

The Dearth of the Author: Philip Massinger and the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio

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In 1647, Humphrey Moseley and Humphrey Robinson published a folio collection of unpublished works which they attributed to Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, two writers famous for their collaborations from 1606 to 1613. But in affording Beaumont a place on the title page, the publishers misattributed the volume. Scholars now accept that Beaumont had very little direct input in the collection whereas Philip Massinger, who began collaborating with Fletcher soon after Beaumont's retirement, had a very significant, unacknowledged role in the collected plays. This essay offers the first extended discussion of why it was that Massinger was written out of this canon-defining volume. I argue first that Massinger was by many accounts a popular and vendible dramatist, whose omission from the folio had little to do with him having a poor reputation. Instead, I suggest that the reputation of the names Beaumont and Fletcher, established in the preceding decades, proved irresistible to the publishers. Furthermore, I argue that Massinger's reputation as a distinctive solo playwright also counted against him, making it harder to apprehend him as a prolific collaborator. Next, I demonstrate how the 1647 folio participated in a process of canonization which elided Massinger's significant collaborative contribution and discuss the distorting effect this has had on our understanding of Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger, and playwrighting practice more broadly. I end by pointing towards some ways of rectifying the historical elision of Massinger's collaboration with Fletcher.

John Fletcher and Philip Massinger formed one of the most prolific and influential playwrighting partnerships in the history of English theatre. In sheer numerical terms, their partnership outweighed that of all other known playwrighting collaborations in the early modern period.¹ Many of their collaborative plays appear to have found stage success in the authors' lifetimes and several endured long beyond their authors' deaths. Their plays influenced later generations of playwrights: tragicomedy, the mode of dramatic writing they helped to popularize, became the principal theatrical form of the seventeenth century.² Despite this, Fletcher is

¹ Fletcher and Massinger are known to have co-authored approximately 20 extant plays. Other more famous collaborators worked together much less frequently: Beaumont and Fletcher collaborated on eight plays; Middleton and Rowley co-authored six; Middleton and Dekker worked together on five dramatic entertainments and Fletcher and Shakespeare co-wrote three plays in partnership. These numbers are not intended to be precise but nonetheless give the impression of just how frequently Fletcher and Massinger worked together. I have drawn my figures, here and elsewhere from Martin Wiggins, in association with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, 9 vols (Oxford, 2016–2019).

² On seventeenth-century tragicomedy see Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration: English Tragicomedy, 1660–1671* (Cambridge, 1992), 1; Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660–1769* (Oxford, 1992), 21–2.

much better known for his partnership with Francis Beaumont, with whom he wrote several significant and enduring plays. Beaumont and Fletcher were clearly important and influential theatrical collaborators, but Fletcher and Massinger collaborated more frequently and for longer. Beaumont and Fletcher worked together on eight plays over a six year period from 1606, when Fletcher began playwrighting, to 1613 when Beaumont retired; Fletcher and Massinger collaborated—sometimes aided by other writers like Nathan Field or John Ford—on around 20 plays from Massinger’s arrival on the London theatre scene in 1613 to Fletcher’s death in 1625.³ Fletcher wrote approximately 54 plays across his 20-year career: his collaboration with Beaumont accounts for about 15% of his total output whereas his collaboration with Massinger constitutes approximately 37%. But while the names of Beaumont and Fletcher remain tethered today, the collaboration of Fletcher and Massinger has only very occasionally received due credit.

There are several factors that might account for the low profile of such an important and long-standing playwrighting collaboration as the one between Fletcher and Massinger but the single most significant—and the focus of this essay—is the 1647 publication *Comedies and Tragedies*, better known as the Beaumont and Fletcher folio. The volume, which assembled 35 theatrical works, almost all of which were appearing in print for the first time, was a major act of canon construction and authorial preservation on the part of the publishers, Humphrey Moseley and Humphrey Robinson. In contrast to the earlier folios of Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare, the 1647 folio innovatively emphasized collaborative authorship, placing the names of Beaumont and Fletcher on its title page. But in fact, the Beaumont and Fletcher folio contained very little Beaumont and rather a lot of Massinger. Beaumont was likely involved with just three of the 35 texts in the edition: *The Captain* and *The Coxcomb*, which he wrote with Fletcher, and *The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray’s Inn*—the one text in the volume that had previously received publication—which he wrote alone. In contrast, Massinger co-wrote approximately 15 of the plays in the folio and Field also made a substantial, unacknowledged contribution, collaborating with Fletcher—and sometimes also Massinger—on five of the plays (the [Appendix](#) provides more details about who seems to have contributed what to the volume).⁴

At least one early modern commentator noted that Massinger’s omission from the volume was strange. Aston Cockayne, who had previously written commendatory verses to quarto publications of Massinger’s *The Emperor of the East* (1632) and *The Maid of Honour* (1632), was a friend and supporter of Massinger and so well-placed to press his claims to co-authorship. In a poem, ‘To My Cousin Mr Charles Cotton’, Cockayne writes:

Had *Beaumont* liv’d when this Edition came
 Forth, and beheld his ever living name
 Before Plays that he never writ, how he
 Had frown’d and blush’d at such Impiety?
 His own Renown no such Addition needs
 To have a Fame sprung from anothers deedes
 And my good friend Old *Philip Massinger*
 With *Fletcher* writ in some that we see there.
 But you may blame the Printers⁵

³ Scholars agree on the size of the Beaumont and Fletcher corpus. The precise size of the Fletcher and Massinger corpus is much less secure, although the general numbers are agreed upon. Debating the parameters of the Fletcher and Massinger corpus more precisely would be a useful enterprise, but it is beyond the scope of this essay.

⁴ These raw figures are suggestive, rather than exact. The share of each writer’s contribution is tricky to determine, but the core point remains that Massinger’s contribution to the Beaumont and Fletcher folio very clearly exceeds that of Beaumont.

⁵ Aston Cockayne, *Small Poems of Divers Sorts* (London, 1658), G6r–v.

This is a rare, fleeting acknowledgement of Massinger's involvement in the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio and an indictment of the title-page Beaumont attribution, but it is not quite what it seems. Cockayne goes on to understate the collaborative nature of the volume, claiming, contradictorily, that after Beaumont died 'Fletcher then did pen alone'.⁶ In another poem from *Small Poems of Divers Sorts*, 'An Epitaph on Mr, John Fletcher, and Mr Philip Massinger', Cockayne refers directly to their collaboration before figuring the two men as united in death, as they were in life: 'So whom on earth nothing did part, beneath | Here (in their Fames) they lie, in spight of death.'⁷ Cockayne's poem makes clear that he knew that Fletcher and Massinger were buried in the same tomb at St Mary Overy's (now Southwark Cathedral) but despite his awareness of the close connection between Fletcher and Massinger, and the tantalizing hints at their collaboration, Cockayne passed over several opportunities explicitly to recognize Massinger's contribution to the Fletcher canon. *Small Poems of Divers Sorts* also includes an epigram to Moseley and Robinson:

In the large book of Playes you late did print
(In *Beaumonts* and in *Fletchers* name) why in't
Did you not justice? Give each his due?
For *Beaumont* (of those many) writ in few:
And *Massinger* in other few; the Main
Being sole issues of sweet *Fletchers* brain.
But how came I (you ask) so much to know?
Fletchers chief bosome-friend inform'd me so.
Ith'next impression therefore justice do,
And print their old ones in one volume too:
For *Beaumonts* works, & *Fletchers* should come forth
With all the right belonging to their worth.⁸

Cockayne accurately acknowledges the relatively small part Beaumont played in the volume and correctly registers Massinger's contribution. He also rightly acknowledges that Fletcher wrote many of the plays alone. But even here, there is a sense that Massinger's contribution is underestimated. The poem ends by anticipating the 1679 second edition of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio which did, in fact, as Cockayne hoped, 'bring their old ones in one volume too', incorporating Beaumont and Fletcher plays that had been excluded from the 1647 volume on the basis that they had already received quarto publication and were therefore not marketable as new. The project that Cockayne wished for in this poem helped consolidate the Beaumont and Fletcher association thereby burying Massinger's collaborative contribution further.

But perhaps the damage was already done. The 1647 folio made a major statement about the authorial identity of the plays and Massinger's friends were not blameless in his exclusion. Cockayne may have later carped at Moseley and Robinson, but they had granted him one and a half folio pages of commendatory verse space in which he could have at least hinted at Massinger's involvement in the plays. Here is what he said instead: 'While Fletcher liv'd, who equal to him writ | Such lasting Monuments of naturall wit?'⁹ Cockayne and his fellow encomiasts helped build the lasting monument of the folio that honoured Beaumont and Fletcher and omitted Massinger. Likewise, James Shirley, who, as Martin Butler points out, was on friendly terms with Massinger (Massinger wrote verses for *The Grateful Servant* in 1629 and Shirley returned

⁶ Cockayne, *Small Poems*, A6v.

⁷ Cockayne, *Small Poems*, N5v.

⁸ Cockayne, *Small Poems*, P5r.

⁹ Cockayne, 'ON THE Deceased Authour, Mr John Fletcher, his Plays; and especially *the Mad Lover*', in *Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher* (London, 1647), A3r.

the compliment in *The Renegado* the following year) chose not to mention Massinger in either of his commendatory poems to the 1647 edition.¹⁰ Remarkably, Massinger is not mentioned once in the folio, even in passing. Shirley, Cockayne, Moseley, Robinson, and all who contributed to the publication of *Comedies and Tragedies* colluded in the occlusion of Massinger.

Whether Moseley and Robinson knew that Massinger was a major contributor to the volume or not is unclear. It is possible that the publishers knew about Fletcher and Massinger's collaboration but chose to suppress it for marketing reasons. Equally, it is possible that they did not know the extent of Massinger's collaboration and assumed that Beaumont, already a famous Fletcher collaborator, had a much bigger hand in the plays they published. But such questions have gone largely unexamined for centuries. Despite widespread critical acknowledgement of Massinger's involvement in the Beaumont and Fletcher folio there has been no sustained attempt to grapple with the rationale for, and the ultimate impact of, Moseley and Robinson's elision of Massinger. Those few, brief reflections that do address the issue require either qualification or elaboration. This essay seeks to redress matters. I begin by arguing that Massinger's exclusion from the 1647 volume was not inevitable and that, in a different set of circumstances, it is possible to imagine his name on the collection's title page. Then, extending Will Sharpe's short but persuasive analysis of Massinger's omission, I assess two significant factors which Moseley and Robinson likely considered: first, the attraction of the longstanding association of the names Beaumont and Fletcher, which may have overridden any desire for fidelity of attribution; secondly, Massinger's emergence as a solo writer in the mid-1620s, which may have militated against his presentation as a collaborative writer.¹¹ As Sharpe argues, taken together, both factors likely influenced the publishing decision to overlook Massinger. Finally, I consider the legacy of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio and its impact, not only on the reception of the writers whose work it comprises, but on scholarly considerations of collaborative playwrighting in early modern England more broadly.

MISSING MASSINGER

Sandra Clark points out that the 10 members of the King's Men who signed the dedicatory letter opening the 1647 folio would have known about Massinger's contribution to the plays in the volume; some of them would presumably have been responsible for commissioning his work.¹² For some scholars, the King's Men signatories are evidence of the relatively low esteem in which Massinger was held. Lawrence Wallis argues that Massinger's perceived lack of ability might have contributed to the elision of his contribution: 'Perhaps the actors looked upon Massinger as a skilful but pedestrian, run-of-the-mill playwright – one who had been called in when the Master, under pressure, wanted help.'¹³ Cyrus Hoy issues a similar assessment of Massinger's talents as a writer, painting him as a diligent but ultimately uninspired dramatist, largely responsible for plotting, who played second fiddle to Fletcher and consequently struggled to find his own creative voice.¹⁴ Such negative assessments of Massinger's contributions are easily contested. Gordon McMullan notes that, while Massinger does seem to have taken primary responsibility for the plots of his collaborative plays, Hoy's judgement of Massinger's worth betrays a prejudice about collaborative work and thereby offers an 'unnecessarily negative' overview of Massinger's partnership with Fletcher.¹⁵ Claire M. L. Bourne has shown that Massinger was held in high

¹⁰ Martin Butler, 'Love's Sacrifice: Ford's Metatheatrical Tragedy', in Michael Neill (ed.), *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions* (Cambridge, 1987), 201–32 (205).

¹¹ Will Sharpe, *Shakespeare and Collaboration* (Oxford, forthcoming). Although I had come to my own conclusions independent of Sharpe's work, I am very grateful to him for sharing his valuable work ahead of publication.

¹² Sandra Clark, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher: Sexual Themes and Dramatic Representation* (London, 1994), 12.

¹³ Lawrence B. Wallis, *Fletcher, Beaumont and Company: Entertainers to the Jacobean Gentry* (New York, NY, 1947), 6.

¹⁴ Cyrus Hoy, 'Massinger as Collaborator: The Plays with Fletcher and Others', in Douglas Howard (ed.), *Philip Massinger: A Critical Reassessment* (Cambridge, 1985), 51–83 (77–8).

¹⁵ Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst, 1994), 145.

regard for his skill as a plotter and that ‘playgoers were willing to assess plot independently of language as a particular skill that not all playwrights, even those renowned for their rhetorical achievements, were presumed to possess.’¹⁶ The idea, then, that the King’s Men found Massinger a laboured or insipid writer holds little water.

Despite Hoy’s claims to the contrary, Massinger thrived as a solo author (albeit he did so after Fletcher’s death) and seems to have been a frequent playwright for the King’s Men in the Caroline era. 10 of his solo plays were printed prior to 1647 and his name appeared frequently on playbook title pages. In total, Massinger was named on 11 plays published before 1647: *The Virgin Martyr* (1622; Thomas Dekker was also acknowledged on the title page), *The Duke of Milan* (1623), *The Bondman* (1624), *The Roman Actor* (1629), *The Renegado* (1630), *The Picture* (1630), *The Emperor of the East* (1632), *The Maid of Honour* (1632), *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1633), *The Duke of Florence* (1636), and *The Unnatural Combat* (1639). Three of these plays made it into a second edition: *The Virgin Martyr* (1631), *The Duke of Milan* (1638), and *The Bondman* (1638). These figures are not as impressive as Fletcher’s (he was named on the title page of 13 plays in the same period, seven of which were reprinted at least once) and they pale next to those of James Shirley, who was named on the title page of 24 dramatic editions, three of which were reprinted, but Massinger’s name appeared on printed title pages far more frequently than many other dramatists of the era. For example, of the 11 William Davenant plays printed prior to 1647, only six named him and none of the plays were reprinted. Thomas Middleton was named on four plays and 10 pageants in the same period and only two of these texts were then reprinted. Perhaps most remarkably, Ford’s name did not appear on a title page until after the publication of the 1647 folio, when his seven, previously non-attributed plays, were included together in collection. Massinger’s name, then, had a greater print presence than many of his contemporaries. Neither print popularity nor authorial reputation were obvious obstacles to his inclusion in the folio.

Martin Garrett has suggested a different explanation for Massinger’s omission, which also requires consideration. He argues

Massinger’s political reputation was less amenable than his colleagues’ to the strongly Royalist vein running through the [commendatory] verses [of the 1647 folio], and his aesthetic reputation was not primarily ... for the witty artifice so emphasized in the verses and in Shirley’s address to the reader. It was more poetically appropriate – and more likely to sell the book – to say with Sir John Berkenhead that Beaumont’s soul had entered Fletcher than that a new contract had been drawn up for Massinger.¹⁷

There are several reasons to query this argument. Beaumont and Fletcher were not exactly ideally suited to the royalist framing they received either. Several of their plays, such as *A King and No King*, which was available in four print editions prior to 1647, could be viewed as critical of monarchical absolutism.¹⁸ Many of the plays printed in the folio also appear uneasily to sit next to their explicitly royalist prefaces.¹⁹ Such considerations evidently did not bother Moseley, who was resourceful enough to market John Milton as a royalist (as he did in his 1645 edition of *Poems*). It is hard to see him baulking at the prospect of figuring Massinger in

¹⁶ Claire M. L. Bourne, “High Design”: Beaumont and Fletcher Illustrated, *English Literary Renaissance*, 44 (2014), 275–327 (281).

¹⁷ Martin Garrett (ed.), *Massinger: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1991), 10.

¹⁸ See, for example, Philip J. Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton, NJ, 1990), 178–9; Clark, *The Plays*, 116–20. For a nuanced reading, that nonetheless remains open to monarchical critique, see Zachary Lesser, ‘Mixed Government and Mixed Marriage in *A King and No King*: Sir Henry Neville Reads Beaumont and Fletcher’, *English Literary Renaissance*, 69 (2002), 947–77.

¹⁹ For an example, see Eoin Price, ‘War Without Shakespeare: Reading Shakespearian Absence, 1642–1649’, *Shakespeare Survey*, 72 (2019), 75–85 (82–4).

royalist terms. Indeed, Moseley evidently had an eye on Massinger's works. In 1655 he published three previously unprinted Massinger plays—*The Bashful Lover*, *The Guardian*, and *A Very Woman*—under the title *Three New Plays*. During the English Republic, Moseley published several short, octavo or duodecimo collections of dramatists from the assumed golden age of pre-theatre-ban England. In 1651 he published William Cartwright's *Comedies, Tragi-comedies, With other Poems*; in 1653 he published Richard Brome's *Five New Plays* and James Shirley's *Six New Plays*, and in 1654 he printed Thomas May's *Two Tragedies*. Massinger may not have had the strongly royalist credentials of these writers, but Moseley happily placed him in a continuum with them. Massinger's King's Men connections helped. The volume's front page poignantly notes that the enclosed plays 'have been often Acted at the Private-House in *Black-Friers*, by His late MAJESTIES Servants, with great Applause.'²⁰ This claim is repeated on the internal title pages of each play. Massinger's association with the King's Men was not quite as firm as Fletcher's, but he was nonetheless a regular writer for the company from the early years of his career until his death in 1640 (indeed, by the 1630s he seems to have succeeded Fletcher as the company's most reliable dramatist). Moseley and his collaborators could have exploited Massinger's involvement with the King's Men for their royalist purposes in the 1647 edition, if they had wanted to, by placing him in a continuum with Beaumont and Fletcher. Massinger's omission is not easily explained away on political grounds.²¹

THE BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER CONNECTION

Massinger's exclusion from the folio is of course only one side of the coin: as well as considering the potential limitations of Massinger's name we must also consider the benefits of using Beaumont's. A folio publication was a particularly risky venture, very different in nature to the octavo or duodecimo volumes that Moseley later published.²² The earlier print success of Fletcher's collaborations with Beaumont must surely have appealed to the 1647 publishers. Three first editions of texts by Beaumont bore both Beaumont and Fletcher's names. *The Scornful Lady* (printed five times from 1616 to 1639), *A King and No King* (printed four times from 1619 to 1639); and *Philaster* (printed five times from 1620 to 1639), had sustained success over several decades. In addition, the second and third quartos of *Cupid's Revenge* (1630; 1635), the third, fourth, and fifth editions of *The Maid's Tragedy* (1630; 1638; 1641), and the second quarto of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1635), advertised Beaumont and Fletcher as collaborators. The example of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is especially interesting as this is a play now conventionally treated as solo-authored: it may be a rare example in which Fletcher receives credit for a work he did not himself produce.²³ The fact that several different stationers were involved in the production of these editions lends credence to the idea that the Beaumont and Fletcher name had serious cachet.

Not very many of Fletcher's non-Beaumont plays had made it into print by 1647 (which was, indeed, a big part of their collected attraction) and of those that did only *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Bloody Brother* made it into multiple editions. It is difficult to gauge the success of those editions that were published towards the end of the 1630s: among other considerations, they did not have as much time to sell enough copies to justify reprints. That *The Bloody Brother* (a collaborative play first attributed to 'B.J.F.' in 1639 and then to Fletcher in 1640) went into two editions so rapidly is unusual; that other plays did not have such a sudden marker of success

²⁰ Philip Massinger, *Three New Plays* (London, 1655), title page.

²¹ The republican qualities of Massinger's plays are also arguably overstated. See Benedict S. Robinson, 'The "Turks", Caroline Politics, and Philip Massinger's *The Renegado*', in Adam Zucker and Alan B. Farmer (eds), *Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern English Stage, 1625–1642* (New York, NY, 2006), 213–37.

²² On the risk of folios, see Tara L. Lyons, 'Publishers of Drama', in Arthur F. Kinney and Thomas Warren Hopper (eds), *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 2017), 560–75 (571).

²³ Challenging attempts to assign the play to a single author, Jeffrey Masten reflects on the play's inherently collaborative nature: *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities* (Cambridge, 1997), 23.

is not necessarily an indicator of their failure. Zachary Lesser has described the 1634 first quarto of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (which named Fletcher and Shakespeare on its title page) as a 'flop' but has cogently argued that its failure stems from the publisher's specific marketing strategy, which entailed attempting to package the play as if it were the work of a highly educated, elite, university writer rather than as a collaboration by commercial playwrights.²⁴ The failure of this edition is not evidence of a failure with Fletcher's marketability. On the contrary, editions of *The Elder Brother* (1637; attributed to Fletcher, but co-authored by Massinger), *Monsieur Thomas* (1639; attributed to Fletcher alone), *Wit Without Money* (1639; a solo-play here attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher), *The Coronation* (1640; a Shirley play, erroneously assigned to Fletcher), *The Night Walker* (1640; attributed to Fletcher alone) and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* (ditto) hint at considerable demand for Fletcher's plays.

But while the spate of mostly solo-attributed Fletcher plays towards the end of the 1630s might have encouraged a publisher to print the 1647 volume under his name alone (which, Cockayne's poetry suggests, would have been the more ethical thing to do), it was probably sensible to bind Beaumont and Fletcher's names together, particularly given the success of those plays which were advertised as co-authored. The Beaumont and Fletcher names were already heavily associated with each other, if not by 1613, when Beaumont retired, then certainly within a couple of decades, by which point several of their plays had been reprinted several times. It would have been a striking and risky move to shun the bankable Beaumont and Fletcher label, particularly given that the Fletcher and Massinger label had not been used previously. Earlier published plays by Fletcher and Massinger had either been advertised as Fletcher's alone (as in the case of *The Elder Brother* and *The Bloody Brother*) or else published without authorial attribution (as in the case of *Thierry and Theodoret* in 1621). Publishing a big book of plays was risky enough without adding in an extra variable. Indeed, as the first folio of collaborative plays (building on, but also departing from, the earlier Jonson and Shakespeare folios), the 1647 edition needed to be especially carefully advertised. Readers who had purchased an edition of one of the plays already attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher in print may have been especially keen to buy a copy of the handsome folio promising to bring together all of Beaumont and Fletcher's unpublished plays, except for *The Wild Goose Chase*, a Fletcher play which Moseley was not able to get the rights to, but which he eventually published in folio in 1652, as a complement to the 1647 edition.²⁵

The association of Beaumont and Fletcher persisted in other ways too. An epigram in the popular verse miscellany *Wits Recreations* printed seven years before the Beaumont and Fletcher folio, titled 'To Mr Francis Beaumont and Mr John Fletcher gent.' offers one such example:

Twin-stars of poetry, whom we justly may,
Call the two-tops of learn'd Pernassus-Bay,
Peerlesse for friendship and for numbers sweet,
Whom oft the Muses swaddled in one sheet:
Your works shall still be prais'd and dearer sold,
For our new-nothings doe extoll your old.²⁶

The verse stresses the poetic quality of Beaumont and Fletcher's collaborations, but more than this, it also mythologizes the pair, establishing them not simply as fine dramatists but as paragons of friendship. In the later seventeenth century, the biographer John Aubrey would add an extra, more salacious layer to this story when he claimed that the two men 'lived together on the Banke side, not far from the Play-house, both bachelors; lay together ... had one wench in the house

²⁴ Zachary Lesser, 'Shakespeare's Flop: John Waterson and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*', in Marta Straznicka (ed.), *Shakespeare's Stationers: Studies in Cultural Bibliography* (Philadelphia, PA, 2012), 177–96.

²⁵ Humphrey Moseley, 'The Stationer to the Readers', in *Comedies and Tragedies*, A4r.

²⁶ *Wits Recreation* (London, 1640), B4v.

between them, which they did so admire; the same cloathes and cloake, &c., between them.²⁷ Massinger's close connection with Fletcher, which continued to the grave, did not register in the cultural consciousness in the same way. This may have been because Beaumont and Fletcher's relationship was particularly intense or simply because it was established earlier (Beaumont seems to have retired from playwrighting in 1613, the same year that Massinger was just starting out). There is a sense too, however, that the names Beaumont and Fletcher simply fit well together on the page, on the tongue, and in the mind. Lee Bliss is not wrong to note the 'potent' power of their names.²⁸ The neat symmetry of their trochaic names, the way that Beaumont's French name hints at his aristocratic lineage while Fletcher's suggests a humbler background, the sense that their names combined evoke the qualities of beauty and craft that emblemize their dramaturgy: these serendipitous features were a gift for publishers like Moseley and Robinson.²⁹

THE BIRTH OF THE AUTHOR

But perhaps the dearth of the author is connected to the birth of the author. By the time Mosley and Robinson published the Beaumont and Fletcher volume, Massinger had established himself as a solo writer. Whereas Fletcher sought out collaborators after the departure of Beaumont and Shakespeare, Massinger opted to go it alone once Fletcher died. Beaumont and Fletcher had an identifiable authorial label, but so too did Massinger; the issue was that his reputation—at least as delineated in print editions—was of a writer excellent at working alone. Only twice was Massinger credited as a co-author on a title page before 1647 (for his collaboration with Dekker on *The Virgin Martyr* and with Field on *The Fatal Dowry*).³⁰ All 10 of Massinger's solo plays to make it into print before 1647 bore his name alone on their title pages. Closer attention to these editions and to his career trajectory, helps better explain how Massinger, contrary to Hoy's claims, emerged as a distinctive authorial voice in the mid-seventeenth century and in turn allows us better to see why Moseley and Robinson may have preferred not to name him on the title page of their folio.

Massinger's career shape was unusual, perhaps even unique, among early modern dramatists, in that it can be split roughly in half. In the first half of his career, he wrote almost exclusively in collaboration; in the second, seemingly entirely alone. It was not unusual for a writer to collaborate as frequently as he did (Fletcher, for example, apparently collaborated more often) but it seems to have been highly unusual for a playwright to have shifted playwrighting practice so apparently definitively. Despite his well-deserved reputation as a frequent collaborator, Fletcher also wrote alone throughout his career. While working extensively with Beaumont on several plays for boy companies in the first years of his career, he also wrote *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *The Woman's Prize or The Tamer Tamed*, seemingly for different companies. In the midst of his collaboration with Massinger in the early 1620s he seems to have written several plays alone.³¹ Massinger, by contrast, does not seem to have started writing alone until around 1621, some eight years after his first foray into playwrighting, when he wrote *The Duke of Milan*, and it wasn't until after 1625 that he started to do so regularly. Other frequent collaborators appear to have alternated between solo authorship and collaboration more easily. Middleton, for example, was

²⁷ John Aubrey, *Brief Lives chiefly of contemporaries, set down by John Aubrey, between the Years 1669 and 1696*, vol. 1, ed. Andrew Clark (Oxford, 1898), 96. For a discussion of this anecdote and what it might suggest about the relationship between Beaumont and Fletcher, see Masten, *Textual Intercourse*, 61–2.

²⁸ Lee Bliss, *Francis Beaumont* (Boston, MA, 1987), 133.

²⁹ Sensing something magical about the name, the interior designer John Crowell chose Beaumont and Fletcher as the name of his upmarket furniture and fabrics company, which he founded in 1989: <<https://www.beaumontandfletcher.com/about/company-history/>> accessed 5 July 2022.

³⁰ Printed in 1632, *The Fatal Dowry* bears the initials of its authors: P. M. and N. F. rather than their full names.

³¹ Wiggins dates *Women Pleased* to 1620 and *The Island Princess*, *The Wild Goose Chase* and *The Pilgrim* to 1621, which puts them right in the midst of a period of prolific collaboration with Massinger on *The Laws of Candy*, *The Little French Lawyer*, and *The False One* (all 1620) and *The Double Marriage*, *The Prophetess*, and *The Sea Voyage* (all 1622). See, Wiggins, *British Drama*, vol. 7.

writing alone and in partnership almost from the very beginning of his career.³² After Fletcher's death Massinger seems to have turned his attentions completely towards writing alone, save, perhaps, for helping to complete the unfinished *The Fair Maid of the Inn* after Fletcher's death.

By the time of his death in 1640, then, Massinger was well-established as a solo writer. His collaborative work, while highly significant, belonged to an earlier phase of his career. His most recent work, perhaps more likely to stick in the memory of the folio publishers, was ostensibly produced alone. The reasons for such a change in practice are unclear. It may have been that, once Fletcher died, Massinger felt that he could not work closely with another writer. Alternatively (or additionally), he may have relished the opportunity to step out of the shadow of his more senior friend and forge his own path. Being a solo author probably brought with it financial incentives too: he would not need to split a fee with a partner if he wrote alone.³³ Massinger may have preferred to be known, as he is now (insofar as he is known at all), as his own man, a solo writer. Accordingly, Moseley, who printed three Massinger plays in one 1655 edition, may have felt that adding Massinger's name to the 1647 folio would muddy the authorial waters too much. As Jeffrey Masten argues, the paratexts to the Beaumont and Fletcher seemingly vacillate 'between singular authorship and dual collaboration' but leave little space available for the articulation of a tripartite collaboration.³⁴

In 1652 Moseley printed *The Widow* with a title page bearing the names of Jonson, Fletcher, and Middleton, so he was not averse to the idea of advertising three authors on a title page, and he was also prepared (seemingly erroneously in this case) to associate Fletcher with playwrights other than Beaumont.³⁵ But that it was easier to market Massinger as a solo dramatist rather than as a collaborator is perhaps suggested by Moseley's decision to include *A Very Woman* in the Massinger 1655 edition, attributed to Massinger alone, even though it was in fact a Fletcher and Massinger collaboration. While Massinger generally got the bad end of the bargain, by having many of his plays wrongly attributed to another writer, false attribution here worked to strengthen his reputation as a solo playwright.

The 10 playbooks printed before 1647 bearing Massinger's name alone demonstrate not only that Massinger was a vendible author, but that he was invested in his authorial presentation in print. Massinger wrote a dedication to a patron for each of his solo authored plays and all but one play featured an encomiastic dedication to Massinger, whereas the two plays to which he was attributed on the title page as a co-author feature no such prefatory material.³⁶ Massinger was fashioning himself (and was being fashioned by a range of different stationers) as a sole author and some of his solo plays, such as *The Roman Actor* and *The Emperor of the East*, included several poems praising his work. In his dedication to the former, Massinger describes his play as his 'Minerua' and to press home the point six dedicatory poems lavish further praise.³⁷ The amateur dramatist Thomas Goffe contributed a poem in Latin and Joseph Taylor, the King's Men actor who performed in the play and who was one of the signatories to a dedicatory epistle in the 1647 folio, penned his own commendatory verse.³⁸ Michael Neill rightly notes that elaborate encomiastic displays were in vogue in Caroline England; Massinger participated fully in this cultural

³² On Middleton's collaborative practices, see James P. Bednarz, 'Collaboration: The Shadow of Shakespeare', in Julie Sanders (ed.), *Thomas Middleton in Context* (Cambridge, 2011), 211–18, and in the same volume, Heather Hirschfeld, 'Collaboration: Sustained Partnerships', 219–28.

³³ For an example of the potentially contentious nature of payments for collaborative writers, consider Robert Daborne's dispute with Philip Henslowe, in which he was paid less than Massinger for work on a collaboration: W. W. Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Papers, Being Documents Supplementary to Henslowe's Diary* (London, 1907), 70–1. For discussion, see Lucy Munro, 'Writing a Play with Robert Daborne', in Tiffany Stern (ed.), *Rethinking Theatrical Documents* (London, 2021), 17–32 (18).

³⁴ Masten, *Textual Intercourse*, 123; 154.

³⁵ *Eastward Ho* was printed three times in 1605, each time with a title page acknowledging tripartite collaboration, so there was an available precedent for Moseley and Robinson.

³⁶ The exception was *The Unnatural Combat* (London, 1639).

³⁷ Philip Massinger, 'To my much Honoured, and most true Friends', in *The Roman Actor* (London, 1629), A2v.

³⁸ Thomas Goffe, 'In Philippi Massinger', in *The Roman Actor*, A3v; Joseph Taylor, 'To his long knowne and lou'd Friend, Mr PHILIP MASSINGER', in *The Roman Actor*, A4r.

environment and successfully presented himself as a distinctive authorial figure, as attested to in several mid-century poems.³⁹ In *Wits Recreations*, for example, Massinger, unlike Beaumont and Fletcher, gets his own poem, which figures him as ‘Apollo’s Messenger, who doth impart, | To us the edicts of his learned art.’⁴⁰ Similarly a 1650s miscellany includes a poem which surveys leading writers of the century:

The fluent Fletcher, Beaumont rich in sense,
In Complement and Courtships quintessence;
Ingenious Shakespeare, Massinger that knows
The strength of Plot to write in verse and prose;
Whose easie Pegasus will amble ore
Some threescore miles of Fancy in an hour.⁴¹

Beaumont and Fletcher (their names here reversed) are grouped together, but Massinger again emerges as a writer with his own individual qualities, here outlined at some length.

Two dedicatory verses, in two different Massinger plays, shed particular light on the factors that led to the elision of the Fletcher and Massinger collaboration. In both instances, the encomiast invokes Beaumont and Fletcher as a pair while praising Massinger as a solo writer. In the first, ‘To My Worthy Friend, Mr Philip Massinger’, appended to *The Emperor of the East*, Cockayne situates Massinger in a continuum with other writers of significance from across the seventeenth century: ‘Read Iohnson, Shakespeare, Beaumont, Fletcher, or, | Thy neat-limnd peeeces, skilful Massinger.’⁴² In the second, ‘To his friend, the Author’, appended to *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, Thomas Jay opens by comparing Massinger to Beaumont and Fletcher: ‘You may remember how you chid me when | I ranckt you equall with those glorious men; | Beaumont and Fletcher; if you love not praise | You must forbear the publishing of plays.’⁴³ In the earlier poem, Beaumont and Fletcher are not exactly linked, but their juxtaposition is highly suggestive; in the second, they are explicitly paired. The point of Cockayne’s poem is to situate Massinger in a wider tradition while also clearly delineating his characteristic dramatic quality. Similarly, Jay wishes to accord Massinger the status of Beaumont and Fletcher while adumbrating his particular writerly attributes: ‘The craftie Mazes of the cunning plot, | The polish’d phrase; the sweet expressions.’⁴⁴ By prefacing Massinger’s plays, Cockayne and Jay consolidate his reputation as a solo author of repute but by doing so in relation to Beaumont and Fletcher they make it harder to apprehend Massinger as a Fletcher collaborator. They also demonstrate that by the early 1630s Beaumont and Fletcher (both now deceased) had become entwined in a way that was probably difficult to unpick. It was the confluence of these two factors: the fame and convenience of the Beaumont and Fletcher label and the strong reputation of Massinger as a solo writer, rather than any failing on Massinger’s part, that likely led to Massinger’s total exclusion from the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher folio.

LASTING MONUMENTS

In opting not to acknowledge Massinger as a major Fletcher collaborator, Moseley and Robinson made a big decision that probably made a lot of marketing sense, but it was a decision that had a long-lasting and ultimately distorting effect on the reception of the playwrights involved in

³⁹ Michael Neill, ‘“Wits most accomplished Senate”: The Audience of the Caroline Private Theatres’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 18 (1978), 341–60.

⁴⁰ *Wits Recreations*, B8v.

⁴¹ *Choice Drollery, Songs and Sonnets* (London, 1656), B3v.

⁴² Cockayne, ‘To my worthy Friend Mr PHILIP MASSINGER’, in Massinger, *The Emperor of the East* (London, 1632), A3r.

⁴³ Thomas Jay, ‘To his friend the Author’, in Massinger, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (London, 1633), A3v.

⁴⁴ Jay, ‘To his friend the Author’, in Massinger, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (London, 1633), A3v.

the folio and on early modern playwrighting practice more generally. The folio was a major statement, seeking not only to preserve the unpublished work of Fletcher and his collaborators but, as Francis X. Connor notes, 'to ensure the Royalist stage will survive the closing of the theatres in 1642'.⁴⁵ This was a serious undertaking and Moseley and Robinson called in reinforcements: their folio includes 36 commendatory verses in addition to the stationers' address and dedicatory epistle. The number of prefatory poems far outweighs similar, earlier literary folios such as Ben Jonson's 1616 *Works* and the Shakespeare folios of 1623 and 1632. The Jonson folio contained 10 commendatory verses—three, in fact, by Beaumont—several of which were reprinted from earlier quartos, while the Shakespeare folios each featured six separate prefatory pieces. The sheer volume of encomiastic material deployed in the Beaumont and Fletcher folio suggests something of the intensity of the effort required to canonize Beaumont and Fletcher and to memorialize the pre-civil war stage. The assembled encomiasts—several of whom, like Shirley and Jonson, were noted writers of the pre-theatre ban; several of whom, like the Roger L'Estrange and John Berkenhead, would become major literary arbiters in Restoration England—lent their collective authority to Beaumont and Fletcher, legitimizing that collaboration (and, inadvertently or otherwise, suppressing the involvement of Massinger).⁴⁶

The folio, then, was already a major statement of literary importance, but Moseley cannily continued to recategorize Fletcher plays as Beaumont collaborations, strengthening the already strong association between the two writers and increasing the appeal of his 1647 collection. Jitka Štollová observes that Moseley consolidated the Beaumont and Fletcher connection further by reissuing *The Elder Brother*—a play by Fletcher and Massinger but initially published by John Waterson and John Benson in 1637, as Fletcher's alone—as a Beaumont and Fletcher collaboration and by advertising his 1652 edition of *The Wild Goose Chase* as collaborative, even though four of the five paratexts attribute the play solely to Fletcher.⁴⁷ The title page of Moseley's edition of *The Wild Goose Chase* appealed to readers looking to complete the Beaumont and Fletcher canon: 'Being the Noble, Last and Oneley Remaines of those Incomparable Drammatists { FRANCIS BEAUMONT, | AND | JOHN FLETCHER. }'.⁴⁸ Moseley was also diligent to correct what was from his perspective the misattribution of *The Woman Hater*, a Beaumont and Fletcher play which had previously been printed in 1607 without authorial attribution, by Robert Raworth to be sold by John Hodgets. Moseley's 1648 edition was printed with a title page that referred only to Fletcher but he rectified this in 1649, issuing the play with a new subtitle, *The Hungry Courtier*, as well as a prologue, epilogue, dramatis personae, and, crucially, a new title page attribution: 'Written by {FRANCIS BEAUMONT| AND| JOHN FLETCHER.} Gent.'⁴⁹ Moseley repeated this trick with *Thierry and Theodoret*, a Fletcher and Massinger play which was first printed in 1621 without an authorial attribution, by Nicholas Okes for Thomas Walkley. Moseley's 1648 edition attributed the play to Fletcher alone, but the following year he reattributed the play to Beaumont and Fletcher, while also providing additional paratextual materials.⁵⁰

Partly because of their print canonization, the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio were attractive and easily available to theatre-makers when the playhouses reopened in the English

⁴⁵ Francis X. Connor, *Literary Folios and Ideas of the Book in Early Modern England* (New York, NY, 2014), 124. See also, Brian Chalk, *Monuments and Literary Posterity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge, 2015), 196.

⁴⁶ On the influence of L'Estrange in Restoration England, see the essays in Anne Dunan-Page and Beth Lynch (eds), *Roger L'Estrange and the Making of Restoration Culture* (Aldershot, 2008). On Berkenhead, see P. W. Thomas, *Sir John Berkenhead, 1617–1679: A Royalist Career in Politics and Polemics* (Oxford, 1969), 197–237.

⁴⁷ Jitka Štollová, "'This silence of the stage': The Play of Format and Paratext in the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio", *Review of English Studies*, 68 (2017), 507–23 (512).

⁴⁸ John Fletcher, *The Wild Goose Chase* (London, 1652), title page.

⁴⁹ W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols (London, 1939–1959), 245b(i) and 245b(ii).

⁵⁰ Greg, *Bibliography*, 368b(i) and 368b(ii).

Restoration.⁵¹ Fletcher and Massinger plays were among the first to be performed after the theatre reopening (Samuel Pepys famously recorded seeing a performance of *Beggars' Bush* as being 'the first time that ever I saw Women come upon the stage').⁵² Indeed, *Beggars' Bush* was seemingly a hot commodity: it was illicitly published by Francis Kirkman in 1661, causing Robinson and Anne Moseley (the widow of the recently deceased Humphrey), to publish a quarto rebuking Kirkman and other purveyors of pirated copies. It is, of course, Beaumont and Fletcher whose names take pride of place on the edition's title page. Moseley's legacy lived on, after his death: a 1678 edition of *The Elder Brother* followed Moseley's attribution of the play to Beaumont and Fletcher, rather than to Fletcher and Massinger. Similarly, the 1690 edition of Fletcher and Massinger's *The Prophetess*, adapted into an operatic form by Thomas Betterton, with music by Henry Purcell, advertised Beaumont and Fletcher on its title page. The popular appeal of Beaumont and Fletcher is also suggested by the 1660 miscellany *Poems The Golden Remains of those so Much Admired Dramatick Poets, Francis Beaumont & John Fletcher*, which brought together solo work by Beaumont including his poems *Salmacis and Hermaphroditis* and *The Remedy of Love*, along with his masque for the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn. The collection also included a host of prologues, epilogues, and songs, from plays popularly attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher (but often, in fact, by Massinger).⁵³

The later seventeenth century saw a rapid development and extension of the Beaumont and Fletcher mythology, of which Aubrey's anecdote about the playwrights' living arrangements was but one example. Another anecdote, retold in multiple sources, involves Beaumont and Fletcher being accused of treason by an eavesdropper who heard them plotting *The Maid's Tragedy*; disaster is averted when they finally manage to explain themselves to a constable.⁵⁴ The story drives home the close connection between the two writers, who were frequently described as 'inseparable' and who many commentators compared to Castor and Pollux, while also mimicking the tragicomic shape associated with much of their drama.⁵⁵ During this period, Beaumont and Fletcher took up a position of prominence among English theatre writers, forming a triumvirate of wits along with Shakespeare and Jonson (and often placed ahead of both).⁵⁶ The phrase itself derives from Sir John Denham's prefatory poem, addressed to Fletcher, in the 1647 folio: 'When JOHNSON, SHAKESPEARE, and thy selfe did sit, | And sway'd in the Triumvirate of wit.'⁵⁷ Denham conceived of Fletcher as distinct from Beaumont in his poem, but the fact that it prefaced a volume purporting to be the work of both men, combined with the mythology that had developed around the pair, meant that Beaumont and Fletcher were regularly grouped together as one part of the triumvirate.⁵⁸ The association was long-lasting: Jonathan Bate draws attention

⁵¹ The tragicomic form of many of the plays in the 1647 volume also appealed strongly to Restoration players and audiences. See Dobson, *Making of the National Poet*, 21–5.

⁵² Pepys records this playgoing experience on Thursday, 3 January 1661: Robert Latham and William Matthews (eds), *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 2 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1970), 5.

⁵³ *Poems* (London, 1660). Examples of Fletcher and Massinger plays referenced in the volume include the prologue, epilogue, and songs to *The False One*, 14v–H2v; the prologue, epilogue, and songs to *The Little French Lawyer*, H4v–11v; two prologues and epilogues to *The Custom of the Country*, 12v–13r; and the prologue and epilogue to *The Martial Maid* (now better known as *Love's Cure*), O3v–O4r.

⁵⁴ A version of this story is told by Thomas Fuller in *The History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), Ooo1v and is also recounted in the popular jest compilation *Poor Robin's Jestes, or The Compleat Jester* (London, 1667), C8r.

⁵⁵ Edward Phillips, *Theatrum Poetarum, or a Compleat Collection of the Poets* (London, 1675), Bb8v. For the Castor and Pollux comparison see *Poor Robin's Jestes*, C8r; William Winstanley, *The Lives of the Most Famous English Poets* (London, 1687), Kr; G. S., *Anglorum Speculum, or The Worthies of England in Church and State* (London, 1684), Ll8v.

⁵⁶ For further discussion, see Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet*, 29–32; Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History, From the Restoration to the Present* (New York, NY, 1989), 26–32.

⁵⁷ John Denham, 'On Mr JOHN FLETCHER's VVorkes', in *Comedies and Tragedies*, B1v.

⁵⁸ Some commentators followed Denham by excluding Beaumont from the trio. See, for example, Francis Kirkman, 'To His much honored Friend Wil. Beeston, Esq;', in Kirkman (trans.) *The Loves and Adventures of Clerio and Lozia. A Romance* (London, 1652), A2v–A3r. It was common, however, to include both men as one part of the triumvirate. For examples, see, Richard Flecknoe, *A Short Discourse of the English Stage*, in *Love's Kingdom* (London, 1664), G5r; Thomas Rymer, *The Tragedies of the Last Age* (London, 1678), B1v–r.

to an early nineteenth-century satirical print that depicts mice or rats nibbling at the discarded books of the triumvirate (now a symbol of an outdated and vulgar theatrical past).⁵⁹

The high regard in which Beaumont and Fletcher were held in turn led the publisher Henry Herringman, together with John Martyn and Richard Marriot, to embark on an ambitious new folio project which incorporated the plays published in the 1647 volume with the Beaumont and/or Fletcher plays printed prior to, and therefore not included in, that earlier collection. In doing so, Connor suggests, Herringman positioned himself as a ‘cultural arbiter’ who cemented the existing dramatic canon that Moseley and Robinson had helped to create.⁶⁰ Herringman also helped to calcify the existing connection between Beaumont and Fletcher, making it harder than ever to countenance Massinger as a Fletcher collaborator. The 1679 folio still contains more Massinger plays than Beaumont works, but the balance is less awry than it was in the 1647 edition. Massinger’s involvement in the volume increased in numerical terms from around 15 to 18 plays (*The Elder Brother*, *Rollo, Duke of Normandy*, also known as *The Bloody Brother*, and *Thierry and Theodoret* were all added) but Beaumont’s involvement increased more dramatically: he was involved, either as author or co-author, on 10 entertainments in the 1679 collection, whereas he was involved in only three texts in the earlier volume. Viewed in percentage terms, Massinger’s involvement in the folio dropped down from around 42% to around 35% whereas Beaumont’s rose significantly from around 8% to around 19%. Beaumont’s figures are boosted greatly not only by the addition of his very successful Fletcher collaborations—*Philaster*, *A King and No King*, and *The Maid’s Tragedy* were in particularly high demand in the Restoration era—but also by the addition of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, a play now conventionally attributed to Beaumont alone, but advertised in 1635 as a collaboration. Expanding the Beaumont and Fletcher canon to over 50 plays (adding in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen* for good measure), the 1679 folio asserted the place of Beaumont and Fletcher at the head of the Restoration theatrical canon and left Massinger—still the major collaborator in the volume—locked out.

BEYOND BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

There is a lot to be thankful for about the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher folio. Without Moseley’s dedication to seeking out so many unpublished works it is possible we may have lost some of the seventeenth century’s most successful and influential plays.⁶¹ But the attribution of the volume has distorted our understanding of the plays and their authors in such a way as is difficult to rectify. The names Beaumont and Fletcher simply go well together and to insert Massinger into the equation, or to replace Beaumont with him, would be to disrupt a pleasingly coherent narrative that has been ingrained in the English theatrical imagination since the seventeenth century. Even when the reputation of Beaumont and Fletcher took a sharp downturn in the late eighteenth century at the hands of Romantic critics like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for whom, Philip J. Finkelpearl notes, they became ‘whipping boys for the glorification of Shakespeare’ the Beaumont and Fletcher names remained entwined.⁶² Shakespeare’s bardic canonization brought with it a valorisation of a sole authorship model that remains dominant today and which makes it hard properly to acknowledge or assess Massinger’s collaboration with Fletcher.⁶³ The dominance of

⁵⁹ Samuel De Wilde, *Feast of the Board of Management* (February 1809), discussed in Jonathan Bate, *Shakespearean Constitutions, Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* (Oxford, 1989), 29.

⁶⁰ Francis X. Connor, ‘Henry Herringman, Richard Bentley and Shakespeare’s Fourth Folio (1685)’, in Emma Depledge and Peter Kirwan (eds), *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade 1640–1740* (Cambridge, 2017), 38–54 (39–40).

⁶¹ Even when he acquired the plays, it was not a foregone conclusion that he would publish them. Moseley accumulated a large collection of plays, entered in the Stationers’ Register, which he did not publish. Most famously, this includes Shakespeare and Fletcher’s ‘Cardenio’.

⁶² Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics*, 5.

⁶³ There is of course a significant and growing body of work on early modern collaboration, but in criticism and practice, sole authored plays and single authorship models continue to dominate.

the sole authorship model has permitted Massinger a seat at the table of the theatrical canon at various points in history (albeit not usually for very long and only in partial forms) but it has rarely allowed a deeper consideration of his prolific collaborative practice.⁶⁴

The most recent collected works of the Fletcher canon—a mammoth 10-volume edition, the first volume printed in 1966, the last in 1996—broke new ground by offering a fuller consideration of Massinger's contribution, but it retained the Beaumont and Fletcher name on its title page. In a brief forward, the general editor Fredson Bowers offered this justification:

These volumes contain the text and apparatus for the plays conventionally assigned to the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, although in fact Fletcher collaborated with dramatists other than Beaumont in numerous plays of the canon and some of the preserved texts also represent revision at a later date by various hands.⁶⁵

Massinger, notably, was not named in this foreword and his contribution is therefore buried in the volumes themselves.⁶⁶ As such, Beaumont, rather than Massinger, retains his place as Fletcher's principal collaborator and Massinger's considerable labour remains, while more visible than ever before, nevertheless obscured from full view.

During the long process of publishing the Bowers Beaumont and Fletcher edition, Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson undertook the task of editing the collected plays of Massinger. But their edition—the most recent collection of Massinger's work—includes just two collaborative plays, only one of which was co-authored with Fletcher. Fear of duplication was part of the reason for the omission of Massinger's Fletcher collaborations: the editors chose not to include the collaborative *Virgin Martyr* on the basis that it had been edited by Bowers in his dramatic works of Dekker and they would have known that Massinger's Fletcher collaborations would soon appear in the Beaumont and Fletcher collection too. But there was another rationale: the editors state their desire to 'continue the development of a canon begun in Coxeter's edition of 1759'.⁶⁷ Thomas Coxeter's four-volume edition, itself developing the canon formation processes of the 1620s and 1630s, enshrined Massinger primarily as a solo dramatist and opted not to acknowledge his prolific partnership with Fletcher. Rather than breaking with tradition, to acknowledge Fletcher and Massinger's partnership fully, the Edwards and Gibson edition continues a publishing practice which occludes large sections of Massinger's work. The strength of the Beaumont and Fletcher authorial label and the establishment of Massinger as a solo writer of repute—both seventeenth-century canon constructions—continued to exert its influence centuries later.

What then, can be done about it? A starting point might be to think more concertedly about what exactly the elision of Massinger's collaboration has obscured. The careers and practices of all three writers look different when Massinger's substantial contribution is placed into greater focus and a deeper study of their collaborations could well yield new insights into broader practices of playwrighting. Beaumont ought to remain an influential figure, especially given that the plays he wrote with Fletcher (acting as the senior partner) achieved considerable success, but if his grip on Fletcher is loosened, his influence may appear less direct and perhaps more ghostly than the Beaumont and Fletcher tag implies. In what ways, we might ask, did Beaumont remain in Fletcher's mind when he worked alone, or when he worked with Massinger? Did Massinger

⁶⁴ Consider, for example, the remarkable success of Massinger's *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, whose villainous protagonist, Sir Giles Overreach, became one of Edmund Kean's most celebrated roles. See, Robert Hamilton Ball, *The Amazing Career of Sir Giles Overreach* (Princeton, NJ, 1939).

⁶⁵ Fredson Bowers, 'Foreword', in Fredson Bowers (ed.), *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon* (Cambridge, 1966), vii.

⁶⁶ For a trenchant critique of Bowers' editorial logic, see McMullan, *The Politics of Unease*, 148–9.

⁶⁷ Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, 'Preface', in Edwards and Gibson (eds), *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1976).

worry about stepping into the void that Beaumont had left? To what extent did Beaumont influence Massinger? Such questions take account of Beaumont's importance without according him a direct hand in plays he was not alive to see, let alone write. Lucy Munro has written about the influence Shakespeare continued to exert on Fletcher after his death and there is scope to consider much more fully the ghostly influence of Beaumont too.⁶⁸

Proper acknowledgement of Massinger's long-standing collaboration with Fletcher would also make more apparent Fletcher's lifelong commitment to collaboration (a commitment that went well beyond Beaumont). By placing him second, the Beaumont and Fletcher label casts Fletcher into perpetual service to his more senior (albeit younger) writing partner, obscuring more than a decade of his work, often as a senior writing partner to more junior dramatists, including Massinger, whom he seems to have mentored. McMullan has written the best account yet of Fletcher's collaborative practice and is unusual in placing more emphasis on Fletcher's work with Massinger than his work with Beaumont, but it is striking that he does so in a book that bears only Fletcher's name.⁶⁹ Fletcher's dramatic canon (large for an English dramatist of the period) is in need of much further examination, but collaboration needs to be at the centre of this work (as it is, in fairness, for McMullan, who has recently recanted his earlier decision to name only Fletcher on his book's title page).⁷⁰ Given the historical elision of Massinger's contributions, scholars need to be even more diligent than they might ordinarily be about foregrounding Massinger's collaboration with Fletcher. In addition to aiding our understanding of Massinger, this approach will help us better to understand what it was that Fletcher got out of collaboration, given that he was so committed to it throughout his career.⁷¹

Finally, and most obviously, the elision of Massinger's contribution to his collaborative plays (which make up a substantial portion of his overall output) impoverishes our understanding of him as a writer. His achievement, as both a solo playwright and a collaborator, is significant and arguably equals or exceeds many writers from the period. A canonical contest about which writer is best or most influential is probably not helpful (and would no doubt lead to its own occlusions) but it should be sufficient to note that theatrical commentators have, for centuries, delimited the boundaries of the Massinger canon in an unnecessarily inaccurate way that obscures his accomplishments. When considered fully, the Fletcher and Massinger collaboration may well emerge, as the introduction to this essay claims, as one of the most significant in English theatrical history. The plays of the canon historically attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher are some of the seventeenth century's richest and strangest dramatic texts and are calling out for new attribution work, to test and qualify Hoy's now rather dated attribution scholarship.⁷² While attribution scholars have tended to focus on Shakespeare's collaborations (with striking results), the practices of the period's most prolific dramatic collaborators is in desperate need of thorough and sustained study.⁷³ The time is also ripe for new editions of Fletcher and Massinger plays—many of which have yet to receive single editions in the modern era—which place proper emphasis

⁶⁸ Lucy Munro, 'His collaborator John Fletcher', in Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells (eds), *The Shakespeare Circle: An Alternative Biography* (Cambridge, 2015), 305–14 (312–3).

⁶⁹ McMullan, *The Politics of Unease*, 132–55. Domenico Lovascio has recently written an illuminating book which focuses in part on plays Fletcher wrote in collaboration with Massinger but his book, also, finds space only for Fletcher in its title: *John Fletcher's Rome: Questioning the Classics* (Manchester, 2022).

⁷⁰ Gordon McMullan, 'The Strange Case of Susan Brotes: Rhetoric, Gender, and Authorship in John Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed*, or How (Not) to Identify an Early Modern Playwright', *Renaissance Drama*, 47 (2019), 177–200 (177–8).

⁷¹ For a useful discussion of this question in relation to Shakespeare's career, see Gary Taylor, 'Why did Shakespeare Collaborate?', *Shakespeare Survey*, 67 (2014), 1–17.

⁷² Hoy produced seven essays in the 1950s and 1960s attending to the Beaumont and Fletcher canon. See, for example, 'The Shares of Fletcher and his Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (1)', *Studies in Bibliography*, 8 (1956), 129–46. For a critique of Hoy's attribution approach (and indeed, of attribution studies more broadly), see Masten, *Textual Intercourse*, 16–20.

⁷³ For an example of a valuable study of Shakespeare and collaboration, see Will Sharpe, 'Framing Shakespeare's Collaborative Authorship', *Shakespeare Survey*, 67 (2014), 29–43. For a major study of collaborative work beyond the Shakespeare canon, see David Nicol, *Middleton and Rowley: Forms of Collaboration in the Jacobean Playhouse* (Toronto, 2012).

on collaboration and which aim to keep Massinger's involvement in them in the foreground.⁷⁴ Greater attention to this body of work will yield new insights, not only into the plays of Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger, but also Field, Rowley, and other collaborators who appear to have played smaller but nonetheless important roles and whom this essay, in its attention to Massinger, has also occluded.

Would Massinger have cared about what I have argued is the unfair elision of a significant proportion of his corpus? Perhaps, and understandably so. But perhaps not. Massinger may have preferred to be known as a solo writer rather than the junior partner in a collaboration. Looking at his career trajectory, it seems very possible that he thought of writing alone as an upgrade in status. Were he able to know about it, he may have been more irked at the unfortunate disappearance of several of his solo plays, reputedly destroyed in the eighteenth century by the antiquarian John Warburton's cook, who used the manuscripts to light fires when making pies. But while there is nothing that can now be done about the destruction of Massinger's late career work (his plays from 1636 to 1640 are almost entirely lost) it is possible, belatedly, to do something about the elision of his part in a theatrical collaboration which produced what John Dryden described as 'the most pleasant and frequent entertainments of the stage.'⁷⁵

⁷⁴ See John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, *Love's Cure, or The Martial Maid*, ed. José A. Pérez Díez (Manchester, 2022) for an example of what careful, rigorous, sustained scholarly attention to Fletcher and Massinger plays can achieve.

⁷⁵ John Dryden, *Of Dramatick Poesy, An Essay* (London, 1668), H1r. Work on lost plays has yielded new insights about plays that do not survive in print or manuscript, so more concerted work on Massinger's lost work would be extremely useful, even if the play texts themselves seem irrecoverable.

APPENDIX: AUTHORSHIP OF PLAYS IN *COMEDIES AND TRAGEDIES WRITTEN BY FRANCIS BEAUMONT AND JOHN FLETCHER* (LONDON: 1647). DETAILS FROM MARTIN WIGGINS, *BRITISH DRAMA, 1533-1642: A CATALOGUE*

Play Title	Author(s) according to Wiggins
<i>The Mad Lover</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Spanish Curate</i>	Fletcher and Massinger
<i>The Little French Lawyer</i>	Fletcher and Massinger
<i>The Custom of the Country</i>	Massinger and Fletcher
<i>The Noble Gentleman</i>	Fletcher and collaborator
<i>The Captain</i>	Beaumont and Fletcher
<i>Beggars' Bush</i>	Fletcher, Massinger & Field
<i>The Coxcomb</i>	Fletcher and Beaumont
<i>The False One</i>	Fletcher and Massinger
<i>The Chances</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Loyal Subject</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Laws of Candy</i>	Massinger, Fletcher & Ford
<i>The Lovers' Progress</i>	Fletcher (rev. Massinger)
<i>The Island Princess</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Humorous Lieutenant</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Nice Valour</i>	Middleton possibly with Fletcher
<i>The Maid in the Mill</i>	Rowley and Fletcher
<i>The Prophetess</i>	Massinger and Fletcher
<i>Bonduca</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Sea Voyage</i>	Massinger and Fletcher
<i>The Double Marriage</i>	Fletcher and Massinger
<i>The Pilgrim</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Knight of Malta</i>	Fletcher, Field & Massinger
<i>The Woman's Prize</i>	Fletcher
<i>Love's Cure</i>	Fletcher and Massinger
<i>The Honest Man's Fortune</i>	Fletcher, Field, Massinger & Daborne
<i>The Queen of Corinth</i>	Massinger, Field & Fletcher
<i>Women Pleased</i>	Fletcher
<i>A Wife for a Month</i>	Fletcher
<i>Wit at Several Weapons</i>	Middleton and Rowley
<i>Valentinian</i>	Fletcher
<i>The Fair Maid of the Inn</i>	Webster, Massinger, Ford & Fletcher
<i>Love's Pilgrimage</i>	Fletcher (& collaborator?)
<i>The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn</i>	Beaumont
<i>Four Plays, or Moral Representations, in One</i>	Field and Fletcher