

“Did ever Spanish lady pace so”: National Identity, Gender Performance, and Metatheatre in John Fletcher and Philip Massinger’s *Love’s Cure*

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EN Abstract. *Love’s Cure*, attributed to John Fletcher and Philip Massinger and dated to 1615 by José A. Pérez Díez, is an early modern play that offers a distinctive portrayal of gender in early modern drama. Critics have often identified the metatheatricality in the play’s depictions of gender. Overlooked, however, is the significance of national identity in this discussion. My paper will argue that, when examined alongside Ben Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass*, the Spanishness of crossdressing roles in *Love’s Cure* accentuates the play’s metatheatricality. Taking into account its rare Spanish inheritance, alongside the unique access women had to the Spanish stage through the genre of the *comedia* compared to the exclusive presence of boy actors on the Jacobean stage, I will demonstrate that Clara and Lucio are not just learning how to behave like a woman and a man respectively, but as Spanish versions of these gender stereotypes.

Keywords. Anglo-Spanish stages, Fletcher and Massinger, early modern metatheatre, gender performance onstage.

ES “Did ever Spanish lady pace so”: Identidad nacional, performance de género y metateatro en *Love’s Cure* de John Fletcher y Philip Massinger

ES Resumen. *Love’s Cure*, atribuida a John Fletcher y Philip Massinger y fechada en 1615 por José A. Pérez Díez, es una obra del teatro que ofrece una representación singular del género en la dramaturgia de la época. La crítica ha señalado con frecuencia la metateatralidad en dichas representaciones, pero se ha pasado por alto la importancia de la identidad nacional. En este ensayo demostraré que, al leerse junto a *The Devil is an Ass* de Ben Jonson, la “españolidad” de los papeles travestidos en *Love’s Cure* intensifica su metateatralidad. Considerando su rara herencia española y el acceso particular que tuvieron las mujeres al escenario hispano mediante la comedia—en contraste con la exclusividad de los actores varones en el teatro jacobea—demostraré que Clara y Lucio no solo aprenden a comportarse como mujer y hombre respectivamente, sino como versiones españolas de esos estereotipos de género.

Palabras clave. Escenarios anglo-españoles, Fletcher y Massinger, metateatro del Siglo de Oro, representación de género en escena.

Sumario. Introduction. Methodology. 1. The Spanish *Comedia*. 2. Gender and National Identity. 3. Conclusion. Works Cited.

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In the manuscript Lansdowne MS 807, featuring the 1611 play *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*, we find the stage direction “Enter Ladye Rich Robinson” (Chess, 2019, p. 251). Richard Robinson, at the time a boy actor for the King’s Men, was known for his feminine roles both inside and outside the theatre, as he is also noted to have had drag-like appearances “off-stage” (Chess, 2019, p. 251) at dinner parties. About half a decade later, during his transition from boy to adult male actor, Robinson was cast as a series of characters whose gender presentations appears to be more complicated: Lucio in John Fletcher and Philip Massinger’s *Love’s Cure* (1615), and Wittipol in Ben Jonson’s *Devil is An Ass* (1616). *Love’s Cure* follows the story of two Spanish siblings who have been raised as members of their opposite genders and spent years apart: Lucio, who is brought up as Posthumia, and Clara, who is brought up as Lucio. As their father, Álvarez is pardoned by King Philip and allowed to return home, the siblings’ disguises are deemed no longer necessary

and different approaches are taken to help them embrace their masculinity and femininity respectively, ranging from violent threats to romantic, heterosexual love. The *Devil is an Ass*, on the other hand, opens in Hell, where Satan sends a minor devil, Pug, to torment Fitzdottrel. Various figures throughout the play try to con Fitzdottrel, and Wittipol becomes one of these, disguising himself as a Spanish woman as a way to get closer to Fitzdottrel's wife.

Critics have often identified the presence of metatheatricity in the depictions of gender stereotypes in both *Love's Cure* and *The Devil Is an Ass*. The English Jacobean theatre as a space to reflect anxieties surrounding "the anti-theatrical debate of the time" and the "staged spectacle of a man portraying a woman within his theatrical fiction", in particular, have been highlighted by Rachel S. Bassan (2023, p. 16) and Regina Buccola (2005, p. 13) respectively within these two plays. Overlooked, however, is the significance of national identity and national stereotypes in these discussions. Set in Seville, *Love's Cure* is steeped in references of seventeenth-century Spain, with allusions to the siege of Ostend, conflict in the Netherlands, and the Infanta, King Philip II's daughter, which all coexist alongside notable depictions of gender within the play. Similarly, Jonson makes it clear that Wittipol is not just crossdressing as a woman in *The Devil is an Ass*, but more uniquely, as a Spanish woman, bringing with it a performance of nationality as well as gender. Using *Love's Cure* as an example, with *The Devil is an Ass* as a conceptual touchstone, I will argue that analysing crossdressing roles in relation to their Spanishness accentuates the metatheatricity of Jacobean plays. Comparing the English context of these plays to the Spanish Golden Age *comedia*, a genre whose "general parameters and essential characteristics" have often been considered "porous" and "not always stable" (Stroud, 2006, p. 302), I will demonstrate that the plays' metatheatricity is deepened by an awareness that female actors were allowed on Spanish stages, compared to England's theatres only featuring boy and adult male actors. The English Jacobean theatre's inheritance of Spanish genres—and in the case of *Love's Cure*, Spanish dramatic sources too—finds its way into the content of the plays themselves, as stereotypes of gender and national identity become inextricably linked to one another.

The Devil Is an Ass is used as a comparative touchstone to *Love's Cure* in this essay, not just because both plays are connected through Richard Robinson's crossdressing roles, but also as they provide a unique range of onstage depictions of gender identity and expression that intersect with Spanish stereotypes. When analysed together, we find fruitful comparison between a play that engages with gender stereotypes through two siblings whose blurred and complex identities are the particular subject of critical debate, and another where crossdressing is used to fulfil comedic and even playful stereotypes of gender and Spanishness.

Methodology

In my analysis of these two plays, I will use José Pérez Díez's most recent dating of *Love's Cure* to 1615 and his authorship attribution to John Fletcher and Philip Massinger (Pérez Díez, 2022, pp. 11-19). In establishing terminology for my discussion of metatheatre, I also acknowledge the work of Thomas Austin O'Connor, who builds upon Lionel Abel's discussion of metatheatre to argue that it is not "only a psychological posture adopted by an individual", but also "a philosophical, theological, and dramatic view of that posture adopted by the dramatist" (O'Connor, 1975, p. 277).

Most importantly, however, I will continue building on the extensive development of queer studies that focus on crossdressing and gender identity in Jacobean theatre by applying a queer lens throughout this essay. In one of the most recent published works about *Love's Cure*, Bassan rejects the use of this presentist methodology due to "the uniformity of approach in these studies", arguing that "a play such as *Love's Cure* could not sanction what Pérez Díez identifies as *transgenderism* and *fluid gender identity*, mainly because such terms were not part of the early modern English 'encyclopedia'" (Bassan, 2023, pp. 16-17). It is important to acknowledge, however, that this argument does not take into account the work done by critics such as Joseph Gamble on Renaissance terminology of queer and trans bodies. In analysing Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), for example, Gamble finds that "while scholars have long recognised that the early modern sex/gender system was in some ways more malleable than the modern dimorphic distinction between male and female", Browne, interestingly, takes this further and "imagines gender malleability [...] through the language of 'trans'" (Gamble, 2019, p. 29). Though modern terminology may not overlap exactly with early modern language of gender, sex, and queerness, it does not mean we have to discard it altogether.

The potential lack of a contemporary vocabulary for these identities should not deter us from working with queer and gender studies entirely. Kit Heyam explores this idea further in *Before We Were Trans*. Even when the criteria we often use to determine whether someone may fit into a queer or trans identity "are met, we get anxious if the person we're dealing with lived before the advent of the terminology that we use to talk about trans identities today", to the extent of even dismissing "their trans possibility altogether" (Heyman, 2022, p. 11). However, it is important that our fears of being anachronistic do not lead us away from nuanced discussions of complex identities altogether, especially those appearing before early 20th century sexology terms were introduced. In identifying potential issues present within the queer lens as Bassan does, the solution is not to distance ourselves from the field, but instead to continue to work within the field to make it less "uniform" in its approach. In the words of Gamble, working within these frameworks can ultimately help us "retrieve from the said all the unsaid possibilities that would help us move toward a language of vibrant trans life. And that is a 'toward' worth turning toward" (Gamble, 2019, p. 39).

Therefore, in this essay I will build on the work of Simone Chess, Colby Gordon, and Will Fisher in their attempts to dispel the belief that "trans people are a recent phenomenon" (Chess et al., 2019, p. 1). In the word of early modern theatre, in particular, they cite the presence of "queer residues of genderfluid boy actors and

trans-affirmative productions of Renaissance plays” (Chess et al., 2019, p. 1). It is important to acknowledge the potential for “proto trans figures” (Chess et al., 2019, p. 8), especially on the Jacobean stage during a time period before our modern perceptions and constructions of gender, not only to identify oversights, but also to work towards a deeper understanding of how gender influences other themes within these texts. As many early modern critics working within gender and queer studies stress, this work is “a beginning and not an endpoint” (Chess et al., 2019, p. 18). Discussions regarding gender in early modern texts can be used to explore deeper connections, in this case, how gender, national identity, and metatheatricality intersect not only within *Love’s Cure* and *The Devil is an Ass*, but also in the broader genre of early modern English drama.

Ultimately, this essay is not looking to suggest whether the characters in these plays, or even the actors who played these roles, are transgender, or to make any claims regarding their gender identities. Instead, I emphasise the importance of being open to the potential, while also seeing how, in the words of Lucy Munro, the context in which Jacobean plays “were originally performed” can “encourage us to extend” criticism “beyond gender” (Munro, 2018, p. 217)—in this case towards a discussion of how gender informs metatheatricality and national identity—to further our understanding of gender stereotypes upon the English Jacobean stage.

1. The Spanish *Comedia*

Much has been written about the influence of Spanish sources on English drama. Noting how the Anglo-Spanish conflict of 1585-1604 meant that “travel between countries was all but impossible” (Loftis, 1984, p. 231), John Loftis situates the cultural exchange of dramatic inspiration between these two countries within a uniquely Jacobean context, once, according to Allardyce Nicoll, the “dark spirt [...] following the defeat of the Armada in 1588 and the exultation consequent” (Nicoll, 1963, p. 96) had dissipated. There are two important factors to note about this cultural exchange. Firstly, it was for the most part, overwhelmingly “one-sided”, as “the English knew something about the *comedia*” while “the Spanish knew nothing about English drama” (Loftis, 1986, p. 231). Secondly, despite the overwhelming presence of Spanish prose as inspiration—the impact of source material such as Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and his *Novelas ejemplares* on English theatrical texts, for example, cannot be downplayed—it was as far back as 1906 that Rudolph Schevill identified only four English Renaissance plays that could be traced back to contemporary Spanish plays. These are texts that Loftis, almost eighty years later, continues to argue are the only four plays with convincing and definitive evidence to be attributed as inspiration for English Renaissance plays. They are as follows: Fletcher and Massinger’s *Love’s Cure*, based on Guillén de Castro’s *La fuerza de la costumbre*; *The Young Admiral* and *The Opportunity*, both by James Shirley and based on Lope de Vega’s *Don Lope de Cardena* and Tirso de Molina’s *El castigo del penséque* respectively; and Massinger’s *The Renegado*, based on Cervantes’s *Los baños de Argel* (Loftis, 1986, pp. 232-233). When analysing the intersection between gender stereotypes and national identity within *Love’s Cure*, it is therefore also important to consider not only the Spanish nature of the source material, but also its uniquely theatrical inheritance. Before even delving into the textual aspects of *Love’s Cure*, knowing it is one of only four English Renaissance plays with traceable roots to Spanish Golden Age plays immediately establishes a metatheatrical connection to national identity. The play’s cultural connection to Spain transcends the Sevillian setting within the plot and can be found within the play’s wider cultural context and inheritance.

The Spanish source material in *Love’s Cure* not only takes on metatheatrical qualities when it comes to the play’s setting, but it also extends to the gender relations present within the history of the early modern stage. One of the most important differences between Spanish and English early modern theatre is the presence (or lack) of female actors onstage. In his 1601 theatrical manifesto the *Arte nuevo de hacer comedias en este tiempo* (the *New Art of Writing Plays*), Lope de Vega calls for the presence of women on the Spanish stage, particularly those who cross dress, as “*suele el disfraz varonil agrandar mucho*” (“the crowd is always pleased by male disguise”) (Carrión, 2016, p. 233). María M. Carrión examines how 1586 legislation banning women from the early modern Spanish stage was overturned the next year by “a group of famous female actors” whose “group action led King Phillip II to make women’s acting in theatres a lawful event”, which ensured the subsequent popularity of “the *mujer varonil* (manly woman)” (Carrión, 2016, p. 235) on Spanish stages in the 1620s. Both Spanish and English theatres in the early seventeenth century seem to reflect an acute interest in crossdressing characters, but the theatrical implications of viewing a crossdresser onstage, particularly a female character crossdressing as a male one, varies drastically depending on the country. Rather than having an audience suspending disbelief, watching a boy actor playing a female character disguised as a man, a Spanish audience’s interest in the crossdressing trope instead becomes about how “the male costume would have revealed more of the female form, thus enticing male audience members from the state with the rare glimpse of a bare ankle or clearly delineated silhouette not visible in female costumes” (Seagraves, 2014, p. 13). The disparity between Spanish and English dramatic contexts mean that gender roles and gender performance take on metatheatrical proportions as nations determine how an audience would have perceived contemporary onstage performances of Fletcher and Massinger’s *Love’s Cure* in contrast to Guillén de Castro’s *La fuerza de la costumbre*.

The experience of an early modern Spanish audience therefore serves as a notable contrast to how Huw Griffiths’s imagines an English Jacobean audience perceiving Lucio step onstage for the first time “in women’s clothes” in *Love’s Cure* (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, p. 77). Contrasting forms of crossdressing emerge depending on whether an audience member was watching an English rendition of *Love’s Cure* or a Spanish performance of *La fuerza de la costumbre*—both ‘English’ Lucio stepping onto the stage for the first time, alongside ‘English’ Clara would have been male actors appearing onstage in women’s clothes, as op-

posed to the 'Spanish' version of Clara in *La fuerza de la costumbre*, Hipólita, who would have been a female actor in men's clothes. However, Griffith argues that "the audience [of *Love's Cure*] would have assumed that the actor playing him [Lucio] was going to be playing the part of a woman for the duration of the play" (Griffiths, 2019, p. 212), particularly if they recognised the actor Robinson from his previous female roles as a boy actor. As an early modern English audience member watching Fletcher and Massinger's play, it would be impossible to tell whether Lucio stepping onto the stage for the first time was a male actor performing in a female role, or the more accurate albeit more complicated alternative, that the male actor onstage was playing a male character who is dressed in women's clothes; a form of confusion which would have been unique to an early modern English stage.

In the words of G. E. Bentley, "nearly everything about the play is in a state of confusion" (as cited in Pérez Díez, 2022, p. 5), and this confusion in particular is an exclusively English one, given that male actors playing women's parts, and male actors playing male parts who then crossdressed in character as a woman could not be distinguished. This inability to deconstruct with certainty the layered gender identities, constructed through stereotypes, associated with characters onstage becomes highly metatheatrical when used to create purposeful confusion in *Love's Cure*, and also when considering how its source material, Guillén de Castro's *La fuerza de la costumbre*, would have been staged differently on a Spanish stage. The confusion an early modern audience would have experienced watching Lucio onstage before uttering a single word is purely an English one, predicated on theatrical norms present in Jacobean drama.

Unlike *Love's Cure*, Jonson's *The Devil Is an Ass* does not have a Spanish dramatic source, but it still engages with the Spanish *comedia* in metatheatrical ways. Wittipol's costume combines both nation and gender as a form of disguise, and its markers of Spanishness are particularly striking given Jonson's earlier descriptions of Spanish fashion in *The Alchemist*. In this play first performed in 1610, when asked if a Spanish Countess is better than an English one, Face says "your *Spanish*/ Stoop is the best garb. Your *Spanish* beard/ Is the best cut. Your *Spanish* ruffs are the best/ Wear" (Jonson, 2009, ll. 4.4.9-12). As in the crossdressing trope, national identity—just like gender—become identifiable through physical, external features, particularly costuming. In *The Devil Is an Ass*, a similar scene ensues where Spanishness is inextricably connected to costuming, but where an additional metatheatrical twist is introduced by having characters within the play make reference to the actor "Robinson" himself, who is also said to be well-versed in the trends of Spain: "he wears *Cioppinos*: as they do so/ In Spain" (Jonson, 2009, 3.4.4, ll. 13-14). These humorous references to the King's Men actor, combined with mentions of Spanish fashion, make the audience even more aware of the layers of costume involved in constructing not only the complexities of Wittipol's character (Robinson playing Wittipol playing a Spanish woman), but also of theatre itself.

So though not explicitly based on a Spanish *comedia* like *Love's Cure*, *The Devil Is an Ass* uses the link between Spanish stereotypes and gender stereotypes in Wittipol's disguise to make a comment on theatricality. In embodying not just a woman, but more specifically a *Spanish* woman, Wittipol's—and by extension Robinson's—crossdressing alludes to genre of Spanish *comedia* itself. This theatrical look towards Spain ultimately culminates with later references to an "infanta of the giants" (Jonson, 2009, ll. 4.2.71) which not only harkens back to earlier jokes about Wittipol being too tall to pass as a woman, but also serves as a reminder of the Jacobean political context, as rumours of "the prospects of a marriage between Prince Charles and the Spanish Infanta" were growing (Evans, 1992, p. 156). The gendered stereotypes of Wittipol cannot be separated from the Spanish political and theatrical overlaps in the Jacobean period.

Just as the confusion of seeing Lucio onstage in *Love's Cure* becomes about both the actor and the character, references to Robinson make the same type of confusion in *The Devil Is an Ass* apparent too. Spanishness, whether present in the dramatic source material and the genre or woven within the fabric of the crossdressing disguise onstage, is inextricably tied to gender stereotypes and the metatheatrical of Jacobean drama. Critics have often commented on the *comedia* being a metatheatrical genre, with Austin O'Connor going so far as to state that "for the Spanish dramatist the world is indeed a stage—but a real stage" (O'Connor, 1975, p. 279). Fletcher, Massinger, and Jonson show us how these themes that are intrinsic to the *comedia* can be adapted for an English Jacobean stage through the dramatisation of gender stereotypes. The combination of costumes, disguise, and confusion all take on a playful quality, a form of playfulness that alludes strongly to the idea of 'playing' a theatrical role. The act of acting itself, of performing in a play, becomes as porous as the onstage depictions of gender, and by extension, of nationality too, as English actors such as Robinson take on Spanish roles as well as feminine ones.

2. Gender and National Identity

Just a few years before the performances of *Love's Cure* and *The Devil Is an Ass*, the publication of the *King James' Bible* in 1611 stated that a "woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God" (*The Holy Bible*, King James Version, Deuteronomy 22:5). This Bible verse brings up two points of interest in relation to *Love's Cure*. Firstly, it highlights an implication that there is an identical sense of scorn towards male and female crossdressers. However, when looking at the siblings as they are forced into new identities through enforced habits—both in terms of clothing and customs—it becomes clear that "the play's attitude towards female crossdressing is very different from its attitude towards male crossdressing" (Berek, 2004, p. 362). While Clara and Lucio's father Álvarez threatens violence towards both siblings, it is Lucio who bears the brunt of this, as his father threatens to "hang him" when he realises that there seems to be "no cure" for Lucio (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 3.4.103, 102). When it comes to Clara on the other hand, though the stage

directions describing her mirror her brother's as she is said to appear onstage "in men's clothes" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 1.3). Álvarez urges her to forget her previous masculine persona in less violent terms: "For Lucio is the name thou must forget with Lucio's bold behaviour" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 1.3.18-19). Paternal concern stems from an insistence that Clara must return to her feminine self, "Endeavour rather to be what you are" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 1.3.38-39), and that her current behaviour is something that she can unlearn. While Álvarez's disdain at his crossdressing children may appear to be equally channelled towards each sibling, his reaction suggests some subtle disparities, with the majority of the more sinister vitriol targeted towards Lucio.

Interestingly, there also seems to be a lack of sibling solidarity in their experiences. Both show similar discomfort in their new roles (Lucio complains that his "masculine attire is most uneasy" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.2.19) while Clara believes that "these clothes will never fadge with me" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.2.69)) and yet, Clara later also threatens Lucio with violence, telling him that he will "scarce be a man" and that she is willing to "cut thy head off!" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.2.142, 117) if he does not exert the manly behaviours that are expected of him. These behaviours are of course the same ones that she herself is used to enacting, as demonstrated by her willingness to draw her sword during confrontations, but they are never as demonised so thoroughly as when her brother is unable to follow them. Though both siblings struggle to embrace the new costumes and customs that come with their new imposed gender identities, Lucio, perceived by fellow characters as an overly-feminised man, sustains a level of verbal abuse that his sibling, as a masculine woman akin to the *mujer varonil*, does not experience. Clara is given the ability to mould herself to the gender stereotypes associated with the archetype associated with the Spanish *comedia* which her brother is not afforded, highlighting the different ways the sibling's femininity or masculinity is perceived.

This is further emphasised by the alternative name given to the play, *The Martial Maid*, suggesting that a level of tolerance, perhaps even understanding or acceptance, is given to Clara and her masculine identity, which Lucio does not experience. Gender stereotypes in Jacobean drama, particularly its variations as presented in *Love's Cure*, therefore continue to enforce the patriarchal norms even within depictions of crossdressing. This disparity is rendered all the more ironic when remembering that, from a metatheatrical perspective, both actors playing Clara and Lucio would have been played by male actors. Álvarez's cry, asking "who soonest can turn this man woman, or this woman man" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 1.3.183-184) seems to lose all meaning entirely, harking back to Bentley's "confusion". Though the character in the play are perceived to embody different gender identities, from a theatrical perspective there would be little to no difference given the gender of the actors performing the play on a Jacobean stage.

The second point of interest in examining 'Deuteronomy 22:5' alongside *Love's Cure* is that we might expect Christian morality to be at the forefront of characters disapproving of Lucio and Clara's inability to embrace the gendered stereotypes expected of them. Instead, however, the fairly pagan figure of Nature is introduced and alluded to throughout the play. It is Nature who is deemed to have been led astray: she is "wronged" and needs help "to recover" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 1.3.179); "custom" has "turned nature topsy-turvy" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.2.99); she has undergone "monstrous metamorphoses" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 5.3.268). These allusions to Nature are similar to depictions found in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, perhaps the most well-known early modern English play to feature crossdressing. When Viola is revealed to have been disguised as Cesario, Sebastian states the following to Olivia:

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid.
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceived:
You are betrothed both to a maid and man (Shakespeare, 2008, ll. 5.1.271-275).

Just as in *Love's Cure*, *Twelfth Night* depicts crossdressing as an act of Nature's own confusion. However, not as prevalent in Shakespeare's play, is the overlap between gender identity and national identity. While Viola-Cesario's crossdressing takes place in the fictional Illyria, nationality, firmly rooted in Spanishness, prevails in *Love's Cure* as the siblings are forced to learn new gendered behaviours. Bobadilla is determined that under his training, Lucio "shall to the wars" and "use his *Spanish* pike" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 1.2.41-2, my emphasis) and as he grows further exasperated watching Clara walk, he questions "did ever *Spanish* lady pace so?" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.2.106, my emphasis). Even Clara's own sense of honour is intertwined with national identity when she refers to the ideal of the "true-born Spaniard" (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.3.136) when questioning the masculinity of the men around her ("are you men, rather?", (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.3.114)). It may be easy to dismiss or overlook these seemingly small references to Spain and Spanishness within the text, but doing so risks falling into a broader literary pattern of erasing the Spanish influences in early modern English texts. Citing rivalries as well as political and religious tensions between early modern Spain and England as the two main reasons, Barbara Fuchs argues that "the challenge lies in recognising that the often vociferous rhetorical denunciation of Spain in the period and beyond did not impede literary traffic" (Fuchs, 2013, p. 5). While perhaps not reflecting an accurate version of Spanish pikes, ladies, and honour, these references to the nation within the play help reinforce a fascination with Spain, as well as sense of how Spanish masculinity and femininity operate, within the early modern English literary imagination.

When it comes to criticising the siblings and their initially failed attempts to embrace new gendered customs and stereotypes, rather than using explicit religious teachings, Massinger has his characters use an

entirely different moral code: the honour code of the seventeenth-century Spanish aristocracy. In her work on honour in Spanish *comedias* as a “literary representation of reality” (McKendrick, 1984, p. 313), Melveena McKendrick states that “to say that the plays reflect not historical truth but poetic truth – not how men acted but how they would have liked to act – is to establish an important distinction” (McKendrick, 1984 p. 316). The irony here, is that, in an English setting, these attempts to impose Spanish gender stereotypes on the siblings are viewed by a Jacobean audience through the knowledge that, despite Clara and Lucio’s differences, they are both ultimately played by male actors.

In comparing Fletcher and Massinger’s depictions of gender subversion and crossdressing in *Love’s Cure* to Jonson’s in *The Devil is an Ass*, it is imperative to highlight their differences as well as their similarities, especially within the context of their Spanishness. *Love’s Cure* takes a nuanced and oftentimes purposefully confusing approach to the siblings’ gender identity, and questions about whether Clara and Lucio are cisgender, transgender, or perhaps closer to a fluid or non-binary identity have often been disputed by critics. Jonson’s Wittipol, on the other hand, engages with dramatisations of gender stereotypes differently, focusing more on gender expression rather than identity, as his disguise takes on comic features closer to drag. Both plays demonstrate external costuming as forms of performing gender, yet while the true gender identity of the siblings remains difficult to pinpoint, the character Wittipol remains a man under his disguise. The comedic nature of his role is heightened by the reminder that his femininity is playful, and comes in the form of a disguise.

Despite these differences, *The Devil Is an Ass* continues to exemplify an important intersection between national identity and gender stereotypes. Jonson is no stranger to having his characters play with nationality and gender in his earlier writing; city comedy *The Alchemist* (1610) features the figure of Surly pretending to be a wealthy Spaniard, while his plays *Cynthia’s Revels* (1600), *Epicoene* (1609) *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), and *The New Inn* (1629), and all feature crossdressing. But what makes *The Devil Is an Ass* unique is that it blends the two by having Wittipol dress up, not only as a woman, but as a Spanish one. References to custom and fashion that prevails throughout *Love’s Cure* are also explicitly present in *The Devil Is an Ass*, especially in Act IV once Wittipol enters “dressed as a woman” (Johnson, 2009, ll. 4.3). Once again, gender and national stereotypes are conflated, but in these scenes, their satirical nature becomes apparent. Wittipol’s insistence that “it is in the manner of Spain, to embrace only, never to kiss” (Jonson, 2009, ll. 4.3.5–6) alongside the bombastic proclamations of recipes “that with a piece of scarlet, makes a Lady of sixty look at sixteen” (Jonson, 2009, ll. 4.4.38–9) are met with exclamations about the strange and fantastical “manner of Spain!” (Jonson, 2009, ll. 4.4.64). These depictions of Spanishness are clearly exaggerated and stereotypical in a way that differs from *Love’s Cure*, as place-specific references to “Hyde Park”, “Blackfriars”, and “Pimlico” (Jonson, 2009, ll. 1.4.216, 4.4.164) place *The Devil Is an Ass* in a London setting, firmly away from “the Court of Spain” (Jonson, 2009, ll. 4.4.79). In its combining of national and gender stereotypes, Wittipol’s costume culminates in exactly that, an external disguise, whereas the Seville setting of *Love’s Cure* constructs a community where to defy the seventeenth century codes of Spanish honour and gender holds a different significance. Knowing Wittipol is an English and male character reminds the audience that the actor playing this part too is an English and male actor. The awareness of Robinson as Wittipol as the Spanish lady makes it ultimately metatheatrically impossible to separate the links between gender and national stereotypes throughout the play.

3. Conclusion

As this exploration demonstrates, Fletcher and Massinger’s *Love’s Cure* and Ben Jonson’s *The Devil Is an Ass* are examples of how Jacobean theatre combines stereotypes of national identity and gender together to heighten the metatheatricity of these plays. When compared to the Spanish genre of the *comedia*, and in contrast to early modern Spanish stages featuring women actors, the parameters of Jacobean theatre instead make its audience constantly aware that Spanish roles are almost always being played by English actors, and female roles are being played by male actors. The humorous elements of Wittipol’s performance are heightened by the knowledge that his feminine disguise is just that, a theatrical costume, and the opposing gender roles Clara and Lucio are expected to embody become all the more ironic with the reminder that both characters would have been played by male actors. Analysing both plays within the framework of early modern queer and gender studies allows us to see that the Spanishness in these plays is not arbitrary—not only because of their Spanish influences but also because of the gendering possibilities that English imaginings of Spain at this time facilitate.

But there is more work to be done. In the wake of C. Riley Snorton’s recent statement that “the condensation of transness into the category of transgender is a racialised narrative” (Snorton, 2017, p. 8), there is an unavoidable link between depictions of gender, national identity, and racialised language in both these plays that has often been overlooked by critics. Racialised Spanish identities are nothing new for this time period—the black Spanish chess pieces of Thomas Middleton’s *A Game at Chesse* are a prime example of this—but images of blackness are also associated with gender in *Love’s Cure* when Bobadilla compares his task to help the siblings’ shift in gender to “wash[ing] an Ethiop” (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 2.2.151), and in *The Devil Is an Ass* with Manly’s references to “Old Afric, and the new America” (Jonson, 2009, ll. 1.5.8). There is also a case to be made for examining how class intersects with national identity and gender stereotypes in the plays (the role of Lazarillo, in particular, is an often underrepresented subject in writing on *Love’s Cure*, especially given that an early modern English audience would have been introduced to the famous picaresque protagonist of the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* in 1586 with David Rowland’s translation from Spanish). Examining the depictions of gender withing Fletcher and Massinger’s, and Jonson’s work opens up the pos-

sibility of further analysis, allowing us to explore the intersection between gender and other themes—in this case, national identity and metatheatre, but which could be expanded to race, class, transnationalism, and further areas of discussion.

Pairing *Love's Cure* and *The Devil Is an Ass* not only harkens back to the stage direction reminding “Layde Rich Robinson” to enter stage, but it also demonstrates how gender stereotypes can be effectively deployed in the context of metatheatre and national identity. Ultimately, these two plays serve as a reminder that critics must go against what Vitelli advocates in the closing lines of *Love's Cure*, and instead, continue to seek out more examples in Jacobean drama where nature experiences other “long monstrous metamorphoses” and instances where “strange affairs” end up having “worse success” (Fletcher and Massinger, 2022, ll. 5.3.268, 269).

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