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The Elder Brother, Virgil's *De apibus*, and the Chronology of the Plays in the Canon of John Fletcher and His Collaborators, 1617–20

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Article abstract

This article argues that John Brinsley's 1620 translation of Virgil's *Georgics*, Book IV, is a source for John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Elder Brother*. This contention results in dating the play to 1620 rather than 1618 as suggested by Martin Wiggins. The re-dating has consequences for the dating of other plays in the canon of Fletcher and his collaborators for the period 1617 to 1620, and I propose a new chronology for the Fletcher plays in this time span.

Domenico Lovascio

***The Elder Brother*, Virgil's *De apibus*, and the Chronology of the Plays in the Canon of John Fletcher and His Collaborators, 1617–20**

This article argues that John Brinsley's 1620 translation of Virgil's Georgics, Book IV, is a source for John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's The Elder Brother. This contention results in dating the play to 1620 rather than 1618 as suggested by Martin Wiggins. The re-dating has consequences for the dating of other plays in the canon of Fletcher and his collaborators for the period 1617 to 1620, and I propose a new chronology for the Fletcher plays in this time span.

Dating *The Elder Brother*: The State of the Art

John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Elder Brother* is one of the most difficult plays to date securely within the large and mazy canon of Fletcher and his collaborators.¹ In his *Catalogue* of British drama, Martin Wiggins marks 1615 as the terminus a quo and 1625 as the terminus ad quem. The choice of these upper and lower limits creates a rather large interval of time for the composition of the play, which ends up almost coinciding with the entire duration of the Fletcher-Massinger partnership (their first known collaboration dating to 1613).² Wiggins then chooses the year 1618 as his best guess for the writing and first performance of *The Elder Brother* based on several different considerations.

First, Wiggins dismisses Cyrus Hoy's argument that the play is 'a Fletcherian original, the first and last acts of which have been virtually rewritten by Massinger' (a view endorsed by Fredson Bowers, the most recent editor of the play).³ Wiggins highlights the 'identical pattern of collaboration in *The False One*' — ie, with acts 1 and 5 written by Massinger and acts 2, 3, and 4 by Fletcher — and

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remarks that '*The False One* has never been proposed as a Massinger revision'.⁴ Hoy believed that his theory was adequately supported by 'The manner in which Fletcher's linguistic forms appear in what are otherwise Massinger scenes' — namely *ye* (occurring sixty times in Fletcher's portion and six in Massinger's), *y'* (twenty and seven), *'em* (twenty-five and five), *them* (twelve and sixteen), *i'th* (four and two), *o'th* (four and three), *'s* for *his* (four and four), and *hath* (five and seven).⁵ Although the proportion between the usage of these forms in the sections respectively assigned to Fletcher and Massinger is indeed slightly different from what occurs in other collaborative plays by the duo, the evidence appears to be too slender to back Hoy's 'supposition' — as he himself described it — 'that Massinger, in addition to re-writing Acts I and V, tended to reduce the occurrence of *ye* throughout the play', and 'that, at the same time, he introduced an occasional *hath*'.⁶ This sounds more like fanciful speculation than responsible conjecture. All in all, Hoy's case for Massinger's revision appears rather weak in the absence of more compelling evidence.

Second, Wiggins counters the suggestion first advanced by F.G. Fleay that in act 4, scene 3, Fletcher drew an allusion to 'blue Neptune courting of an island' from Ben Jonson's masque *The Fortunate Isles*, which would entail the play's having been written in the period 'between the masque's court performance in January 1625 and Fletcher's death in August'.⁷ Wiggins reasonably argues that 'Fletcher could only realistically have been influenced by the masque if he had seen it at court on 9 January', since 'the only text printed before 1640 was the small edition apparently issued at the performance itself'.⁸ However, Wiggins continues, 'there is no verbal overlap between the two texts, and the points of conceptual contact are overstated', given that 'the strikingly visual "blue Neptune" alludes to a figure who is never actually seen in the masque'.⁹ In addition, Wiggins observes that 'Fletcher could have drawn on some other source', since, for instance, 'Neptune often appeared in the aquatic elements of the Lord Mayors' pageants' and the concluding scene of *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, which was written before *The Fortunate Isles*, contains a non-specific reference to 'blue Neptune'.¹⁰ Hence, the alleged relationship between *The Elder Brother* and Jonson's masque appears doubtful.

Third, Wiggins correctly remarks that *The Elder Brother* 'is unlikely to be one of the eleven [plays] written during the period 1622–5 for which Malone saw Revels Office licences'; and, fourth, he points out that 'Fletcher was already busy in these last months of his life, preparing *The Fair Maid of the Inn* and *The Noble Gentleman*', while Massinger was 'otherwise engaged'.¹¹

Wiggins then concludes that 'the play more probably belongs to the 1614–19 period, and perhaps later rather than earlier, since the responsibility given to Massinger ... matches that in *The Queen of Corinth* and *The False One*'; at the same time, Wiggins adds, 'In terms of Fletcher's development, it belongs to a run of plays ... dealing with difficult fraternal relationships', including *The Queen of Corinth*, *Rollo; or, The Bloody Brother*, and *Thierry and Theodoret* (all written with Massinger and Field), which leads him to place the play in 1618.¹²

What Wiggins especially laments concerning the difficulty in more precisely dating *The Elder Brother* is 'the absence of positive indicators of origin during the 1619–22 or 1622–5 periods of Fletcher's output'.¹³ The mainspring of the present article is my conviction that I have in fact identified one such indicator that Fletcher and Massinger probably wrote the play in 1620.

***The Elder Brother* and John Brinsley's Commentary on Virgil**

In *The Elder Brother*, act 1, scene 2, Justice Brisac tries to persuade his elder son, the scholarly Charles, to 'part with / This bookish contemplation and prepare / Yourself for action' (*EB* 1.2.122–4) and consequently exhorts him to 'study / To know that part of my land's good for th' plough / And what for pasture, how to buy and sell / To the best advantage, how to cure my oxen / When they're o'ergrown with labour' (*EB* 1.2.125–9). Charles, however, refuses this practical advice, and he replies to his father that his own reading will suffice because, 'for what concerns tillage, / Who better can deliver it than Virgil / In his *Georgics*? And, to cure your herds, / His *Bucolics* is a masterpiece' (*EB* 1.2.130–3). Charles then launches into an enthusiastically detailed commendation of Virgil's discussion of bees in the *Georgics*:

when

He does describe the commonwealth of bees,
 Their industry and knowledge of the herbs
 From which they gather honey — with their care
 To place it with decorum in the hive —
 Their government among themselves, their order
 In going forth and coming laden home,
 Their obedience to their king — and his rewards
 To such as labour, with his punishments
 Only inflicted on the slothful drone —
 I'm ravished with it, and there reap my harvest,

And there receive the gain my cattle bring me,
And there find wax and honey. (EB 1.2.133–45)

To this praise of Virgil, Brisac dismissively retorts: 'And grow rich / In your imagination. Heyday! Heyday! / *Georgics* and *Bucolics* and bees? Art mad?' (EB 1.2.145–7). The conversation then goes on for around sixty lines, touching upon the virtues and vices of a series of women from antiquity (Portia, Cornelia, Tullia, and Clitemnestra), with some annoying displays of arrogance on Charles's part until the two characters are interrupted by the entrance of Eustace, his younger brother.

Charles's impromptu yet prolonged panegyric on Virgil's description of bees strikes one as a somewhat gratuitous and largely unnecessary digression during his exchange with his father. Brisac talks about ploughing the land, putting animals out to pasture, purchasing and selling goods and animals for the highest possible profit, and taking care of the oxen when they are too tired. Charles's mention of bees stands out for not being pertinent to Brisac's words, and I argue that it becomes helpful towards dating the play more accurately in light of the fact that the year 1620 witnessed the publication of a translation (complete with a detailed commentary) of Virgil's *Bucolics* by John Brinsley. Interestingly, Brinsley did not limit himself to translating and commenting on the *Bucolics*; on the contrary, he enriched the volume by including in it the translation of Book 4 from the *Georgics*, also known as *De apibus*, the one section of the poem that focuses on bees.¹⁴

Now, it is true that Virgil's *Georgics* was a popular literary work in early modern England and one of the texts that were regularly taught in grammar schools across the reign both under Elizabeth I and James I.¹⁵ In addition, the *Georgics* had been already translated in full in 1589 by Abraham Fleming. Hence, a random allusion to Virgil's book on bees might not be distinctly indicative of a specific date or translation.

What is particularly worth consideration, though, is that Charles's words in *The Elder Brother*, act 1, scene 2, display some striking verbal parallels with Brinsley's commentary on the fourth book of Virgil's *Georgics* (and with other paratextual material), but *not* with Brinsley's translation. This consideration is pertinent because the correspondences between the textual fabric of the play and the specific phrasing adopted by Brinsley accordingly acquire added weight and significance, in that in writing the commentary Brinsley would not have been conditioned by any (conscious or unconscious) attempt at adhering 'faithfully' to Virgil's Latin text as he may instead have been while translating it. Hence, any

parallels between *The Elder Brother* and Brinsley's commentary cannot be attributed to any direct or mimetic relationship with Virgil's Latin text.

First, the phrase '**commonwealth of bees**' (EB 1.2.134) in the play echoes Brinsley's introductory words to his translation, with which he explains that Virgil 'assigns even to the **bees** their certain **commonwealth**' (*De apibus* 102); second, 'Their **government** among themselves' (EB 1.2.138) in *The Elder Brother* recalls words from Brinsley's title, namely '*Concerning the **Government** and Ordering of Bees*'; third, the phrasing '**the herbs / From which they gather honey**' (EB 1.2.135–6) in Fletcher and Massinger echoes Brinsley's wording '**the herbs from whence they gather their honey and wax**' (*De apibus* 122); fourth, the bit 'their care / To place it with decorum in the hive' (EB 1.2.136–7) and the reference to 'their [ie, the bees'] order' (EB 1.2.138) in the play seems to allude to the passage 'all of them do bestir themselves in their work, each in their proper place, as sweating at it' (*De apibus* 122) in Brinsley; fifth, *The Elder Brother*'s '**coming laden home**' (EB 1.2.139) corresponds closely to 'such bees as **come laden home**' (*De apibus* 122) in Brinsley's commentary; finally, 'his punishments / Only inflicted on the **slothful** drone' (EB 1.2.141–2) in Fletcher and Massinger seems to draw upon Brinsley's gloss on the drone as a 'sluggish or **slothful** beast, only consuming honey and getting none' (*De apibus* 122).¹⁶ What makes this cluster of parallels even more surprising is the fact that, apart from the first two, all the passages in *The Elder Brother* echoing Brinsley's commentary refer to material found on page 122 (R1^v) of his book. The presence of all these echoes on a single page is a curious coincidence that is, in my view, difficult to explain away as the product of mere chance, even should one object that describing bees as a commonwealth was rather standard in the period.

True, some of the phrases that I have highlighted in bold above, when taken individually, have correspondences — even closer ones — to other texts too. Namely, 'commonwealth of bees' (EB 1.2.134) has an exact parallel in *The Treasury of Ancient and Modern Times* (1613): 'We live not in the commonwealth of bees'; 'the slothful drone' (EB 1.2.142) has a quasi-exact correspondence in Raphael Holinshed's *The First and Second Volumes of Chronicles* (1587): 'The slothful drones'; while the idea of the king bee punishing the lazy drones (EB 1.2.141–2) might theoretically be seen as echoing John Lyly's *Euphues and His England* (1580), in which the king bee is presented as 'preferring those that labour to greater authority and punishing those that loiter with due severity', as first suggested by Wilfred P. Mustard.¹⁷ However, single, isolated parallels (as exact as they may be when considered one by one) to be found in books published either several years or even decades earlier than *The Elder Brother* cannot but carry a much weaker

evidentiary value than a whole cluster of verbal correspondences that all point to the same, recently published book — most of them, in fact, pointing to the very same page in that book.

The parallels listed above become even more intriguing on realizing that, aside from being a writer and translator of the classics, Brinsley was first and foremost a schoolmaster, and worked at Ashby School at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, from 1600 to 1617.¹⁸ He had been personally appointed by Henry Hastings, the third earl of Huntingdon, who was his principal benefactor. As Fletcherian scholars are well aware, the earl of Huntingdon (with his wife Elizabeth Stanley, countess of Huntingdon) was also Fletcher's patron for his entire career.¹⁹ The fact of having the same patron makes it highly likely that Brinsley and Fletcher (and possibly Massinger, who would later dedicate his play *The Duke of Milan* and his poem 'A New Year's Gift' to Hastings's sister, Catherine Hastings Stanhope, countess of Chesterfield) met at Ashby at some point in their lives and perhaps even knew each other reasonably well. This relationship remains possible even though Brinsley was a puritan and Fletcher a playwright, as both their common patronage and Fletcher's being the son of church of England priest and bishop Richard Fletcher (who was successively dean of Peterborough and bishop of Bristol, Worcester, and London) may have made the fact that Fletcher was a playmaker a somewhat tolerable flaw in Brinsley's eye. Towards the end of the 1610s, Brinsley was forced to leave Ashby and went to teach grammar in St Ethelburgh, London; consequently, he must have been living in London in 1620 when Richard Field printed his translation and commentary of Virgil.

Is it too much of a stretch of the imagination to envision a scenario in which Brinsley, once in London, reconnects with long-time acquaintance Fletcher (and possibly with Massinger) and gives him pre-publication access to the manuscript of the book — which was entered in the Stationers' Register on 3 September 1619 — when it is close to completion and to its sale to the stationer?²⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, Fletcher and his collaborators were fond of using recently published books, both from England and the continent, as source material for their plays.²¹

For example, Fletcher and Massinger authored *The False One* (1620) shortly after the issuing of Thomas Farnaby's 1618 edition of Lucan's *Pharsalia* and Edmund Bolton's 1619 translation of Florus's *Epitome of Roman History*; Fletcher penned *The Prophetess* with Massinger soon after the publication of Nicolas Coeffeteau's *Historie Romaine* (1621); in *Valentinian* (1614) Fletcher drew upon Henry Savile's *The End of Nero and the Beginning of Galba*, which had been reprinted in 1612.²²

As Wiggins points out, this pattern is also on display in *The Custom of the Country* (1619), for which Fletcher and Massinger used an anonymous 1619 English translation of Miguel de Cervantes's *The Travels of Persiles and Sigismunda*; in *The Pilgrim* (1621), in which Fletcher drew upon a 1621 English translation (probably by William Dutton) of Lope de Vega's *The Pilgrim of Castile*; and in *Women Pleased* (1620), for the subplot of which Fletcher is very likely to have relied upon John Florio's recently published translation of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1620).²³

Conceivably, then, in *The Elder Brother* Fletcher and Massinger may have been referring specifically to Brinsley's commentary to Virgil's *De apibus* in order to exhibit on stage their awareness of this new book so as to be ahead of the playmaking competition in terms of appearing au fait with recent publications. Depending on the kind of relationship that Fletcher and Brinsley had, Fletcher and Massinger may have used the allusion as a kind of advertising message to promote Brinsley's book; after all, Charles's words 'I'm ravished with it, and there reap my harvest, / And there receive the gain my cattle bring me, / And there find wax and honey' (*EB* 1.2.143–5), albeit prima facie referring to Virgil, could be also viewed as an indirect compliment for Brinsley's translation and commentary. Alternatively, the whole operation might have been a sort of jibe at the expense of their puritan acquaintance, whose translation was being alluded to and possibly even praised during one of those 'wanton plays' that Brinsley would vehemently attack three years later in the second edition of his devotional tract *The Third Part of The True Watch and Rule of Life* — at least for the benefit of that (admittedly small) section of the audience that would have been able to recognize the borrowings.²⁴

In theory, one might object that the influence could have worked in the opposite direction, that is, with Brinsley drawing upon *The Elder Brother*. This seems to me very unlikely for a number of reasons: first, the concentration of correspondences with *The Elder Brother* on a single page of Brinsley's commentary makes it more likely that Fletcher and Massinger focused on that single page rather than on Brinsley accumulating references to a whole play all in that place; second, unlike Brinsley, Fletcher habitually drew upon recently published books; third, Brinsley, as a puritan, is not known to have been interested in the London commercial theatre as source material for his own writings; finally, there exists a precedent for a similar occurrence in the canon of Fletcher and his collaborators, given that *The Captain*, which Fletcher wrote with Francis Beaumont probably in 1611–12, appears to gesture towards a translation of Epictetus's *Enchiridion* that

had been published in London in 1610 as *Epictetus His Manual, and Cebes His Table, out of the Greek Original*, translated by John Healey.²⁵

One might find it tantalizing to imagine that, when in *The Elder Brother* Charles 'Plucks out a book and reads' (EB 1.2.104.1 SD) — as indicated by the SD in the manuscript of the play now kept at the British Library — the actor playing Charles might have been holding in his hands precisely Brinsley's volume. True, this idea is certainly too fanciful, as it would have been hard (if not impossible) at the time to identify any book by its appearance (and many were even sold without covers); nevertheless, the appearance of a book prop in the hands of Charles as he praises Book IV of Virgil's *Georgics* would have acted as a visual correlative that would have made it easier for playgoers to make the connection between Charles's words and the newly published Virgilian translation.

Even more importantly, however, Virgil's passages on beekeeping were, as mentioned above, some of the most familiar pieces of Latin literature in early modern England, drummed into students at the grammar school — as T.W. Baldwin remarked, 'Probably no Elizabethan schoolboy ever escaped those bees' — and they were also among the most contested ones, as the metaphors they generated about the good ordering of society were variously manipulable, the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech in Shakespeare's *Henry V* being a classic example.²⁶ While I do not believe either that the reference to Virgil's book *De apibus* significantly adds up or feeds into a wider take on social order in *The Elder Brother*, or that Brinsley's commentary suggests any such wider themes, the controversial nature itself of *Georgics*, Book IV, would have made audiences both more alert to the publication of a new book on the topic and readier to identify any references to it. Playgoers were used to following and decoding these tropes, so any new voice would have been recognizable and would have generated interest, at least among the educated classes. This way, even if Brinsley's commentary did not make use of the bee metaphor in political terms in a significantly different way from previous commentators, Fletcher and Massinger would still have pleased the sophisticated palates of the more learned and intellectually fashionable playgoers by discernibly referencing a new Virgilian translation. Inevitably, this logic can only be applied to the early performances of *The Elder Brother*, as the allusion to Brinsley's book would have become less and less effective as time went by, and it would have certainly fallen flat during such later revivals as the one documented at the Blackfriars on 19 February 1635.

Was *The Elder Brother* Written in 1620?

At all events, if the allusion in *The Elder Brother* is indeed to Brinsley's book, then the play cannot possibly have been written and first performed in 1618. Moreover, for the allusion to have been effective, the more likely year for the composition of *The Elder Brother* must be 1620.

True, according to Wiggins's chronology, 1620 was a relatively busy year for Fletcher and Massinger: they worked together on *The False One* and *The Little French Lawyer*, Fletcher wrote *Women Pleased* by himself, and Massinger penned *The Virgin Martyr* with Thomas Dekker. But a third Fletcher-Massinger collaboration that year would not be impossible, considering that in 1622 Fletcher and Massinger wrote as many as *four* plays together in Wiggins's view (ie, *The Double Marriage*, *The Prophetess*, *The Sea Voyage*, and *The Spanish Curate*). Temporal proximity to *The False One* would also reasonably chime with the *identical* division of labour in those two plays, with acts 1 and 5 written by Massinger and acts 2 through 4 penned by Fletcher, as noted above.

The date of *The Elder Brother* is less likely to be 1621 than 1620 both because the allusion to Brinsley's translation of Virgil's *De apibus* would have been less effective and because in 1621 Massinger was devoting himself to writing plays (*The Duke of Milan* and the lost 'The Woman's Plot') singlehandedly for the first time, while Fletcher was busy writing *The Island Princess*, *The Wild-Goose Chase*, and *The Pilgrim* by himself. All in all, 1621 seems to have been a year in which the duo decided to take a break from collaborating.

One objection to my argument could be that placing *The Elder Brother* in 1620 moves it away from the Fletcherian plays dealing with brotherly issues grouped together by Wiggins in 1617 (*The Queen of Corinth*, *Rollo*, and *Thierry and Theodoret*), but Fletcher and Massinger easily could have returned in 1620 to the same theme dramatized two or three years earlier. They had certainly returned to it for *The Custom of the Country* in 1619; moreover, there are other similar cases in Fletcher's career that testify to his habit of reprising old themes and topics: just to mention a couple of examples, he wrote Roman plays around 1614 (*Bonduca* and *Valentinian*) and then again in 1620–2 (*The False One* and *The Prophetess*), and he used the trope of the failure to consummate a marriage on the wedding night first in *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610, with Beaumont), then in *Thierry and Theodoret*, and again in *A Wife for a Month* (1624).

Another counter-argument to moving *The Elder Brother* forwards from 1618 to 1620 could be that, by doing so, the year 1618 would be left with only two plays by Fletcher — *The Knight of Malta* (with Massinger and Field) and *The Loyal*

Subject — which would be an unusually low amount in the post-Beaumont phase of his career. However, I must note that Wiggins places as many as four plays in 1617 — *The Chances*, *The Queen of Corinth*, *Rollo*, and *Thierry and Theodoret* — but said dating cannot be firmly established for any of them.

As a matter of fact, I suggest in my Revels Plays edition of *Thierry and Theodoret* that the play — which alludes to recent events in France, namely to the arrest and murder of Concino Concini, the favourite of Maria de' Medici, queen of France — may be plausibly dated to 1618 if one is willing to contemplate the possibility that Fletcher, Massinger, and Field were able to consult an octavo French pamphlet probably written by Pierre Matthieu and published in Paris in late 1617, *La conjuration de Concino Concini* (reprinted in early 1618 as *La conjuration de Conchine*), which makes an unexpected parallel between the historical Protade (the Protaldi of the play) and Concini — the only known instance of an explicit comparison between the two personalities, which may have decisively inspired Fletcher and his collaborators.²⁷

True, the time frame for Fletcher to have read *La conjuration de Concino Concini* before writing the play is narrow, and demonstrating that he did read it is impossible, but, if that is the case, then the date for the play's composition needs to be pushed forwards to 1618 rather than 1617 — though earlier than November 1618 if the four soldiers appearing in act 5, scene 1, were to be played by what Wiggins has labelled the 'Gang of Four', namely 'a small ensemble of actors within the King's Men' that appeared in scenes together from 1613 to 1618 portraying 'distinct groups of four characters who interact primarily with one another and whose contribution to the play as a whole might not be felt to justify the deployment of quite so many actors'.²⁸ From 1614, these four actors are accompanied by a fifth one in a configuration of 'Four Plus One', with 'the new recruit regularly [taking] the role of their leader, a semi-detached character who connects them to the wider world of the play at large', who in this case would be the actor playing the character of de Vitry.²⁹

A 1618 dating for *Thierry and Theodoret* has several advantages: it evens out Fletcher's workload to three plays per year in 1617 and 1618, in line with what occurs in 1619 with *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Sir John Van Olden Barnaveit* (with Massinger), and *The Custom of the Country* (with Massinger); the proximity of *Thierry and Theodoret* with *Rollo* and *The Queen of Corinth* on which Wiggins primarily relies to date the play still holds; and *Thierry and Theodoret* is brought closer to *The Knight of Malta*, with which it curiously shares (together with 'a semi-comical soldier role', ie, that of de Vitry and Norandine respectively, as Wiggins points out) the theatergram of the presumed deceased veiled wife restored to

her grieving husband taken from Euripides’s *Alcestis*, which appears only in these two plays in the canon of Fletcher and his collaborators — its use in *The Knight of Malta* probably also functioning as a sort of comment upon the use Fletcher had made of it in the earlier play.³⁰

A New Proposed Chronology for the Plays in the Canon of John Fletcher and His Collaborators, 1617–20

As the culmination of this dense succession of titles and dates, I think it will be helpful for readers to look at the table below, which presents side by side Wiggins’s and my own proposed Fletcher chronology for the years 1617–20 — including the placement of *The False One* before rather than after *The Little French Lawyer* — with the changes to Wiggins’s chronology highlighted in bold.³¹

Wiggins’s chronology			New proposed chronology		
Year	Author(s)	Title	Year	Author(s)	Title
1617	Fl	<i>The Chances</i>	1617	Fl	<i>The Chances</i>
1617	Fl, M & Fi	<i>The Queen of Corinth</i>	1617	Fl, M & Fi	<i>The Queen of Corinth</i>
1617	Fl, M & Fi	<i>Rollo; or, The Bloody Brother</i>	1617	Fl, M & Fi	<i>Rollo; or, The Bloody Brother</i>
1617	Fl, M & Fi	<i>Thierry and Theodoret</i>	1618	Fl, M & Fi	<i>Thierry and Theodoret</i>
1618	Fl & M	<i>The Elder Brother</i>	1618	Fl, M & Fi	<i>The Knight of Malta</i>
1618	Fl, M & Fi	<i>The Knight of Malta</i>	1618	Fl	<i>The Loyal Subject</i>
1618	Fl	<i>The Loyal Subject</i>	1619	Fl	<i>The Humorous Lieutenant</i>
1619	Fl	<i>The Humorous Lieutenant</i>	1619	Fl & M	<i>Sir John van Olden Barnavelt</i>
1619	Fl & M	<i>Sir John van Olden Barnavelt</i>	1619	Fl & M	<i>The Custom of the Country</i>
1619	Fl & M	<i>The Custom of the Country</i>	1620	Fl & M	<i>The False One</i>
1620	Fl & M	<i>The Little French Lawyer</i>	1620	Fl & M	<i>The Elder Brother</i>
1620	Fl & M	<i>The False One</i>	1620	Fl & M	<i>The Little French Lawyer</i>

1620	Fl	<i>Women Pleased</i>	1620	Fl	<i>Women Pleased</i>
<hr/>					
Fl = Fletcher; M = Massinger; Fi = Field					

The table should enable readers to grasp at a glance another major consequence of this proposed reshuffling: namely, the emergence of a more regular pattern of collaboration for Fletcher, with a clear-cut separation between two clusters of plays: four written by Fletcher with Massinger and Field, and five written by the Fletcher-Massinger duo, separated by a block of two that Fletcher wrote autonomously — which also makes sense biographically in light of Field’s death in 1619/20. I have placed *The Elder Brother* before *The Little French Lawyer* simply to keep the former closer to *The False One* on the grounds of the identical division of labour between the two co-authors, but it could easily be the other way around: at present, I do not have sufficient elements to establish the sequence of *The Elder Brother* and *The Little French Lawyer* with any certainty.

Like other arguments of this kind, mine must rely significantly on informed conjecture rather than incontrovertible evidence, and I am fully aware that not every reader will agree with my reconstruction. Nevertheless, I hope that my article will contribute to scholarship on Fletcher not only through the identification of a previously unknown source for *The Elder Brother* — which provides new elements towards more firmly establishing the date of the play’s composition — but also by shedding new light on Fletcher’s broader intellectual network through the discussion of his potential connection with Brinsley (which had never been suggested before), and by offering a reconsideration of the broader authorial practices of the play’s authors. In doing so, this article should hopefully enliven the debate on the chronology of the plays in the canon of Fletcher and his collaborators, a more accurate understanding of which would further illuminate the trajectory of Fletcher’s career, his approach to collaboration and to writing plays autonomously, as well as more generally promoting a more precisely informed historical reading of the single plays themselves or of clusters of them.

Notes

- I would like to thank Michela Compagnoni, Richard Dutton, and Maddalena Repetto for generously commenting on earlier versions of this article. I am also grateful to *Early Theatre*'s two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.
- 1 All references to the play are to John Fletcher and Philip Massinger, *The Elder Brother*, ed. Fredson Bowers, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 9 (Cambridge, 1994), 461–567, henceforth abbreviated to *EB*. Quotations from all early modern English texts are modernized in spelling and punctuation or are taken from modernized editions.
 - 2 Martin Wiggins, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, 9 vols (Oxford, 2012–18), #1866.
 - 3 Cyrus Hoy, 'The Shares of Fletcher and His Collaborators in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon (II)', *Studies in Bibliography* 9 (1957), 143–62, 148; Fredson Bowers, 'Textual Introduction' to *The Elder Brother*, in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers, vol. 9 (Cambridge, 1994), 463–7, 463.
 - 4 Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1866.
 - 5 Hoy, 'Shares', 148.
 - 6 *Ibid.*
 - 7 Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1866.
 - 8 *Ibid.*
 - 9 *Ibid.*
 - 10 *Ibid.*
 - 11 *Ibid.*
 - 12 *Ibid.* Wiggins here also points out that 'the prologue and epilogue, which refer to Fletcher's death, were written for a revival', the same thing 'the King's Men seem to have done ... when they revived *The Chances* in c. 1627'. On the attribution of *Rollo* and *Thierry and Theodoret* to Field, see Darren Freebury-Jones, 'Authorship Attributions in the Fletcher Canon', in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, 38 (2025), forthcoming, and Domenico Lovascio, 'Introduction' to *Thierry and Theodoret* by John Fletcher, Philip Massinger, and Nathan Field (Manchester, 2024), 1–51, 1–5.
 - 13 Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1866.
 - 14 All references to this work are to *Virgil's Eclogues, with his Book De apibus, Concerning the Government and Ordering of Bees, Translated Grammatically and Also According to the Propriety of our English Tongue, so far as Grammar and the Verse Will Well Permit: Written Chiefly for the Good of Schools, To Be Used According to the Directions*

- in the Preface to the Painful Schoolmaster, and More Fully in the Book Called Ludus Literarius; or, The Grammar-School, Chap. 8* (London, 1620; STC: 24818), henceforth abbreviated to *De apibus*.
- 15 Andrew Wallace, *Virgil's Schoolboys: The Poetics of Pedagogy in Renaissance England* (Oxford, 2010), 123–77.
 - 16 Exact verbal correspondences are here highlighted in bold.
 - 17 Pedro Mexia, et al., *The Treasury of Ancient and Modern Times, Containing the Learned Collections, Judicious Readings, and Memorable Observations, Not Only Divine, Moral and Philosophical, But Also Poetical, Martial, Political, Historical, Astrological etc.* (London, 1613), L5r; Raphael Holinshed, *The First and Second Volumes of Chronicles, Comprising 1 The Description and History of England, 2 The Description and History of Ireland, 3 The Description and History of Scotland* (London, 1587; STC: S122178), 3:25; John Lyly, *Euphues and His England, Containing His Voyage and His Adventures, Mixed with Sundry Pretty Discourses of Honest Love, the Description of the Country, the Court, and the Manners of That Isle* (London, 1580; STC: 17069), Gr; Wilfred P. Mustard, 'Virgil's *Georgics* and the British Poets', *American Journal of Philology* 29 (1908), 1–32, 6, <https://doi.org/10.2307/288504>.
 - 18 John Morgan, 'Brinsley, John (bap. 1566, d. in or after 1624)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* (Oxford, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3440>.
 - 19 Gordon McMullan, 'Fletcher, John (1579–1625), playwright', *DNB* (Oxford, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/9730>.
 - 20 Master Man and Jonas Man, Entry SRO7142, <https://stationersregister.online/entry/SRO7142>.
 - 21 Domenico Lovascio, *John Fletcher's Rome: Questioning the Classics* (Manchester, 2022), 50–1.
 - 22 Domenico Lovascio, 'Introduction' to *The False One* by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger (Manchester 2022), 1–59, 16–17, 28–9; Lovascio, *John Fletcher's Rome*, 36–9, 43–5.
 - 23 See Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1911, #1998, #1965.
 - 24 Cf. John Brinsley, *The Third Part of the True Watch; or, The Call of The Lord to Awake All Sorts to Meet Him Speedily with Entreaty of Peace and to Turne unto Him by True Repentance, Showing What Causes We Have Forthwith to Betake Ourselves to Watching and Prayer, Taken out of the Vision of Ezekiel chap. 9: Second Edition* (London, 1623; STC: S106650), 302, attacking 'those wanton plays ... In which are the continual sowings of all atheism and throwing the very firebrands of all filthy and noisome lusts into the hearts of poor simple souls, the stirring up and blowing the coals of concupiscence to kindle and increase the fire thereof to break out into a hideous flame until it burn down to hell'.

- 25 See Lovascio, *John Fletcher's Rome*, 126–7; Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1665, lists the allusion as a mention of Epictetus's *Discourses*. Yet the *Discourses* remained unavailable in English translation until 1758, while the *Manual* (or *Enchiridion*) had been already translated in 1567 (from French) by James Sandford before Healey's 1610 translation (from Greek) appeared.
- 26 T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols (Urbana IL, 1944), 1.331; William Shakespeare, *King Henry V*, ed. T.W. Craik (London, 1995), 1.2.187–204. On this passage, see, among others, Andrew Gurr, 'Henry V and the Bees' Commonwealth', *Shakespeare Survey* 30 (1977), 61–72, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ccol0521216362.006>.
- 27 Lovascio, 'Introduction' to *Thierry and Theodoret*, 7–9, 13–15.
- 28 Martin Wiggins, 'Signs of the Four', *Around the Globe* 57 (2014), 48–9, 48.
- 29 Wiggins, 'Signs of the Four', 48.
- 30 Wiggins, *British Drama*, #1848; Domenico Lovascio, 'Unveiling Wives: Euripides' *Alcestis* and Two Plays in the Fletcher Canon', in *Classical Receptions in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Silvia Bigliuzzi and Tania Demetriou (Verona, forthcoming). The term 'theatergram' was introduced in the late 1980s by Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven, 1989), 6, to refer to well-established units of repertoire, prominent action and character clusters, or compelling bits of stage business that can migrate across plays. On the many points of contact between *Rollo* and *Thierry and Theodoret*, see Lovascio, 'Introduction' to *Thierry and Theodoret*, 7.
- 31 I place *The False One* earlier than *The Little French Lawyer* as several pieces of evidence suggest that the former was first performed at the Blackfriars in the first quarter of 1620 (see Lovascio, 'Introduction' to *The False One*, 3–11); hence, the Caesar references in *The Little French Lawyer* (Lovascio, 'Introduction' to *The False One*, 2) are to be seen as retrospective rather than prospective.