

José A. Pérez Díez, ed. *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid* by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022. Pp 250. Hardback, £80. ISBN 9781526135155.

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1613 must have been a trying year for John Fletcher. By October Francis Beaumont, the writing partner with whom he remains most often associated, had suffered a career-ending stroke and was forced to withdraw from stage life. Although Fletcher had already been working with William Shakespeare on such titles as *All Is True*, the performance of which famously brought the Globe theatre down by fire on 29 June, the lost *Cardenio*, performed at court that July, as well as *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably completed the following year, he too chose retirement in 1613, leaving Fletcher to assume the King's Men's lead playwriting duties.

Shakespeare's successor apparently flourished in his new role. We have it on the authority of leading Restoration dramatist and critic John Dryden that during his own age the plays with which Fletcher may be associated were 'the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage, two ... being acted through the year for one of Shakespeare's or [Ben] Jonson's'.¹ But Fletcher's gifts were of an altogether different character than those exhibited by Shakespeare and Jonson. Although some sixteen dramas have been attributed to the playwright alone, whether by force of circumstance or natural inclination, it was his gift for writing collaboratively that would most impress itself upon the English theatrical community. Indeed, among the fifty-odd titles appearing in the ten volumes of Fredson Bowers's standard edition of *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, associations have been made between Fletcher and a who's who of English playwrights, including — in addition to Beaumont and Shakespeare — George Chapman, Nathan Field, John Ford, Jonson, Thomas Middleton, William Rowley, James Shirley, John Webster, and Philip Massinger, who after 1613 would become Fletcher's most consistent co-writer.²

Given the extensive range of Fletcher's collaborative projects, we can understand why problems of authorship and dating have dominated the study of the Beaumont-Fletcher canon, often to the exclusion of other literary-historical matters. To a certain extent this blockage may arise, at least in part, from a dearth of reliable modern texts, whether in individual or anthologized versions. Lacking the modern performance traditions that have kept Shakespeare (and to a lesser extent Jonson) alive, there has been little motive to reproduce Fletcherian drama.

Consequently, we have lost a sense, not only of the massive theatrical and literary appeal Dryden observed, but also of how well the dramas he crafted (or helped to craft) might function in performance. Where interest exists, those who turn to Bowers's *Dramatic Works* find the volumes unwieldy and prohibitively expensive (even in single paperback reprint) and laden with commentaries that are heavy on textual history and light on textual glossing. At the same time, its discussions of individual plays are extremely uneven in terms of cultural and historical context — not unexpectedly so in that the plays were farmed out for editing by individual scholars across some three decades time. Unfortunately, the span between the compilation's inception and completion were years of rapid developments in literary, textual, and especially cultural theory, which fail to register within its volumes.

The culmination of more than a decade of patient textual comparison, collation, and emendation coupled with extensive biographical and historical research, José A. Pérez Díez's Revels edition of *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid* constitutes an important addition to the relatively small extant body of Fletcher-associated plays available as single volume texts. Supplying us with an accessible modern-spelling text of a play that twenty-first century instructors and students will likely find compelling, the edition's extensive, efficiently organized front matter offers a clear-eyed glimpse into the literary-historical matters that complicate study of the playwright and his collaborators that could well serve as an introduction to the so-called Beaumont and Fletcher canon itself.

Pérez Díez dates *Love's Cure* to 1615, identifying the play as the first wholesale collaboration of a developing Fletcher and Massinger partnership. Rather than apportioning a 'share' to Beaumont after the manner of Cyrus Hoy's mid-twentieth-century bibliographic studies,³ this shift in dating and attribution allows Pérez Díez to situate *Love's Cure* at a moment in Fletcher's career in which he was, in the wake of his and Shakespeare's *Cardenio* experiment and Beaumont's retirement, turning increasingly toward the adaptation of Spanish literary sources for English stage production. Beaumont and Fletcher previously produced Spanish-themed dramas such as *Philaster* (ca 1610) and *A King and No King* (ca 1611), and in *The Coxcomb* (1609) the pair had also experimented with material from Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605). But the date Pérez Díez posits locates *Love's Cure* squarely among a cluster of more than twenty Jacobean plays that likewise move beyond Cervantes's novel to adapt other recently arrived Spanish sources, including Cervantes's enthusiastically received *Novelas Ejemplares* (1613) and several works by Felix Lope de Vega.⁴ Although Fletcher had a hand in as many as sixteen of these, what makes *Love's Cure* somewhat unique among this

grouping is that this play, the main plot of which derives from Guillen de Castro's *La Fuerza de Costumbre* (ca 1604), offers a confirmed example of a Siglo de Oro drama adapted whole cloth for transposition from the Spanish corral to the English playhouse. Deftly examining the Spanish materials with which Fletcher and Massinger worked, Pérez Díez confirms not merely 'Spanish influence' but that during in the mid-Jacobean historical moment that also produced *Love's Cure*, the imitation and incorporation of Spanish literary resources was generating a significant body of English dramatic art.

While the edition's contribution to literary and theatre history is significant, of much wider interest will be the fact that *Love's Cure* itself has the potential to speak to our own time — both in the classroom and onstage. Built around the early modern notions of gender performance that allow *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* to speak across generations, the play's main plot centres on a Spanish brother and sister who are raised by their parents as gender-switched opposites. Forced to leave Seville over his alleged murder of one Don Pedro Vitelli, Don Fernando de Álvarez heads north to the Low Countries where he will raise his daughter Clara as the boy-child 'Lucio'. Amidst the violence of the Dutch War Lucio learns the soldier's trade, eventually distinguishing 'himself' for valour in the Battle of Ostend. During these years of exile the real Lucio has been brought up as the girl-child 'Posthumia' by Don Fernando's wife, Doña Eugenia, cultivated in the manners and matter appropriate to a Spanish lady. When soldiering earns Don Fernando a pardon, he and Clara return to Spain where she must unlearn her 'unnatural' masculine qualities so as to find an appropriate mate. Their return home will similarly require the real Lucio to shed the identity of Posthumia so he may assume his 'natural' role of son and heir.

While in its earlier performance contexts the gender fluidity *Love's Cure* stages was likely received as unproblematically comic, viewers today might well regard them as bordering on the tragic. And yet, the genre-bending mode Fletcher favoured suggests the play's continuing potential for stage humour. Its multiply awkward gender reorientations engage, in Pérez Díez's words, 'with a number of recurrent and characteristic Fletcherian tropes, including a playful handling of the theme of cross-dressing, and insightful exploration of the performativity of gender, and a meditation on the transformative power of love and (hetero)sexual desire' (1). As the edition's introduction aptly observes, *Love's Cure* 'explores the difficulties that two essentially transgender characters encounter when forced to conform to the gender-normative expectations of a fiercely patriarchal society' (1). Having overseen the acting of the play with both all-male and all-female casts during the process of preparing his text, Pérez Díez writes with the authority of a

dramaturg who has tested his script in performance as well as a scholar who has mastered its textual intricacies. Within the resulting edition these complementary perspectives are evident throughout in glosses geared toward verbal nuance, attention to historical detail, and live performance.

Pérez Díez is to be commended for recovering a relatively unnoticed Jacobean play that twenty-first century audiences will find engaging on multiple levels. Its text will enliven courses in Renaissance drama, gender studies, and performance, with its front matter and appendices providing students, scholars, and stage professionals with a glimpse into the nature of Fletcher's contribution to the English dramatic canon. This reviewer plans to add *Love's Cure* to his own course syllabi very soon.

Notes

- 1 John Dryden, 'An Essay of Dramatic Poesy' in *The Oxford Authors: John Dryden*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford, 1987), 111.
- 2 Fredson Bowers, ed. *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*. 10 vols. (Cambridge, 1966–96).
- 3 Cyrus Hoy, 'The Shares of Fletcher and His Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (I-VI)', *Studies in Bibliography* vol. 8 (1956), 129–146, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40371173>.
- 4 See Alexander Samson, 'Maybe Exemplary? James Mabbe's Translation of the *Exemplarie Novells* (1640)', *Republic of Letters* 4.2 (2016), 1–16, <https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/maybe-exemplary-james-mabbes-translation-exemplarie-novells-1640>.