The Date of "The Chances"

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Prof. Thomas argues his case with the skill and learning that might be expected. I need add only a few observations.

(1) He still prefixes the indefinite article to 'fit quantity of syllables,' which is misleading. If 'a fit number' had been meant, would not Milton have used that word? And why should he name it at all, if the number was fixed by rule? With the term 'quantity,' in its technical sense, Milton must have been quite familiar, as in Latin grammar, so in English literature; and I think that, till now, no one has doubted that it was in this sense he used the term.

(2) Fully granting that contractions were more common in Elizabethan and Jacobean speech than now, I still find lines which cannot be explained by these, and am unable to imagine how the last two vowels of 'Adria' can form a 'diphthong.' Prof. Thomas admits that some lines in *Paradise Lost* contain more than ten (counted) syllables; why not others? Neither the dicta of prosodians, nor the spellings of printers, are final proof; Milton's own spelling I have shown to be inconclusive. One line, quoted by Prof. Saintsbury, seems to put the matter almost beyond dispute, viz. (*P. L.*, ix, 1082):

And rapture so oft beheld? Those heav'nly shapes.

Is it credible that Milton said 'And rapture soft'?

(3) The reference to music seems unfortunate, since, while the total contents of any bar equal those of its neighbours, the number of notes in any is a varying quantity. No one denies that the normal unit of Milton's verse is dissyllabic.

(4) I did not reject such accentuations as *future*, *exile*, etc., but merely called them doubtful. Even in contemporary verse, the intended accentuation of words is often open to question.

(5) Though it is a side-issue, let me assure Prof. Thomas that 4-syllable feet not infrequently occur in recent trisyllabic verse, as in some of older date; and that quadruple metre has been attempted by many writers, in Australia as well as England, though secondary accent is naturally apt to obtrude itself. The objection to 'a sequence of three unaccented syllables' is not shared by poets.

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THE DATE OF 'THE CHANCES.'

In the *Modern Language Review* of July Mr E. K. Chambers raises the question of the date of Fletcher's comedy *The Chances*, in connexion with a passage in Act iii, Sc. 1, in which the Duke of Lorraine and the Pope are mentioned. These allusions he thinks are appropriate to the year 1609 and not to any later date in Fletcher's life-time. At the same

time he admits that there is no reasonable possibility that Fletcher was acquainted with *La Señora Cornelia*, the novel of Cervantes on which the play is based, before 1613, when it was first published in Spanish; and it may be added that he probably knew it first from the French version of d'Audiguier, published in 1615.

But there is evidence in my opinion that *The Chances* belongs to a much later date than this. The prologue, as Mr Chambers is of course aware, refers to the recent death of the author:

ingenious Fletcher made it, he
Being in himself a perfect Comedy.
And some sit here, I doubt not, dare aver,
Living he made that house a theatre
Which he pleased to frequent; and thus much we
Could not but pay to his loved memory.

Now it seems to me from internal evidence that this prologue belongs to the first production of the play, rather than to a revival. The manner in which the play is spoken of is that which would be natural in introducing a new entertainment, and there is no reference, such as might naturally be expected, to any previous performance. It seems to me likely that both this comedy and *The Elder Brother*, the prologue of which has a somewhat similar reference, were produced on the stage after Fletcher's death, which took place in August, 1625.

As to the allusions, I do not attach much importance to them as indicating a particular date. The joke about the Pope's bulls being baited in England would be appropriate at almost any time, and not least in 1625, when the papal court was violently irritated by the European policy of Richelieu, with which the English government had definitely associated itself, after throwing over the Spanish marriage. The Duke of Lorraine played no part at all in the events of 1609, though Henry IV, whose brother-in-law he was, no doubt counted on his support. The reference to him is probably a vague one.

It may be added finally that the style of *The Chances* is like that of Fletcher's latest comedies, e.g., *The Wild-Goose Chase* and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*; and the fact that neither *The Chances* nor *The Elder Brother* are mentioned in Herbert's office-book will not justify us in deciding that they do not belong to 1625 or 1626 until we are more assured than we are at present of the completeness of that record. The suggestion with regard to *The Elder Brother*, that it was left unfinished by Fletcher, and completed by Massinger in 1637, seems to be contradicted by the internal evidence, which points to cooperation.

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