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ABSTRACTS

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The Unknown and the Undead: Tragicomedy and Audience Deception

Theater, insisted early modern antitheatricalists, is the art of deception, a form premised on fraudulent representation and the vulnerability of the imagination to manipulation. It is therefore not surprising to find that in instances of deception within the play-world, playwrights typically positioned audiences in a privileged epistemological position, making spectators aware of plot machinations to which the characters were oblivious, thereby creating gratifying dramatic irony.

However, after 1609 early modern playwrights begin to deliberately deceive their audience, thereby paradoxically confirming antitheatrical claims. Tragicomedy, a genre largely popularized by Fletcher, is especially prone to such deception. The shift from tragic potential to comic resolution often involves not just revealing previously withheld information, but correcting earlier, intentionally misleading details: a character presented as a woman is exposed as a man in disguise (the eponymous characters in Ben Jonson's *Epicene*), or vice versa (Bellario/Euphrasia in *Philaster*); or a supposedly dead character turns out to be alive (Hermione in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*).

This paper—a part of a larger project on audience deception—situates this major shift in audience-play relations as part of a larger exploration of the ethical relationship between early modern plays and their audiences. Specifically, it examines what audience deception reveals about the implied contract between playgoers and playwrights and its evolution over time.

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The Challenge of editing the John Fletcher Canon

Along with Gordon McMullan I have recently completed a Cambridge Element entitled 'How to Edit an Early Modern Play'. In this paper I consider some of the specific issues facing the editor of a play from the canon of John Fletcher, from anticipating the

expected readership to addressing the complications created by variant sources, as well as by early treatment of the text by 'friends', publishers, printers, and acting companies. In particular, I concentrate on the treatment of plays with variant possible base texts, exemplified by the early quartos of *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, as well as on the many revelations about the process of bringing Fletcher plays to print that emerge from the paratextual material in single quartos and the 1647 and 1679 folios.

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No Future for Queer Fletcher?

T. S. Eliot wrote that, "the blossoms of Beaumont and Fletcher's imagination draw no sustenance from the soil, but are cut and slightly withered flowers stuck into sand".[1] Eliot's aesthetic assessment of the plays as "cut and slightly withered flowers" captures, despite the disdainful tone, something of the vexed relationship of Fletcher's plays to futurity. Finkelpearl reminds us of, "the position of great importance [Beaumont and Fletcher] once held and its almost complete collapse".[2]

In this paper, I take up Eliot's "withered flowers" as a starting point for queer readings of the Fletcher canon, with a focus on questions of futurity.

On the one hand, a queer historicist critique of Fletcher's work needs to come to terms with its introduction of conceptions of gender and sexuality that are prescient of conservative and restrictive futures. The plays may have been popular in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries because they announced, or even helped to engender, a bourgeois culture of politeness that sought to domesticate and privatise sexual expression.

But, on the other hand, different kinds of queer investment in the work might choose to consider the plays as "cut and slightly withered flowers", in decorative isolation from their own futures.

Plays to be covered will include *The Coxcomb*, *The Custom of the Country*, and *Philaster*.

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'You stole that resolution / I had it in a play': *The Loyal Subject*, *Twelfth Night*, and making the Fletcherian King's Men

[1] T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920), 116.
[2] Philip J. Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 3.

On Easter Monday, 6th April 1618, the King's Men revived William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* for the celebrations at Court. Seven months (and ten days) later, on 16th November 1618, John Fletcher's *The Loyal Subject* was licensed for performance. There are marked similarities between *The Loyal Subject* and *Twelfth Night*, yet, throughout his play, Fletcher makes explicit the queerness that is only implicit in Shakespeare's. This paper argues that this queering of Shakespeare's plot is emblematic of Fletcher's authorial legacy in the King's Men. Through comparison of these plays, it shows that the queering of the King's Men's Shakespearean repertory through concurrent adaptations and revivals is what made the late-1610s and early-1620s repertory Fletcher's own.

The similarities between *Twelfth Night* and *The Loyal Subject* are clear: each centre on a gendered disguiser who falls in love with their Lord/Lady, but whose disguise becomes the object of affection for another member of the nobility, leading to the exchanging of a ring and an enforced discovery. Yet, within these similarities exists a blatant queering of *Twelfth Night* by Fletcher. In *The Loyal Subject*, the audience are unaware of the gendered disguise until the discovery scene and gone is Sebastian and the Orsino/Olivia plot. In its place exists Olympia's unwavering love for her gentlewoman Alinda (really the disguised Young Archas) and her commitment to remain with Alinda, unmarried, for life. Consideration of the repertorial relationship between Fletcher's *The Loyal Subject* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* can dramatically shift the way in which we understand how early modern playmakers and playgoers perceived the queerness in *Twelfth Night*, suggesting that modern, queer readings of the play are not as ahistorical as is sometimes assumed.

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Professor Lopez will act as respondent.

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Reading Fletcher, 1631 to 1677

This paper tracks certain dynamics of John Fletcher's reputation from about 1640, complementing work by Lucy Munro on his early reputation, as well as thriving fields of research on Massinger, Middleton, and others. Across mid-seventeenth-century disruptions, such dynamics necessarily reflect the growth of seventeenth-century *reading* audiences for drama; my larger purpose is to argue for a more flexible model of such audiences' _acquisition and experiences, one that acknowledges the robust market in second-hand and unbound playbooks. The paper focuses on two near-contemporaries with contrasting access to playhouse culture. Abraham Wright wrote

excerpts from 28 favorite plays of his fashionable youth in London in a commonplace book (ca. 1640); Frances Wolfreston, a Staffordshire gentlewoman who apparently never visited a playhouse, acquired and signed dozens of Stuart playbooks between 1631 and 1677. One apparent anomaly of Wolfreston's collection is that, although she had several early Shakespeare quartos and many plays by James Shirley, the plays we now assign to Fletcher are barely represented. Meanwhile, Wright discusses 6 plays now partially or fully attributed to Fletcher, but never mentions his name (or Francis Beaumont's). Contextualizing these two readers' _practices amidst the century's patterns of performance, publication, and attribution, I speculate about the variables that guided playbook buyers in their choices in the decades before the later Restoration's catalogues sealed authorial attribution as the future of literary valuation.

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Strange and Straying Pages

John Fletcher's dramatic texts faced uncertain futures. Edward Knight's note in his transcription of *Bonduca* (BL MS Add. 36758) that three scenes' worth of Fletcher's "fowle papers" of the play were lost – or, rather, not "found" – when he came to copy the play indicates a certain textual precariousness (fol. 23a). The extant manuscripts of *The Honest Man's Fortune* (V&A MS Dyce 25.F.33) and *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* (BL MS Add. 18653) see Fletcher's texts departing from early conceptions through the interventions of the scribe Ralph Crane, an unidentified bookkeeper, Edward Knight acting as bookkeeper-scribe, George Buc and Henry Herbert, another theatrical functionary or two, and revising authors that may include Fletcher himself and his co-authors Philip Massinger and Nathaniel Field.

This paper will centre on one (mostly) recoverable instance of a Fletcherian text straying significantly from an earlier form: the different endings of *The Honest Man's Fortune* found in the manuscript and the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher folio. In both texts, the apparently male page Veramour, who has been harassed by the lascivious Laverdure who believes him to be female, enters "as a woman" declaring that s/he previously took to men's habit due to taking "example by two or three playes", which of course seem likely to include *Philaster* (fol. 34a). Veramour then reasserts his (their?) masculinity in ways that differ between the texts. I shall attempt to read Veramour's challenging gender identity and its differing expression between the two texts through a notion of *strayng*ness – a simultaneous sense of straying (and its opposite, fidelity) and

strangeness (with a nod to Huw Griffiths, among others) that I take from a conjectured inscription (*strayng*) that lies behind Berowne's "straying shapes" in Q1 *Love's Labour's Lost* (sig. I4). I shall also attempt to show that a similar and perhaps analogous sense of *strayng*ness, which encompasses the instability of Fletcher's text and the interventions of other textual agents, may also be fruitfully be applied the textual processes that leave us with these different endings.

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Fletcher's and Massinger's Commentary on 17th-Century Geopolitics

John Fletcher's plays co-written with Philip Massinger tend to reflect the latter author's interest in contemporary geopolitics. Two of the products of this collaboration reflect on European political affairs so recent and so controversial that they were heavily censored: *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt* is the best example, as Howard-Hill, Dutton, and this author have written, but seemingly also the lost—or very effectively suppressed—play *The Jeweller of Amsterdam* (also containing the writing of Nathan Field). This paper will examine Fletcher and Massinger's references (and a few of Fletcher alone) to contemporary European politics, whether the explicit main focus of a work (as in *Barnavelt*), in more veiled terms (as in *Beggars' Bush*), or in various passing allusions in a multitude of plays. Among political topics, I will focus especially on the Eighty Year's War (aka "The Dutch Revolt"), including France's and England's interests in that conflict, as well as the Anglo-Dutch Wars and other conflicts involving the major European powers (and the foreign characters associated with these powers). The dramatists utilize well-known stereotypes associated with various Europeans: the "vengeful" Spaniard, the "drunken" Dutchman, and the "chivalrous" Frenchman all appear in the plays—whether to confirm or to complicate the preconceptions of playgoers. In addition to the plays already mentioned, I will examine several others, perhaps including *The Woman's Prize*, *The Elder Brother*, *Love's Cure*, *The Sea Voyage*, *The Knight of Malta*, and some of the plays set in France.

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Fletcher's Textual Entanglements and the Work of Ornamentation

In contrast to Shakespeare, Fletcher's legacy since the seventeenth century has been characterized not by autonomous individual authorship but by collaboration: as Lucy Munro writes, "We are used to thinking of Fletcher in terms of '– and Fletcher'." While that blank is usually filled by names like Beaumont, Massinger, Field, and Shakespeare, Fletcher's perhaps uniquely collaborative reputation invites us to consider his textual engagements beyond fellow playwrights. In this paper, I will look specifically at the work

of visual ornamentation in the mediation of Fletcher's plays in print and manuscript. In the editorial tradition shaped by the New Bibliography, ornamentation is often dismissed as the least significant of textual features: purely superficial, probably arbitrary, beneath scholarly notice as a meaning-making component of a text. However, building on the recent work of Erika Mary Boeckeler, Claire M. L. Bourne, Douglas Bruster, Juliet Fleming, Jeffrey Masten, and Peter Stallybrass, my paper argues that two Fletcherian texts—the presentation manuscript of *Beggars' Bush* (Folger Shakespeare Library, MS J.b.5, c. 1636–39) and the 1634 fourth quarto of *Philaster* (STC 1684)—deliberately blur the line between ornamentation and illustration, provoking readers to think about the creative agency of those who reproduced early modern plays on the page and to take them seriously as collaborators shaping the meaning of Fletcherian texts.

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The Jamestown Brides and the Amazons of John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *Sea Voyage*

In *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher,* Gordon McMullan identified Fletcher and Massinger's *The Sea Voyage* (1622) and Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1619-21) as "colonial" plays. My paper will further his discussion by looking at Fletcher's representation of female characters, particularly in the historical context of the "Jamestown brides". Short of funds, in 1619 the Virginia Company began a program of sending unmarried women to Jamestown, partly to enhance settlement, but also as a source of income. In 1621, when the women arrived in the colony, prospective bridegrooms were expected to pay the equivalent of 150 pounds of tobacco for the privilege of marrying one. On 22 March 1622 many of these women died in what was then described as an Indian massacre. I plan to examine Fletcher's female characters and their relationships with the men around them within this historical context.