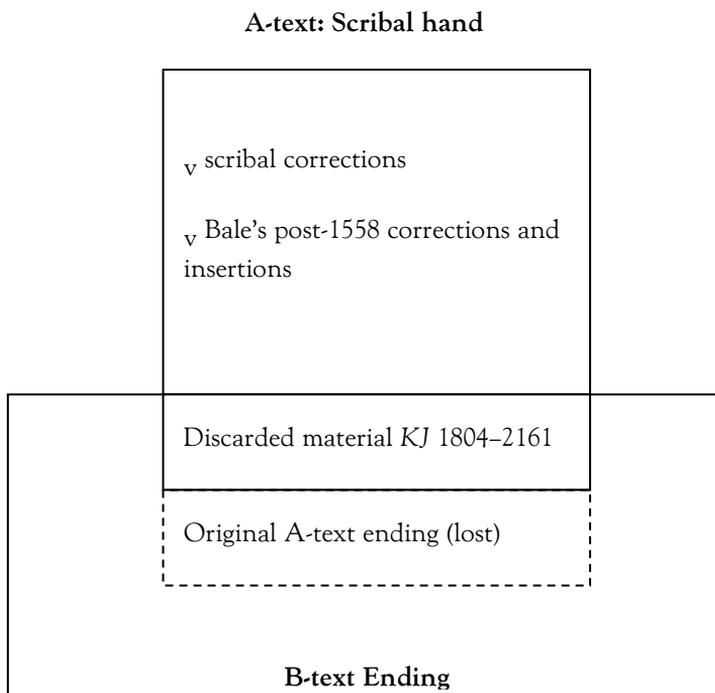


FIG. 2: The Dating of *King John*



the second act (*KJ* 1804 and after) he continued with a fair copy, canceling the remainder of the A-text. Two leaves of this canceled material survive, which can be compared with the B-text up to *KJ* 2161, although the original ending of the A-text is lost (FIG. 2). Comparing the canceled material with Bale's fair copy (B-text) reveals that the playwright incorporated almost every word of the A-text into his final version.³

Through an analysis of the watermarks and stitching, Pafford reasonably concluded that the A-text originally was made up of a complete book of twenty-two folios, the final two leaves being lost. These missing pages could contain no more than around 180 lines; and if this is so, could

not have included all the material that we have in the B-text ending. This has caused a measure of confusion among recent scholars who have relied on Pafford's work.⁴ Although his conclusions concerning the A-text were sound, other aspects of Pafford's analysis had been questioned from the very beginning.⁵ What external evidence we have indicates that the play was originally in two *libri*,⁶ and as we shall see, much material in the B-text is undoubtedly from the 1530s.

My suggestion is that, rather than a complete play as has been assumed, the A-text simply represented the first *liber* of a longer two-part, or two-book play, the original ending having spilled over to the second *liber*. Bale revised his play in a number of ways after 1558, probably for printing, but the original A-text counterpart, the second *liber*, would have been discarded and subsequently lost. There is little reason to suppose that the second *liber* ended substantially different from the surviving B-text.⁷ After 1558 Bale revised a two-*liber* play, though only the changes made to the first *liber* (the A-text) survive. The ending of the play as we have it is essentially the same as that of the original composition.

Bale's Revision (B-text)

Bale's fair copy revision of *King John* was undisputedly prepared after 1558. There is an allusion to 'our late kynge Henrye' (KJ 1112)⁸ and a direct reference to England's 'quene', which must be Elizabeth (KJ 2671-91).⁹ Adams and Happé regarded the following citation to reflect Elizabeth's proclamation of 22 September 1560, 'Ordering Deportation of Anabaptists':¹⁰

In Danyels sprete she hath subdued the Papistes
 With all the ofsprynge of Antichristes generacyon;
 And now of late dayes the secte of Anabaptistes
 She seketh to suppressse for their pestiferouse facyon KJ 2678-81

Though the lines certainly refer to Elizabeth, we must caution against automatically placing allusions to the 'anabaptist sect' into Elizabeth's reign. It is more likely that KJ 2678-84 was original to the play's 1530s version, and that Bale in the B-text simply tidied-up the play by imposing a different gender on a passage originally referring to Henry VIII. The term 'Anabaptist' is commonly cited in public discourse of the 1530s as a radical extreme against which all churchmen should be on their guard. In March 1535, for example, a proclamation warned of Anabaptists, those strangers

'that of late' have come into the realm, and ordered them to leave within twelve days. It derided their 'divers and sundry pestilent heresies', and accused them of being 'corrupt, seditious, and erroneous persons'.¹¹ This proclamation was followed by arrests, examinations, and eventually, burnings of twenty-five 'detestable heretics' in May, under Cranmer's watch. All this occurred at the height of fears of the Anabaptist heresy in both England and the continent, occasioned by the Münster rebellion.¹² Henry's proclamation against Protestant primers, November 1538, also outlawed 'sundry strange persons called Anabaptists and Sacramentaries which be lately come into this realm', and forced them to leave within ten days.¹³ While there would certainly be contemporary relevance to an Anabaptists reference in the early 1560s — one which Bale would not have missed — the original application is more likely Henrician. Bale would simply have tweaked the pronouns in this particular passage to fit Elizabeth.

Two other passages in the B-text mentioning the Anabaptist heresy also appear topical to the 1530s, and were probably present in the play's original ending. *KJ* 2626–31 describes the 'Anabaptystes' as 'a secte newe rysen of late', and references their take-over of Münster in the early 1530s: 'The cytie of Mynster was lost through their debate / They have here begonne their pestilent sedes to sowe ...'¹⁴ Sedition, the papist Vice, takes comfort in the fact that those subjects of the realm who work for reformation can simply be arrested 'for sacramentaryes / Or Anabaptystes' (*KJ* 2530–32). Henry's 1538 proclamation, mentioned above, conjoins the same two terms on three different occasions.¹⁵ But more importantly, Henrician Protestants in particular laboured to distance themselves from 'radical sectes', while conservatives in the 1530s attempted to conflate the two in order to retard the progress of evangelical reform. A case in point can be seen in the trial and burning of John Lambert, autumn 1538, who was accused of being a 'sacramentary'. Foxe's account has Gardiner 'of a subtle and crafty wit' frightening the king into action with reports from abroad that he 'be a favourer of new sects and opinions'.¹⁶ While Bale probably is not alluding to Lambert in particular, evangelical anxieties that their cause would be associated with the radical reformation were no greater than in the mid to late 1530s.¹⁷ In contrast, by 1563 the danger seemed sufficiently dissipated that it was thought prudent to *expunge* a warning against Anabaptists in Article 9 of the Articles of Religion.¹⁸

Thus, although the B-text dates from Elizabeth's reign and was adjusted for topical application in the 1560s, references to 'Anabaptystes and sacramentaries' were probably already present during the 1530s and belong to Bale's original polemical purposes.

The A-Text

It is difficult to determine precisely when Scribe A copied his text. There is a clear reference to the 1533 Act in Restraint of Appeals (*KJ* 926), but some assert a later *terminus a quo* in the brief mention of 'a joynt of Darvell Gathyron' — listed among a long line of mock relics (*KJ* 1229).¹⁹ Darfel Gedern founded a church at Llanderfel in Merioneth; his image 'which the Welchmen much worshipped' was burned along side a 'papist' friar called Forrest, on 30 May 1538. John Foxe leaves us with an account of the event (fully staged with scaffold and sermon), and underscores the dark irony contained in the Welsh prophecy that the image of Darfel Gedern would set a whole 'forrest' on fire.²⁰ Cromwell received two letters concerning the matter which attest to the Welsh people's affection for the image.²¹ While Bale scholars have maintained that Scribe A copied his text shortly after this event, it seems more probable that the play simply cites another well-known saint and shrine whose superstitious content made great stage business for Bale. It is, after all, only the relic and not its destruction that is recorded in *King John*: 'Here ys a joynt of Darvell Gathyron, / Be sydes other bonys and relyckes many one' (*KJ* 1229). Indeed, if the event *had* already occurred one would expect Bale to have milked it for all its dramatic worth. Contrast, for example, the treatment of the same by William Gray's propagandist Ballad, 'The Fantassie of Idolatrie', also recounted in Foxe, and written sometime in the 1540s:

Also Delver Gathaene,
As (saieth the Welcheman)
 Brought outlawes out of hell,
Is come with spere and shelde,
In harneys to burne in Smythfielde;
 For in Wales he may not dwell.

Then Forest the fryer,
That obstynate lyer,
 That wyllingly is dead;
In his contumacy,

The gospell dyd deny,
 And the kyng to be supreme head.²²

Bale's citation on the other hand, does not mention the burning, or Forrest. The reference could have been written anytime in the 1530s, and does not compel us to date the A-text past 30 May 1538.²³ In fact, the other correspondences between Bale's various poetic parodies and 'The Fantasy of Idolatry' tend to reinforce the contrast: Bale's burlesques are in every case pushing *towards* a further dismantling of the traditional faith; they seldom look back at its success, as does Gray's Ballad, which belongs to a slightly later context. In fact, we may have a tentative *terminus ad quem* and not a *quo* in Bale's reference to 'Darvell Gathyron': if the A-text were written *after* 30 May 1538 we would expect Bale to make much more dramatic use of the destruction of the image and burning of Forrest. While the argument that Bale inserted the reference because of renewed interest in the Welsh saint occasioned by Forrest's death cannot be disproved, it is not compelling. The 'Darvell Gathyron' line is but one of dozens of short, rapid-fire attacks on all things 'popish' found throughout Bale's dramatic works.

A safer place to look for fixing the A-text is found in references to the dissolution of religious houses. As a *typos* of Henry VIII, King John is in the *process* of closing churches and monasteries: 'Bothe chyrchys and abbeys he opressyth more and more, / And take of the clergye — yt is onreasonable to tell' (KJ 659–60). In his righteous anger he may be forced to destroy them all (KJ 259).²⁴ Dissimulation and Sedition lament that fact that the 'abbeys go downe', but believe the process can still be stopped (KJ 736). Of course, one could argue that all this is simply a function of plot: the King must arouse papal displeasure if the play is to have dramatic tension. But Bale's purposes are to draw both a mythic and also a historical link between Henry VIII and King John. The play's snapshot of the dissolution in mid-process, coupled with other obvious correlations with Crown-sponsored propaganda — obedience, supremacy, vernacular scripture, sedition hidden under *benedicite*, monastic wealth and oppression of the poor, papal threat of foreign intervention, superstitious use of saints, images, and worship — settles composition of the A-text comfortably within the spring 1536 to the end of 1538, a time after the start of the 'oppression' of the smaller houses and amid the push for complete dissolution.²⁵

1530s material in the B-text

There are three topical allusions in the B-text which support and narrow our dating of the A-text. Although the original ending of the A-text is lost, what we *do* have which overlaps with the B-text shows that Bale included almost every word in his Elizabethan revision. Further, B-text passages clearly topical to the 1530s, if not part of the A-text, itself, may have been part of the original second *liber* of the play.²⁶ It is unlikely that Bale would compose new lines in 1558 to fit so specific a Henrician context. Two 1530s references are helpful to our present discussion:

Sedicyon: Ye gave injunctyons that Gods wurde myghte be taught,
 But who observe them? Full manye a tyme have I laught
 To see the conveyauce that prelates and priestes can fynde.
Imp Maj: And whie do they beare Gods wurde no better mynde?
Sedicyon: For if that were knowne than woulde the people regarde
 No heade but their prynce; with the Churche
than were it harde.
 Than shoulde I lacke helpe to maynteyne their estate,
 As I attempted in the Northe but now of late.

KJ 2508–15

First, Bale mentions the northern uprising, or Pilgrimage of Grace, which broke out in a series of conflicts stretching from autumn 1536, to early 1537.²⁷ This gives us a *terminus a quo* of the beginning of 1537. Further, Sediton's words probably imply that the conflict is over. If this is so, than we find ourselves towards the middle of 1537. Richard Rex has similarly dated the surviving manuscript of Thomas Swynnerton, a Henrician evangelical. A reference to the Pilgrimage of Grace, that is, lessons which 'experience taught us but of late, by the Northe Flete', Rex places in 1537–1538.²⁸ There were, of course, other Tudor uprisings, such as the 1549 Prayer-Book rebellion, which arose in the West Country and spread to smaller disturbances in the West Midland to Yorkshire. For these, Bale's B-text adds the proviso, 'And sens that tyme in other places besyde' — an obvious later gloss on the 1530s reference (KJ 2516).²⁹

The second reference at first glance appears to mention the second set of Cromwellian 'injunctyons' issued in September 1538,³⁰ which provided that an English Bible be set up in every parish by the following Easter (6 April 1539).³¹ Sediton's quip, 'But who observe them' (KJ 2509), and his remark, 'Some of the Byshoppes at your injunctyons slepe' (KJ 2524) would seem to place us firmly into the spring of 1539. Indeed, in March

1539, they were jeered at as no more than ‘a rhyme, a jest or a ballad’; in April a deposition to Cromwell complains that ‘from Sarum westward the Injunctions are not observed, and will not be unless you send surveyers into these parts to enquire by verdict of twelve men whether they have been obeyed’.³² Thus, if one maintains that Bale, here, refers to the 1538 Injunctions, then the passage ‘but who observe them’ tends to move the dating of the A-text to the spring of 1539. This becomes problematic when we recall that Henry at this time had begun his radical shift in policy towards the conservative side. The King even celebrated Holy Week in all its traditional liturgical glory.³³

But could the citation refer to the earlier, 1536 Injunctions? In fact, Cromwell’s first set of Injunctions—which in the event, *were* largely ignored — also provided for a Bible in every parish, at least initially.³⁴ In any case, the teaching of ‘Gods wurde’ in *King John* is such an elastic concept that it could refer to practically any evangelical imperative in either set of injunctions. I am convinced that those cited here are of 1536. *King John* is a play that *moves forward* to further, more extreme measures precisely because earlier means were regarded as unsuccessful. The injunctions of 1538 were more radical, and it is a more natural reading of *King John* to see KJ 2508–15 as a piece of propaganda which is part of the process of preparing the realm for further measures. Given the close proximity to a mention of the northern uprising (KJ 2515), it is more likely that Bale is citing the 1536 Injunctions and that 1537 is a safe dating for the passage.

This also corresponds to a third B-text reference, or rather, series of references, which must have been part of *King John* in the 1530s. Toward the end of the play, Veritas has exposed Seditio for the traitor that he is, while Imperial Majesty engages the Three Estates, Clergy, Nobility, and Civil Order, for the continued work of reformation. The Monarch bids the three swear ‘to take me for your heade’, while Civil Order affirms that, ‘we wyll obeye yow, as our gournour in Gods steade’ (KJ 2435–6). Clergy promises that ‘your grace shall be the supreme head of the Church’ (KJ 2389), asks Imperial Majesty to ‘put Private Welthe [also a Cardinal] out of the monasteries’ (KJ 2443), and further vows ‘here to exyle Usurped Powre [the Pope] / And your supremyte to defende yche daye and howre’ (KJ 2447–8). Nobility also promises ‘out of the monasteries / To put Private Welthe and detect hys mysteries’ (KJ 2449–50). Civil Order beseeches Imperial Majesty ‘Of the Christen fayth playe now the true

defendar' by exiling 'thys monster' Antichrist 'with hys venym wormes, hys adders, whelpes and snakes' (KJ 2427–9). Bale even goes out of his way to condemn the 'papist' exaltation of Henry's least favourite English saint, Thomas Becket (KJ 2597–2600). These passages point unquestionably to a time in which the Supremacy remains a hot issue, the menace of papal power a real threat, and the dissolution of the monasteries has not yet reached its *dénouement*. They correspond to similar references in the extant A-text,³⁵ and again, help date the A-text into 1537, or perhaps 1538. They also argue for a 1530s origin of the substance of the B-text. Anti-Catholic and anti-papal polemics played well throughout the period, including the 1560s — which is precisely why Bale sets about tweaking the play to fit an Elizabethan context. But their propaganda value would have been no greater than in 1537–1538 and their flavour is unmistakably Henrician.³⁶

Revisions in the 1540s related to the B-text

Could the B-text be based on a 1540s exemplum (see FIG. 1)? Pafford suggested that an intermediate revision was made between the A-text and the Elizabethan version, and that the character Imperial Majesty was not part of the original ending, referring to Edward VI and not Henry VIII. While Bale scholars have convincingly refuted these arguments,³⁷ a few additional comments are necessary as the theory has resurfaced of late.³⁸ In the first place, the image of Bale using a late 1540s text to revise a 1530s scribal manuscript, but then continuing with his 1558 fair copy seems rather cumbersome. Why would he not have made his changes onto the 1540s text? Postulating an *additional* text from which Bale was working, while not impossible, is certainly unnecessary. A reference in the B-text to 'duke Ioshue, whych was our late kynge Henry ...' (KJ 1112) is perfectly natural in an Elizabethan setting, and does not compel us to postulate some kind of late 1540s recension. Designating Imperial Majesty as an Edwardine, or even an Elizabethan creation, makes for a rather awkward reading of the text. It is more natural to see Imperial Majesty as Henry VIII, who furthers the Reformation where the tragic King John could not, and to assume the character's presence from the earliest life of the play.³⁹ As we have seen, Imperial Majesty bids Clergy, Nobility, and Civil Order swear to him as the Supreme Head of the Church, vow to defend and obey his supremacy, and promise to attack the seditious monastic institutions.

All this points to 1537–1538 and suggests that the best editorial procedure is to assume that passages and characters found in the B-text are

from the 1530s unless there is a compelling reason to move them forward. Concerning Imperial Majesty, then, Bale would simply have left the Henrician character essentially as it was, allowing its *persona* to be re-interpreted as either Edward or Elizabeth, as people saw fit.

A reference to John Leland in the B-text has proved to be a red herring in the whole discussion:

I assure ye, fryndes, lete men wryte that they wyll
 Kynge Johan was a man both valeaunt and godlye.
 What though Polydorus reporteth hym very yll
 At the suggestyons of the Malicyouse clergie?
 Thynke yow a Romane with the Romanes can not lye?
 Yes! Therfor Leylande out of thy slumbre awake
 And wytnesse a trewthe for thyne owne contrayes sake

KJ 2193–9

What is meant by Leland's slumber? He became insane in 1547, and died in 1552.⁴⁰ Those who are looking for some kind of Edwardine recension read Bale's exhortation to Leland as a literary orison that he would shed his insanity and see with delight the truth told and the Reformation advanced.⁴¹ Others more sympathetic to an Elizabethan rewrite, maintain that Bale refers to Leland's 'sleep of death', and that 'He calls on the spirit which was active in Leland, and which moves all right-minded Englishmen to witness the truth against the falsifiers of history'.⁴²

I find both interpretations awkward and unnecessary. There is no reason to assume that 'The slumber must refer either to his death or his insanity'.⁴³ It is more likely that the reference is topical to the late 1530s. Bale is simply warning his audience, as well as the *living* Leland (the antiquaries worked closely together in the 1530s), against Polydore Vergil's 'Romanist' version of King John. The Italian historian's *Anglicae Historiae Libri* (Basel, 1534), emphasized King John's immorality and cowardice,⁴⁴ which would stand in direct contradiction to Bale's tragic, yet heroic and 'valeaunt' Protestant saint. Bale had good reason to be concerned about the influence of Vergil's King John, for Cranmer himself received a presentation copy of the *Historia* for his library.⁴⁵ From 1533 Leland, by commission of Henry VIII, was engaged in a diligent search of 'all the libraries of Monasteryes and collegies' of the realm.⁴⁶ This resulted in his *Antiquarii Collectanea* — a collection of sources and narratives concerning British history. Leland had a strong hatred for Vergil, and sought to counter the 'papist's' discrediting of the historicity of Arthur — a king the

Tudors claimed as a direct ancestor. Yet, when it came to King John, Leland could appear complacent — at least from Bale's perspective. Leland follows Vergil's account for King John's lineage,⁴⁷ and adopts very uncomplimentary English versions of the King's life, which side with Stephan Langton (Bale's Vice character) and the Nobility, pointing out John's immoral behaviour.⁴⁸

Although Bale owed much to Leland, he was not beyond correcting his friend's interpretation of history. Sometime after 1552, Bale set about to correct and amplify Leland's *De Viris Illustribus* (contained within the *Anglicae Historiae Libri*) with the aim of publication.⁴⁹ The manuscript was never published, perhaps because Leland failed to give enough evangelical spin to the sources, as was Bale's practice. Bale was dissatisfied with Leland's indiscriminating acceptance of 'papist' histories:

One thing will perhaps leave the reader discontented, and meanwhile displeases me: the fact that many matters are treated here with no discrimination between doctrines or testing of spirits, and the fact that evil things are taken as holy.⁵⁰

Bale also warns against Leland's 'popish' reading of Wycliffe and the Lollards:

Weigh carefully the preposterous judgment of Leland here. He says that the most barbarous sophist is a famous theologian. Pious doctors he calls hydras. And he says that the most frigid—actually the most iniquitous — glosses of the papists are the sword of the Gospel.⁵¹

Although these comments arose amid Bale's Edwardine labours, his evangelical ideals were just as advanced in the 1530s. Nudging a snoozing Leland to discard the 'popish' histories and be wary of Vergil would have been a gentle but effective way of reminding the King's antiquary that even the history of King John could be rescued from the 'papists'. Reading Leland's 'slumber' into the 1530s fits more comfortably with the passage's immediate context, and again, follows a sound editorial procedure that most of B-text corresponds to the earliest life of *King John*.

It is difficult to positively disprove a number of possibilities relating to the manuscript. It must be said, however, that having reviewed the most pertinent verses, nothing compels a late 1540s revision related to the B-text. Of course, it is likely that the play was performed during Edward's reign, and there must have been slight revisions relating to production.

But the supposed Edwardine allusions make more sense in the 1530s, and on the whole, the evidence more comfortably points to two widely different contexts for the manuscript of *King John*: the late 1530s, where the play existed as a complete, coherent work in two *libri*, and an Elizabethan version with slight revisions related to either publication or performance.

Life before the A-text

It is impossible to determine with certainty when *King John* was first written. The earliest reference to the play is found in Bale's *Anglorum Heliades; Scriptores ab Helie*, a history of the Carmelites and their works, compiled between 1536–1539, but copied by a scribe 1539–1540. Bale lists 'Pro Rege Ioanne, Li. ii' on a page which includes the date 1536, which is not interpolated.⁵² But because of the complexities of dating the *Anglorum Heliades*, we can only say that Bale recorded the existence of *King John* between 1536–1539.⁵³ Some have been tempted to place the original composition of *King John* as early as 1533–1534.⁵⁴ Bale provoked controversy wherever he went, and on two occasions was summoned before his Bishop: in 1534 Lee of York investigated Bale's row with the Franciscan, Kirkham; and in late 1536 Stokesly of London summoned him to Greenwich because of conflicts in Bale's Thorndon parish.⁵⁵ Bale later recalled that Cromwell had protected him *ob editas comedias*, because of the comedies he had written.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, Bale does not specify which *comedias*, and one can only guess by their titles which plays listed in the *Anglorum Heliades* would have fitted a 1534–1536 context.⁵⁷ What we *have* of *King John* certainly moves us beyond 1536.

In the end the life of *King John* before the A-text will remain a mystery, but it is unlikely that it existed in coherent form much before 1536. References to the 'King's Matter' are suspiciously lacking. No doubt Bale would have expunged inappropriate matter after the fall of Anne Boleyn, but the fact that all allusions have vanished without a trace makes it more likely that the matter was left to Bale's other plays (such as the lost *Super utroque Regi Coniugio*) and that *King John* represents a later polemical and political context.

In fact, Bale's imprisonment at Greenwich, January 1537, may have occasioned the writing of *King John*. Whilst in custody, Bale prepared his 'Answer unto serten artycles' — a reply to a list of seventeen accusations of heresy from the conservative leadership of Thorndon.⁵⁸ The 'Answer' is significant for a number of reasons, but it is noteworthy that Bale

continually returns to the theme of obedience to the King, pointing out his detractors' support for the northern rebellion and their comments that 'ye kynge mynded to maynteyne all those poyntes yt saynt thomas of caunterberye dyed for'.⁵⁹ Bale pleaded his case in a letter to Cromwell, as did Leland on Bale's behalf.⁶⁰ It is probably at this time when Cromwell discovered the value of Bale's *comedias*, and perhaps *King John* was Bale's response of thanks for freedom given: the themes of *King John*, and its derision of 'thomas of caunterberye', match perfectly Cromwell's programme of 1537–1538.

External evidence

There are two or perhaps three records of Bale's dramatic activity in the 1530s. Cromwell paid for and attended two performances of 'Balle and his fellowes', one on 8 September 1538 in St. Stephen's Church, near Canterbury, and another paid for in January 1539, for a performance at an undisclosed time and location.⁶¹ Further, on 11 January 1539, a certain John Alforde claimed to have witnessed and 'an enterlude concernyng King John' at 'my Lorde of Canterbury's' (Archbishop Cranmer's Canterbury residence) during Christmas time.⁶² In the evening of 2 or 3 January, after having a few drinks, Alforde and one Henry Totehill got into quite a row concerning the recently seen play. Obviously struck by the performance, Alforde remarked that 'it ys petie that the Bisshop of Rome should reigne any lenger, for if he should, the Bisshop wold do with our King as he did with King John'. Totehill responded that 'it was petie and nawghtely don, to put down the Pope and Saincte Thomas; for the Pope was a good man, and Saincte Thomas savid many ...' The host of the party, Thomas Brown, joined the argument remarking that the play was 'one of the beste matiers that ever he sawe, towching King John' and that it had changed his mind about the noble King, for 'he was the begynner of the puttyng down of the Bisshop of Rome, and therof we myghst be all gladd'. Totehill crossed the line by maintaining that the Bishop of Rome was 'made Pope by the clergie and by the consent of all the Kinges Christen' and by further claiming 'the olde lawe was as good as the newe'. Such was the reason for the accusations against him, and the occasion for Alforde's deposition.

Some identify this 'Christmas Tyme' performance with Cromwell's payment of January, mentioned above.⁶³ If this is so—and there is no way to know for certain — then we have a record of two performances, and not

three. Further, while it is clear that the play described in Alforde's deposition is Bale's *King John* (which contains several uncomplimentary references to Becket), one might speculate that an *additional* play was seen that night, namely, Bale's lost *De Traditione Thome Becketi*. It is impossible to tell from the deposition, for the only performance mentioned is of *King John*. However, there was enough banter about Becket that evening to make one suspect a performance on the matter, and we know that Bale, elsewhere staged several of his plays at once.⁶⁴ A performance of 'On the Traitories of Becket' would be timely, considering the recent dismantling of his shrine: 8 September 1538.

It has also been suggested that the payment by Cromwell listed above for 8 September had been part of a general programme of evangelical revelry, capped off by an evening performance of Bale's play on Becket.⁶⁵ I would add that *King John* would have fit perfectly in an evangelical double-bill for that evening: 'In your glasse wyndowes ye whyppe your naturall kynges' (*KJ* 2303).

To return to our purposes, we know that *King John* was performed during the Christmas festival season, December 1538 – January 1539.⁶⁶ How this performance is related to the A-text is not certain. It is possible that the performance occasioned the transcription by Scribe A, which served either as a prompt copy, or as a presentation copy for Cranmer, Cromwell, or Henry, himself.⁶⁷ Scribe A's corrections of his own text concern stage directions and doubling arrangements, indicating that this version was prepared for performance.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, we cannot say for certain. It is my guess that the A-text (and its accompanying second *liber*) was prepared sometime in mid to late 1537 and was used for a series of performances up to early 1539. It has long been suggested that Bale's company was, in fact, one and the same as Cromwell's 'Lord Privy Seal's Men'.⁶⁹ If this is so, as seems likely, then we have a series of venues at which Bale's plays could have been performed (see APPENDIX).

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Appendix

Payments to Thomas Cromwell's Players, Lord Privy Seal's Men

as recorded in the most recent *REED* editions, and including payments recorded in *Dramatic Texts and Records of Britain* edited Ian Lancashire (Cambridge UP, 1984) not found in the *REED* material.

* Indicates payments or performances of 'Bale and his Fellowes'.

1536–7	Shrewsbury (two payments)
[8 September] 1536–7 [1537]	King's College, Cambridge
1537–8	Cambridge
1537–8	Leicester
1537–8	Ludlow (2)
1537–8	Oxford
1537–8	Shrewsbury
1537–8	Thetford
*8 September, 1538	Canterbury
*Christmas, 1538–9	Canterbury, 'King John'
*January 1539	playing before Cromwell
1539–40	Cambridge
1539–40	Thetford
1540	York
1540	Maldon

NOTES

- ¹. *King John* edited J. Pafford and W. Greg (Malone Society Reprints; London: Oxford UP for Malone Society, 1931); *John Bale's King Johan* edited Barry B. Adams (Princeton UP, 1969).
2. The manuscript is MS HM3 (Huntington Library, San Marino, California). A facsimile has been reproduced by W. Bang Kynge Johan, in *Materialien zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas* 25 (Louvain: Uystpruyst, 1909). I follow Peter Happé's description in *The Complete Plays of John Bale* 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 1986) 1 100; see also the summary in Peter Happé *John Bale* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 89–90. All citations of *King John* (hereafter, *KJ*) and *Three Laws* (hereafter, *TL*) are from Happé's edition.

3. Happé *Complete Plays* 1 100.
4. For example, Tom Betteridge 'Staging Reformation Authority: John Bale's *King Johan* and Nicholas Udall's *Respublica*' *Renaissance and Reformation Review* 3 (2000) 34–58.
5. William T. Davies 'A Bibliography of John Bale' in *Oxford Bibliographical Society, Proceedings & Papers, Volume 5* (1940) 203–79, at 209–12; Thora Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* (Copenhagen: G.E.C Gad, 1968), 99–105.
6. See below, 123.
7. The best account of Bale's confusing and inconsistent use of *libri* is Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* 103–104, note 102. Happé, following Pafford, regards the A-text as a condensed version of an earlier, 1530s, two-part play (*John Bale* 90), though Davies rightly questioned this theory in 1940 ('A Bibliography of John Bale' 211–12).
8. This citation occurs in the Interpretour's speech inserted by Bale after his Act I division.
9. The 1558 date in a watermark remains doubtful: Happé *Complete Plays* 7 note 25.
10. *Tudor Royal Proclamations* edited Paul Hughes and James Larkin, 4 vols (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1964–1969) 2 no. 470; see Happé *Complete Plays* 139; Adams *King Johan* 23–4.
11. *Tudor Royal Proclamations* 1 no. 155.
12. For the historical context of the 1535 proclamation, see Diarmad MacCulloch *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1996), 145–6.
13. *Tudor Royal Proclamations* 1 no. 158. For the historical context, again see Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1992) 411.
14. The Anabaptists took over Münster in 1532, and held it under siege until 1535 (Happé *Complete Plays* 1 139).
15. *Tudor Royal Proclamations* 1 no. 158.
16. John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* 8 vols, revised Pratt (London: Religious Tract Society, fourth edition 1971) 5 228. For commentary, see MacCulloch *Cranmer* 232–4. Foxe was probably too eager to blame Gardiner; the evangelical establishment, in attempting to distance itself from continental radicals, deserves the larger portion of blame for Lambert's death.
17. See MacCulloch *Cranmer* 145–6, 230–32.
18. The sentence expunged is against the Pelagian heresy, 'which also the Anabaptists do nowadays renew': *Documents of the English Reformation* edited Gerald Bray (Cambridge: James Clark, 1994) 290.

19. Happé *Complete Plays* 1 124; *John Bale* 90. Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* 99–100. A text-critical note: 'Darvell Gathyron' is found in the A-text, but Bale inserted six additional lines of relics in his B-text revision just before this reference. See Happé *Complete Plays* 1 61.
20. John Foxe *Acts and Monuments* 5 179–180.
21. 6 and 28 April 1538: *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* edited Henry Ellis (London: 1825, 1846) 1st Series 2 83; 3rd Series 3 195.
22. Foxe employs the passage on two occasions: a shortened version set 'upon the gallows' at Forrest's burning (5 180); and in 'The Fantasy of Idolatry' (5 404–409). For its context in the English Reformation, see Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars* 408–410. It is difficult to say when the verses were first composed. Foxe's report that the stanzas were written on Forrest's gallows may simply follow a popular legend, for the 'Fantasy of Idolatry' is certainly from the 1540s.
23. The assertion by Harris (among others) that 'Darvell Gathyron' was an 'obscure image' has never been substantiated: 'John Bale' *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 25: 4 (1940) 100. On the contrary, Foxe's account assumes the shrine was well known before its destruction.
24. Further evidence concerning the dissolution of the monasteries is cited below, 120.
25. One might be tempted to place the A-text of *King John* within the context of the evangelical programme in the summer of 1535, and then again in Lent 1536. Compare, for example, the content of the preaching of Cranmer and others during Henry's processions with Queen Anne in the summer of 1535; and their sermons for Lent, 1536. For a summary of their content, see MacCulloch *Cranmer* 138–40, 150–53. However, the A-text displays the process of dissolution already begun, thus making our *terminus a quo* 28 April 1536, when the instructions to carry out the closure were issued. For evidence of confusion and delay in the process of dissolution, see MacCulloch *Cranmer* 156.
26. See above, 118; below, 127. Davies, against Pafford, points to passages in the B-text being survivals from the A-text's original ending, now lost: 'A Bibliography of John Bale' 212. See also Greg Walker *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge UP, 1991) 174.
27. Although not specifically named, another reference to the Pilgrimage of Grace can be found at KJ 750–55.
28. Thomas Swinnerton 'The Tropes and Figures of Scripture' in *A Reformation Rhetoric* edited Richard Rex (Renaissance Texts from Manuscripts 1; Cambridge: RTM, 1999) 5.
29. The uprising of 1569 challenging Elizabeth's rule can be dismissed. We know that Bale prepared the B-text, and he died in 1563. For an alternate reading of

- these lines, see Adams *King Johan* 195, who argues that ‘now of late’ ‘could have been used of events from the mid-1530s even as late as 1560’.
30. See Happé *Complete Plays* 1 139.
 31. The injunctions are edited in *Documents of the English Reformation* 179–183.
 32. *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* edited J.S. Brewer and others, 21 vols (London: HMSO, 1862–1890) 14: 1 nos. 542, 894. For popular resistance, non-observation, and minimalist readings of the 1538 Injunctions, see Duffy *Stripping of the Altars* 410–19.
 33. See MacCulloch *Cranmer* 241.
 34. See MacCulloch *Cranmer* 166 note 95, following Richard Rex *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (London: Macmillan, 1993) 185–6 note 25. That those of 1536 met with less than enthusiastic response is indicated in the 1538 Injunctions, which invoke previous injunctions and admonish against neglect for ‘default now after this second monition continued’ (*Documents of the English Reformation* 179).
 35. See above, 122.
 36. Davies similarly argued that these and other B-text passages are survivals from the Henrician composition of the play: ‘A Bibliography of John Bale’ 212. More recently, Peter Happé convincingly shows that the character, Imperial Majesty, served as a dramatic image of Henry VIII, and that this identification was undoubtedly present in the 1530s: Happé ‘Dramatic Images of Kingship in Heywood and Bale’ *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 39:2 (1999) 239–53.
 37. Thora Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* 100–102; Davies ‘A Bibliography of John Bale’ 211–12; Happé *Complete Plays* 1 137; Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 176.
 38. See Betteridge ‘Staging Reformation Authority’ 45, 48, 52.
 39. The identification of Imperial Majesty as Henry VIII has recently been described as ‘virtually beyond question’: Happé ‘Dramatic Images of Kingship in Heywood and Bale’ 251. See above note 36.
 40. For a summary of Leland’s life, I follow Professor James Carley, who kindly granted me a copy of his forthcoming *DNB* article.
 41. Pafford *King John* xvi.
 42. Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* 102.
 43. Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* 101.
 44. Book 15, 258–84; Happé *Complete Plays* 1 135.
 45. The book is now in Cambridge University Library. See MacCulloch *Cranmer* 67 and *The Work of Thomas Cranmer* edited G. E. Duffield (Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics 2; Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1964) 362. Interestingly, there are a number of hand-written marginalia in the section on

- Roman Britain (1–45), as well as distinctive underscores amid the narrative on Thomas Becket (210).
46. *The Laboriouse Journey and Serche ... Enlarged by Johan Bale* (1546); *John Leland's Itinerary* edited John Chandler (Stroud: Sutton, 1993) 1.
 47. *Joannis Lelandi Antiquarii De rebus Britannicis collectanea 1* 204–205 [1 215–16]. I have used the eighteenth-century edition by Thomas Hearne, 6 vols (London: B. White, 1774). References to the original *Collectanea* are given in brackets.
 48. *Collectanea 2* 534–6 [1 768–71]. The chronicle Leland follows, called *Historia Aurea*, was particularly harsh in its treatment of King John.
 49. See Leslie Fairfield *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* (West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 1976), 116–117.
 50. Trinity College, Cambridge MS R.7.15, fol. 2^v; cited and translated in Fairfield *John Bale: Mythmaker* 116–117.
 51. Fol. 122.
 52. BL MS Harley 3838, folios 111^v, 112^f, 112^v. For a facsimile of the manuscript, see Harris 'John Bale' 131–34.
 53. BL MS Harley 3838, fol. 43^v, 110^v. On the dating of the *Anglorum Heliades*, see Honor McCusker *John Bale: Dramatist and Antiquary* (PhD dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1937; published Library of English Renaissance Literature; Freeport NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971) 99–100; Fairfield *John Bale: Mythmaker* 162. While the folio indexing Bale's play cites the year 1536, and the work also contains a letter of dedication to the King's antiquary, Leland, dated 1536, it is clear that Bale continued to revise this work over the next few years. The surviving manuscript contains two dates of 1538, which do not appear as additions or alterations. In the text itself, there is a reference to events we know to have occurred in 1539. The manuscript we have was probably copied in 1539 or 1540 from Bale's original 1536 piece, but with certain revisions from 1536 to 1539.
 54. Harris 'John Bale' 67–72.
 55. His examination before Stokesly is the occasion of Bale's *Answer unto certain articles*, discussed below, 124. The most scholarly account of Bale's life remains Fairfield *John Bale: Mythmaker*; see especially 36–42.
 56. *Bale Scriptorum Illustrium maioris Britanniae ... Catalogus* (Basel: I. Oporinus, 1557, 1559) 702. For a translation, see Happé *Complete Works 1* 147.
 57. On Bale's autobiographical lists of his works, see Blatt *The Plays of John Bale* 20–24; Happé *Complete Plays 1* 8–9.
 58. ¹ 'Answer unto serten artycles', Public Record Office MS SP 1/111, fols 183–7 (*Letters and Papers 11* 446–7). The full text has been transcribed in McCusker

John Bale 6–10 (citations are from McCusker). As theatre historians have misread Bale's 'Answer', it is worth adding a few comments on the document. While correctly dating this document to Bale's imprisonment in Greenwich, January 1537, Happé adds unnecessary confusion by mistakenly claiming that it refers to the official 'King's Book', which, of course, was not printed until 1543: *John Bale* 59. The 'kynges boke' Bale refers to as 'dyuyded into ten artycles ... sum be necessarye to saluacyon, and sum not so', is an explicit reference to the Ten Articles of 1536 ('Answer' 6). Further, in defending his preaching concerning the Creed's *descendit ad inferna*, Bale rejects the traditional Harrowing of Hell 'sett forth in peynted clothes, or in glasse wyndowes, or lyke as my self had befor tyme sett yt forth in ye cuntre yer in a serten playe' ('Answer' 7). This passage has been confused by the *a priori* assumption that Bale, before his conversion, did not write traditional plays. For example, Harris, incorrectly maintains that Bale, here, warns his parishioners against taking literally his mock creed in *Three Laws* (TL 1162): 'John Bale' 69. His congregation would have needed no help in recognising their Vicar's caustic parody on traditional religion. Nor is Bale warning against 'artistic and dramatic representations of the harrowing of hell motif', or cautioning that his parishioners 'not take literally pictures and drama of an emblematic nature', for instance, as Blatt maintains: *The Plays of John Bale* 28. Fairfield follows Blatt in wrongly emphasizing Bale's repudiation of his 'image-centred' Carmelite piety in favour of the 'new religion of the word and the book': *John Bale: Mythmaker* 47. Consonant with standard evangelical teaching of the 1530s, Bale's 'Answer' simply separates the 'correct' evangelical teaching of the descent into hell — Christ descended to proclaim his victory — from the 'incorrect' traditional understanding that Christ fought violently with the devils 'for ye sowles of ye faythfull sort' (namely, the Old Testament faithful), freeing them from hell ('Answer' 7). Bale admits openly his change of mind on the matter, and regrets promoting the traditional doctrine in his previous plays. The surviving mystery cycles each include a play on the 'Harrowing of Hell'.

59. 'Answer' 8.

60. *Letters and Papers* 12: 1, no. 307; 13: 1, no. 230.

61. 8 September 1538: 'Balle and his felowes. The same day gyuen to them by my lordes comaundement at Saynt Stephens besyde Caunterbury for playing before my lord ... xl s'. January 1539: 'Bale & his ffelowes. That last of January gyuen to him and his ffelowes for playing befor my lorde ... xxx s'. *Letters and Papers* 4: 2 337, 339. For more on these locations, see Paul White *Theatre and Reformation* (Cambridge UP, 1993) 17–18.

62. Cranmer sent a letter and a deposition concerning the matter to Cromwell: *The Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer* edited J.E. Cox (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846) 1 387–8.

63. See Pafford *King John* xviii; *The Revels History of Drama in English* edited Norman Sanders and others, 4 vols (London: Methuen, 1980) 2 114. White regards the connection as speculative: *Theatre and Reformation* 17.
64. According to his *Vocacyon of Johan Bale* (Wesel: 1553), *God's Promises*, *John the Baptist*, and *The Temptation of our Lord* were all staged in Kilkenny on the day of Mary's coronation, 1553 (C8^v): *The vocacyon of Johan Bale* edited Peter Happé and John King (Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 70; Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1990).
65. Several have made this connection, including MacCulloch *Cranmer* 227. The possible performance of the Becket play is reinforced by Seymour House 'Literature Drama and Politics' in *The Reign of Henry VIII: Politics Policy and Piety* edited Diarmaid MacCulloch (London: Macmillan, 1995) 189–90.
66. 'Knowing Cromwell's gift for timing, a reasonable guess for the performance would be on the Feast of Becket, 29 December': House 'Literature Drama and Politics' 190.
67. See Walker *Plays of Persuasion* 173 note 12.
68. Adams *King Johan* 9–11; Happé *John Bale* 90. These were changes Bale evidently approved of since he did not alter them in his B-text revision.
69. White *Theatre and Reformation* 17–18. For Bale's troupe in general, see 12–41.