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KNIGHTS, PIGEONS, AND CHAPMAN'S *ALL FOOLS*

OF all the writers providing comedies for Philip Henslowe at the Rose Theatre in 1596 and 1597, none was more successful than George Chapman. Henslowe's records of box-office takings show that Chapman's *Blind Beggar of Alexandria* was the most successful offering of 1596, and Chapman followed that with the biggest hit of 1597, *An Humorous Day's Mirth*. No wonder, then, that between May and October of 1598, along with payments to Chapman for the completion of a play begun by Ben Jonson and an unnamed tragedy, Henslowe made a series of payments for a Chapman comedy called *The Will of a Woman*, a title later changed to *The Fountain of New Fashions*.¹ Unfortunately, all these works are lost, but we do have Chapman's next Rose comedy, *All Fools*, a splendid adaptation of two plays by Terence, *The Self-Tormenter* and *The Brothers*.

The date of this play is rendered problematic by a number of factors. As is so often the case, Henslowe's *Diary* is maddeningly inconsistent about the title. On 22 January 1599, Chapman received £3 (the receipt witnessed by Thomas Dekker), 'in earneste of a Boocke called the world Rones A whelles'. Further payments were made on 13 February and 21 June; a final entry of 2 July records payment to Chapman of £3 for 'his Boocke called the world Rones a whelles & now all foolles but the folle'.² While editors of the play agree that this is the work first printed in 1605 under the title *All Fools: A Comody Presented at the Black Fryers, and lately before his Majestie*, uncertainties remain about how much of the text was revised before publication, and when such revisions, if any, were made.

In an intriguing article written for this journal in 2009,³ Shona McIntosh argues that several passages in the text show evidence of late revision, in 1604 or 1605, for they might allude to topical matters current in the first years of the reign of James I. I hope to show that although McIntosh's thesis is plausible, the allusions she cites point just as strongly to 1599, when *All Fools* was being written.

When Cornelio, a would-be courtier, expresses the belief that his wife Gazetta is unfaithful to him, a young page undertakes an elaborate mock defence of 'that absent and honorable lady, whose sworn knight I am, and in her of all that name, for lady is grown a common name to their whole sex' (III.i.172-5).⁴ McIntosh sees this as an indirect but clear reference to the 'massive increase in new knighthoods which had become a controversial topic in the Jacobean era'. Although an audience member of 1604 would no doubt have made this connection, her further comment that 'this could

only have been written and understood in the context of James's new approach to knighthoods⁵ is questionable, since those seeing the play at the Rose in 1599 would have even greater cause to enjoy the same line as a dig at the extraordinary proliferation of 'Essex knights', a scandal that was very much in the news at that precise time.

When the Earl of Essex took his first company of soldiers to France in 1591, he seemed to take no greater pleasure than in awarding as many knighthoods as he could. This honour was normally reserved for those who had shown extraordinary valour in battle, but to Essex, it was a fair recompense for those who, in the absence of any fighting, deserved recognition for what they would have done if given the opportunity. As we read in *The Journal of the Siege of Rouen*, on 8 October, 'not farr from St. Catherine's castle', Essex 'commaunded all the gentlemen to lighte, and said he was verie sorie that noe oportunitie was offered him to have ledd them into a place where they mighte have gayned honor; but the fault was not his, neyther yet in them, for he had receaved a great goodwill in all, and thereof was determynd to give notes of honor to some, and there made 24 knights'.⁶ A letter found in the *State Papers Domestic* comments that 'great mockery was made' of this,⁷ and on 22 October, Lord Burghley sent Essex a reprimand: 'Your Lordship so liberal bestowing of knighthoods is here commonly evil censured, and when Her Majesty shall know it, which yet she doth not, I fear she will be highly offended, considering she would have had that authority left out of your commission'. In concluding, Burghley ruefully admits that what's done is done, and then makes the very same joke as does Chapman in *All Fools*: 'but *quod factum est infectum esse non potest*, and hereby you have increased the state of ladies, present and future'.⁸

This was back in 1591, but in 1599, when *All Fools* was first performed, Essex took command of the Irish expeditionary force, and Elizabeth gave him clear instruction that he refrain from knighting any person who was not 'of ancient blood, good livelihood, or had done some especial service'. Yet Essex was soon at it again, bestowing knighthoods 'beyond all moderation', so the Queen sent him 'an express letter, all written with her own hand', commanding him to stop. Essex's response was to knight thirty-eight more men, provoking Sir Robert Napper, Chief Baron of the Exchequer in Ireland, to write from Dublin that the Earl of Essex 'never drew sword but to make knights'.⁹ An audience of 1599, therefore, knew all about new knights and their ladies.

Another passage McIntosh places within a Jacobean social and literary context occurs when a young gallant, Valerio, boasts of creating havoc 'in the place where

men's lawsuits /Are heard and pleaded' (II.i.311-12), railing against lawyers' 'declarations, replications / Rejoinders and petitions' (II.i.229-30), and going on to ask:

What objects see men in this world but such
As would yield matter to a railing humour,
When he that last year carried after one
An empty buckram bag now fills a coach,
And crowds the senate with such troops of clients,
And servile followers, as would put a mad spleen
Into a pigeon?

(II.i.340-6)

The inference that Valerio deplors the 'unprecedented social mobility' that marked the accession of James I, and that 'the image of an upstart courtier filling the senate with his faction' is suggestive of Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, published in 1603,¹⁰ seems misplaced. In context, the speech is not about upstart courtiers, but upstart lawyers—the 'buckram bag' that our offender carries is specifically a pettifogger's (disreputable lawyer's) briefcase, as seen in Marston's *The Malcontent*, where Passarello will be as recognizable in his velvet 'as a pettifogger by his buckram bag' (I.viii.59), and Count Narcisso's complaint in Dekker's *If This Be Not A Good Play, The Devil Is In It*: 'We must all turne pettifoggers, and in stead of gilt rapiers hang buckram-bags at our girdles' (I.ii.97-8).¹¹ Such scorn of lawyers was common well before the Jacobean era; Philip Stubbes offers a typical diatribe in *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), only a small part of which is quoted here:

The lawyers they ruffle it out in their silks, velvets and chaines of gold, they build gorgeous houses & stately turrets: they keepe a port like mighty potentates . . . In presence of their clientes, they will be so earnest one with another, as one (that knew not their sleightes) would thinke they would go together by the eares. This is in steed of a shoing-horne to draw on their clyents withal: but immediately after the clients be gone, they laugh in their sleeves to see how pretily they can fetch in some summes of money, and that under the pretence of equity and justice.¹²

It is appropriate that all this occurs in the 'senate', since *All Fools* is set in Florence, however much it satirizes English manners—Jonson does exactly the same thing in the first version of *Every Man in His Humour* (1598). Early modern writers often refer to the *signoria*, the chief legislative and judicial assembly of Florence, as

the 'senate': in *The Courtier*, Castiglione advises orators to express themselves simply, 'se a qualsivoglia omo di bon giudicio occorresse far una orazione di cose gravi nel senato proprio di Fiorenza' ('if any man of good judgement had to make a speech on a serious subject before the very senate of Florence'). Even where *signoria* is used, English translations of the time often have 'senate', as seen in Machiavelli's *Florentine Historie*.¹³

To Chapman's Valerio, all this would 'would put a mad spleen / Into a pigeon', imagery also found, as McIntosh notes, in Hamlet's 'But I am pigeon-livered and lack gall' (II.ii.579), and his later 'For though I am not splenative and rash / Yet have I something in me dangerous (V.i.258-9).¹⁴ The date of *Hamlet*, especially if we include the famously missing *ur-Hamlet*, which Chapman seems to draw on extensively in *An Humorous Day's Mirth*,¹⁵ is a matter of never-ending debate, but it is most doubtful that Chapman is engaging in a 'deliberate pastiche', as McIntosh suggests, in *All Fools*, since all the expressions used were long-standing commonplaces.

The proverbial mildness of the pigeon, its cause being a lack of gall, goes at least as far back as the *Problems*, a book once thought to be by Aristotle, although most scholars now attribute it to his 'school', rather than to Aristotle himself. In an English translation of 1595, we find

Question. Why are a sheepe and a pigeon very mild beasts?

Answer. Because they want gall, and it is the gall which stirreth unto anger.¹⁶

According to the various theories of humoral medicine, from Hippocrates right through to Chapman's time, how mild or prone to anger a person might be was attributed to the amount of gall (yellow bile, or choler) in the body, a humour produced in the liver and then sent to the gall bladder for distribution. Too much, of course, led to a 'choleric' disposition.¹⁷

Writers of various treatises on the humours had no empirical evidence to cite, so they preferred just to make things up, and this is nowhere more evident than in the role of the spleen, which could be the seat of melancholy and morose feelings, laughter and merriment, rashness, or hot and violent (i.e. 'splenative') anger. Clearly, the 'mad spleen' that even a pigeon would get if it saw a lawyer is no different from Hamlet's absent 'splenative' rashness, but it is also no different from the 'the unruly spleen / Of Tybalt deaf to peace' in *Romeo and Juliet* (III.i.156-7) or 'the swelling splene, and frenzy raging rife' attendant upon Wrath in *The Faerie Queene* (I.iv.35.7).¹⁸

The one part of *All Fools* that does show signs of either revision or new addition to the text is the prologue. This play was Chapman's last effort for Henslowe; in 1600 he

began writing for the Children of the Chapel at Blackfriars,¹⁹ and as advertised on the title page of the quarto, *All Fools* was one of the Children's offerings. The prologue's opening reference to 'those strange effects / That rise from this hell, or fall from this heaven' (Prol. 3) could refer to either the Rose or Blackfriars, since both theatres were equipped with a stage canopy (heaven) and a trap door (hell), but he later addresses 'you on the stage' (Prol. 31), i.e. the fashionable young men who paid extra to sit on the stage, a practice associated only with the indoor theatres. The speaker asks that they refrain from leaving early, thereby encouraging the rest of the audience to disapprove of the play.

Other lines in prologue allow us to determine with some precision when it was written:

Who can show cause why th'ancient comic vein
Of Eupolis and Cratinus, now revived,
Subject to personal application . . .

(Prol. 13-15).

Eupolis and Cratinus, along with their contemporary Aristophanes, typify the 'ancient' old comedy in filling their plays with personal invective, often about each other. As T. M. Parrott noted in 1913, this 'comic vein' being 'now revived' is surely a reference to the famous 'War of the Theatres', in which Jonson, Marston, and Dekker attacked one another in their plays.²⁰ It began, relatively mildly, in late 1599, when Jonson poked fun at Marston's language in *Every Man Out of His Humour*. Things then got very fierce, and continued as such until Dekker's *Satiromastix* in late 1601 or early 1602, when hostilities more or less came to a close.²¹

While this presents a strong argument for 1600 or 1601 as the date of the prologue, there is no way to tell if it replaced one spoken at the Rose, or if the Rose production was without a prologue, what we have in the quarto being an addition. I suspect it is the latter, since Chapman's two previous Rose comedies have no prologue. Of course, *All Fools* is based on plays by Terence, and Terence always has a prologue, but with the personal references that Chapman specifically avoids. Either way, there is nothing in the body of the play proper to offer convincing evidence of changes from what was written, and presumably performed, in 1599.

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¹ R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, ed., *Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge, 1961), 34-7, 47-8, 54-60, 91, 99-100, 102-3.

² Foakes, 103, 105, 122, 268.

³ Shona McIntosh, 'Knighthoods, *Hamlet*, and the Date of George Chapman's *All Fools*', *N&Q* 56 (2009), 64-7.

⁴ Frank Manly, ed., *All Fools* (London, 1968), all quotations are from this edition.

⁵ McIntosh, 65.

⁶ J. G. Nichols, ed., *Journal of the Siege of Rouen*, in *Camden Miscellany* 1 (1847), 27.

⁷ Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1591-1594 (Nendeln, 1967), 118.

⁸ *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury . . . Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, v. 4 (London, 1892), 151.

⁹ *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1599 April-1600 February* (Nendeln, 1974), 218, 260.

¹⁰ McIntosh, 66.

¹¹ Marston, *The Malcontent*, ed. G. K. Hunter (Manchester, 1975); *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, v. 3 (Cambridge, 1958).

¹² Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses*, ed. Margaret Jane Kidnie (Tempe, 2002), 170-1.

¹³ Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Ettore Bonora (Milan, 1976), 66; Castiglione, *The Book of The Courtier*, trans. George Bull (Harmondsworth, 1967), 71; Machiavelli, *The Florentine Historie*, (London, 1595), *passim*.

¹⁴ McIntosh, 66; Shakespeare quotes from Wells and Taylor, ed., *The Complete Works* (Oxford, 1988).

¹⁵ C. Edelman, ed., *An Humorous Day's Mirth* (Manchester, 2010), 21, 97, 101, 142.

¹⁶ *The problemes of Aristotle with other philosophers and phisitions* (London, 1595), sig. Fr-v.

¹⁷ F. David Hoeningher, *Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (Newark, 1992), 103-6.

¹⁸ Hugh Maclean, ed., *Edmund Spenser's Poetry* (New York, 1968)

¹⁹ Mark Thornton Burnett, 'George Chapman', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁰ T. M. Parrott, ed., *The Plays of George Chapman: The Comedies* (New York, 1961), 713.

²¹ G. B. Harrison, *Elizabethan Plays and Players* (London, 1940), 248-81; Tom Cain, introd., *Jonson's Poetaster* (Manchester, 1995