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Re-Examining the Date of William Rowley's *All's Lost by Lust*

Following G.E. Bentley's The Jacobean and Caroline Stage, scholars normally date William Rowley's tragedy All's Lost by Lust to 1619–20. Re-examining the evidence shows Bentley's interpretation to be faulty: the play could date to any point between 1611 and 1621, although similarities with other plays suggest that it was most likely written toward the latter end of that spectrum. Broader possibilities for the play's date help us to recognize overlooked connections among Rowley's plays, illuminate Christopher Beeston's relationship with the playing companies at the Phoenix playhouse, and facilitate the dating of some fragmentary playlists from the revels office.

William Rowley's tragedy *All's Lost by Lust* gives a rare glimpse of this habitual collaborator's style when writing alone, and its content has significant parallels with the more famous plays to which he contributed. A precise date of composition would thus be very useful for scholars of Jacobean drama. Unfortunately, this article will instead show that the date range of *All's Lost* is broader and less certain than has been previously thought. In *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (1941) G.E. Bentley dated the play '1619 or 1620?' and later catalogues of the drama have followed him without question.¹ However, looking again at the evidence shows faults in Bentley's interpretation: Rowley could have in fact written the play at any point between 1611 and 1621, although similarities with other plays suggest that it was most likely written toward the latter end of that spectrum. While untethering a play from an apparently stable mooring is frustrating, broader possibilities for the date of *All's Lost* can help us to recognize new connections among Rowley's plays that we might otherwise overlook.

The Terminus a Quo, Christopher Beeston, and 'Unlawful Games'

Bentley proposed that *All's Lost by Lust* could not have been written before 1619. His argument originated in the fact that the play appears in the repertories of all

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playing companies that performed at the Cockpit/Phoenix playhouse (hereafter the Phoenix) following that year. The character list in the 1633 quarto notes that the role of Jaques was 'personated by the Poet' (that is, played by Rowley), while its title page declares that it was '*Divers times Acted by the Lady Elizabeths Servants. And now lately by her Majesties Servants, with great applause, at the Phoenix in Drury-Lane*'.² Bentley deduced that because Rowley was an actor in Prince Charles's Men but not in Lady Elizabeth's, *All's Lost* must have been originally written for Prince Charles's (who performed at the Phoenix from 1619–21), and then performed by the companies that followed it at that playhouse: Lady Elizabeth's (1622–25) and Queen Henrietta's (1625–37). Bentley added that the play was still being performed at the Phoenix after that, as it appears in a 1639 list of the repertory of the King and Queen's Young Company.³ He concluded that:

The fact that the play remained in the repertory of the Phoenix to be acted by later companies there and was not taken away with the Prince's men when they left suggests that the manuscript was not the property of the company but of Christopher Beeston, owner and manager of the Phoenix.⁴

Bentley's thesis that Christopher Beeston owned *All's Lost* seems undeniable. But he drew a further conclusion: that 'Rowley probably wrote it while the company was at the Phoenix and that Beeston probably paid for it'.⁵ In other words, Beeston would not have asserted possession of a company's play upon their departure unless he had paid for it, and thus *All's Lost* could not have been written before 1619, the year Prince Charles's Men began playing at the Phoenix under Beeston's management. This assumption is the foundation of Bentley's argument for the terminus a quo of *All's Lost*.

However, evidence Bentley cites elsewhere undermines the idea that Beeston needed to have personally commissioned a play in order to claim possession of it. In the 1639 list of plays belonging to the King and Queen's Young Company mentioned above, *All's Lost by Lust* appears with Middleton and Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel*, which had been published in 1617 when Prince Charles's Men were performing at the Red Bull.⁶ In his entry on *A Fair Quarrel*, Bentley writes that it was 'doubtless' the time Prince Charles's Men spent under his management at the Phoenix 'which brought the prompt manuscript of the play into the hands of Beeston' and 'one would guess that it had probably been performed by the intermediate companies at that theatre, Lady Elizabeth's men and Queen Henrietta's men'.⁷ If Beeston could treat *A Fair Quarrel* as if he owned it, even though it was written before Prince Charles's Men arrived at the Phoenix, then he could have

done the same for *All's Lost*. One explanation may be that Beeston's influence over Prince Charles's Men extended earlier than 1619; Eva Griffith observes that he owned a share in the Red Bull during the period in which the Prince's players were there,⁸ and thus may already have had some degree of influence over them. Whatever the reason, *A Fair Quarrel* shows that *All's Lost* did not need to have been written in 1619 or after to become a fixture of the Phoenix.

Bentley offered some supporting evidence for the terminus a quo in the form of a topical allusion, but this too was faulty. When Margaretta sends her clownish brother Jaques to spy on her husband, whom she suspects of adultery, Jaques replies, 'you woud have me be an informer / Of unlawfull games, as Ticktack, whipper ginny, in & in' (3.2.54–5).⁹ Jaques here uses gambling games — a backgammon variant, a card game, and a dice game — as euphemisms for sexual activity. Bentley saw in this passage an allusion to King James I's *Declaration of Sports*, issued on 24 May 1618, which distinguished between 'unlawfull games' and those recreations that were lawful on Sundays.¹⁰ For Bentley, such an allusion would appear to preclude a composition date before the second half of 1618.¹¹

The content of this line, however, makes it an unlikely allusion to the *Declaration of Sports*. The 'unlawfull games' it prohibited were not the tabletop games to which Jaques refers but 'Beare and Bull-baitings, Interludes, and at all times in the meaner sort of People by Law prohibited, Bowling'.¹² Furthermore, the phrase 'unlawful games' existed long before 1618 as a common legal term for illicit entertainment. The 1541 Unlawful Games Act restricted the lower orders from playing 'at the Tables, Tennis, Dice, Cards, Bowls, Clash, Coyting, Logating, or any other unlawful Game'.¹³ The *Early English Books Online* database shows that the term subsequently appeared in many legal texts; for example, a standard license for alehouses and tippling-houses created in 1615 bans the proprietor from permitting 'Cards, Dice, Tables, Quoits, Logets, Bowles, or any other unlawfull Game or Games'.¹⁴ Jaques's use of the phrase is closer to these examples than to that of the *Declaration of Sports*, and his joke thus offers no evidence for the play's date.

Since Beeston could claim ownership of plays written before a company came under his management at the Phoenix, and since Jaques's reference to unlawful games is not a topical allusion, *All's Lost by Lust* could have been written before 1619. The terminus a quo must instead be 1611, the publication date of Anthony Munday's *Briefe Chronicle of the Success of Times*. As I have argued in an earlier article, this book is the earliest of two possible sources for the names of the Moorish characters in the play; the other is Thomas Milles's *Treasurie of Auncient and Moderne Times* (1613).¹⁵ 1611 is thus the earliest point in time at which *All's Lost* could have been written.

The Terminus ad Quem and the Revels Office Fragments

Bentley gave 1620 as the terminus ad quem for *All's Lost by Lust*, but this too is incorrect. His evidence was the appearance of *All's Lost* on one of four fragmentary playlists from the revels office created at a time when Sir George Buc was master of the revels. One of them, fragment D, includes *All's Lost* along with fifteen other titles that appear to be plays from the repertory of Prince Charles's Men.¹⁶ E.K. Chambers had determined these fragments to be lists of plays under consideration for performance at court, and Bentley cites Chambers's conclusion that they dated to 'about 1619 or 1620' as evidence for the terminus ad quem for *All's Lost*.¹⁷

In a more recent study of the fragments, however, Gary Taylor points out that Chambers applied that date only to fragment C, not to the others, yet Bentley's error 'has been repeated, usually without analysis or qualification, in all subsequent discussions' of fragment D. Looking afresh at fragment D, Taylor concludes that its date range is a little wider, beginning in December 1618 and ending in December 1621 in the leadup to 'the last court season Buc could have overseen'.¹⁸

Unfortunately, Taylor's assessment of the evidence for fragment D's date apparently follows Bentley's inaccurate statement about the unlawful games allusion when he assumes 'the latest play' on the list to be 'Rowley's *All's Lost*, which must be later than June 1618' and thus to provide an earliest date for the list.¹⁹ This inaccuracy may not matter so much if Taylor is correct in arguing elsewhere that *The Old Law*, which also appears on the list, was written in mid-1618,²⁰ but it does mean that the earliest date for fragment D rests on different grounds than has been thought, even if the end result is the same.

To summarize, the terminus ad quem of *All's Lost* should be December 1621, the latest possible date for Fragment D.

Relationship of *All's Lost* to Other Rowley Plays

This note has unsettled the traditional date of *All's Lost by Lust* and has argued that, strictly speaking, it could have been written as early as 1611. Rowley may indeed have been writing solo-authored plays this early if we take literally Sir Henry Herbert's 1633 description of the lost *Hymen's Holiday*, first recorded in 1612 as 'an ould play of Rowleys'.²¹ Connections between *All's Lost* and Rowley's other plays, however, make the latter end of the 1611–21 date range more likely, and it is important to set out that information here. At the same time, unmooring

the play from 1619–20 encourages us to look further back into Rowley's career, and I will propose previously unnoted connections with an earlier play, *A Fair Quarrel*.

All's Lost has striking similarities with plays to which Rowley contributed in 1621 and 1622. Whether he literally wrote the words discussed below is not certain in every case as not all of these plays have been subject to detailed authorship attribution studies, but these examples certainly demonstrate that each play was influenced by, or in some cases may have influenced, *All's Lost*.

Rowley wrote *The Witch of Edmonton* with Thomas Dekker and John Ford in 1621, most likely in early summer. (It is thus not known whether it or *All's Lost* came first.)²² The subplots of both plays tell stories of bigamy ending in murder. In each, a young gentleman (Antonio in *All's Lost*; Frank in *Witch*) quietly marries a lower class woman (Margaretta; Winifred) but then shortly after marries a woman of a higher social rank (Dionysia; Susan).²³ In both plays, the husband's troubled conscience disrupts his sleep (*All's Lost*, 3.3.15–18; *Witch*, 2.2.72–6),²⁴ and he envisages it as a serpentine creature within him: Antonio cries 'oh what a bed of snakes struggle within me' (2.6.36) and Frank feels 'the poisoned leeches twist about my heart' (2.2.121).²⁵

The Changeling, written by Rowley with Thomas Middleton, was licensed in May 1622;²⁶ it thus postdates *All's Lost* and shows the influence of the earlier play. Both tragedies revolve around Spanish castles with subterranean chambers and a room that conceals a secret.²⁷ In addition, N.W. Bawcutt identified some close correspondences of language: when Alsemero tells Beatrice and De Flores to 'rehearse again / Your scene of lust, that you may be perfect / When you shall come to act it to the black audience / Where howls and gnashings shall be music to you' (5.3.114–17),²⁸ his words resemble those of Jacinta when she tells Roderick that his lust is 'the musique of the spheares / Comparede with gnashings, and the howles below. / Can lust be call'd love, then let men seeke hell, / For there that fiery diety doth dwell' (2.1.109–12). When Jasperino in *The Changeling* flirts with Diaphanta and gives her a 'pop i'th' lips' (a kiss), he launches into botanical double entendres that include a reference to 'cuckoo what-you-call't' (1.1.152), the phallic flower of the cuckoo pintle; similarly, Jaques in *All's Lost* describes his sister pining for 'a what doe call 'um? those long upright things ... oh, Cuckow pintle roots' (3.3.106–8).²⁹

A final example, observed by Joanna Udall, is a staging pattern from *All's Lost* that is repeated in *The Birth of Merlin* (licensed 1622 and written by Rowley, most likely with an unknown collaborator).³⁰ In *All's Lost*, the King of the Moors chases Jacinta onto the stage, exclaiming, 'Thou mutable peece of nature,

dost thou fly me?'; she replies, 'Th'a[r]t frightfull to me', to which he responds, 'I shall be more frightfull, / If thou repell a proferd arme of love, / There will rebound a hate blacker in Art / Th[a]n in similitude' (5.5.1–5). In *Birth*, a stage direction reads, 'Enter Joan fearfully, the Devil following her'; Joan spurns him as a 'black horror' and asks 'is thy lustful fire / Kindled agen?', to which the Devil replies 'Why dost thou fly me? / I come a Lover to thee, to imbrace / And gently twine thy body in mine arms' (5.1.1–7). The Devil in this play was, following convention, performed with black makeup — he is earlier described as having 'a face like a Frying-pan' (93.4.64) — so the visual and verbal parallels between these scenes would have been strong, again suggesting that Rowley was repeating popular stage business.

Although these parallels suggest that Rowley probably wrote *All's Lost* at a time close to those other plays, unsettling its date encourages us to look for earlier connections too. One as-yet unrecognized parallel appears in a scene in Middleton and Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel* that was added to the play early in 1617.³¹ *All's Lost* was written for a company containing two fat comic actors: Rowley, whom the character list tells us played Jaques the clown, and the actor who played Lothario, a character repeatedly described as obese.³² The play draws parallels between the situations of the two characters when they meet, as Lothario laments 'I was a Lord, although a bawdy Lord', and Jaques replies, 'I was a Lords brother, although a bawdy Lords brother' (5.3.15–16), and the conversation continues in this vein. The similarity between their bodies adds to the comic effect,³³ and it may therefore be significant that Chough, Rowley's clown role in *A Fair Quarrel*, has a servant named Trimtram whose name alludes to the proverb, 'Trim, tram, like master, like man'³⁴ and may describe a visual similarity between the two. What is more, the comic business of these two pairs of characters is extremely similar: in *All's Lost*, Jaques and Lothario sing or recite a poem about the miserable life of a pander (5.3.35–53); the same thing happens in *A Fair Quarrel* when Chough and Trimtram sing a mocking song against a pander (4.4.118–46) and when Trimtram later recites a mock epitaph for the pander (213–28). This epitaph ends with the line, 'Now stink above ground, stunk long above before', which is reminiscent of Jaques's final speech as he takes the suicidal Lothario to a tree, 'where thou shalt hang till thou art dead, and stink above ground' (65–6). The two sequences echo one another as if a popular piece of stage business (two fat comedians singing about panders) is being repeated.

What these echoes tell us is that shared stagecraft and language appears in Rowley's plays from at least 1617 onward; while these parallels encourage us to lean toward locating *All's Lost* in the latter half of its range, their wide dispersal

over at least six years means that they cannot offer conclusive proof to determine the play's date, and it is not impossible that *All's Lost* was written earlier than any of them.

Previous scholarship has treated *All's Lost by Lust* as if its date of composition is more certain than it is; strictly speaking, the play most likely dates to 1611–21. Intertextual connections with Rowley's other plays suggest that it is more likely to date to the latter half of the spectrum, but its traditional date can no longer be treated as a fact and cannot be used in arguments about other plays and documents of the period, including the revels office fragments.

Notes

- 1 Gerald Eades Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols (Oxford, 1941–68), 5.1018; Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, rev. S. Schoenbaum (Philadelphia, 1964), 110; Martin Wiggins, *British Drama, 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, vol. 7 (Oxford, 2016), 165.
- 2 William Rowley, *All's Lost by Lust* (London, 1633; STC: 21425).
- 3 Bentley, *Jacobean*, 5.1019–20; for the dates of the companies at the Phoenix, see 1.204–5 (on the Prince's Men), 183–6 (on Lady Elizabeth's), 219–40 (on Queen Henrietta's).
- 4 *Ibid.*, 5.1020.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, 1.331 offers a transcript of the 1637 list. On Prince Charles's Men at the Red Bull, see 1.201–2.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 4.868–9.
- 8 Eva Griffith, 'Christopher Beeston: His Property and Properties', in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theatre*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford, 2000), 607–22, 611–12, 618–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199697861.013.0036>.
- 9 Citations for the play-text reference act, scene, and line numbers in William Rowley, *William Rowley: His All's Lost by Lust, and a Shoemaker, a Gentleman*, ed. Charles Wharton Stork (Philadelphia, 1910).
- 10 King James I, *The Kings Majesties Declaration to his Subjects Concerning Lawfull Sports to be Used* (London, 1618; STC: 9238.9), 7; for the date, see 9.
- 11 Bentley, *Jacobean*, 5.1020.
- 12 King James I, *Kings Majesties Declaration*, 7–8.
- 13 *The Statutes at Large, from the First Year of King Edward the Fourth to the End of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1770), 2.309; see also Caroline Baird, *Games*

- and Gaming in Early Modern Drama: Stakes and Hazards* (London, 2020), 22–23, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50857-9>.
- 14 License to Keep a Common Alehouse or Tippling-house (London, 1615; STC: 9175q). Intriguingly, Mark Eccles notes that a William Rowley was licensed as a tippler on 11 January 1616; see ‘Brief Lives: Tudor and Stuart Authors’, *Studies in Philology*, 79 (1982), 1–135, 116–17. If this was the dramatist, he might thus have seen this very document.
- 15 David Nicol, ‘The Names of the Moors in William Rowley’s *All’s Lost by Lust*’, *Notes and Queries* 66 (2019), 522–4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjz134>.
- 16 For a facsimile and transcript of the fragment, see Frank Marcham, *The King’s Office of the Revels 1610–1622: Fragments of Documents in the Department of Manuscripts, British Museum* (London, 1925), 14–15. On the association with Prince Charles’s Men, see David Nicol, ‘The Repertory of Prince Charles’s (I) Company, 1608–1625’, *Early Theatre* 9.2 (2006), 57–72, 64–7, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.9.2.729>.
- 17 E.K. Chambers, Review of *The King’s Office of the Revels, 1610–1622*, by Frank Marcham, *Review of English Studies* 1.4 (1925), 479–84, 483–4; Bentley, *Jacobean*, 5.1020.
- 18 Gary Taylor, ‘Introduction: The Middleton Canon’, in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 331–4, 332, 333, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198185703.book.1>.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 333.
- 20 Gary Taylor, ‘Middleton and Rowley — and Heywood: *The Old Law* and New Attribution Technologies’, *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 96 (2002), 165–217, 211–12, <https://doi.org/10.1086/pbsa.96.2.24295710>; Gary Taylor, ‘*An/ The Old Law*, 1618–19’, in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 405–8, 406–7.
- 21 Bentley, *Jacobean*, 5:1023.
- 22 On the date, see Lucy Munro, ‘Introduction’, *The Witch of Edmonton* (London, 2017), 1–104, 25–6; on the authorship, see 19–25. As Munro explains, authorship attribution studies have not produced definitive results, in part owing to the difficulty of distinguishing Rowley and Dekker (22).
- 23 Cyrus Hoy, *Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to Texts in ‘The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker’*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1980), 235.
- 24 Act, scene, and line references are to Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro.

- 25 For more connections between these plays, see David Nicol, “‘I Knew Not How to Call Her Now’”: The Bigamist’s Second Wife in *The Witch of Edmonton* and *All’s Lost by Lust*, *Comparative Drama* 50 (2016), 317–339, 324–6, 332–4, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2016.0025>.
- 26 Rowley is generally considered the author of the passage quoted from scene 1.1; scene 5.3 was traditionally attributed to him as well, but recent scholarship argues for mixed authorship. For a summary, see Michael Neill, ‘Introduction’, *The Changeling*, rev. edn (London, 2019), ix–xl, xxiii.
- 27 For a detailed study of this imagery in the two plays, see David Nicol, ‘A Secret Within the Castle: William Rowley and *The Changeling*’, in *The Changeling: The State of Play*, ed. Gordon McMullan and Kelly Stage (London, 2022) 61–77.
- 28 Act, scene, and line references to plays associated with Thomas Middleton are to *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007). <http://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199580538.book.1>.
- 29 N.W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Changeling* (London, 1958), 106n (on 5.3.116–17), n 119 (on Alsemero’s condemnation), and n 10 (on 1.1.150, Jasperino’s flirtation).
- 30 Joanna Udall ‘The Context: Sources and Analogues’, *A Critical, Old-Spelling Edition of The Birth of Merlin (Q 1662)* (London, 1991), 33–87, 72. Act, scene, and line references are to this edition. On the date, and on the inconclusive results of authorship attribution attempts, see Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane, ‘The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Works’, in *The New Oxford Shakespeare Authorship Companion*, ed. Gary Taylor and Gabriel Egan (Oxford, 2017), 417–602, 594.
- 31 Suzanne Gossett, ‘A Fair Quarrel, Late 1616’, in *Thomas Middleton and Early Modern Textual Culture: A Companion to the Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 398–400, 400, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198185703.book.1>.
- 32 For the evidence for Rowley’s size, see Bentley, *Jacobean*, 2.556. For Lothario’s, see *All’s Lost* 3.1.4, 66, 142, 145; 5.3.67–8.
- 33 David Nicol, *Middleton and Rowley: Forms of Collaboration in the Jacobean Playhouse* (Toronto, 2012), 78–9, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442696747>.
- 34 Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950), T525.

