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Charles Edelman
Edith Cowan University

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JOHN MANNINGHAM AT THE BLACKFRIARS THEATRE

Although it covers a mere sixteen months, from January 1602 to April 1603, the *Diary* of John Manningham, written when he was a twenty-five year old law student at the Middle Temple, is a rich and entertaining source of information about life in Elizabethan London, especially at the Inns of Court where he resided. Along with lengthy discussions of the sermons heard each Sunday (usually one in the morning followed by another in the afternoon), we have jokes, gossip, poems, a fascinating account of Queen Elizabeth's last days, and many witticisms he heard and enjoyed, sometimes mentioning the source, but very often not doing so. Of greatest interest to students of the Elizabethan theatre is the entry made in February, 1602, wherein he records his attendance at the Middle Temple's Candlemas Feast, when he saw 'a play called 'Twelve night, or what you will''.¹

Manningham seems to have enjoyed the performance, particularly 'the good practise in it to make the steward beleve his Lady widdowe in love with him, by counterfayting a letter',² but it is generally accepted that he was not a theatre-goer, since this is the only clear reference to a play in the *Diary*. However, in November of 1602, Manningham wrote down the aphorism, 'Women, because they cannot have their wills when they dye, they will have their will while they live'.³ He gives no attribution, but it is quite likely that Manningham made this note after attending the Blackfriars theatre to see George Chapman's comedy, *All Fools*.

In his comprehensive collection of early modern English proverbs, M. P. Tilley gives Manningham's *Diary* (1602) as the earliest instance of this saying, followed by Chapman's *All Fools* (1605).⁴ But this is misleading, as is also the case for the dating of many *OED* citations that come from Chapman, Shakespeare, and other early modern dramatists. A play's year of publication is nearly always later, and sometimes much later, than the year of composition and performance. Although *All Fools* was not printed until 1605, the title page of the quarto advertises it as 'A Comedy, 'Presented at the Black Fryers, and lately before his Majestie'.⁵

Richard Burbage bought part of the great monastery at Blackfriars in 1596, wanting to establish an indoor base for his acting company, but over a four year period, pressure from local residents blocked every attempt to begin operations there. Having given up, at least temporarily, Burbage leased out the premises to Henry Evans, a scrivener and entrepreneur, on 22 September, 1600. Evans then engaged Nathaniel Giles, Master of the Chapel at Windsor, to recruit a new company of boy players, the

Children of the Chapel, which began performing soon afterwards.⁶ Although we have no external evidence of when the first and subsequent presentations of *All Fools* occurred, obviously some must have been between late 1600 and 1605, which includes the period covered by Manningham's *Diary*. Therefore, in terms of the quoted aphorism's public circulation, *All Fools* either precedes, or is concurrent with, Manningham's *Diary*.

A delightful sequence in this very delightful play is a long defense of the lady Gazetta, whose husband Cornelio thinks has been unfaithful to him. The speech is delivered by a precocious young page, as part of a prank organized by his rakish master Valerio. In order to drive Cornelio to complete distraction, the page argues that wives must always be allowed to do as they please, nature 'having indued them with a large portion of will' (III.i.217). This is one of many wordings of the popular proverb, 'women will have their wills', which appeared in English as early as 1547. Andrew Boorde includes it in his *Breviary of Health*, with a Latin tag: '*ut homo non cantet cum cuculo* [so that a man may not sing with the cuckoo], lette every man please his wife in all matters, and displease her not, but let her have her owne wyl, for that she wyll have who so ever say nay'.⁷

The page goes on to say, 'Why then, sir, should you husbands crosse your wives wils thus, considering the law allowes them no wils at all at their deaths, because it intended they should have their willes while they lived?' (III.i.220-3). Manningham, being a law student, would know that the page is mostly correct: under a statute passed during the reign of Henry VIII, a married woman could not make a will without her husband's consent. Indeed, there was no real point, since she did not own any property independently. Single women and widows, however, were able to bequeath their property as they wished, and could make wills accordingly.⁸ Whatever the statement's legal accuracy, it is the sort of thing Manningham delighted in, as it brought together a proverb about women with a legal quibble, two of his favorite subjects. It is similar in both length and wit to 'one fee is too good for a bad lawyer, and two fees too little for a good one', and one he heard from his cousin's wife: 'To furnishe a shippe requireth much trouble / But to furnishe a woman the charges are double'.⁹

Blackfriars was a short distance from the Inns of Court—in December of 1602, Manningham, along with 'a great congregacion, specially of women', heard Stephen Egerton preach at St. Anne's church there.¹⁰ The Chapel Children's performances of works by such brilliant dramatists as Chapman and Jonson at the Blackfriars theatre

are known to have been very popular with the lawyers, law students, and other residents of the Inns.¹¹ In itself, this proves nothing about how one particular student spent his leisure hours. However, given that Chapman's play was performed there at this time, it seems more than possible that John Manningham not only enjoyed *Twelfth Night* when Shakespeare's company brought it to the Middle Temple in February, 1602, but that he also attended Blackfriars to see *All Fools* later the same year, and was particularly amused by one of the clever lines he heard.

CHARLES EDELMAN

Edith Cowan University

NOTES

¹ Robert Parker Sorlien, ed., *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple* (Hanover, 1976), 48. The original text says 1603, because the Elizabethan year started in March.

² Sorlien, ed., 48.

³ Sorlien, ed., 140.

⁴ M. P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950), W715. It also appears in John Ray's *Collection of English Proverbs* (London, 1678), 63.

⁵ George Chapman, *All Fools*, ed., G. Blakemore Evans, in *The Plays of George Chapman: The Comedies*, gen. ed. Allan Holaday (Urbana, 1970); quotations from this edition.

⁶ Andrew Gurr, 'Take interest: Shylock was no Venetian Jew but a London loan shark', *Times Literary Supplement* (10 August, 2012), 12; Gurr, *The Shakesperian Playing Companies* (Oxford, 1966), 347-8; G. B. Harrison, *Elizabethan Plays and Players* (London, 1940), 233. On the dates of composition and performance of *All Fools*, see Edelman, 'Knights, Pigeons, and Chapman's *All Fools*', *Notes and Queries* 59 (2012), 553-7.

⁷ Tilley W743; Andrew Boorde, *The Breviary of Health* (London, 1547), sig. Bb4r.

⁸ B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge, 2003), 171.

⁹ Sorlien, ed., 193, 42.

¹⁰ Sorlien, ed., 151, 367-8.

¹¹ William A. Armstrong, 'The Audience of the Elizabethan Private Theatres', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 10 (1959), 234-49.