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Fletcher's dramatic extremism

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Chapter 6



Fletcher's Dramatic Extremism

Because the theatrical projection is fully and brilliantly achieved, Fletcherian tragicomedy may be enjoyed today, once it is recognized for what it is, an extreme of dramatic formalism.

(Waith 1952: 201)

[*Brunbalt.*] [he] should be the actor
Of my extremes

(*Thierry and Theodoret* 2.1.14–15)

As Chapter 2 has observed, Fletcherian drama operates with aspects that require a sensitive balance in the relation between the theatre and the idea. The plays create their own, peculiar worlds with sets of *ad hoc* conventions and rules that the plays' fictional world is governed by. These conventions however do not directly represent conventions of the outer world; they intentionally enhance a certain clash between the onstage world and reality. The relation may be one of analogy, hyperbole (certain grotesqueness of representation), or even contrast and sarcastic subversion (such as the attempts on Lucina's virginity in *Valentinian*).

A technique that Fletcher frequently applies is a disparity between what the story is and what the stage shows; or more specifically, Fletcher often uses and stresses the margin between the *dramatic person*, or *character* (which is the resulting fictional mental image, the noetic 'amalgam' that arises in the spectator's mind; Zich 1931: 52), and its associated *stage figure*, or *acted figure* (sometimes referred to as *role*; Zich 1931: 46).¹ The stage action becomes a figurative code which both expresses the fictive happenings (the sphere of dramatic persons) and, at the same time, has its own, dramatic and theatrical habitat. This phenomenon has been

1 I am using an unpublished translation of Zich's *Aesthetic of the Dramatic Art*, made by Samuel Kostomlatský, revised by Ivo Osolobě, and *ad hoc* by me. Zich uses the terms 'významová představa' (the 'Bedeutungsvorstellung' of German aesthetic, from Johann Volkelt, *System der Ästhetik 1*, München 1905; Sus 1977:4), which I translate as *mental image*; 'dramatická osoba', translated as *dramatic person*, or *character*; and 'herecká postava', translated as *stage figure*, or *acted figure*.

I would like to thank Prof. Osolobě for kindly lending me his private copy of the translation. The page numbering refers to the first Czech edition of 1931.

minutely described, and the latter, onstage aspect has been given the name of *dramatic and theatrical function* (Osolsobě 1992: 158–64).²

In the play, the *acted figure* may parody another character, yet at the same time, the *dramatic person* has its own, independent life. Ivo Osolsobě calls this mode *frivolité* (Osolsobě 1974: 203). Such is the case of Penyus in *Bonduca*, who travesties the pathos of the Roman suicide (perhaps obliquely parodying Shakespeare's Brutus and Antony); the suicide of the fictional Penyus (dramatic person) is a serious thing; at the same time, the theatrical Penyus has his own life; the action enhances the bitter irony of the situation (and perhaps a potentially *frivole*, parodic dealing with the Roman suicide).³ Similarly, Bonduca's death-scene (4.4), which parallels the death of Penyus in the play, is the central catastrophe of the play, while using parodically the dramatic material of *Love's Cure* or *Antony and Cleopatra*.

A more elaborate case is that of the Executioners in Scene 5.2 of *Sir John van Olden Barnavelt*, who cast dice who will cut off Barnavelt's head. The scene may be seen as parasitizing on the mystery play tradition of the Crucifixion plays; it may as well—and very likely—refer directly to John 19:24.⁴ While the black comedy of gambling for the honour of beheading Barnavelt goes on (that is the theatrical function), Barnavelt's fate becomes likened to the death of Christ. The irony is even more exacerbated by the religious dimension of the play's central conflict. It is needless to say that Fletcher's and Massinger's standpoint in this issue is unsettlingly ambivalent, and seems to have been such even for their contemporaries.⁵

The margin between the fictional action and the onstage action—or structurally, the mediation of fiction (communicative function), and the onstage play (dramatic and theatrical function)—is particularly wide in Fletcher. This and the following chapter analyze a set of techniques which operate with the dramatic and theatrical function. In the present study, the concern will be with techniques that are constructed around a central, often hypothetical notion or idea that is developed on behalf of the dramatic and theatrical function. This idea establishes the ruling conventions of the play (the 'laws' of the *acted figures*), while—often allegorically—referring to fictional realities.

2 The term 'dramatic and theatrical function' is modelled on Jan Mukařovský's notion of aesthetic function, and Roman Jakobson's poetic function. These concepts are a common heritage of the Prague School (and Russian Formalism).

3 For an analysis of Penyus' suicide scene, see Chapter 5.

4 For the Crucifixion mystery plays see *The Tomneley Plays* cycle published in EETS 71; *The Crucifixion* (258–78); for the scene of drawing lots see pages 273–74. The Pinners' (York) play of *The Crucifixion* is published in Cawley 1974: 137–48, or in Beadle and King 1984: 211–21. Meg Twycross mentions the scene of dicing executioners in Play 32 of *Passion Play II* of the N-Town cycle (Twycross 1994: 64).

5 For the discussion of the early performance history and the censor's and other political interferences with the play see T. H. Howard-Hill's Introduction to the play in Bowers VIII; Bentley 1956: 415–17; and his articles in *Modern Philology* LXXXVI (Nov. 1988): 146–70, and *RES* XXXIX (1988): 39–63.

The first two sections deal with—what is sometimes referred to as—Fletcherian ‘humour’ characters and with improbable hypotheses on which many of the plays in the canon are constructed (Waith 1952). In essence, both of these techniques are identical. Fletcher creates an imbalance by overdoing one particular feature, and achieves monstrosity, or baroqueness of character (in case of the humour types), or an overdone situation (in the case of enacted hypotheses).

Fletcherian humour types are not dictated by humours proper—as Jonson’s are. The constructional ‘logic’ behind them is rather an idea which is exaggerated and brought to a monstrous dimension. This rationale may manifest itself in the form of a girl brought up as a boy, and a boy brought up as a girl (*Love’s Cure*), a female warrior, a notion sufficiently absurd by early modern standards (*Bonduca* and *The Sea Voyage*), a lustful tyrant (*The Maid’s Tragedy*, *The Loyal Subject*, *A Wife for a Month*), or the licentious lady (*The Custom of the Country*).⁶ Similarly ludicrous, or even grotesque, is the ‘madness’ of the soldier Memnon (in *The Mad Lover*) or of the Lieutenant (in *The Humorous Lieutenant*). The latter play will be analyzed in detail.

In terms of Fletcherian plot construction, situations and even entire plotlines use casuistry and rhetorical controversies as frequent points of departure; such is the case of *The Queen of Corinth*, *The Double Marriage*, or the apocryphal *The Laws of Candy*, as Eugene M. Waith has shown.⁷ There is another level, at which this dramatic procedure is manifest. It is what I will call the ‘extended possible outcomes’ or ‘extended hypotheses’: a character insinuates the likely, or hypothetical, development of a certain action. By doing so, the play dramatizes the consequences that *might* result from the initial potential which the characters or the situation offer. The characters act out this hypothesis, to some extent without realizing it.

6 For Fletcherian types see A. H. Thorndike’s *The Influence of Beaumont and Fletcher on Shakspeare* (Worcester, Massachusetts, 1901), O. L. Hatcher’s *John Fletcher: A Study in Dramatic Method* (Chicago, 1905), Maxwell 1966, and Cone 1976.

7 For the issue of Senecan *controversiae* used in Fletcherian plays, see Waith 1952. Cyrus Hoy, in his ‘Textual Introduction to John Ford’s (?) *The Laws of Candy* in the Fredson Bowers edition, says that the play’s

inclusion in F1 [of Beaumont and Fletcher’s plays] is probably best accounted for by the nature of the play’s principal source. This has been identified by Eugene Waith in his discovery that *The Laws of Candy*, as well as two other plays in the Beaumont and Fletcher canon (*The Queen of Corinth* and *The Double Marriage*), derive their basic plot material from Senecan declamations (*Controversia* 2, book ten, in the case of *The Laws of Candy*). The elaborate dialectic and rhetorical schemes that are such a prominent feature of Seneca’s *Controversiae* exerted a crucial influence on the developing pattern of Fletcherian tragicomedy, as Waith has shown. Rhetorical texts such as those that provided the plots for [the three plays] must have seemed to promise distinctively Fletcherian dramatic possibilities: uniquely rich sources for the sort of startling reversals of plot that by c. 1620 were becoming something of a Fletcherian theatrical speciality. [...] The Senecan sources used in these plays [...] might well have been specifically intended by the King’s Company for Fletcher and his *atelier*, to be worked up into dramatic form either with his assistance or under his direction. All three of these plays date from period c. 1617–21. (Bowers X: 661–62)

As for the extent of the technique, the possibilities or hypotheses occur either at the level of a speech, or may be extended even to several scenes.

The technique has some affinity to the conventional theatrical pattern of Elizabethan fidelity tests—such as a jealous husband assuming a disguise to try the fidelity of his wife (this chapter will look at an instance from *Women Pleas'd*). Both of the techniques (*fidelity tests* and *extended possibilities*) use deception—the initial supposition that something might happen—in order to learn or expose other characters' intentions, or to trick them into realizing the consequences. The case study is *A Wife for a Month*, in which the technique of *extended possible outcomes* is employed several times.

This dramatic device is often used to set the modality of the play or its conflict. The story opens up a certain path, a possible direction of development; however, this option is eventually abandoned undeveloped. These dramatic 'blind alleys' or '*cul-de-sacs*' serve an important expositional purpose; they help define the modality of the play, very often suggesting the Fletcherian pattern of 'the danger not the death' (Edwards 1960).

Section III is devoted to Fletcherian deceptions, another related dramatic device. In *Philaster*, the page Bellario is a central agent in the play; the tragicomic turning point—or the Baroque miracle, as one might say with Mincoff—is the realization that Bellario is Dion's daughter Euphrasia in disguise. A part of the theatrical miracle is the realization how much we *believed* in, and dwelled on, the locally arranged convention that Euphrasia is Bellario even though we knew her (or his) true identity. That is at least the case with another renegade daughter, Innogen *alias* Fidele in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*.

The case study of Section IV, 'Fletcherian Deceptions', analyzes the achievement of the illusion of theatre (or theatrical illusion) in Fletcher's *The Chances*, Act 5, namely the scenes with the conjurer Vechio. Vechio is presented as 'a most sufficient Scholler' who 'can doe rare tricks' (5.1.7–8); in Fletcher's *coup de théâtre*, the conjurer turns out to be a theatrical impresario, an able organizer of stage business rather than a man of magic.

I Fletcherian Unbalanced Characters

Piso. Having these Antidotes against opinion
I would marry any one; an arrant whore.

(*The Captaine* 1.1.41–42)

out-doe all example

(*Bonduca* 3.5.53)

In Scene 2.2 of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Palamon and Arcite play with the idea of becoming all to each other (see Chapter 2); they are all that has been left of the world to them after their imprisonment. Like two extemporizing clowns, they play with the emasculated vision of their future—in order to 'make worthy uses of this place'—and they develop the idea to an extreme, to a grotesque absurdity. Whatever they are

missing is replaced by their kinsman. However, this 'clownery' is only a means, not an end in itself; dramatically, the exchange between Palamon and Arcite expresses the—almost hysterical—despair of their situation, and counterpoints Palamon's and Arcite's repressed ambitions; the more absurd the dialogue gets, the more natural will their later rivalry seem. In this sequence, the onstage action is in direct antithesis to its import. The paradox of this scene, without the 'theatre acoustics'—as Otakar Zich calls it—may become a fundamental obstacle to the reading critic.

It becomes even more problematic with the realization that it is a standard Fletcherian dramatic technique. Much criticism of the plays has stuck with the convention—that is, with the *means*—interpreting it as an end in itself. The usage of the technique in Fletcherian plays is broad and varied; it serves dramaturgical or constructional functions of the techniques, and contributes in a specific tone to the plays' significance.

The instances of Fletcherian humour types mentioned above are the most extreme manifestations. The fact that they have been linked to Jonson's theatre of humours, and that the connection between the plays and the Senecan controversies has been established, does not acknowledge the plays' individuality. As for characters, these need not be humour types in the strict sense of the word; the broader case—what I call an *unbalanced character*—can be found side by side with the above sequence from *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; such is the case of the Jailer's Daughter. In her central monologue before setting Palamon free, she outlines the rise of her 'extreme' love, her exaggerated passion out of measure, with a shade of remorse for the irrationality and perhaps 'That intemprat surfeit of her eye' (4.3.58) with which she fell in love:

[*Daughter.*] First I saw him,
I (seeing) thought he was a goodly man;
[...] Next, I pittied him,
And so would any young wench o'my Conscience
That ever dream'd, or vow'd her Maidenhead
To a young hansom Man; Then I lov'd him,
(Extreamely lov'd him) infinitely lov'd him

15

(The Two Noble Kinsmen 2.4.7–15)

One may—somewhat cynically—say that the Daughter embodies exaggerated love; and her entire subplot is a reaction to the dramatic turbulence she creates by her 'extremism'. As many productions have shown, the Daughter is a rewarding role and a complex character, and although her character is founded upon one single feature, she is far from being a mere schematic derivation.

In theatre the Daughter is a tragicomical figure, bringing comical relief. Apart from this desirable effect, she is dramatically a foil to Emilia. She is a living proof that Palamon (and implicitly Arcite) are not unlikable; the Daughter embodies the fact that Emilia, outside her own emotions, has no objective reason to reject either of the kinsmen. The daughter plays is another important dramaturgical role; she underscores the kinsmen's social status and nobility, as well as their aloofness and aristocratic 'other-worldliness'.

Other Fletcherian unbalanced characters and character types—at least in the mature plays—have a similarly complex import as the Jailer's Daughter of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In the middle period (c. 1615–19), a number of the plays feature them as central figures. In contrast to the early plays—such as *The Woman Hater* (1606), *The Coxcomb* (1608–10), *The Captain* (1609–12) or *Monsieur Thomas* (1610–13)—the later plays tend to incorporate the characters not only as instances of a certain monstrosity of character but as organic parts of the play.

In *The Humorous Lieutenant* (1619), a mature instance of the use of an unbalanced character, the Lieutenant—otherwise a more or less marginal figure—suffers from a mysterious pain:

1. *Gentleman*. I would take Phisicke.
Lieutenant. But I would know my disease first.
(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 1.1.378)

This pain cannot be cured, and although the Lieutenant is admittedly a coward, the only way it can be purged is by a greater pain, by making war. However paradoxical and irrational this may seem it acquires a special meaning within the play. The play antithetically underpins love and war as directly connected. War becomes a metaphor for love and *vice versa*.

Prince Demetrius, who is in love with Celia, first enters from a hunt 'with a Javelin' (1.1.158.1 SD) and is immediately associated both with his role as a lover (through the aside comments of Celia) and as a warrior: his father, King Antigonus, is petitioned by Embassadors from other kings and eventually proclaims war on them. Celia's reaction to Demetrius is crucial:

[*Celia*.] what a sweet noble fiercenesse
 Dwels in his eyes? young *Meleager* like, 160
 When he returnd from slaughter of the Boare,
 Crown'd with the loves and honours of the people,
 With all the gallant youth of *Greece*, he lookes now,
 Who could deny him love?
(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 1.1.159–64)

Demetrius, on hearing the Embassadors' plea, repudiates it in a 'modern braggart's' speech; at the end of which comes an abrupt shock at seeing his Celia, and he immediately turns lover for a conspicuously long time:

[*Demetrius*.] Go home good men, and tell your masters from us,
 We do 'em too much honour to force from 'em
 Their barren countries, ruine their vast Cities,
 And tell 'em out of love, we meane to leave 'em 210
 (Since they will needs be Kings) no more to tread on,
 Then they have able wits, and powers to manage,
 And so we shall befriend 'em:— [*Aside*] ha? what does she there?
 1. *Embassadors*. This is your answer King?
Antigonus. 'Tis like to prove so.
Demetrius. Fie sweet, what make you here?
(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 1.1.207–15)

Demetrius becomes the warlike lover, and the association between love and war becomes unambiguous:

[*Demetrius.*] Bid me go on, no lesse fear'd, then *Antigonus*,
 And to my *maiden* sword, tye fast your fortune; 275
 [...] *Never faire virgin long'd so.*

(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 1.1.274–77; my italics)

Demetrius' first war experiences are spoken of as 'the virgin valour' (2.4.93). General Leontius, on hearing a war impending, says he feels 'young again, and wanton' (1.1.319). In view of the persistent *double entendre*, one may wonder what kind of war it is that Leontius (scurrilously) envisions. At the end of the sequence—and arguably in its culmination—enters the Lieutenant with his pain:

[*Leontius.*] keepe close bodies,
 And you shall see what sport wee'l make these mad-caps;
 You shall have game enough, I warrant ye, 335
 Every mans Cock shall fight.
 [...]
 You never saw the wars yet?

! *Gentleman.* Not yet Collonell.

[*Leontius.* These foolish Mistrisses do so hang about ye,
 So whimper, and so hug, I know it Gentlemen,
 And so intice ye, now ye are i'th' bud; 345
 And that sweet tilting war, with eies and kisses,
 Th'allarums of soft vowes, and sighes, and fiddle faddles,
 Spoiles all our trade: You must forget these knick knacks,
 A woman at some time of yeare, I grant ye
 She is necessarie; but make no busines of her; 350

Enter Lieutenant.

How now Lieutenant?

[*Lieutenant.* Oh sir, as ill as ever;
 We shall have wars they say; they are mustring yonder:
 Would we were at it once: fie, how it plagues me.

(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 1.1.333–36, 342–53)

In the following scene, the leave-taking between Demetrius and Celia, the love-war imagery continues:

[*Demetrius.*] Would you have your love a coward?
Celia. No; beleeve sir, 5
 I would have him fight, but not so far off from me.

[*Demetrius.* Wouldst have it thus? or thus? [*Kisses her.*]

Celia. If that be fighting——

[*Demetrius.* Ye wanton foole: when I come home againe
 I'le fight with thee, at thine weapon *Celia*,
 And conquer thee too.

Celia. That you have done already,
 You need no other Armes to me, but these sir 10

(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 1.2.4–10)

For most of the play's plot, the Lieutenant is marginal. However, he becomes a foil to other characters, and mirrors their deficiencies, such as King Antigonus' lustful desire for Celia, which coincides with the Lieutenant's farcical, and likewise immoderate, love for the King, induced by a magic potion, and the Lieutenant becomes a lover warrior. The war on Celia coincides chronologically with the enemies' war on the Lieutenant, who is unwilling to go into the war once he has been purged of blood (Celia in 3.4, and Lieutenant in 3.5). When Demetrius is passionate about the honour of war, the Lieutenant is passionate about a whore (Scene 2.4).

After the first war, the King wants to dispose of Demetrius in order to have free access to Celia; he employs him in another campaign, admitting to Menippus:

[*Antigonus.*] I knew 'twas she he hunted on; this journey, man,
I beat out suddenly for her cause intended,
And would not give him time to breath.

(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 3.1.12–14)

Several lines later, when giving instructions to his bawd about Celia, he makes explicit the nature of being 'humorous'; *humour* is the imbalance of character, the breach of integrity:

[*Antigonus.*] humour her,
'Twill make her lie more carelesse to our purposes.

(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 3.1.24–25)

The paradoxical nature of the Lieutenant's illness, and later a similarly mysterious outbreak of his passion for the King—both of which are referred to as 'the devill in him' (3.6.23)—parallels the lovers' desire for each other, Demetrius' desire for honour ('Is not the devill in him?' 2.4.117), and later the King's lust ('You'l seeme a Devill else' 4.1.147; 'This royall devill' 4.5.19).

In other words, by being a foil, the Lieutenant represents in the play 'the abstract of all faults' (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.4.9); he is the personification of conflicts in the play; he is a foil to Demetrius, to the hunted Celia, and—in his incurable disease without cause—to the lustful King, which comes full circle in the scenes where he—instead of Celia—drinks the love potion and falls in love with King Antigonus. The connection between the Lieutenant and the seduction plot is upheld by verbal identification: seeing that the King haunts her, Celia exclaims to herself: 'How like a poison'd potion his eyes fright me?' (*The Humorous Lieutenant* 4.5.20). The Lieutenant is an important expositional figure, setting the modality of the play, the proportions of passion (just like the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*), as well as securing the constructional balance of the play.⁸

8 The lustful King Antigonus has, however, another foil. It is Leucippe, 'three Bawdes beaten into one' (3.4.51), a similarly unbalanced character. In order to be commensurate with the King's lust, Leucippe has a school for the serial 'production' of willing girls with a branch in Nicopolis and agents almost anywhere (Scene 2.3):

2. *Maid.*

What's your name, sister?

The Humorous Lieutenant was produced by Battersea Arts Centre in 1999; the production seems to have succeeded in capturing 'the fluency and sophistication which made Fletcher so popular with his contemporaries [as well as Fletcher's] skilful manipulations of mood, his passion for the zigzags of dramatic narrative and his unerring sense of theatrical situation' (Jonathan Keates, 'Courageous appetites', review in *TLS* 1999, Sept. 17; p. 19). As the review says, the 'play's double intrigue pushes this clash ['between the necessary delusions of idealism and the truth of feelings which resist denial'] to its utmost.' The production seems to have failed, however, in

any interaction between Celia and the Lieutenant, as the two characters whose spontaneity of impulse is shown as consistently enviable, even when (in the latter's case) at its most preposterous. (Keates 1999)

The reviewer sees this as the 'single flaw in the comedy's absorbing stagecraft', a failure on Fletcher's part. However, the interaction between the two characters goes along different lines, not in dialogue, or scenes together, but—as the above analysis has shown—in the parallelism of plot.

In *The Humorous Lieutenant*, Fletcher presents a mature and fully-developed specimen of an unbalanced character. Essentially, it is not a 'humour' character in the proper sense; his origin has to be looked for in the subject matter of the play, which is the literal transactions between love/lust and honour/war. The Lieutenant fills up the space between the other 'purposeful' characters and provides the play with an equilibrium of proportions.

The gradual development of unbalanced characters, traceable in Fletcherian plays, culminates in *The False One* (1620–21), in which the title applies ambivalently to the treacherous Septimius and to Cleopatra—as well as to other characters of the play. In the mature plays, to extract characters who are personifications of such abstract things as is the Lieutenant, Septimius, or Katherine's maid Patience

Phebe. *Phebe* forsooth.

Leucippe.

A pretty name; 'twill doe well:

[...]

Knock within.

Lord, shall we never have any ease in this world?

Still troubled? still molested?

Enter Menippus.

what would you have?

I cannot furnish ye faster then I am able

And ye were my husband a thousand times, I cannot do it; 85

At least a dozen poasts are gone this morning

For severall parts of the Kingdome: I can do no more

But pay 'em, and instruct 'em.

(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 2.3.75–88)

The routine with which the seraglio works farcically suggests the monstrous lustfulness of Antigonus.

(in *Henry VIII*) would be to disrupt the unity of the play, of which they are integral parts.

II Extended Possible Outcomes

Tibalt. Here's a Pestle of a Portigue, Sir;
 'Tis excellent meat, with soure sauce;
 And here's two Chaines, suppose 'em Sausages;
 Then there wants Mustar'd.

(*The Sea Voyage* 1.5.44–47)

[*Valerio.*] Do ye speak this truly,
 Or do ye try me Sir?

(*A Wife for a Month* 4.2.127–28)

Several situations and plots in the Fletcherian canon can be expressed in terms of a hypothesis: *The Womans Prize* is constructed on the hypothesis 'Suppose Petruchio the Tamer remarried and were tamed by his second wife'; *The Custom of the Country* presupposes *jus primae noctis*; *The Queen of Corinth* dramatizes a Senecan controversy. E. M. Waith has commented on this common technique:

The improbable hypothesis. The situations which compose the plot are as unusual as they are sensational. Dilemmas like those of a nightmare confront the characters: Tigranes must choose between his duty to Spaconia and his new love for Panthea; Arbaces and Panthea between incest and the renunciation of their love. These are the most characteristic situations of the play [i.e. *A King and no King*]. They provide the best scenes. Each of them is a challenge to the reader or spectator to imagine what it would be like to experience such conflicting emotions. The appalling hypothesis is advanced: 'Let us suppose that a king of great nobility has conceived an instantaneous and consuming passion for his sister'; and as one such hypothesis follows another, we come to accept them as properly belonging in a world that is neither impossible nor quite probable—a world of hypothesis. (Waith 1952: 37–38)

In the mature plays, this dramatic logic—just like that of unbalanced characters—is applied in a more ingenious and proportionate way; the hypotheses are incorporated into the tissue of the play more organically. The technique developed, and the dramatists combined it with another device, the *test*—be it a fidelity or a chastity test. The characters prepare and act out tests for each other in order to learn their rivals' characters. For the audience, this is an important, as well as theatrically rewarding means of exposition; it is a way of externalizing the potential that lies in the characters in question—or, as one character says in *The Lovers' Progress*,

Cleander. Ile believe ye
 When you have endur'd the test.

(*The Lovers' Progress* 1.2.34–35)

Shakespeare uses the technique in powerful and crucial scenes, such as, in *Macbeth*, in the meeting of Macduff and Malcolm (4.3), in which Malcolm tests Macduff by propounding the possibility that he would be as evil a king as Macbeth. This is,

of course, a crucial way of learning what Macduff intends as well as an important reflection on the weight of the offer that Macduff has made to Malcolm. The technique may be seen not only in terms of a test, but also as a hypothesis of a possible outcome.

The device appears in an accomplished form in the final Countess of Salisbury scene in *Edward III* (2.2). The King courts the Countess, who is obliged to obey both him and her father:

Countess. My father on his blessing hath commanded –
King. That thou shalt yeild to me.
Countess. Ay, dear my liege, your due.

(*Edward III* TLN 921–23)⁹

In the following, masterful sequence, the Countess acts out the possibility that she would yield to the King, and brings out all the inevitable consequences, that is, that both her husband and the Queen have to be murdered. When the King agrees to do it, the Countess gives him a knife to kill the Queen in his own heart, while she will kill her husband in hers. The King, brought to this hypothetical extreme, to the breaking point, realizes the impossibility of his passion and surrenders: 'I am awaked from this idle dreame' (*Edward III* TLN 998).

Both the above scenes outline in brief the dramatic technique and its power. What I call the *extended possible outcome*, or the *extended hypothesis*, plays an adequate (proportionate) structural counterpart to the unbalanced characters, such as the passionate King Edward, and serves as a transparent way of externalizing the inner conflict. Fletcherian drama uses the device frequently to expose the absurdity (or monstrosity) of a certain feature in the characters. In a sense, all drama (and literature) operates with expectations of possible outcomes of a situation, both the characters' and the audience's (or reader's) expectations. Expectation is the only means of suspense and of a surprising *dénouement*.¹⁰ The Fletcherian dramatic technique differs only in that it works with extreme exaggerations of some of the characters' expectations.

The Fidelity Test in *Women Pleas'd*

In *Women Pleas'd*, the Claudio-Isabella-Lopes-Penurio subplot is all an extended hypothesis. It starts off with Claudio's supposed death, disguise, and an enigmatic announcement to the audience (with a characteristic Fletcherian inconclusiveness to it). Claudio retreats from the main plot (in which he has confronted, and lost in, a dangerous love rivalry with Silvio):

Claudio. I will retire too, and live private; for this *Silvio*
 Inflam'd with noblesse will be my death else;

9 The punctuation and the spelling is modernized according to Giorgio Melchiori's edition of the play in *The New Cambridge Shakespeare* (2.2.122ff).

10 For the summary of the notion and importance of 'possible worlds' in theatre semiotics see Elam 1980: 99ff.

And if I can forget this love that loades me,
 At least the danger: and now I think on't better,
 I have some conclusions else invites me to it. *Exit.*

(*Women Pleas'd* 1.3.79–83)

The subplot uses the common technique of the fidelity test, which in itself is a morally 'perverted' or 'monstrous' technique, as Middleton had sufficiently shown in his city comedies. In *Women Pleas'd*, the test dramatizes Claudio's jealousy. At the same time, it is a joke that is irrecoverably lost outside the theatre; from Act 2 to Scene 5.2, Claudio is a different person, Rugio, a lustful merchant, trying to seduce Isabella.¹¹

Fletcher was aware of the monstrosity of the fidelity test, and perhaps it was its unsettling quality that he was dramatizing. At the very end of the extended hypothesis of the subplot, when the action brings the issue to its extreme, with Claudio in the danger of death, Fletcher brings about an anagnorisis, making Claudio himself aware of the histrionic absurdity of his disguise and the whole undertaking he has been indulging in:

Claudio. Am I catch't thus?
Lopez. The Law shall catch ye better.
Isabella. You make a trade of betraying womens honours,
 And think it noble in ye to be lustfull,
 Report of me hereafter——
Claudio. Fool'd thus finely? 95
Lopez. I must intreat ye walk, Sir, to the Justice,
 Where if hee'l bid ye kill me——
Claudio. Pray stay a while, Sir,
 I must use a Players shift, [*putting off his disguise*]
 do you know me now Lady?
Lopez. Your brother *Claudio* sure.
Isabella. O me, 'tis he Sir,
 O my best brother.
Claudio. My best sister now too, 100
 I have tryed ye, found ye so, and now I love ye,
 Love ye so truly nobly.
Lopez. Sir, I thank ye,
 You have made me a most happy man.

(*Women Pleas'd* 5.2.92–103)

Within the play as a whole, Claudio's disguise parallels that of Belvidere. Like Claudio, she should be left unknown to us throughout, until her final self-revelation. Disguises—'Shapes', to use the early modern word—are the central issue of the play as the 'Masquerado of severall Shapes and Daunces' in the closing scene evidences.

As for the proportions and the expositional power of the device, as used in the play, Claudio's masculine jealousy is a foil to the feminine whims of the

11 In reading, the identity is betrayed by the speech prefixes; on the stage, he is a man in disguise, and we wait for him to abandon it and expose himself.

Duchess and her paranoid suspicion of Belvidere's wooer Silvio. It works almost as a dramatic disclaimer: 'We do not purpose to denigrate either of the sexes; foolishness is distributed equally.' At the same time, Claudio's perverted and absurd efforts at finding whether his sister is truthful or not, are a foil to Silvio's central search for the answer to the riddle given him by the Duchess, which he has to solve in order to get and keep Belvidere:

*Tell me what is that oney thing,
For which all women long;
Yet having what they most desire,
To have it do's them wrong.*

(*Women Pleas'd* 5.1.127–30)

The fidelity test subplot, by resonating with the action of the main plot, throws a new, *frivole* light on the otherwise grave despotism of the world of the Duchess, Silvio and Belvidere.

A Wife for a Month, a play of extreme contrasts and possibilities

Fidelity and chastity tests are one type of extended possible outcomes. Tests often require an assumed identity or a disguise. Extended hypotheses rest on deceptive acting; a character pretends to be complying with the hypothesis, assuming a certain role played to his or her rival in order to dramatize its necessary consequences which the rival cannot see at that moment, or—from the point of view of the theatre—to mediate to the rival and the audience the *physical experience* of the possibilities.¹² Besides, it serves as a crucial moment in the development of the plot as it gives one particular possible outcome that might follow, and in this choice obscures the probability of what would happen, thus preparing for the surprise of the *dénouement*.

In *A Wife for a Month*, the device is used repeatedly, and serves as a proportionate dramatic technique to counterpoint King Frederick's lust. The modality of hypotheses is established early in the play, when Evanthe, being seduced by Frederick, opens up the possibilities that would follow if she yielded to him. The sequence contains the germinal form of both the initial deception (on Evanthe's part) as well as the cathartic turning point:

Evanthe. Shall I be rich do you say, and glorious,
And shine above the rest, and scorne all beauties,
And mighty in command?
Frederick. Thou shalt be any thing.
Evanthe. Let me be honest too, and then ile thank ye.
[...]

12 In *The Spanish Curate* the technique of extended possibilities is applied several times: it is the deception in Diego's death-scene (4.5), Bartholus' breakfast (5.2), and in the closing scene (5.3), where the device is used to persuade Don Henrique of the evil of his consort Violante; Don Jamie, in order to convince Henrique of the true state of things, acts out his role in Violante's treacherous plan.

Can all the power you have or all the riches,
 But tye mens tongues up from discoursing of me,
 Their eyes from gazing at my glorious folly,
 Time that shall come from wondering at my impudence 115
(A Wife for a Month 1.1.106–15)

Evanthe's evil brother, Sorano—an unbalanced character, extreme in his corruption—counterpoints his sister's chaste speech:

Sorano. You have fool'd enough, be wise now, and a woman,
 You have shew'd a modesty sufficient,
 If not too much for Court. 115
(A Wife for a Month 1.1.146–48)

After the initial failure, Evanthe needs to get the Queen on her side, and form an alliance with her against her lustful husband. Again, she uses the *extended possibility*, mediating to the Queen (and the audience) the foretaste of what might happen. The Queen is suspicious and perhaps jealous when she meets Evanthe near the King:

Queene. 'Tis strange to finde thy modesty in this place,
 Doe's the King offer faire? doe's thy face take him?
 Nere blush *Evanthe*, 'tis a very sweet one,
 Doe's he raine gold, and precious promises 190
 Into thy lap? will he advance thy fortunes?
 Shalt thou be mighty wench?

Evanthe. Never mock Madam;
 'Tis rather on your part to be lamented,
 At least reveng'd, I can be mighty Lady,
 And glorious too, glorious and great, as you are. 195

Queene. He will marry thee?

Evanthe. Who would not be a Queene, Madam?

Queene. 'Tis true *Evanthe*, 'tis a brave ambition,
 A golden dreame, that may delude a good minde,
 What shall become of me?

Evanthe. You must learne to pray,
 Your age and honour will become a Nunnery. 200

Queene. Wilt thou remember me? *Weeps.*

Evanthe. She weeps.— [Kneels.]
 Sweet Lady

Upon my knees I aske your sacred pardon,
 For my rude boldnesse

(A Wife for a Month 1.1.187–204)

Frederick ferrets out that Valerio is in love with Evanthe and that he has sent her a poem. In the poem—a sufficiently Platonic, romantic verse to counterpoise the King's filthy sneaking—Valerio wishes:

*To be your owne but one poore Moneth, I'd give
 My youth, my fortune, and then leave to live.*

(A Wife for a Month 1.2.91–92)

In reaction to the hyperbole of the poem, the King goes about defeating Valerio, 'my rivall', and Evanthe in their own terms, by taking it literally: Valerio may marry her but only for one month and with the condition that Evanthe will then remarry within one day with the same proviso. Valerio embraces the offer, entering into an almost identically desperate situation that the imprisoned Palamon and Arcite (of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*) are in. He is likewise exuberant about the existential little that has been left to him:

[*Valerio.*] the King has honour'd me,
 Out of his gracious favour has much honour'd me,
 To limit me my time; for who would live long?
 Who would be old? 'tis such a wearinesse,
 Such a disease, that hangs like lead upon us; 25
 As it increases, so vexations,
 Griefes of the minde, paines of the feeble body,
 Rhumes, coughs, catarrs, we are but our living coffines;
 Beside, the faire soules old too, it growes covetous,
 Which shewes all honour is departed from us, 30
 And we are earth againe.

Cleanthes. You make faire use Sir.

(*A Wife for a Month* 2.5.21–31)

Frederick's tyranny does not however stop at that; he is a real extremist in bringing out his jealous intentions, secretly ordering Valerio not to sleep with Evanthe and, of course, not to tell her why. In Act 4, the King intends further to crush him and offers: '(yeeld up your *Evanthe*) | Take off my sentence also' (4.2.60–61). Valerio seizes the opportunity and acts out an extensive possible outcome, a sequence dramatically growing in intensity towards the shocking turning point:

Valerio. I fall thus low Sir, [*Kneels.*]
 My poore sad heart under your feet I lay,
 And all the service of my life.

Frederick. Do this then,
 For without this 'twill be impossible,
 Part with her for a while.

Valerio. You have parted us, 65
 What should I do with that I cannot use Sir?

Frederick. 'Tis well consider'd, let me have the Lady,
 And thou shalt see how nobly ile befriend thee,
 How all this difference——

Valerio. Will she come, do you think Sir?

Frederick. She must be wrought, I know she is too modest, 70
 And gently wrought, and cunningly.

[...]

Valerio. If it might be carried thus——

Frederick. It shall be Sir.

Valerio [*aside*]. Ile see you dead first,——with this caution,
 Why sure I think it might be done.

Frederick. Yes, easily. 85

Valerio. For what time would your Grace desire her body?

Frederick. A moneth or two, it shall be carried still
 As if she kept with you, and were a stranger,
 Rather a hater of the Grace I offer:
 And then I will returne her with such honour—— 90
 [...]

Valerio. But all this time 100
 Have you the conscience Sir to leave me nothing,
 Nothing to play withall?

Frederick. There be a thousand,
 Take where thou wilt.

Valerio. May I make bold with your Queene?
 She is uselesse to your Grace as it appears Sir,
 And but a loyall wife that may be lost too; 105
 I have a minde to her, and then 'tis equall?

Frederick. How Sir?

Valerio. 'Tis so Sir, thou most glorious impudence,
 Have I not wrongs enow to suffer under,
 But thou must pick me out to make a monster?
 (*A Wife for a Month* 4.2.61–109)

An analogy to this sequence appears in the following scene (4.3), in which the debauched lady Cassandra tries to reason Evanthe out of chastity.¹³ Evanthe pretends to be interested in what Cassandra argues until the complete revelation of the lady's perverted offer. Then another turning point comes; Evanthe rejects her with 'Peace thou rude bawde, | Thou studied old corruptnesse' (4.3.68–69). This sequence turns out to be only an exposition to another confrontation between Evanthe and her royal seducer, in which she enacts the same trick again. While Frederick is trying to defame Valerio, Evanthe seemingly collaborates. In an aside she says, 'Sure there is some trick in't; | Valerio ne're was a coward' (4.3.158–59). When she finds out the trick, she chastises Frederick in a counterattack:

Evanthe. Take thou heed thou tame Devill,
 Thou all *Pandora's* box in a Kings figure,
 Thou hast almost whor'd my weake believe already,
 And like an Engineer blowne up mine honour; 200
 But I shall countermine, and catch your mischief
 (*A Wife for a Month* 4.3.197–201)

In 4.5, to provide completeness and dramatic balance, Evanthe in an impulse ('It was a womans flash, a sudden valour, | That could not lye conceal'd' 4.5.64–65) subjects Valerio to a fidelity test on the grounds of the King's trick.

Meanwhile, the entire play acts out the possibility that Frederick's instrument, Sorano, might poison the rightful king, Frederick's melancholy brother Alphonso. Although nothing is concealed from the audience, the abundance of more immediate dramatic action screens the circumstances that lead to the play's *dénouement*.

13 The misuse of logic for mischievous ends in *A Wife for a Month* is analyzed in Chapter 2.

The constructional logic of the *extended possible outcomes* is, as it were, based on the maxim of King Claudius of *Hamlet*:

[*King*.] diseases desperate growne,
By desperate appliance are releued,
Or not at all.

(*Hamlet* 4.3.9–11)

In *A Wife for a Month*, Alphonso is cured of his arcane melancholy by means of the poison that Sorano ministers to him.¹⁴ In a sense, this corresponds to the dramatic techniques Evanthe and Valerio (and Fletcher, in other plays) use to ‘cure’ the lustful Frederick. The literal significance of the play matches the ‘extremist’ techniques of the plays.

Dramatic *Cul-de-sacs*

Fletcherian drama applies the technique of *extended possibilities* not only for the purposes of the story but also to set the modality of the play—what is possible or available; in other words, the device is often used for purely expositional purposes.¹⁵ The plot offers a certain direction in which the story could develop, but this path is intentionally abandoned and serves only as a latent threat or possibility; hence the term *dramatic cul-de-sacs*, or *blind alleys*. At the same time, of course, this is a theatrically rewarding technique as it gives the play the desirable richness and diversity.¹⁶

One example comes in the death-scene of Bonduca and her two Daughters (4.5). The Second Daughter, face to face with impending death, refuses to commit suicide at first, providing a powerful anticlimax before her, her sister’s and mother’s self-slaughters occur (see Chapter 5). Similarly, in *A Wife for a Month*, Scene 4.3, Evanthe’s waiting-woman Cassandra, offended by her rebuke, exits weeping with the menacing words, ‘You’ll repent this’ (4.3.101). Even this potential danger turns out to come to nothing, apart from raising suspense.

In *The Custom of the Country*, *cul-de-sacs* are used to establish the dangerous atmosphere. Guiomar’s son Duarte comes to her in disguise to deliver a letter from Rutillio, and to find out how she bears his (Duarte’s) supposed death. When he finds his mother in good spirits, he grows jealous and angry at Rutillio, announcing a threat:

Duarte [*aside*]. I am dumbe:
A good cause I have now, and a good sword,
And something I shall do——

(*The Custom of the Country* 5.3.71–3)

14 The same moment is mentioned in Chapter 2 in a different context.

15 For narrative modalities see also Doležel 1998: 113ff.

16 Sometimes critics consider instances of *dramatic cul-de-sacs* as cases of collaborative faults. Oliphant, enumerating signs of revision of *The Fair Maid of the Inn* (1626) says, ‘In II.2 a hint is given of the Clown’s intention to have Bianca stolen, but nothing comes of it’ (Oliphant 1927: 468).

In the further development of the play, this threat serves only to escalate the powerful surprise of the happy ending and reconciliation.

A more extensive instance is in Scene 4.2, in which the jealous Leopold intends to hire a bravo to get rid of his rival in love, Arnaldo:

| | |
|---|--|
| <i>Enter Leopold, Zabulon [Leopold's servant], Bravo.</i> | |
| <i>Zabulon.</i> | I have brought him Sir, a fellow that will do it Though Hell stood in his way, ever provided You pay him for't. |
| <i>Leopold.</i> | He has a strange aspect And lookes much like the figure of a hang-man In a table of the Passion. |
| <i>Zabulon.</i> | He transcends, 5 All presidents beleeve it, a flesh'd ruffian, That hath so often taken the Strappado, That 'tis to him, but as a lofty tricke Is to a tumbler: he hath perused too, All Dungeons in Portugall, thrice seven yeares 10 Rowed in the Galleys for three severall murthers, Though I presume that he has done a hundred, And scapt unpunisht. |
| <i>Leopold.</i> | He is much indebt to you, You set him off so well. What will you take Sir To beate a fellow for me, that thus wrongd me? 15 |
| <i>Bravo.</i> | To beate him say you? |
| <i>Leopold.</i> | Yes, beate him to lamenesse, To cut his lips or nose off; any thing, That may disfigure him. |
| <i>Bravo.</i> | Let me consider? Five hundred pistollets for such a service I thinke were no deare penniworth. |
| <i>Zabulon.</i> | Five hundred! 20 Why there are of your brother-hood in the Citie, Ile undertake shall kill a man for twenty. |
| <i>Bravo.</i> | Kill him? I think so; Ile kill any man For halfe the money. |
| <i>Leopold.</i> | And will you aske more For a sound beating then a murther? |
| <i>Bravo.</i> | I Sir, 25 And with good reason, for a dog that's dead The Spanish proverb saies, will never bite: But should I beate or hurt him only, he may Recover, and kill me. |
| <i>Leopold.</i> | A good conclusion, The obduracie of this rascall makes me tender. 30 Ple runne some other course, there's your reward, Without the employment. |
| <i>Bravo.</i> | For that as you please Sir; |

When you have need to kill a man, pray use me,
But I am out at beating.

Exit.

(*The Custom of the Country* 4.2.1–34)

The bravo is not employed and appears no more in the play. Yet the sequence fulfils several important functions: apart from being an enjoyable scene, (1) it exposes the measure of Leopold's jealousy, and at the same time, (2) presents his ability to relent ('The obduracie of this rascall makes me tender' 4.2.30); this is a recurrent pattern of the entire play; (3) it sets the potentiality (modality) of the play's world, presenting what could happen if other, less human persons were involved; and, (4) it prepares for a multiplicity of possible endings to the conflict; the audience is 'Confounded with the clamour' (*The Honest Man's Fortune* 1.1.262), and is prepared for a wide range of paths which the play could take.

In *The Queen of Corinth*, the playwrights play with the stock character of the lascivious lady. The Queene has much of that potential, and the reports of her are supportive of this tendency, though it is not developed in the play beyond mere hints at the possible threat, such as Crates' malicious insinuation:

[*Crates.*] You know the Queen your Mother
Did from a private state your Father raise,
So all your Royalty you hold from her;
She is older then she was, therefore more doating,
And what know we but blindnesse of her love 30
(That hath from underneath the foot of fortune
Set, even *Euphanes* foot, on fortunes head)
Will take him by the hand, and cry, *Leap now*
Into my bed; 'tis but a trick of age;
Nothing impossible.

(*The Queen of Corinth* 3.1.26–35)

The Queene herself supports this threat by her teasing meditation confided to Euphanes later in the same scene:

Queene. Sirrah, I was thinking
If I should marry thee, what merry tales
Our neighbour Islands would make of us;
But let that passe, you have a Mistris 265
That would forbid our Banes: troth I have wish'd
A thousand times that I had been a man,
Then I might sit a day with thee alone,
And talke,
But as I am I must not; there's no skill 270
In being good, but in not being thought ill.

(*The Queen of Corinth* 3.1.262–271)

In the last scene, she brings in the coquet mode of her affection for Euphanes again when acknowledging the marriage of Euphanes and Beliza:

[*Queene.*] I will share with her in you:
I am pleas'd that in the night she shall enjoy you, 40

And that's sufficient for a Wife: the day time
I will divorce you from her.

(*The Queen of Corinth* 5.2.39–42)

These insinuations are, however, blind alleys creating a tension in the central melodramatic love between Euphanes and Beliza.

The cases mentioned so far have been fairly clear-cut. However, Fletcherian drama orchestrate the technique in complex situations, producing minor climaxes within the plays. Such is the case of the dramatic *cul-de-sac* in *The Lovers' Progress*, Scene 3.3. Caliste is torn between her duty to her husband Cleander, and her love for Lisander—Cleander's friend, 'A man without a rivall: one the King | And Kingdome gazes on with admiration':

[*Caliste.*] How is my soule divided? O *Cleander*, 225
My best deserving husband! O *Lisander*!
The truest lover that e're sacrific'd
To *Cupid* against *Hymen*

(*The Lovers' Progress* 1.1.225–28)

At midnight, while Caliste's husband Cleander is asleep within, and while her lady Clarinda 'make[s] use of stoln houres' with Leon (side plot), Lisander comes to her (with a pistol) and tries to seduce her. When disturbed by a noise, and threatened by Cleander, who enters with a taper, Lisander is about to shoot him. However, Cleander leaves without noticing anything. When another noise comes and Cleander re-enters, Lisander escapes with a threatening remark, which is not fulfilled. In this mid-play climax, Fletcher and Massinger bring together three plot-lines of the play (Lisander-Caliste-Cleander, Malfort-Clarinda-Leon, and Dorilaus' adventures with forest gangsters):

Lisander. Heaven keep my hand from murther,
Murther of him [*Cleander*] I love.
Caliste. Away deare friend,
Down to the garden staires, that way *Lisander*,
We are betray'd else.
Lisander. Honour guard the Innocent. *Exit Lisander.* 160

Enter Cleander.

Cleander. Stil up? I fear'd your health.
Caliste [*aside*]. 'Has miss'd him happily;—
I am going now, I have done my meditations,
My heart's almost at peace.
Cleander. To my warme bed then.
Caliste. I will pray ye lead. *A Pistoll shot within.*
Cleander. A Pistoll shot i'th' house?
At these houres? sure some theefe, some murtherer: 165
Rise ho, rise all, I am betraide.
Caliste [*aside*]. O fortune!
O giddy thing! he has met some opposition,
And kil'd; I am confounded, lost for ever.

Enter Dorilaus [Caliste's father, and master of the house].

Dorilaus. Now, what's the matter?

Cleander. Theeves, my noble father,
Villaines, and Rogues.

Dorilaus. Indeed, I heard a Pistoll, 170
Let's search about.

Enter Malfort [a braggart], Clarinda, and Servants.

Malfort. To bed againe, they are gone sir,
I will not bid you thanke my valour for't;
Gone at the garden doore; there were a dozen,
And bravely arm'd, I saw 'em.

Clarinda [aside]. I am glad,
Glad at the heart.

Servant. One shot at me, and miss'd me. 175

Malfort. No, 'twas at me, the bullet flew close by me,
Close by my eare; another had a huge Sword,
Flourish'd it thus; but at the point I met him,
But the Rogue taking me to be your Lordship,
(As sure your name is terrible, and we 180
Not much unlike in the darke) roar'd out aloud:
'Tis the kill cow *Dorilaus*, and away
They ran as they had flowne:— [*apart to Clarinda*] now you must love me,
Or feare me for my courage wench.

Clarinda [apart]. O Rogue?
O lying Rogue:— [*apart to Caliste*] *Lisander* stumbled Madam, 185
At the staires head, and in the fall the shot went off;
Was gone before they rose.

Caliste. I thanke heaven for't.

Clarinda. I was frighted too, it spoyl'd my game with *Leon*.

(*The Lovers' Progress* 3.3.157–88)

In each of the three plots, the comical incident has its significance and function. While still working with the same pattern of *extended possibilities* (in this case, in the form of *dramatic cul-de-sacs*), the dramatists have achieved masterful verisimilitude and a powerful dramatic effect. The climax brings together the expectations and the potential events, while subverting it by the ignoble reality of *Lisander* stumbling on the stairs.

The device of *extended possible outcomes* has diverse usage, as has been shown. The central logic is that it dramatizes the expectations of dramatic characters, thus realizing what their function within the play is. It becomes no more a stereotypical or *cliché* convention or mannerism, but a device that offers a scope of uses, and—in its dramatizing of the characters' inner lives—replaces the technique of the monologue, and incorporates it in the essence of the theatre, character interaction.

III Fletcherian Deceptions

Celia. I could laugh now,
To see how finely I am cozn'd
(*The Humorous Lieutenant* 3.4.35–36)

[*Leocadia.*] they that look on
See more than we that play
(*Love's Pilgrimage* 3.2.227–28)

Deception is one of the central dramatic techniques of the Fletcherian canon. Its importance for the related device of *extended possible outcomes* was suggested in the previous section. The skill with which Fletcher uses deception has been appreciated in a separate study:

His ability to take a stock technique and convention and not only make it fit organically and thematically into his play but also use it in such a way that the actor is given enormous scope is what sets him apart as a dramatist.

Although the deceptions are frequently dismissed as no more than showy tricks. Fletcher's skill is such that he also makes them functional, integral to plot and often to theme. He employs deception to serve a range of dramatic purposes, chiefly to aid in plot construction, but also to comment on human follies and foibles, to reveal character, and to cure humours, among others. (Wilson 1987)

However, deception is not used only in the fictional world of the characters; it is, by the same token, applied to the audience. In the early plays, this is done as a means of teasing and provoking the spectators. Such is the case of incest in *A King and No King*. As there is no substantial reality in the theatre, the fictional reality of the play is wholly dependent upon what the playwrights have presented. Throughout the play, we take Panthea and Arbaces for siblings; it is only in the last act that we learn of the actuality of Arbaces' parentage. Until that moment—however disturbing this may be—incest *is* present.¹⁷

In a 1998 Czech production of *A King, and No King*, the final revelation of the parentage, made by Gobrias and Arane, were presented as a conspiratorial act of necessity, a piece of lie, to give out at least a hope that their love was *not* incestuous.¹⁸ This resolution came across as the only possible way out; the obsessed and impulsive Arbaces of this production would never allow himself to be severed from his sister-wife Panthea.

In the mature plays, deception is used to serve more complex and profound purposes, be they the disguises of Belvidere in *Women Pleas'd* or the tricks that characters use in *A Wife for a Month*. The following chapter, 'Fletcherian Subjective Allegories', proposes a Baroque, allegorical reading of the techniques.

17 For a discussion of this issue see Leech 1962: 20–21, and Adams 2000: 60.

18 Produced in Činoherní klub, Prague: Francis Beaumont a John Fletcher, *Král nekrál* (A King and No King), directed by Michal Lang. For a Czech review and commentary see my 'Král nekrál a Pitvora', in the online theatre journal *Yorick* 3 (1999) (<http://yorick.hyperlink.cz/archiv.htm>).

One of many instances of deception used for complex purposes is in *The Prophetess*; Maximinian rebels against destiny—his private *telos*, the inescapable duty he has—and decides to try the power of the prophetess Delphia (who is a personification of destiny):

[*Maximinian.*] You then beleeve (for me thinks, 'tis most necessary)
 She knows her own Fate?
Diocles. I beleeve it certain.
Maximinian. Dare you but be so wise to let me try it, 140
 for I stand doubtfull.
Diocles. How?
Maximinian. Come neerer to me;
 because her cunning divell shall not prevent me:
 Close, close, and hear; [*Whispers to him.*]
 If she can turn this destinie,
 I'll be of your faith too.
Diocles. Forward, I fear not. 145
 For if shee knows not this, sure she knows nothing.
 (*The Prophetess* 1.3.138–46)

Diocles assumes a deceptive role, in order to try Delphia, asking her incredulously if she can see her own fate when she knows those of others. Delphia instantaneously discovers his deception as well as exposes Maximinian, who is concealed and pretending to be about to shoot at Delphia:

Diocles. Knowing my fortune so precisely, punctually, 195
 And that it must fall without contradiction,
 Being a stranger of no tie unto ye,
 Me thinks you should be studied in your own,
 In your own destiny, me thinks, most perfect,
 And every hour, and every minute, Mother, 200
 So great a care should heaven have of her Ministers;
 Me thinks your fortunes both waies should appear to ye,
 Both to avoid, and take. Can the Stars now,
 And all those influences you receive into ye,
 Or secret inspirations ye make shew of, 205
 If an hard fortune hung, and were now ready
 To powr it self upon your life, deliver ye?
 Can they now say, Take heed?
Delphia. Ha? pray ye come hither.
Maximinian [*aside, unseen*]. I would know that: I fear your divel wil cozen ye,
 And stand as close as ye can, I shall be with ye. 210
Delphia. I find a present ill.
Diocles. How?
Delphia. But I scorn it.
Maximinian [*aside*]. Do ye so? do ye so?
Delphia. Yes, and laugh at it, *Diocles.*
 Is it not strange, these wild and foolish men
 Should dare to oppose the power of Destiny?
 That power the gods shake at?—Look yonder, Son. 215
Maximinian. Have ye spide me? then have at ye.

Delphia. Do, shoot boldly.
 Hit mee and spare not, if thou canst.
Diocles. Shoot cosen.
Maximinian. I cannot; mine arm's dead, I have no feeling:
 Or if I could shoot, so strong is her arm'd vertue,
 She would catch the arrow flying.
Delphia. Poor doubtfull people, 220
 I pity your weak faiths.

(*The Prophetess* 1.3.195–221)

Diocles' and Maximinian's test of Delphia is exposed by her as superficial and 'foolish', and it is symptomatic of their rebellion against 'the power of Destiny'. Allegorically, Diocles' and Maximinian's deception represents their unwillingness to play the roles they are allotted.

The Magic of Theatre in *The Chances*

Albert. Suppose it but a dream

(*The Sea Voyage* 2.1.89)

A more playful deception, this time played on both the characters and the audience, appears in *The Chances*. The final scene of the play (5.3) enjoys the advantage of the 'lie' of theatre, the theatrical illusion. In the *dénouement* of the play, the Conjurer Vechio conjures up the persons which his guests ask for only to discard the illusion later as a pure theatrical delusion. The supposed spirits are the characters themselves. In other words, Fletcher uses theatrical noetic in the same way as the thaumaturge of his scene. He skilfully conflates the exposition of the play and of the fictional story, and uses the possibilities of the barren stage to the full. The theatrical illusion overlaps with the conjurer's illusion in the fiction. It is a noetic trick, played on us, the audience.

Fletcher, however, is not the first to use it. There are traces of that in earlier drama. Shakespeare plays a similar trick in *A Taming of the Shrew* (4.5):

Enter Petruchio, Kate, Hortentio

Petruchio. Come on a Gods name, once more toward our fathers:

Good Lord how bright and goodly shines the Moone.

Kate. The Moone, the Sunne: it is not Moonelight now.

Petruchio. I say it is the Moone that shines so bright.

(*A Taming of the Shrew* 4.6.1–3)

And later again:

Enter Vincentio.

Good morrow gentle Mistris, where away:

Tell me sweete *Kate*, and tell me truely too,

Hast thou beheld a fresher Gentlewoman:

Such warre of white and red within her cheekes:

What stars do spangle heauen with such beautie,

As those two eyes become that heauenly face?

Faire louely Maide, once more good day to thee:
Sweete Kate embrace her for her beauties sake.

(*A Taming of the Shrew* 4.6.28–35)

In the first instance, part of the delight is the confusion arising from the fact that we—as the audience—do not know whether it is day or night. It is only after several reversals and a series of realizations on the part of the audience that we may take the scene to be happening by day. The second passage—in a sense—might be seen as a joke at the reality that, on the Elizabethan stage, the vehicle may be very different from the tenor: a column may become a tree if denoted so, a sunlit summer day will become a stormy autumn or winter night in *King Lear*, and a man (or a boy)—if described so—will become a ‘Yong budding Virgin, faire, and fresh, & sweet’ (*TS*, 4.6.38). A formally similar instance is Quince’s

here’s a maruailous conuenient place for our rehearsall. This greene plot shall be our stage, this hauthorne brake our tiring house...

(*A Midsummer-Night’s Dream* 3.1.2–4)

While saying that, Quince is pointing to the *actual* stage and the *actual* tiring house. By this kind of magic, we believe things that are fiducially different (and untrue) for the sake of our enjoyment and understanding. A realization of the power of theatre magic comes, for instance, in Act 5 of *Twelfth Night* when Viola first meets Sebastian. Although they are *never* identical (nor should perhaps be) we believe and see that they are (and may even be surprised how strongly we believe it).

A different, and a typically (cynically) Fletcherian trick is the magic-less magical Act 5 of *The Chances*, centred on the figure of the quack conjurer Vechio. Let me analyze the fictional existence of this figure, that is, the noetic process by which he comes into being as the figure he is.

The existence of a dramatic figure is secured by its exposition (the announcement that it exists) and its onstage presence. Apart from that, if it is a specific figure, like a conjurer, it depends on the mode of the fiction. The conjurer Vechio, who plays a principal role in the last act of *The Chances*, is prepared for modally in several passages (quoted below) in which the supernatural is invoked:

[*John.*] did the devill lead me?

(*The Chances* 1.5.3)

Fredrick. Hee’s safe,
Be what he will, and let his foes be devills,
Arm’d with your pittie. I shall conjure ’em.

(*The Chances* 1.10.43–45)

Peter. Then this must be the Devill.

Anthony. Let it be. *Sing[sing within a little] agen.*

Good Devill sing againe: O dainty devill,
Peter believe it, a most delicate devill,
The sweetest Devill——

[...]

Anthony. The house is haunted sir,
For this we have heard this halfe a yeare.

Fredrick. Ye saw nothing?
Anthony. Not I.
Peter. Nor I Sir.
Fredrick. Get us our breakfast then,
 And make no words on't; wee'll undertake this spirit,
 If it be one. *Sing.*
Anthony. This is no devill *Peter.*

(*The Chances* 2.2.31–34, 42–46)

John. Now 'tis impossible I should be honest,
 She [Constantia] kisses with a conjuration
 Would make the devill dance

(*The Chances* 2.3.58–60)¹⁹

Concerning the exposition proper, it is the jealous Antonio (cuckolded and robbed by his whore Constantia), who first invokes magical powers:

Antonio. Get me a conjurer,
 One that can raise a water devill...
 ...get me a Conjurer,
 Enquire me out a man that lets out devils ...

(*The Chances* 4.2.16–17, 21–22)

Antonio's impulse is further elaborated and gathers weight in the Servant's reaction:

[*Antonio.*] ...Sirrah meet me
 Some two houres hence at home; In the meane time
 Find out a conjurer and know his price,
 How he will let his devils by the day out,
 I'le have 'em, and they be above ground. *Exit Antonio.*
Servant. Now blesse me,
 What a mad man is this? I must do something
 To please his humour: such a man I'le aske for,
 And tell him where he is: but to come neare him,
 Or have any thing to do with his *don* devills,
 I thanke my feare, I dare not, nor I will not. *Exit.*

(*The Chances* 4.2.30–39)

By now, Vechio has both a solid reputation and good publicity. As is implicit in the above treatment of indicators of theatricality (and from the two examples of misapprehension), if a delusion of this type is to be successful, we have to be deprived of a certain part of the exposition, namely of seeing how Vechio behaves and acts. As his persona is introduced before he enters, the audience (as well as the deluded characters) may suppose that what they see is Vechio's true, standard acting.

19 It might be of some interest in this context that there are two Constantias in the play, a beloved of the Duke and a whore; one of the plots and a major misunderstanding (the eponymous chance) turn on there being one sign (name) for two references. There are 52 occurrences of 'devill' in the play, that is one occurrence to every 35 lines (the play has 1825 lines in total), which is a remarkably high proportion.

The last words of Act 4 tacitly prepare for Vechio's magnificent entrée. (Don John is the clown of the play.)

Fredrick. Come *Don John*,
We have something now to doe.
John. I am sure I would have.
Fredrick. If she [the Duke's Constantia] be not found, we must fight.
John. I am glad on't,
I have not fought a great while.
Fredrick. If we dye——
John. There's so much money sav'd in lecherie. *Exeunt.*
(*The Chances* 4.3.143–47)

After this intermission 'Enter Duke, Petruchio *below*, and Vechio *above*' (5.1.0), and the first true presentation of the conjurer as a figure occurs. Vechio, whom we have no chance of identifying now, is eavesdropping on the two.

Duke. It should be hereabouts.
Petruchio. Your grace is right,
This is the house I know it.
Vechio [apart]. Grace?
Duke. 'Tis further
By the description we received.
Petruchio. Good my Lord the Duke,
Believe me, for I know it certainly,
This is the very house.
Vechio [apart]. My Lord the Duke? [*Exit Vechio.*]
(*The Chances* 5.1.1–5)

At this moment we have no idea where the Duke and Petruchio are, since at their exit (at 4.3.143), they left no trace of their intentions. (There was no projection.) The man above (Vechio) echoes Petruchio's terms of address to the Duke and (most likely) exits. It is only then that the full exposition of the scene comes. Vechio is, however, not identified by name. It is interesting to observe that it is virtually Petruchio, who introduces the persona of the 'most sufficient Scholler' in this scene, prompted by the Duke's exclamation:

Duke. Pray heaven this man Prove right now.
Petruchio. Beleeve it, hee's a most sufficient Scholler,
And can doe rare tricks this way; for a figure,
Or raising an appearance, whole Christendome
Has not a better; I have heard strange wonders of him.
Duke. But can he shew us where she is?
Petruchio. Most certaine,
And for what cause too she departed.
Duke. Knock then,
For I am great with expectation,
Till this man satisfie me: I feare the Spaniards,
Yet they appeare brave fellowes: can he tell us?

Petruchio. With a wet finger, whether they be false.

Duke. Away then.

Petruchio. Who's within here?

Enter Vechio.

Vechio. Your Grace may enter.

Duke. How can he know me?

Petruchio. He knowes all.

Vechio. And you sir. *Exeunt.*

(*The Chances* 5.1.6–18)

The following scene (5.2) continues in the exposition of the conjurer, although the audience do not know until the following scene that Fredrick and John are after the very same man.

John. What do you call his name?

Fred. Why, Peter Vechio.

John. They say he can raise devills, can he make 'em
Tell truth too, when he has rais'd 'em? for beleeve it,
These devills are the lyingst Rascalls.

Fred. He can compell 'em.

(*The Chances* 5.2.1–5)

The rest of the scene is an extensive exposition of Vechio's putative magical capacities and virtues.

The identification of the 'Scholler' of 5.1 (the physical Vechio) and of the fictive Vechio of 5.2 is carried out at the beginning of 5.3, that is, only after his reputation as a magician has been firmly established.

Duke. Is your name Vechio?

Vechio. Yes sir.

(*The Chances* 5.3.2)

In this sequence Vechio does nothing that contradicts his reputation. On the contrary, he astounds the guests and asks for a promise that they will protect him from prosecution (presumably for practising magic).

The following passage further establishes Vechio's position, while he is gone to 'prepare some Ceremonies' (5.3.7). It is interesting to observe how the communication (of the onstage characters, the *acted figures*) hoaxes the audience and supplants the possible doubts:

Duke. Sure hee's a learned man.

Petruchio. The most now living;

Did your grace marke when we told all these circumstances, 10

How ever and anon he bolted from us

To use his studies helpe?

Duke. Now I thinke rather

To talke with some familiar.

Petruchio. Not unlikely,

For sure he has 'em subject.

Duke. How could he else

Tell when she went, and who went with her?
Petruchio. True. 15
Duke. Or hit upon mine honour: or assure me
 The Lady lov'd me dearely?
Petruchio. 'Twas so.

(*The Chances* 5.3.9–17)

The abrupt entry of Fredrick and John (5.3.24–32) and John's following clownish escapades further serve to divert the critical attention from Vechio, and the firmness of his established reputation, to the 'businessse ... And ... this very cause that we now come for' (5.3.27–28).

The most fascinating (and perhaps disquieting) fact about what we assume in this case is that the establishment of a *genuine* magician and this pseudo-magician would be identical. It is only after the series of astounding apparitions and revelations (which Fletcher successfully and typically subverts by means of Don John's clownery), and after the 'old *Gillian*, flesh and bone'²⁰ and the real Constantia enter, that Vechio admits the truth to the perplexed Duke, asking him

For pardon for my boldnesse: yet 'twas harmlesse
 And all the art I have sir; those your grace saw
 Which you thought spirits, were my neighbours children
 Whom I instruct in Grammer, here, and Musick;
 Their shapes, the peoples fond opinions,
 Beleeving I can conjure, and oft repairing 170
 To know of things stolne from 'em, I keepe about me,
 And alwaies have in readinesse; by conjecture
 Out of their owne confessions, I oft tell 'em
 Things, that by chance have fallen out so: which way
 (Having the persons here, I knew you sought for)
 I wrought upon your grace: my end is mirth,
 And pleasing, if I can, all parties.

(*The Chances* 5.3.165–77)

In admitting his purpose ('mirth | And pleasing, if I can all parties') he becomes a theatrical, as well as fictive, impresario, who pleases by apparitions (visions), incantations (conjuring up of fictional personae) and song; which is just about a description of Jacobean theatre.

This theatrical trick is elaborated even later with the clown Don John entering 'like a Spirit' before the jealous cuckold Antonio for the sake of 'a mirth above all, | To observe his pelting fury' (5.3.183–84). Seen from the present perspective, it is—above all—an ingenious play of the cognitive processes of the theatre and the 'mirth' derived from them.

The aim of this chapter has been to present Fletcherian dramatic language as a unified, and yet sufficiently diverse and enjoyable means of presenting meaning.

20 As Gillian is a comical character from Don John's plot, her entry is a convenient opportunity for 'a strange incantation, A Song ... and [a] rude pipe' (5.3.82–84).

Critics have often overly reacted to the outer form; the fact that the theatrical *code* which Fletcher and his *atelier* use in their mature plays is—just like Mozart's employment of the techniques of classicism—proportionate and appropriate to their material, and—as a full-blooded code—does not hinder communication on both literal as well as figurative levels. The major figurative mode of the plays, the *Baroque subjective allegory*, is the topic of the following chapter.