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War Without Shakespeare:

Reading Shakespearean Absence, 1642-1649

Shakespeare wrote in the shadow of war. His plays deal with the historical conflicts of medieval England and ancient Rome but they were written during the French Wars of Religion, the Anglo-Spanish War, the Nine Years War in Ireland and other significant pan-European conflicts.[1] In death, Shakespeare has only become more tightly entangled with the history of international conflict. Michael Dobson has argued that the Seven Years War helped accelerate the elevation of Shakespeare to the status of national icon.[2] Sarah Valladares has shown how the early-nineteenth-century Peninsular War provided the backdrop to the Covent Garden productions of J.P. Kemble, and the Shakespeare lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.[3] Douglas Lanier has written about the commemoration of the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth in the American Civil War, Ton Hoensalaars about the reception of Shakespeare in World War I-era France, and Jésus Tronch about how *Hamlet* came to represent the sense of ineffectuality and irresolution experienced during the Spanish Civil

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[1] On Shakespeare and the French Wars of Religion, see Gillian Woods, *Shakespeare's Unreformed Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 58-89. On Shakespeare and the Anglo-Spanish War, see Nick de Somogyi, *Shakespeare and the Theatre of War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 132. On Shakespeare and the Irish wars, see Andrew Murphy, 'Shakespeare's Irish History', *Literature and History*, 5 (1996), 38-59.

[2] Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 227.

[3] Sarah Valladares, *Staging the Peninsular War: English Theatres, 1807-1815* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 59-106.

War.[4] In the Second World War, Shakespeare's plays were used, to contrasting effects, in a wide range of geographical locations: Ryuta Minami has written about Shakespeare in wartime Japan, Tibor Egervari about Shakespeare performances in Auschwitz, Tina Krontiris on Shakespeare in occupied Greece.[5] Shakespeare was regularly invoked in the Cold War too, as shown by Erica Sheen's study of airlift-era Berlin and Krystyna Kujawinska Courtney's work on Shakespeare in Communist Poland.[6] More recent conflicts, such as the so-called War on Terror have inspired further uses of Shakespeare.[7] This is hardly an exhaustive list, as the contributors to this issue demonstrate.

Whether we like to think of Shakespeare as a largely benign dispenser of cultural and political wisdom, or as the vanguard of English colonial expansion (and in that sense, then, a product of war), there's no denying his abundance. But was it ever thus? The focus of this

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[4] Douglas M. Lanier, 'Commemorating Shakespeare in America, 1864', in *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory*, ed. by Clara Calvo and Coppélia Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 140-60; Ton Hoensalaars, 'Great War Shakespeare: Somewhere in France, 1914-1919', *Actes des congrès de la Société française Shakespeare*, 33 (2015), http://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/2960; Jésus Tronch 'Hamletism in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39', *Critical Survey*, 30 (2018), 115-32.

[5] See the contributors to *Shakespeare and the Second World War: Memory, Culture, Identity*, ed. by Irena R. Makaryk and Marissa McHugh (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

[6] See the contributors to *Shakespeare in Cold War Europe: Conflict, Commemoration, Celebration*, ed. by Erica Sheen and Isabel Karremann (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015).

[7] For Shakespeare and the War on Terror see Graham Holderness and Brian Loughrey, '"Rudely Interrupted": Shakespeare and Terrorism', *Critical Survey*, 19 (2007), 107-23; and David Coleman, 'Ireland and Islam: *Henry V* and the "War on Terror"', *Shakespeare*, 4 (2008), 169-180.

essay is a war from which Shakespeare was curiously absent: the English Civil War of the mid-seventeenth-century. Shakespeare, of course, was dead by then, although that's never been much of an impediment. We are used to Shakespeare being at the centre of everything, but his plays seem to have played a reduced role at this crucial juncture in his nation's history. In this essay I will begin by thinking about how and why Shakespeare came to occupy a relatively marginal position, before turning to the writers that took his place in the print marketplace, focusing particularly on the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio of 1647. This hugely important but comparatively understudied book engages with the vexed politics of the Civil War in strikingly complex forms. While Shakespeare is often a vehicle for meaning in periods of conflicts, at this time it was the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher that played the largest part on the paper stage.[8] My interest in this essay, then, is why Shakespeare, so often celebrated for his ability to speak for the time, seems consigned to silence and what it means that Beaumont and Fletcher, now confined to the margins of the canon, took centre stage.

Shakespeare was not printed at all during England's decade of internecine conflict. Adam G. Hooks notes that 'virtually the same number of Shakespearean playbooks were published between 1623 and the Restoration in 1660 than had appeared in the 1590s'.[9] This observation about the general decline in the publication of Shakespeare's plays is instructive but it does not account for the absence of newly printed material alone. As this Table A shows, several Shakespeare editions appeared in the decade leading up to the Civil War, including the second edition of the Shakespeare folio and a first edition of Shakespeare and

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[8] On the interregnum as a 'paper stage' see Rachel Willie, *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647-72* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), pp. 25-51.

[9] Adam G. Hooks, *Selling Shakespeare: Biography, Bibliography, and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 133-4.

Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. This is hardly the height of Shakespeare's print popularity but nor does it obviously portend a 15 year hiatus in Shakespearian publication. Yet, as Table B demonstrates, it was not until 1655 that a publisher issued a new edition of a Shakespeare text (the 1652 edition of *The Merchant of Venice* is a reissue of the 1637 edition, with a new title page). Lukas Erne and Adam Hooks are among scholars who have shown that stationers sought to market Shakespeare's texts in relation to the new political climate of the 1650s; this arguably makes the absence of Shakespeare editions in the 1640s all the more curious.[10] Shakespearian publication was not at its most prolific in the early years of the Restoration either, but even then, the 1660s witnessed a significant new Shakespeare edition: the third folio of 1663 and a reissued folio of 1664 which included *Pericles* and six other plays now viewed as apocryphal. Emma Depledge has observed that these folio editions 'suggest that Shakespeare was deemed to be vendible in the 1660s'.[11] So why was he not in the 1640s?

Table A

Date	Text	Edition Number
1632	*1 Henry IV*	9
1632	*Comedies and Tragedies*	2

[10] Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 130-134; Adam G. Hooks, 'Royalist Shakespeare: Publishers, Politics, and the Appropriation of *The Rape of Lucrece* (1655)', in *Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640-1740*, ed. by Emma Depledge and Peter Kirwan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 26-37.

[11] Emma Depledge, *Shakespeare's Rise to Cultural Prominence: Politics, Print and Alteration, 1640-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 41.

1634	*Richard II*	8
1634	*Richard III*	10
1634	*The Two Noble Kinsmen*	1
1635	*Pericles*	5
1637	*Romeo and Juliet*	7
1637	*The Merchant of Venice*	5
1639	*Hamlet*	7
1640	*1 Henry IV*	10
1640	*Poems*	2

Table B

Date	Text	Edition Number
1652	*The Merchant of Venice*	5
1655	*King Lear*	5
1655	*Othello*	5
1655	*The Rape of Lucrece*	9

Depledge argues that rather than disappearing from the cultural consciousness, Shakespeare's plays appeared in new genres in the 1640s, in response to the theatrical ban which made performing a risky, illegal business.[12] Shakespeare's plays circulated in abbreviated form, as drolls (short playlets) and play-ballads, and in commonplace books and anthologies. Diane Purkiss observes that Royalists regularly used Shakespearean tragedy to

[12] Depledge, pp. 13-38.

lampoon Oliver Cromwell in political pamphlets of the Civil War era.[13] Laura Estill has shown that both Royalists and Parliamentarians excerpted Shakespeare in manuscript miscellanies around this time.[14] Shakespeare continued to be read, used, and perhaps even performed during the English Civil War, even if his plays were not being printed. To this list of caveats we must also note that the Civil War apparently had a broader, negative effect on playbook publication. Alan Farmer and Zachary Lesser write that from 1641 to 1649 the number of plays published dropped to 'levels not seen since the 1580s' whereas the 1630s had seen 'the highest edition totals of the entire early modern period'.[15] In such circumstances, the lack of Shakespeare publications may not be a surprise. But while the Civil War was a slow time for playbook publication more generally and for Shakespeare especially, it was a boom period for the publication of Beaumont and Fletcher, the two authors controversially credited with the authorship of the plays in the 1647 Folio.

In an illuminating article, Heidi Craig offers a finely nuanced investigation of playbook publication in Civil War England, addressing both the absence of printed Shakespeare and the rationale behind the publication of the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio.[16] Craig offers several reasons for the decline in Shakespearian publications, including, a legal

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[13] Diane Purkiss, *Literature, Gender and Politics During the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 136.

[14] Laura Estill, *Dramatic Extracts in Seventeenth-Century Manuscripts: Watching, Reading, Changing Plays* (Lanham; Maryland: University of Delaware Press, 2015), pp. 77-114.

[15] Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'Canons and Classics: Publishing Drama in Caroline England', in *Localizing Caroline Drama: Politics and Economics of the Early Modern Stage, 1625-1642* (Palgrave, 2006), pp. 17-41 (pp. 20-1).

[16] Heidi C. Craig, 'Missing Shakespeare, 1642-1660', *English Literary Renaissance* (forthcoming).

dispute between Mary Allot, the widow of the publisher of the second Folio and his apprentice, Andrew Crooke, which prevented the earlier publication of the third Folio; the deaths in 1640 and 1641 of John Norton and John Smethwick, two of the most likely publishers of Shakespeare; and the fact that Miles Fletcher and Richard Cotes, who each owned the rights to multiple Shakespeare plays, shifted their focus towards the publication of religious or political material. The lack of printed Shakespeare in the Civil War is not the result of a straightforward process: it was part practical, part economic, part bad luck (or, as I will go on to argue, for Shakespeare's later reputation, good luck). In addition to these factors, Craig argues that the Shakespeare market had reached saturation point; the theatre ban meant that publishers (and readers) were inclined to look for novelties. Shakespeare, then, may have seemed old, or, in David Scott Kastan's words 'a time-bound literary figure, very much of his age'.[17] Even so, we might expect a writer who apparently evokes an earlier, less obviously troubled time, to appeal particularly to publishers with royalist sensitivities but instead, Humphrey Moseley, the foremost purveyor of royalist writing, the man Kastan credits with no less than the invention of English literature, turned his attention elsewhere.[18]

In 1647, Moseley and Humphrey Robinson published a volume of thirty-four plays and one masque, none of which had been printed before. They called the volume *Comedies and Tragedies Written by* FRANCIS BEAVMONT and IOHN FLETCER. Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were attractive partly because so many of them were unpublished; market saturation was not a problem. But the mere fact that they had never been printed cannot have

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[17] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 84.

[18] David Scott Kastan, 'Humphrey Moseley and the Invention of English Literature', in *Agent of Change: Print Culture and Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), pp. 105-25.

been enough to convince these publishers to undertake the hazardous process of producing a largescale edition. Moseley and Robinson must have been convinced of the appeal of the plays and the prestige of their authors. Indeed, Beaumont and Fletcher plays that had previously made it into print proved to be very successful: *Philaster* went through five editions from 1620 to 1639; *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *The Scornful Lady* each went through five editions in a near identical period; while *A King and No King* was printed four times, *Cupid's Revenge* three, and *The Bloody Brother*, two.[19] Even *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* and *The Faithful Shepherdess*, which were both initially marketed as theatrical flops, went on to have later success and made it into second and third editions respectively. In the years immediately before the closure of the theatres and the outbreak of war, several stationers published first editions of Fletcher plays, suggesting an anticipated demand for

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[19] Thomas Walkley published editions of *Philaster* in 1620 and 1622, Richard Hawkins published editions of the play in 1628 and 1634. William Leake published an edition in 1639. Richard Higenbotham published the first edition of *The Maid's Tragedy* in 1619, further editions followed in 1622 (for Francis Constable), 1630 (for Hawkins), 1638 (for Henry Shepherd), and 1641 (for Leake). Miles Partrich published editions of *The Scornful Lady* in 1616 and 1625; Thomas Jones published an edition in 1630, Augustine Matthews in 1635, and Robert Wilson in 1639. Walkley published *A King and No King* in 1619 and 1625, Hawkins published a version in 1631, and Leake published the 1639 edition. *Cupid's Revenge* was first published in 1615 by Josias Harrison and then in 1630 by Thomas Jones and 1635 by Matthews. Thomas Allott and John Crooke published the first edition of *The Bloody Brother* in 1639; a second edition followed in 1640, published by Leonard Lichfield, printer to the University of Oxford.

Fletcher in print several years before the Folio was published.[20] Moseley's interest in publishing a folio of Beaumont and Fletcher plays may have begun around this time. In 1641 the Lord Chamberlain issued a warrant preventing the publication of sixty King's Men plays; R.C. Bald, in a claim more recently endorsed by Lukas Erne, suggested that the King's Men made this move to block Moseley, before agreeing terms with him in 1646.[21]

Predictably, then, Moseley was keen to market the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio as new, but at the same time, he also traded on their oldness. The title page of the volume emphasizes a double claim: the plays are 'Never printed before' but also supposedly 'now published by the Authors Originall Copies'.[22] This paradoxical desire to hark back to the 'Originall' while also bringing forth the truly new, is characteristic of the book's fraught relationship with the apparently better days of the previous decades, the troubled times of the civil war, and the uncertain future. Moseley reiterates many of these claims in his prefatory address, repeatedly locating the book's vendibility in its newness (the volume, he says, is 'entirely New') while also recounting, in brief, the lives of the now long deceased authors (A4^{v}). Fletcher died 22 years before the book was published; Beaumont

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[20] John Waterson and John Benson published *The Elder Brother* in 1637, Waterson published *Monsieur Thomas* in 1639, William Cooke and Andrew Crooke published *Wit Without Money* in 1639, and *Night Walker* in 1640. In the same year, Lichfield published *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*.

[21] R.C. Bald, *Bibliographical Studies in the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio of 1647* (Oxford: Printed at Oxford University Press for the Bibliographical Society, 1938), pp. 5-10; Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 174-175.

[22] Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Comedies and Tragedies* (London, 1647). Subsequent references to this edition are cited parenthetically.

died the same year as Shakespeare, 31 years before the 1647 volume. Moseley figures the plays in the book as popular, familiar, successful, redolent of brighter days, but also new, fresh, and urgent, not crusty relics but texts capable of speaking to and for the times. In the first of his two paratextual addresses, the playwright and one-time Fletcher collaborator James Shirley presses the point even further, situating the plays of the folio explicitly in the context of the Civil War, arguing, not only that they are peculiarly apposite but that their new printed form makes them even more important and powerful than they were when they were performed.

> And now Reader in this *Tragicall Age* where the *Theater* hath been so much out-acted, congratulate thy owne happinesse that in this silence of the Stage, thou hast a liberty to reade these inimitable Playes, to dwell and converse in these immortall Groves, which were only shewd our Fathers in a conjuring glasse, as suddenly removed as represented, the Landscrap is now brought home by this op|tick, and the Presse thought too pregnant before shall be now look'd upon as greatest Benefactor to Englishmen, that must *acknowledge* all the felicity of *witt* and *words* to this Derivation (A3^{r-v}).

Shirley encourages his readers to see the plays anew, through the 'optick' of the book and not the 'conjuring glasse' of the pre-Civil War stage. In the '*Tragicall Age*' of civil war, Beaumont and Fletcher, rather than Shakespeare, are proffered as the playwrights most beneficial to the nation.

Shakespeare, though, is not entirely absent from the collection. He is present in echoes and even direct allusions. Jitka Štollová notes that the Beaumont and Fletcher volume is 'modelled on its 1623 precursor', sharing several typographical features such as the double

column arrangement and the use of pica roman type.[23] Erne alerts us to more correspondences: like the 1623 Folio, the Beaumont and Fletcher collection confines itself only to dramatic material; it features 34 plays, a similar number to the Shakespeare folio, which contains 36, and it makes similar claims about the authority of its texts.[24] The imagery of the 1623 book influenced the compilers of the 1647 volume in other ways too, as detailed by Jeffrey Masten in his discussion of authorship and patriarchal rhetoric.[25] The two volumes also share the same dedicatee. The 1623 folio was dedicated to William and Philip Hebert; the 1647 volume was dedicated to Philip alone, as William had died, although he is mentioned as the '(now glorified) *Brother'*.[26] The dedication, which contains ten signatories, all by members of the King's Men, makes a point of connecting the Herberts with the 1623 folio, calling them '*Patrons to the flowing compositions of the then expired sweet Swan of Avon SHAKESPEARE*' (A2^{v}). Shakespeare's name, mediated through Ben Jonson's commendatory poem, is used to confer authority on the Beaumont and Fletcher collection.

Although Shakespeare's name appears in several of the volume's encomiastic poems, to help consolidate Beaumont and Fletcher's literary credentials, the use of his name is not straightforward. The royalist poet Sir John Denham lists Fletcher alongside Shakespeare and

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[23] Jitka Štollová, '"This silence of the stage": The Play of Format and Paratext in the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio', *Review of English Studies*, 68 (2016), 507-523 (514).

[24] Erne, *Literary*, p. 174.

[25] Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 121.

[26] *Comedies and Tragedies*, A2^{r}. On the choice of the Herbert brothers as a dedicatee to the 1623 folio see Sonia Massai, 'Edward Blount, the Herberts, and the First Folio', in *Studies in Cultural Bibliography*, ed. by Marta Straznicky (Philadelphia; PA.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 132-146.

Jonson in ‘the Triumvirate of wit’ (B1v) but some other comparisons treat Shakespeare a little less less favourably. For example, George Buck – not to be confused with the long since deceased former Master of the Revels – puts Fletcher ahead of Shakespeare, George Chapman, and ‘applauded Ben’ (C3r), while a poem by the Anglo-Welsh historian James Howell places Fletcher ahead of his rivals as the writer most valuable during ‘tragedy’ of the Civil War era. Howell imagines that had ‘grim *BEN*’ lived in the 1640s he would ‘rage’ against the injustice of the time while Shakespeare and George Chapman would have ‘grown madd, and torn/Their gentle *Sock*’ (B4r). Howell means to praise Jonson, Shakespeare and Chapman for what he imagines would be their righteous fury, but his description of the angry trio makes them sound impotent in their rage. In contrast, Howell confers power on Fletcher: ‘Rare *FLETCHER'S quill*’ would have ‘soar’d up to the sky,/And drawn down Gods to see the tragedy’. Quite how Fletcher’s plays are supposed to enact this miracle is unclear but, even though he is himself long since dead, Fletcher is configured as useful and relevant in a way that other great writers of the seventeenth-century are not.

But where Howell’s criticism of Shakespeare comes in the form of a backhanded compliment, other poets offer more bracing critiques of Shakespeare, in their attempts to emphasize the importance of Beaumont and Fletcher. In a posthumously published piece the royalist poet William Cartwright claims that Shakespeare was comparatively ‘dull’ to Fletcher:

> Shakespeare to thee was dull, whose best jest lyes
> I’th Ladies questions, and the Fooles replyes;
> Old fashion’d wit, which walkt from town to town
> In turn’d Hose, which our fathers call’d the Clown;
> Whose wit out nice times would obseannesse call,
> And which made Bawdry passe for Comicall:

Nature was all his Art, thy veine was free

As his, but without his scurillity;

From whom mirth came unforc'd, no jest perplex,

But without labout cleane, chast, and unvext (D2^{v}).

Shakespeare is here associated with 'Old fashion'd wit' and out-of-date clothing. His plays are scurrilous, and his humour is, by implication, forced. Rather curiously, given the smuttiness of many of the plays in the Beaumont and Fletcher volume, Cartwright seems to think Beaumont and Fletcher plays are 'cleane, chast, and unvext'.[27] I will return to the veracity of the claims made by the commendatory poets later in this essay, but for now it should suffice to note that Cartwright and his royalist supporting companions are keen to present Shakespeare as unfashionable and somehow ill-suited to the gravity of the occasion of war. In another poem, John Birkenhead, who would in time become the editor of the royalist newsbook, *Mercrius Publicus*, writes that '*Shakespear* was early up, and went so drest/As for those *dawning hours* he knew was best;/But when the Sun shone forth, [Beaumont and Fletcher] thought fit/To weare just Robes, and leave off Trunk-hose-Wit' (E3^{v}). Like Cartwright, Birkenhead figures Shakespeare as comically unfashionable, both in the sense that his humour is old-fashioned and in the sense that his unfashionableness is the butt of the royalist jokes. Beaumont and Fletcher, on the other hand, wear 'just Robes' rather than the inappropriate 'Trunk-hose' of an older time. Their plays are properly fit for the circumstances of civil war. The implication is not that Shakespeare is a republican writer (although we know his plays were sometimes read as such) but that he is comparatively stale

[27] In his study of Shakespeare's sexual imagery, Eric Partridge acknowledges that Beaumont and Fletcher equal Shakespeare for smut, if nothing else: *Shakespeare's Bawdy* (London: Routledge and Keenan Paul, 1947), p. 53.

or inconsequential, unable to reform the ills of the day or restore former glories.[28] To the royalist creators of the 1647 folio, Beaumont and Fletcher were ripe for the time and more easily used for their political purpose. It is to their project that I now turn.

The Beaumont and Fletcher folio was a collective effort, but scholars generally agree that Moseley was the driving force behind the volume (even if there is a certain irony to the critical elision of the book's other publisher, Humphrey Robinson). Moseley was well-known as a royalist sympathizer; Lois Potter describes him as a specialist in 'subversion for the polite reader'.[29] In the 1640s he published a series of books by royalist writers such as John Suckling, Edmund Waller, William Davenant, John Denham, Richard Fanshawe and James Shirley which David Norbrook says 'evoked the world of the 1630s'.[30] Margret Ezell adds that Moseley's publications sought to foster 'a literary and cultural community banding together in the face of national "tragedy"'.[31] But Moseley did not limit himself to the publication of professed royalists. In 1645, he published an edition of John Milton poems, in

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[28] The fullest study of Shakespeare's engagement with Republican thought is Andrew Hadfield's *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For examples of stationers marketing Shakespeare's plays in a republican context, see Erne, *Book Trade,* pp. 130-134; Kirk Melnikoff, 'Nicholas Ling's Republican *Hamlet* (1603)', in *Shakespeare's Stationers: Studies in Cultural Bibliography*, ed. by Marta Straznicky (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), pp. 95-111

[29] Lois Potter, *Secret Rites and Secret Writing: Royalist Literature, 1641-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 19.

[30] David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 159.

[31] Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Oxford English Literary History: Volume V: 1645-1714: The Later Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 41-53 (p. 43).

Warren Chernaik's words, Milton was 'transformed against his will into a royalist'.[32] The book's title page, which situates Milton in relation to Henry Lawes, 'Gentleman of the KINGS Chappel, and one of His MAIESTIES Private Musick', is just one prominent example of how Moseley sought to frame Milton.[33] Nobody would claim though, that Moseley's publication of these poems meant Milton was a royalist. So how successfully did the producers of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio present its deceased subjects as royalist?[34]

One thing is for sure, Moseley and his contributors, who counted among them many of the most prominent royalist voices of the time, were not subtle. Marcus Nevitt calls the volume the 'assertion of a collective royalist identity'; Trevor Ross goes further still in claiming that the volume was 'symbolically avenging Parliament's closure of the theatres'; Nicholas McDowell tops them all by declaring it 'a mass act of writerly resistance to the supposed cultural barbarity of the recently victorious Parliamentary party'.[35] The paratexts

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[32] Warren Chernaik, 'Books as Monuments: The Politics of Consolidation', *Yearbook of English Studies*, 21 (1991), 207-17.

[33] John Milton, *Poems* (London, 1645).

[34] The authorship of the plays in the 1647 is contested, but the other writers thought to have been involved in their authorship were also dead by this point. Nathan Field died in 1620, William Rowley in 1626, Thomas Middleton in 1627, John Webster in 1634, John Ford in 1639 and Philip Massinger (whose role in the plays of the volume is considerably greater than Beaumont's) in 1640. Author attributions taken from Martin Wiggins, with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama, 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, vols. 6-8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015-2017).

[35] Marcus Nevitt, 'Restoration Theatre and Interregnum Royalism: The Cavalier Rivalry of John Denham and William Davenant', in *Sir John Denham (1614/15-1669) Reassessed: The State's Poet*, ed. by Philip Major (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 52-74 (p. 69); Trevor Ross,

abound with references to royal imagery. G. Hills calls Fletcher the ‘King of Poets’ (F1^{v}); John Harris describes Fletcher as the ‘sole Monarch’ and ‘abs’lute Soveraign’ (F4^{v}), and Thomas Peyton, the former MP turned royalist activist, says that praising Fletcher is a risky business that ‘might raise a discontent/Between the Muses and the ___’ (A2^{v}).

The commendatory poems also routinely praise Beaumont and Fletcher for their wit: Shirley calls Fletcher ‘the best wit ever trod on our English stage’ (A3^{v}); Aston Cockaine praised his plays as ‘lasting Monuments of natural wit’ (A4^{v}); George Lisle admires Beaumont and Fletcher as ‘Two Potent Witts’ (B1^{r}). Of course, it was nothing new to praise a writer for their wit. Indeed, the poems appended to the 1623 Shakespeare folio similarly sought to present their author as a paragon of wit. Jonson’s poem ‘To the Reader’ singles out Shakespeare’s ‘wit’ as one of his key characteristics; John Heminges and Henry Condell note that Shakespeare’s ‘wit can no more be hid, then it could be lost’; Jonson’s longer commendatory poem ‘To the memory of my beloued’ praises Shakespeare’s wit and contrasts him with the ‘antiquated’ Aristophanes, Terence, and Plautus ; and Leonard Digges describes the folio as a ‘wit-fraught Booke’.[36] But the use of the word ‘wit’ in the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio carried with it a much more pronounced political charge. As McDowell notes, ‘wit’ had become a cavalier code-word in the civil war as ‘royalists sought to claim a

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The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), p. 134; Nicholas McDowell, *Poetry and Allegiance in the English Civil Wars: Marvell and the Causes of Wit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 19. See also, Ann Baynes Coiro, ‘Reading’, in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. by Henry S. Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 534-555 (p. 543).

[36] William Shakespeare. *Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (London, 1623), A1^{v}; A2^{v}; A4^{v}; B2^{r}.

monopoly of literary and linguistic talent over a Parliamentary opposition and government that they represented as stereotypically Puritan and thus as grim, philistine, and deeply hostile to the arts'.[37] This newer understanding of wit exposed the older vision of wittiness to political scrutiny. Just as Jonson presented ancient comic writers as 'antiquated' to highlight Shakespeare's commercial relevance so the 1647 encomiasts configured Shakespeare as outdated to prop up the image of Beaumont and Fletcher as vendible royalist icons. For many of the volume's contributors, Beaumont and Fletcher's supposed wit could bring about what they see as much needed political change. The cavalier poet Alexander Brome says that the plays 'bring exploded witt againe in fashion', causing a 'Reformation' (F3^{r}); Roger L'Estrange, the future Restoration press censor, calls the book a 'balsame' to the troubled times (C1^{r}); and William Habington invokes Fletcher to help cure a country 'in the worst scaene of Time' (B3^{v}). These images contrast with the earlier description of an impotently enraged Shakespeare.

So far, so royalist, but the politics of both royalism and reading are knotty and uncertain. The civil war caused divided loyalties. Ezell observes that the dramatist and translator Thomas May wrote a commendatory poem to James Shirley's Humphrey Mosely-published 1646 edition of poetry, even though, by this time, May had joined the Parliamentary cause.[38] Sabrina Baron notes that Milton, assuredly not a royalist, had royalist connections: his brother served in the King's army and his Oxfordshire in-laws were also royalists.[39] Moseley, as Milton's publisher, marketed the poems to appeal to royalists, but he would hardly complain if the book was bought by Parliamentarians and he had no qualms about publishing Milton's material. Christopher D'Addario reminds us that 'just because a

[37] McDowell, p. 8.

[38] Ezell, p. 42.

[39] Sabrina A. Baron

work was produced by a "royalist" does not mean it was only read by "royalists" or even in a royalist manner'.[40] It is perfectly possible to read the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher folio without endorsing the reams of prefatory royalist rhetoric. Indeed, Katrin Beushausen is right to point out that a number of the poems 'steer away from […] politicisation […] and focus on the plays themselves', promising above all an enjoyable reading experience.[41] We might expect the Cavalier poet Robert Herrick to write something explicitly royalist, for example, but his offering focuses on the beauty and variety of Fletcher's plays.

It is possible, then, that some readers discarded or rejected the royalist packaging of the 1647 Folio. Despite the prefatory claims, Beaumont and Fletcher are not necessarily an obvious vehicle for royalism. To end, I want to think about some of the ways in which the volume might even undermine its goals or open up the possibility of alternative readings. Jeffrey Masten has argued that the contributors apply contradictory models of authorship: some poets figure the book as a 'kingdome' and others view Beaumont and Fletcher as 'Consul-Poets', thus registering different kinds of political systems. 'This is the story of a volume', Masten writes, 'and perhaps a nation, that could not make up its mind(s)'.[42] I want to take this further still, making more visible the different ways in which the royalist publication strategy activates conflicting, even directly divergent political readings. Sandra Clark suggests that 'at certain moments in the seventeenth-century [Beaumont and Fletcher's] plays were closely identified with royalist values; but that it is not clear that the point of first

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[40] Christopher D'Addario, *Exile and Journey in Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 61.

[41] Katrin Beushausen, *Theatre and the English Public from Reformation to Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 219.

[42] Masten, p. 151.

production was one of these'.[43] I would add that, in spite of Moseley's attempts, it is not clear that 1647 was one of these either.

Consider, for example, the vexed politics of the book's dedication. In 1623, when he was a dedicatee to the Shakespeare folio, Philip Herbert was the Earl of Montgomery; by 1647 he had taken the additional title, Earl of Pembroke from his deceased brother. But that is not all that had changed.[44] In the intervening years, Herbert had a troubled relationship with the English monarch. A favourite of James I, whom he served as a Gentleman of his Majesty's Bedchamber, Herbert had a trickier time with Charles I and became even more alienated from court after disagreeing with the King about the 1639-40 negotiations with the Scots. In 1641 he was removed from his position as Lord Chamberlain. From 1642, he became a moderate Parliamentarian; Andrew Hopper has shown that Herbert prevaricated and groomed contacts on both sides of the war as he attempted to negotiate the strongest possible position.[45] This kind of vacillation was not uncommon but in time it made him the subject of royalist propaganda which figured him as an illiterate, unintelligent, drunken cuckold. In the Restoration, John Aubrey described him as the product of incest.[46] The

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[43] Sandra Clark, *The Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher: Sexual Themes and Dramatic Representation* (Oxford: Routledge, 1994), p. 15.

[44] I am indebted to David L. Smith's *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry for the following information.

[45] Andrew Hopper, *Turncoats and Renegadoes: Changing Sides in the English Civil Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 22.

[46] Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon, and Michael Brennan, 'Introduction', in *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 10. See, John Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, ed. by Richard Barber (London: Boydell Press, 1975; 1982), p. 139.

decision to dedicate the 1647 volume to Herbert may have inspired all kinds of conflicting thoughts within the minds of its readers. It looks like an attempt to hark back to the happier days when Herbert was a royal favourite but this attempt to restore a lost past is obviously and perhaps for some readers, royalist or otherwise, painfully futile. The dedication might look like a failed attempt to curry favour with a man who, in his actions, did not have the royalist cause firmly at heart. This may not have been a consideration for all readers, but it could be as well said to weaken as bolster the strength of the volume's royalist credentials.

Opportunities for devious or counterintuitive readings of the prefaces also abound. As we have seen, many of the poems display strongly royalist convictions, but these strengths can become weaknesses; if a reader finds unexpected ironies in staunchly royalist passages, they can undermine the entire enterprise. The final lines of the volume's penultimate poem, Shirley's second contribution to the prefatory material, may serve as an example:

> But let him live and let me prophesie,
>
> As I goe Swan-like out, Our Peace is nigh;
>
> A Balme unto the wounded Age I sing,
>
> And nothing now is wanting but the King (G1^{v})

Scholars routinely (and reasonably) read this as Shirley hopefully imaging a peaceful restoration for Charles I. Masten describes it as a 'second coming […] a projected moment of "Peace" (imagined in the midst of war)'; Štollová sees it as a much-needed 'message of hope' at a dire moment for the royalists.[47] The implication, of course, is that the 'wanting' king will return from his enforced absence. Fletcher (and Shirley, through his prophecy) set the scene for his arrival; the poem ends with the conditions primed for his glorious entrance. This is, if you'll excuse the tongue-twister, surely Shirley's intention. But the phrasing and syntax invite a less optimistic and generous alternative reading. For many people at the time,

[47] Masten, p. 150; Štollová 518.

regardless of their allegiance, King Charles had been found ‘wanting’, lacking the necessary skills to be a successful ruler. In this reading, he is wanting *because* he is wanting; the prospect of a sudden transformation, as Shirley desires, looks not only impossible but undesirable.

Finally, there are the plays themselves, which frequently resist their royalist marketing. Philip J Finkelpearl has helped to argue against the long-held belief that, as Coleridge had it, Beaumont and Fletcher are ‘servile jure divino royalists’, a belief presumably rooted in the 1647 Folio prefaces.[48] But old habits die hard and it is always worth restating the political sophistication of Beaumont and Fletcher plays. Several of the prefatory poems offer miniature readings of specific plays (usually, it has to be said, ones not actually published in the 1647 folio). In one such poem, Henry Howard, sixth duke of Norfolk, gives an idiosyncratic, royalist account of *A King and No King*. In his vision of the play, Arbaces is a returning war hero who ‘saved his peoples dangers by his own’ (A1^{v}) and defeated his rival without the assistance ‘of any *Mirmydon*’. Howard’s reading of the play entails focusing on the pre-play narrative at expense of what actually happens in the play. *A King and No King* begins with Arbaces’ triumph but as the action progresses, he becomes increasingly tyrannical. The play ends, in typically tragicomic fashion, with an astonishing about-turn; Arbaces learns that he is an illegitimate ruler who has no inherited right to the throne. What follows is a remarkable, complicated political rearrangement in which Arbaces is removed from power, because he is not the king, and then returned to power, because he marries Panthea, the heir to the throne. But he is no longer the supreme ruler. Zachary Lesser has argued that the play imagines a new form of government in which the royally born Panthea

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[48] Philip J. Finkelpearl, *Court and Country Politics in the Plays of Beaumont and Fletcher* (Princeton; N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), *passim*; Roberta Florence Brinkley, ed. *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century* (Durham; NC, 1955), p. 658.

rules with the non-royal Arbaces.[49] None of this sits very easily with Howard's version of events; nor does it feel particularly conducive to a royalist interpretation. It is surely possible to read the play in royalist terms but it is telling that Howard sidesteps the thorniest issues.

Elsewhere in the volume, the cavalier poet Richard Lovelace provides a similarly royalist negotiation of *Valentinian*, a Roman tragedy which is, in fact, part of the 1647 folio. Valentinian is a corrupt ruler who is assassinated by a subject who becomes emperor but shows signs of corruption and is assassinated in turn. Fletcher reflects at length on the morality of resistance and the duty of subjects to their monarch. Gordon McMullan has shown that these issues would have felt very topical to the play's earliest audiences, but they would have felt even more pertinent to readers in 1647.[50] Lovelace focuses his attention on 'brave' (B2^{v}) Aetius, the loyal subject who hopes to reform Valentinian through wise counsel but who is betrayed by Maximus, who thinks, with Aetius gone, it will be easier to kill Valentinian. By centring Aetius, Lovelace can laud loyal service while also criticising the tyrannical Valentinian, 'the costliest Monarch' (B2^{v}). But as with Howard, Lovelace ignores aspects of the play that might trouble his political convictions. In the final act, the usurper Maximus is killed by Eudoxa, Valentinian's widow. Where we might expect blame, we have praise. Affranius, a high-ranking military official, declares her 'righteous' (5.8.111); Sempronius, a senator calls her a 'saint' (5.8.116) and 'our protector' (5.8.117).[51] Killing

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[49] Zachary Lesser, 'Mixed Government and Mixed Marriage in *A King and No King*: Henry Neville Reads Beaumont and Fletcher', *ELH*, 69 (2002), 947-77 (964).

[50] For a reading of the play's Jacobean political context, see Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst; MA.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), pp. 95-99.

[51] John Fletcher, *Valentinian*, in *Four Jacobean Sex Tragedies*, ed. by Martin Wiggins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 233-328.

Maximus, a usurper, is different to killing Valentinian, a legitimate ruler, but Eudoxa's actions complicate the picture considerably, demonstrating that, at least in some circumstances, violent resistance may be appropriate. Again, it is possible to read the final scene of *Valentinian* in royalist terms, but it is notable that Lovelace does not try. Later, in the Restoration, the Earl of Rochester adapted the play, cutting the final act entirely, suggesting unease about the play's politics. That Rochester thought he had to make considerable changes to make it do what he wants it to do is a reminder of the play's unruly power.

That Beaumont and Fletcher's plays were co-opted to a royalist cause does not mean that their plays were royalist, any more than Shakespeare's co-option by campaigners for Brexit means that Shakespeare would have opposed the EU. Shakespeare's ambiguity, which enables diverse groups to adapt him to suit their own purposes, is one of the qualities we most frequently celebrate. Some critics will attribute this to Shakespeare's unique universality which renders him readily available to all circumstances, but there is reason to be sceptical of this conclusion. After all, when Restoration dramatists brought Shakespeare back to prominence, a little over a decade after the publication of the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio, they did not think of him as universal. On the contrary, Shakespeare was a writer in need of rehabilitation. As we have seen, Shakespeare did not fit the 1640s, according at least to several of the most important literary influencers of the decade, and when the theatres reopened, Shakespeare's stock was not especially high. But the absence of newly printed Shakespeare texts in the English Civil War may have led to Shakespeare's later print success. The lull in the printing of Shakespeare playbooks during the war years solved the problem of Shakespearean saturation. Moreover, the sense that Shakespeare did not quite suit the culture of mid-seventeenth-century England may have helped him flourish again in the Restoration, as dramatists set about the process of making Shakespeare fit, to adopt Sandra Clark's

phrase.[52] Shakespeare offered a challenge to a new generation of theatremakers, who adapted him to suit changing aesthetic tastes, enabling a process of adaptation and appropriation which has continued into the present day. Ironically, the canonization of Shakespeare was probably aided by his print absence during the troubled years of civil war.

Beaumont and Fletcher's plays have not had the same sustained success, but they too have offered themselves up for political interpretation at moments of cultural crisis and scholars could benefit from paying them more attention. Moseley's printing of the Beaumont and Fletcher Folio is an early example of the appropriation of Jacobean drama. Rather than telling us anything particular about Beaumont and Fletcher's political affinities it instead suggests the rich ambiguities of their plays. At the same time, the fact that Moseley did not try to use Shakespeare for the royalist cause does not mean that Shakespeare could not have been used, or that he was associated with republicanism. His print absence was arguably a result of his previous print abundance. Shakespeare, Jonson, and Chapman each had a print presence when the Civil War began; but they brought with them a set of associations which may have made it seem that they were harder to co-opt to a royalist cause. Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, many of which had never been printed, were ripe for use. Of course, politics was not the only concern and practical issues also dictated Moseley's strategy: had he had access to 34 unpublished Middleton plays he may have printed them as a folio. But he didn't. He had Beaumont, Fletcher, and the unnamed collaborators of what was to become the 1647 folio. It was their plays, more than anyone else's that came to define the time, just not necessarily in the way that Moseley had hoped.

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[52] Sandra Clark, ed. *Shakespeare Made Fit: Restoration Adaptations of Shakespeare* (London: Everyman, 1997).