“NATURE HATH GIVEN YOU A SHEATH ONLY”': SWORDPLAY AND GENDER
IN BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER’S ❤️LOVE’S CURE, OR THE MARTIAL MAID❤️

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This thesis is dedicated with love to Jody Matthews and Nick Clark.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines female engagement with honor codes in early modern English literature. Through the circa 1605 Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher play Love’s Cure, or the Martial Maid I examine the textual understanding of honor, gender, and social power or “custom” through scenes involving swordplay. Lucio and Clara, a brother and sister, have been raised in the garb and encouraged to behave as the gender opposite to their sex to protect them from their family’s enemies. While one of the main components of the play is the return of these siblings to their “proper” gendered social roles, the play is a didactic tool that the playwrights use to criticize early modern honor codes that privilege personal integrity and violence over Christian charity or law.

Through contemporary textual sources, including fencing manuals, pamphlet literature, and additional plays, this thesis examines Love’s Cure as a way to understand early modern English attitudes about honor. I examine the concept of gender through three scenes of swordplay in three separate chapters. In chapter one I study the reputation of the female protagonist and her engagement with swordplay. Chapter one also examines gender issues and how they are portrayed through crossdressing. In chapter two I investigate the concepts of honor and justice in the text by how they are portrayed in a
street brawl. In chapter three I examine the superior honor code portrayed by the women in the play. This honor code is used as didactic tool in a judicial duel scene to teach the men a superior and less bloody code of honor and conduct. While ostensibly the “natural” outcome of the play is a subservient role for women, the reality is much more subversive: the women’s code of honor is clearly superior to that of the male characters.
# Table of Contents

Introduction........................................................................................................................................1

Chapter One  
Acting Like a “Man”: the Intersection of Gender and Swordplay.................................17

Chapter Two  
A (Wo)Man of Honor: Clara Performs Justice..........................................................34

Chapter Three  
Female Power as Resolution and Rehabilitation..................................................49

Bibliography.................................................................................................................................66
Introduction

“Life’s but a word, a shadow, a melting dream,
Compar’d to essential, and eternal honor.”
(Viii.124-125)

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s *Love’s Cure, or the Martial Maid* is about the problematic nature of honor, gender, and social power or “custom.” Lucio and Clara, a brother and sister, have been raised in the garb and encouraged to behave as the gender opposite to their sex, to protect them from their family’s enemies. While one of the main components of the play is the return of these siblings to their “proper” gendered social roles, the play is a didactic tool that the playwrights use to criticize the early modern honor codes that privilege personal integrity and violence over Christian charity or law. Through performing what the play portrays as a traditionally masculine honor code, the protagonist and swordswoman Clara is able to find love, act upon her own brand of honor, and resolve the violence within the community of the play’s characters. Through performing male honor on the surface through the “masculine” arts of fencing, dueling and swordplay, Clara manifests a deeper, and less violent, honor code than that of the men in the play. While ostensibly the “natural” outcome is a subservient role for women, the reality is much more subversive: the women’s code of honor is clearly superior to that of the male characters.

Modern readers understand sex as biological difference and gender, as Judith Butler would argue, as the self-sustaining performance of social roles.¹ However, gender

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¹ “gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be.” Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 34.
and sex were one and the same in the understanding of Renaissance English writers. Any deviation from accepted gender roles would be seen as social aberration, but there is a long tradition of women warriors in early modern literature who take up male behaviors for the sake of social and religious responsibility.

Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* (1596) presents two central characters who are warrior women. Britomart follows from a tradition based on Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, which was first translated into English in 1591; and Belphoebe, a Diana-like figure, is a huntress who wears armor. Spenser’s women warriors both celebrate Queen Elizabeth I, but tradition goes far beyond poetry. *Love’s Cure* (written circa 1605) is one of a handful of known English plays in a ten-year span that feature warrior women or women who engage with swordplay, including *The Fair Maid of the West, Part 1* (written circa 1603-4), *The Maid’s Tragedy* (circa 1611), *The Roaring Girl* (1611), and *Bonduca* (1613). Female engagement with power, especially “masculine” forms of power like swordplay, is clearly on the minds of playwrights.

**Background on the Text**

*Love’s Cure, or the Marital Maid* is a collaborative work of Beaumont and Fletcher. As their partnership is known to have been mostly in the early 17th century, the play must have been composed prior to Beaumont’s retirement in 1613.² Cyrus Hoy, cited by Fredson Bowers, argues that the play must have been written before 1606, though the

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play was entered in the Stationer’s Register between the 4th and the 15th of September 1646 and was first printed in the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher folio. This text is the only one of authority.

While the play was first composed as a collaboration between Beaumont and Fletcher, there is substantial revision by Philip Massinger. The play was influenced by the Spanish play La fuerza de la costumbre, by Guillén de Castro y Bellris, which was published in 1625 but was most likely available in manuscript form before publication. The play’s title translates to “The Force of Habit” or “The Force of Custom.” Both the Spanish play and the English one are concerned with the effect of social forces on the development of what modern scholars describe as gender.

The historical context of the play is a time of political upheaval. In England, Elizabeth I died, and James I ascended the throne in 1603. England had ongoing connections with Spain, where Love’s Cure is set. The play’s time is in the wake of the Eighty Years War, in which a Dutch uprising sought to overthrow Philip II of Spain, the lord of the Habsburg Netherlands. There is historic context for Clara’s bravery: a contemporary observer “…noticed the presence of marital maids on both warring sides during the siege of Ostend.” The Siege of Ostend, during the Eighty Years War, took place from 1601 to 1604, and was news in England as well as Spain. King Philip, who is named in Love’s Cure as a vital catalyst for the action, first pardons Alvarez, Clara and

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3 Bowers, 5.
4 Bowers, 3.
5 Bowers, 4.
6 Anne Duncan, “It Takes a Woman to Play a Real Man: Clara as Hero(ine) of Beaumont and Fletcher’s Love’s Cure” in English Literary Renaissance 30:3 (2000), 398.
7 Bowers, 6.
Lucio’s father, and then permits the judicial duel, which leads to the cessation of the violence of the play. The same King Philip was at one time married to Mary Tudor during her reign of England from 1553 to 1558. English playgoers would have recognized the king of Love’s Cure as the former monarch of England, and Spanish culture from the time of Henry VIII’s marriage to Catherine of Aragon was certainly influential.

The Hic Mulier/Haec Vir Controversy

England of 1620 was undergoing a debate in print. The conservative pamphlet Hic Mulier: or the Man-Woman was published, bewailing the fashion for women to adopt male clothes, and with them, male behavior. The writer argues against:

lascivious civill embracement of a French doublet, being all unbutton’d to entice, all of one shape to hide deformitie, and extreme short wasted to give a most easie way to every luxurious action…for Needles, Swords; for Prayer bookes, bawdy Jigs…

Men’s clothing is equated with promiscuity, or male sexual agency. The author also fears that women are adopting male tools, like swords, instead of the domestic tools like needles, and dancing instead of attending church. Spanish culture is referenced in this pamphlet as well:

doe not become the idle sisters of foolish Don Quixote, to beleeeve every vaine Fable which you reade, or to think you may bee attired like Bradamant, who was often taken for Ricardetto her brother; that you may fight like Marfiza, and winne husbands with conquest, or ride astrythe like Claridiana, and make Gyants fall at your stirrops, (the Morals will give you better meanings) which if you shunne, and take the grosse imitations, the first will deprive you of all good societie; the second, of noble affections; and the third, of all beloved modestie: you shall lose

all the charmes of womens naturall perfections, have no presence to winne respect, no beauty to inchaunt means hearts, nor no bashfulnesse to excuse the vildest imputations.\(^9\)

Don Quixote, a Spanish man who believes himself to be a medieval-style knight, is the subject of the popular book *The Ingenious Hidalgo Don Quixote of La Mancha*, the first English translation of which was published in 1603. The writer warns women not to imagine themselves with that kind of power, lest they be confused for men. He also references a “Claridiana,” also called Diana, who is one of the heroines of the 1599 Spanish play *Clara Diana a lo divino*. The play’s title translates to “Diana in the religious way” and includes a warrior woman, Felisimena.\(^10\) Diana is criticized for her changeable and sometimes improper behavior—the author of *Hic Mulier* draws the comparison of riding astride. The author argues that without female arts and virtues, women will lose the respect of men and their beauty will be good only for sexual congress. The author takes the obvious strength and popularity of the images of female warriors and uses them as a means to convince women that male behavior is dangerous. If the author attacks these symbols of women engaging with arms, certainly they were popular enough to be a threat, as were the fashionable male/female composite clothing the author attacks. Women warriors were clearly understood as part of the early modern English social fabric.

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\(^9\) *Hic Mulier*, excerpted by O’Malley, 269-270.

While the author of *Hic Mulier* attacks women for wearing male fashions and adopting male behavior, the pamphlet writer was assaulted in print just a week later. *Haec-Vir*, the title of which translates to “The Womanish Man,” was written in response to *Hic Mulier*. The author of *Haec-Vir* essentially argues that men have adopted women’s clothing—the court of James I was notorious for effeminacy—and that the women must claim the male clothing and behavior that the men have discarded. The pamphlet is a dialogue between two characters—Hic Mulier, the man/woman and Haec Vir, the womanish man. Hic Mulier takes Haec Vir to task for what she thinks is his excess attention to appearance:

why doe you curle, frizell and powder your hayres, bestowing more houres and time in deviding Locke from locke, and hayre from hayre…why doe you rob us of our Ruffes, of our Earerings, Carkanets…our Fannes and Feathers, our Busks and French bodies…Fie, you have gone a world further, and even ravisht from us our speech, our actions, sports and recreations.  

Not only are the men spending too much time at their *toilette*, they have taken women’s fashions the way the author of *Hic Mulier* accuses women. The author of *Haec-Vir* is particularly concerned that men have appropriated women’s speech and behavior, and their lack of attention to martial skills is the result:

you have demolish’d the noble schooles of Hors.manship…hung your Armes to rust, glued those swords in their scabberds that would shake all Christendome with the brandish, and entertained into your mindes such softnes, dulnesse and effeminate niceness…

There is a veiled allusion to sexual behavior in this passage. The men have ceased to seek the school of “Hors.manship.” Note punctuation separation between “Hors” and

11 *Haec-Vir*, excerpted by O’Malley, 295.
12 *Haec-Vir*, excerpted by O’Malley, 296.
“manship.” It is as if the author is complaining that there is no need for whores (which
sounds like “Hors”) because the men are no longer red-blooded and prefer the company
of other men. The same sort of impotence is reflected in the way the men no longer draw
their swords—their phallic symbols have been rendered unnecessary by the fashion for
effeminacy.

Nature is juxtaposed against custom, or social rules, in *Haec-Vir*. One of the most
critically examined sections explains the author’s feelings about social structure:

*Custome* is an Idiot; and whosoever dependeth wholly upon him, without the
discourse of Reason, will take from him his pyde coat, and become a slave indeed
to contempt and censure.\(^{13}\)

The author of the pamphlet argues against relying excessively on convention and
tradition. The author argues for “reason” above all else, but he also argues that with it
comes freedom for women:

you condemne me of *Unnaturalnesse*, in forsaking my creation, and contemning
custome. How doe I forsake my creation, that doe all the rights and offices due to
my Creation? I was created free, born free, and live free: what lets me then so to
spinne out my time, that I may dye free?\(^{14}\)

The author argues that women do have freedom. Created by God, women are individuals
with liberties. That is not to say that women have as much power as men, but the
pamphlet does argue that women are free. There is, however, the pun on “spinning” time
and “dyeing” free, which are both allusions to the domestic images of spinning and dying
wool. One of early modern England’s major exports was wool, and cloth manufacture

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\(^{13}\) *Haec-Vir*, excerpted by O’Malley, 291.

\(^{14}\) *Haec-Vir*, excerpted by O’Malley, 290.
was an important part of the financial landscape, as well as often being the domain of women.

Just a matter of weeks before *Hic Mulier* was published, King James gave officials of the Church of England a directive, through the bishop of London John King. Churchmen were to admonish women against wearing the fashionable hybrid of male/female clothing, and men were told to put women in their place. John Chamberlain wrote to Sir Dudley Carleton that the clergymen were told to

> inweigh vehemently and bitterly in theyre sermons against the insolencie of our women, and theyre wearing of brode brimd hats, pointed dublets, theyre haire cut short or shorne, and some of them stillettaes or poniards…if pulpit admonitions will not reforme them he wold proceed by another course; the truth is the world is very far out of order, but whether this will mend it God knows.\(^{15}\)

Political leaders of the time were concerned with hierarchy and order, which were threatened by women’s appropriation of male garments. The Biblical basis for condemning women wearing men’s clothing is Deuteronomy 22:5: “The 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 an abomination unto the LORD thy God.” The feminine man of *Haec-Vir* says

> It is dispntable [disputable] amongst our Divines, whether upon any occasion a woman may put on mans attyre, or no: all conclude it unfit; and the most indifferent will allow it, but onely to escape persecution. Now you will not onely put it on, but weare it continually; and not weare it; but take pride in it, not for persecution, but wanton pleasure; not to escape danger, but to runne into damnation; not to helpe others, but to confound the whole sexe by the evilnesse of so lewd an example.\(^{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) O’Malley, 252.

\(^{16}\) O’Malley, 293.
Haec Vir goes on to accuse him of stealing women’s fashions, which is equally a sin. Some “divines” and scholars, including John Selden, believed the Biblical dictate was in response to pre-Christian rites in which men dressed as women and vice versa, not merely to keep women from wearing male clothes.\footnote{Jason P. Rosenblatt. Renais
essance England’s Chief Rabbi: John Selden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 282.} The agency women take up with male clothing, and especially the “stillattaes” or “poniards”—weapons—John Chamberlin mentions, is an anxiety to early modern men. Either way, Haec Vir does say that women may wear male clothing to escape persecution, which is exactly what Clara does in Love’s Cure.

Although Love’s Cure was likely first written around 1605-1606, the Hic Mulier/Haec-Vir controversy of 1620 may inform the language of the play. The word “custom” only appears in those sections written or revised by Massinger before the publication of Love’s Cure in the Beaumont and Fletcher folio of 1647. Bowers suggests that Massinger revised Love’s Cure after 1625—the controversy may well have been fresh in his mind.\footnote{Bowers, 7.} The first two instances of the word “custom” are at the beginning of the play, where Alvarez and Eugenia, Clara and Lucio’s parents, begin their work retraining them into their proper roles:

\textit{Alter’d by custom, more then woman, he}  
\textit{Transform’d by his soft life, is less then man.}  
\textit{(I.iii.172-173)}
Clara’s masculine behavior makes her more than a woman, where Lucio’s feminine characteristics diminish him. Alvarez continues by outlining their new duty as parents: to fix Lucio and Clara.

Now our mutual care must be
Imply’d to help wrong’d nature, to recover
Her right in either of them, lost by custom
(I.iii.178-180)

Here, nature is juxtaposed with custom—Alvarez does believe that “custome is an idiot.”

However, their efforts are in many ways wasted. In the end of the play, Vitelli says:

Behold the power of love: lo, nature lost
By custom irrecoverably
(V.iii.257-258)

Even at the resolution of the plot, custom is still causing problems. Social power is still the most important force, as custom has changed Clara “irrecoverably.”

Dueling in Early Modern England
Swordplay was a bloody and often deadly pastime. In France, from 1590 to 1610, near the time Love’s Cure was composed,

one-third of the nobility—around 4,000 men—were killed in private combats…The situation in England, especially after the succession of James I in 1603, was probably comparable.19

Many of the most educated, trained, and wealthy men were cutting themselves down in private disputes. Instead of seeking legal recourse, men were taking to the field or street, swords drawn, to prove the better man. Monarchs and their laws were left out of this

system. Elizabeth I knew this was a problem for her rule and thus published “Articles for
the Due Execution of the Statutes of Apparell, 6 May 1564”:

And where as an [usage] is crept in, contrary to former orders, of wearing of long
Swords, and Rapiers, sharpened in such [sort], as may appear the [usage] of them
can not tend to defense, which ought to be the very meaning of wearing of
weapons, in times of peace: but to murder, and evidence death, when the same
shall be occupied.

Dueling was such a problem in Elizabeth’s reign that she apparently had to make more
than one law about it; men continued to duel “contrary to former orders,” making this
proclamation necessary. The statute notes that weapons are for defense, not for the kind
of aggression that constitutes murder. The proclamation goes on to specify acceptable
lengths and proscribes other rules for the manufacture of weaponry. Most likely there
was some kind of financial incentive for this law, or a guild or artificer was seeking
protection from armorers or cutlers (craftsmen who assembled swords from finished
component parts) who were making extra long rapiers. Perhaps this law was even meant
to protect English fencing masters unhappy with the new fashion for rapier fencing.

It is no surprise that Hamlet asks, “these foils have all a length?” (V.ii.264-265).
A longer sword could often mean death to the opponent with a shorter blade. The
punishment for ignoring the queen’s law in this case was a fine, imprisonment, and the
prohibition of returning to trade. This is a severe punishment—young men, and
sometimes women, were apprenticed to guild members at a fairly young age. If a skilled
tradesman was not allowed to continuing making his goods, he would have to find
another trade—which would be nearly impossible. The law truly meant to reduce the
deaths by dueling and street brawling by controlling the lengths of weapons.
Love’s Cure uses several types of swordplay, and it is important to understand how they differ. A judicial duel is a fight sanctioned by law or monarch that accepts the outcome as the legal dictate. This kind of fight is based on medieval judicial jousts and fights where champions are elected, and God supposedly selects the outcome. A duel is private combat between two combatants with prescribed rules and distinct protocols. A street brawl is any fight where swords are drawn without the rules of dueling. There are of course many shades of these kinds of fights, and Turner and Soper note a disturbing trend in early modern dueling:

With all these swords at hand, personal disagreements frequently escalated into fights and duels, turning into full-blown affairs of honor that would ordinarily have ended in hurt feelings or a few bruises. In addition to the psychological factors, dueling also fed on a number of male-dominated historical and social traditions, many derived from the Continent. The duel alla macchia—held at an out-of-the-way spot with no rules and no judges—was to become an annoying and distinct threat to social order and harmony by the seventeenth century.\(^{20}\)

The widespread popularity of swordplay ended up causing a lot of death. The authors explain that by turning judicial duels into private combat, swordsmen, and perhaps swordswomen, were circumventing law and disturbing the social order.

Vincentio Saviolo, one of the most important fencing masters of Renaissance England, wrote *His Practice* in 1595. The work is a treatise on rapier techniques, which was a contentious subject in early modern England. Rapier fence filtered into England through Italian, French and Spanish fencing masters and their written works, and were progressively more popular amongst duelists of the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) century. Against the English short sword, the longer-bladed rapier was extraordinarily deadly. Continental

\(^{20}\) Turner and Soper, xxii.
techniques were a touchy issue to English masters of fence, who continued to teach the short sword and techniques more suited to the battlefield than private combat. The landscape of private violence was shifting in the late 1580s and 1590s, and Saviolo, from the tone of his fencing manual, seems to feel almost guilty about the carnage going on because of the new techniques. He bemoans how quick men are to quarrel with swords:

Now malice and hatred overrunneth all, strife and rancor are the bellows of quarrels, and men upon every light cause enter into more actions of defiance, than for any just occasion offered in respect of justice and honor. ²¹

As the leading rapier master, Saviolo wrote his treatise to teach and refine rapier technique and to educate those interested in swordplay about the correct uses of force.

While *His Practice* is partly a manual on technique, partly a treatise on the proper uses of force and honor, it also contains a surprising section about women. The second book of the section “honorable Quarrels,” titled “The nobility of Women,” praises warrior women and is ultimately a compliment to Queen Elizabeth I, as were many works of literature of the period. However, he seems to be genuinely interested in women’s role in society and their power and engagement with honor. He writes:

I think they [women] deserve fellowship and communing in honor with men, considering nature hath bestowed on them as well as on men, means to attain unto learning, wisdom, and all other virtues active and contemplative: which is made manifest by the example of many that have confirmed the opinion of their valor and excellency, by their rare virtue, and almost incredible prowess. ²²

Saviolo often brings God and Christianity into his argument, but here he writes of “nature” as he explains the “virtues” of women. “Nature” and “Custome,” though very

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different ideas, often go hand in hand, and Saviolo introduces a question—is it the natural order of things that women do not typically engage with the male honor codes because those codes are defined by violence? He does ascribe to women “virtues active,” which could certainly pertain to fencing. Clara, the “Martial Maid,” engagements male honor codes, through swordplay, as a means for justice. Saviolo goes on to describe centuries of warrior women, from Deborah and Judith to Elizabeth I, whom he describes as an empire builder and a warrior queen. In a treatise about honor codes, his surprising argument is that women too are honorable by male standards.

**Heroism and Honor: Framing the Critical Argument**

Swordplay is inextricably connected to the conception and perception of honor in *Love’s Cure*. Clara, a woman, functions as the apex of honor that all others are measured against. Most critics, such as Jennifer Low and Peter Berek, argue that honor in *Love’s Cure* is understood only as a masculine ideal. Low explains that female characters use swords as a didactic tool:

> Female characters engage in the duel (if they do so at all) with much less braggadocio than male characters, often agreeing to keep their combat unknown. Their purpose is not to punish their opponent but to change his view of what is due to women.\(^\text{23}\)

Low’s argument is complicated by Clara in *Love’s Cure*, who battles publicly and fights to punish various men in the play, but also manifests justice both dressed and acting like

a woman and dressed and acting as a man. This forms one of the central arguments for this essay—women do not perform masculinity for the sake of merely correcting social attitudes about women; rather, they represent a greater ideal of fairness and justice. This essay argues further that another understanding of honor and heroism is necessary to understand the play. Mary Beth Rose initially argues that heroic identity should be understood as a male/female binary, and that male identity is tied to honor:

the accomplishment of heroic identity would seem to consist either of killing and dominating, thus courageously risking death and defeat (male); or suffering and submitting, thus patiently enduring pain and death (female, male, or both). To kill or die well: these are the distilled elements of heroism.24

“To kill or to die well” is also the point of honor culture. Dueling rules were in place for a sense of fairness, and to find a conclusion where the person with superior will and skill is the victor. A fair fight is an honorable one, and these two concepts cannot be separated. If this masculine “heroic identity” is a form of honor culture, the female flip side of this binary should also be imbued with honor. Rose continues her argument by positing a third type of heroism:

There remains one alternative to these alarming options: survival. Heroic survival can range from witty triumph over obstacles to resigned acceptance of limitations and can appear as a manifestation of both the heroics of action and the heroics of endurance. Thus the surviving hero can occupy both male and female subject positions…[I]n her speeches Elizabeth I makes survival a key component of her heroic identity and associates it predominantly with the female.25

24 Mary Beth Rose, Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature (Chicago and London: the University of Chicago Press, 2002), 54.

25 Rose, 54.
Clara dresses in male garb and fights to survive. She embodies two types of Rose’s heroism: the ability to dominate with violence and the ability to survive. She does not, however, occupy the subject position Rose describes as female: “patiently enduring pain and death.” Clara occupies the male subject position and Rose’s third subject position in *Love’s Cure*, thereby embodying an honor that is not gender-specific. Heroism and honor are not relegated to male or female subject positions—critics who define honor simply as masculine miss much of the point of *Love’s Cure*. With Rose, I argue against the absolutism of early modern honor. This essay seeks to explain through an understanding of swordplay that honor is not gender specific. Chapter one of this essay interrogates the masculine honor code presented by the men in the play and how Clara performs a “masculine” role of an ideal swordsman better than the “real” men. Chapter two focuses on Clara’s superior conception of honor and justice and argues for a more complicated understanding of the intersection of gender and honor culture than is currently recognized by critics of early modern literature. In chapter three, I argue for the social subversiveness of the women’s code of honor and that the superior honor code presented by the women is a didactic device used by the playwrights to educate the audience about the dangers of an honor culture based on violence.
Chapter One
Acting Like a “Man”: the Intersection of Gender and Swordplay

The first mention of Clara in Love’s Cure is of her performance as an ideal warrior. Alvarez fled Castile after he killed Vitelli’s uncle in a duel and joined up with the Spanish army in the Eighty Year’s War. For Clara’s safety, Alvarez disguised her as a boy. She grew up as a man, and she is a skillful and successful warrior. Lamorall, a young swordsman, relates to Vitelli Clara’s heroic action in battle. Don Inigo Peralta, son of the general of the Castile forces, throws himself into a mortally dangerous situation in a mistaken display of honor, and Clara is the only one willing to rescue him.

Yet he (brave youth) as careless of the danger,
As careful of his honor, drew his sword,
And waving it about his head, as if
He dar’d one spirited like himself, to trial
Of single valor, he made his retreat
With such a slow, and yet majestic pace,
As if he still called low’d, dare none come on?
When suddenly from a postern of the town
Two gallant horse-men issued, and o’re-took him…

(I.i.56-64)26

Peralta is taking it upon himself to challenge the enemy to single combat without orders or parley—because he is bored. Single combat between armies could be chosen by the leaders to decide the outcome of the battle with minimum casualties. Lamorall notes that Peralta was “weary of ease” but two of his enemies ride out to overtake him. This becomes an unequal fight, two on one, but his fellow soldiers are reluctant to support Peralta in such a dangerous situation. This is the first instance we see of Clara performing justice and honor by evening out the numbers in a fight, and she will continue

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26 Modernized spelling of the cited text of Love’s Cure is my own.
doing the same throughout the play. Lamorall, who is a friend of Vitelli’s, respects Clara’s daring behavior, even though she is the sworn enemy of his friend.

The army looking on, yet not a man
That durst relieve the rash adventurer,
Which Lucio, son to Alvarez then seeing,
As in the vant-guard he sat bravely mounted,
Or were it pity of the youths misfortune,
Care to preserve the honor of his Country,
Or bold desire to get himself a name,
He made his brave horse, like a whirl wind bear him,
Among the Combatants
(I.i.65-73)

Like much of Love’s Cure, this section of the play focuses on Clara’s performance of “masculine” honor. Although the hero of the day is not a biological man, masculine motives are attributed to her actions. Lamorall believes that Lucio (in reality Clara) wishes to “get himself a name.” She in fact uses the credit she receives for her action to clear her family name and secure her father a legal pardon for unlawfully slaying Vitelli’s uncle. While she performs male behavior, her motives are not necessarily the desire to get herself a name. Rather, she wishes to further her family’s interests by making it possible for both father and daughter to legally return home.

Clara is not just the most honorable and brave of the army men; she is also remarkably skilful:

and in a moment
Discharg’d his Petronel, with such sure aim
That of the adverse party from his horse,
One tumbled dead, then wheeling round, and drawing
A faulchion, swift as lightning he came on
Upon the other, and with one strong blow
In view of the amazed Town, and Camp
He strake him dead, and brought Peralta off
With double honor to himself.
The difference between the general’s son’s display of honor and Clara’s is striking. While Peralta’s actions are foolhardy, daring the opposing army to fight him, Clara is the bravest of all the men: “yet not a man…durst relieve the rash adventurer” but Clara. Clara’s actions, which are superior to those of the “real men,” prove her skill, which is related with such detail and reverence by Lamorall. She shoots a gun, a petronel, from a moving horse, a difficult feat, and manages to kill one of the attackers immediately. Early modern firearms were notoriously difficult to aim in this period, with one shot loaded at a time, which is why the sword continued to be a popular weapon. With the gun and the falchion (sword), she defeats two men singlehandedly. She earns “double honor” for slaying two enemies and rescuing Peralta.

Clara is rewarded for her bravery with a favor by the Infanta, a princess of Spain. Instead of asking for wealth or power, Clara asks for a pardon for her father. While the (female) authority figure grants Clara’s father a pardon, Vitelli’s code of honor transcends the law of the king as he pursues a vendetta against Alvarez. Vitelli explains to Lamorall why he does not believe the king has a right to pardon Alvarez:

Vitelli.
To make that good.
Anastro.
Dares contradict his power?
Vitelli.
In this I dare,
And will: and not call his prerogative
In question, nor presume to limit it.
I know he is the Master of his Laws,
And may forgive the forfeits made to them,
But not the injury done to my honor;
And since (forgetting my brave Uncles merits

'Tis not in the King
Not in the King? what subject
In this I dare,
And will: and not call his prerogative
In question, nor presume to limit it.
I know he is the Master of his Laws,
And may forgive the forfeits made to them,
But not the injury done to my honor;
And since (forgetting my brave Uncles merits
And many services, under Duke D’Alva
He suffers him to fall, wresting from Justice
The powerful sword, that would revenge his death,
I’le fill with this Astrea’s empty hand,
And in my just wreak, make this arm the King’s.
(I.i.107-118)

Vitelli makes it quite clear that his understanding of honor, and presumably that of his peers, operates outside the dictates of the law. The gendered aspects of the pardon, and how Vitelli will later respond to female power, is informed by this passage. It is a royal female who determines Alvarez’s pardon, and that pardon happens through the performance of honor by a woman. Although Alvarez has been legally pardoned, Vitelli states that he accepts that the king is the “master of his laws,” he is not satisfied and will continue to swear blood vengeance on Alvarez for the death of his uncle. Vitelli says that the king has taken from “Justice / The powerful sword” that should revenge Vitelli’s uncle’s death. Even though he pays lip service to the king’s laws, he essentially ignores the power of the ruler for the sake of his personal honor. The king, and therefore the law, is responsible for what Vitelli sees as injustice. However, Vitelli will use his own sword for justice, by filling “Astrea’s empty hand.” The figure of justice in his speech, Astraea, is often associated with Elizabeth—another female figure of righteousness. Even in this short passage we see female figures (Astraea/Elizabeth, the Infanta) pitted against male (James I, perhaps, and the never-seen Philip II of Spain), and the female sense of honor and justice juxtaposed with the masculine. The English king would certainly be on the mind of playgoers as they watch the young, handsome protagonist of the play swear that his honor transcends the will of the monarch. Vitelli believes his vendetta is just, and that ultimately his sword, which he will use to fill Justice’s empty hand, will indeed be an
“arm” of the king’s. He sees his masculine honor as the only real honor; Vitelli’s sense of honor and justice depends on the personal duel, not on the laws of his country. Vitelli believes he will eventually be recognized for being right, and that his own honor code will be acknowledged as legitimate. Clara and other women in the play manifest a sense of superiority of the law over personal vengeance. Women represent the honor and justice that transcends the personal, while men represent the honor that resides in personal integrity.

Vitelli’s emphasis on swordplay and personal integrity connects to the importance he places on language.

let your deeds
Make answer to me; useless are all words
Till you have writ performance with your Swords.
(I.i.128-130)

Vitelli calls on his fellows, those that share his conception of honor, to use their deeds to support him in his goal of destroying Alvarez’s family. Vitelli collapses the idea of performance: the reality of words lies in actions, and only by performing deeds do words matter. This is especially layered considering that the language in reality is a performance, a play.

Gender relations are always connected to power relations, and Peter Berek argues that in Love’s Cure Beaumont and Fletcher turn what is seemingly a discussion of gender to a masked interrogation of English political power:

the echoes of Shakespeare in Beaumont and Fletcher change the subject from gender to power. In the Beaumont and Fletcher canon, cross-dressing often enacts
anxiety about political authority as well as gender roles, as though gender served as a discussible surrogate for a less discussible topic, royal absolutism.\textsuperscript{27}

Berek sees topical references to \textit{Twelfth Night} in \textit{Love’s Cure}, and certainly there are parallel issues of the performance of masculinity in both plays. If Berek is correct, and Beaumont and Fletcher were consciously using \textit{Love’s Cure} as a vehicle for political criticism, then Vitelli’s blatant disrespect for the law and emphasis on private versus lawful vengeance is an important part of constructing an understanding of the text. Berek notes that the play is ultimately somewhat supportive of James I, often understood as an effeminate and peace-loving monarch, as the play does its best to convince the audience that inherent masculinity will always surface. However, Vitelli is wrong, and the end of the play proves it—the women are able to change the men’s minds about personal revenge by threatening to turn the violence in on themselves.

Early in the play, Vitelli’s bloodlust was dormant when there was no male to engage in a duel. However, he does involve the females of the Alvarez family when the men return.

My deadly hate to Alvarez, and his house,  
Which as I grew in years, hath still encreas’d,  
As if it call’d on time to make me man,  
Slept while it had no object of her fury  
But a weak woman, and her talk’d of Daughter:  
But now, since there are quarries, worth her flight  
Both in the father, and his hopeful son,  
I’le boldly cast her off, and gorge her full  
With both their hearts…  
(I.i.119-127)

\textsuperscript{27} Peter Berek, “Cross-Dressing, Gender and Absolutism in the Beaumont and Fletcher Plays,” \textit{Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900}, 44, No. 3, (Spring 2004), 360.
Vitelli will engage with other men only when it comes to swordplay. However, Vitelli is perfectly happy once Alvarez returns to make Eugenia pay a price for her husband’s misconduct by killing him and her son. He will involve the women of the family to punish them but will not engage with them directly in matters of honor. Clara disrupts this system by functioning as a female and confidently engaging with swordplay. She is the lynchpin of the plot by acting with her brother, as Jennifer Low notes, as the *pharmakoi* who will cure the community of the ongoing bloodshed and vendettas.\textsuperscript{28}

While Clara garners a lot attention for her deeds, much of the comedy in the play is associated with Lucio’s lessons in masculinity. One of the major themes of the play is nature versus nurture: how “real” gender will surface when given the opportunity. This chance arises for Lucio/Posthumia when Alvarez and Clara return. Bobadilla, a steward of Alvarez’s house, is tasked with helping Lucio behave accordingly and return (or perhaps turn) to his proper, gendered behavior. Bobadilla is often the mouth piece for conventional and coarse language, and he continually mocks Lucio for his feminine behavior:

\begin{quote}
O good St. Jaques help me: was there ever such an Hermaphrodite heard of? would any wench living, that should hear and see what I do, be wrought to believe, that the best of a man lies under this Petticoat, and that a Cod-piece were far fitter here, then a pind-Placket? (I.ii.5-10)
\end{quote}

Babadilla calls Lucio a hermaphrodite and in so doing implies that Lucio has a biological difference: he has female genitalia as well as male. He also likens the biological difference to clothes: petticoats for women and codpieces for men, which are evocative of male genitalia. Clothing, and how that clothing relates to the performance of the person

\textsuperscript{28} Low, 158.
underneath, is a key consideration of the play as a whole. A placket is an apron, and Bobadilla links Lucio’s behavior to both anatomy and female labor in the domestic sphere. Jean Howard writes

the Renaissance needed the idea of two genders, one subordinate to the other, to provide a key element in its hierarchical view of the social order and to buttress its gendered division of labor.  

Although Lucio has been socialized as a woman for his protection, Bobadilla indicates that time spent in the domestic sphere has weakened him. Lucio may not yet know how to fence or act like a “real” man, he is quite skilled at embroidery and household organization. However, those tasks and skills are subordinated to what Bobadilla clearly thinks are more important masculine tasks:

though my Lady your mother, for fear of Vitelli and his faction, hath brought you up like her daughter, and h’as kept you this twenty year, which is ever since you were born, a close prisoner with doors, yet since you are a man, and are as well provided as other men, are, methinks you should have the same motions of the flesh, as other Cavaliers of us are inclin’d unto.  

(I.ii.21-26)

Babadilla hones in on the fact that Lucio lacks experience in the public sphere and has essentially been imprisoned. Bobadilla is convinced that though Lucio has been socialized to act like a woman, his biological male-ness, his sexual nature, will cause him to perform as a man. Alvarez and Bobadilla are increasingly frustrated that Lucio continues to behave like a woman even though he is equipped with male reproductive organs. The play reinforces that it is only through the phallus that Lucio will become masculine, though it is not quite in the fashion Alvarez and Bobadilla wish. His father

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29 Howard, 423.
quickly reaches the end of his patience and insists that Lucio either pick a fight with the
next passing man or rape the next woman he sees:

There’s only one course left, that may redeem thee,
Which is, to strike the next man that you meet,
And if we chance to light upon a woman,
Take her away, and use her like a man,
Or I will cut thy hamstrings.
(VI.iii.37-41)

Alvarez is threatening his son with violence if he does not use one phallus immediately:
either his penis or his sword. Ultimately, Lucio does both, but under more honorable
circumstances. Alvarez is attacked, and Lucio saves him. He is also instantly attracted to
Genevora, Vitelli’s sister, and follows her back to her house to speak with her, where he
feels the first literal and figurative stirrings of love: “What strange new motions do I
feele? my veins / Burn with an unkn...” (IV.iv.13-14). Later, when Lamorall
takes Genevora’s favor—a glove—from Lucio, the less experienced man fights to get it
back. Lamorall is reputed to be a great fighter, and Lucio’s triumph causes despair for
the seasoned swordsman. In fact, when Lucio takes his sword as he wins the fight,
Lamorall asks him to take his “poor life” as well, to escape the humiliation of being
bested and being defeated by an opponent who is considered less than a man (V.i.57).
Essentially, the men in the play, with the exception of Lucio, are obsessed with and
define themselves by the phallus. They can be taught a new kind of honor only by the
women of the play. Lucio, who was brought up by a woman, offers Lamorall his own
sword, and the two part as friends after their fight. Instead of perpetuating the slaughter,
the man raised to be a woman takes the high road and begins healing the community.
When word arrives in Seville that Alvarez and Clara are returning from exile, Eugenia begins the process of integrating Lucio with masculine behavior:

"first kneel with me Lucio,  
No more Posthumia now, thou hast a Father,  
A Father living to take off that name,  
Which my too credulous fears, that he was dead…  
(I.ii.60-63)"

This re-naming is a solemn ceremony—Eugenia asks Lucio to kneel with her, as if in prayer. Lucio has been called Posthumia, which roughly translates as “after death.” The name is of Roman origin, and could occasionally be used for children who were born after the death of their father. It is as if Alvarez died but has been reborn as “a father living.” Eugenia seems to have genuinely believed, or at least feared, that Alvarez was dead. If he was not dead, he was at least powerless through the resource of the law; she says he “Suffere’d a civill death” which reflects Alvarez’s exile—civil and Seville sound very similar in English (I.iii.73). He has been dead to his city and his home. This is another indicator that women in \textit{Love’s Cure} tend to work through the auspices of legal power, rather than through “masculine” honor codes. Eugenia indicates that with a new name, Lucio must begin a new course of action:

"Change those qualities thou didst learn from me,  
For masculine virtues, for which seek no tutor,  
But let thy father’s actions be thy precepts…  
(I.ii.81-83)"

Eugenia’s speech shows the expectation that Lucio and Clara are supposed to return to their “natural” gender immediately, with no training. Eugenia tells Lucio that he should ignore the training of his mother—so necessary for his survival—and now mimic his
father. Like Lucio, Clara too is renamed, and told to perform vastly different actions, or perhaps avoid action altogether, by her father:

My lovd Clara

(For Lucio is a name thou must forget
With Lucio’s bold behavior) though thy breeding
I’the camp may plead something in the excuse
Of thy rough manners, custom having chang’d,
Though not thy Sex, the softness of thy nature,
And fortune (then a cruel stepdame to thee)
Impos’d upon thy tender sweetness…
Thou shalt no more need to use thy sword;
Thy beauty (which even Belgia hath not alter’d)
Shall be a stronger guard, to keep my Clara…
(I.iii.17-32)

Clara is expected to simply forget the training of a lifetime. She has been very successful as a young man, and is now tasked with being a woman. Later in the play she does exhibit “sweetness,” but she is also a galvanizing, vital person—dressed as a man or a woman. In the beginning of the play she tells bawdy jokes and beats up on men who say rude things to her. She is clearly more comfortable in the tavern than in the drawing room, which is logical, as she was raised in the battlefield. Alvarez insists that Clara needs merely to change “custom.” She has been a “real” woman all along, and now she does not need to act like a man. How a seasoned warrior could think that a child brought up to combat can suddenly switch all her reactions and behave as a “normal” woman is ridiculous. Alvarez tells Clara that her beauty will be a stronger guard than her sword and that the honor of men will keep her safe, even as we see later that Lucio is told to rape a young woman to prove his manhood. Beauty and femininity will not keep her safe.
Like anyone forced to wear drastically different clothing, Clara has trouble adjusting to the garments and behavior suddenly expected of her.

Clara. Oh, I shall no more see those golden days, these clothes will never fadge with me: a—o’ this filthy vardingale, this hip-hape: [to Bobadilla] brother why are women’s hanches only limited, confin’d, hoop’d in, as it were with these same scurvy vardingales?

Babadilla. Because women’s hanches only are most subject to display and fly out.

Clara [to Lucio]. Bobadilla, rogue, ten Duckets, I hit the prepuse of thy Cod-piece.
(II.ii.67-75)

A vardingale, also called a farthingale, is a framework of hoops used to make skirts stick out from the body. Clara, of course, would be unused to and untrained to wear this kind of garment, which requires practice. This could be a very humorous scene on stage, if Clara attempts to walk dressed like a woman. This is possibly the only comic instance we see of her retraining—the audience sees much more of Lucio’s attempts to become more masculine. Clothing is always related to culture and behavior, and Clara is frustrated that she has to wear female garments and behave according to “custom.”

When she asks Bobadilla why women have to wear such restrictive garments, Bobadilla answers that women’s “hanches,” or privates or buttocks, are out of control. The word “haunch” is often used in terms of food: a haunch of venison. Not only are women’s private parts to be consumed by men, they are also to be controlled by garments, as Bobadilla explains to Clara. Bobadilla shows a clear fear of female sexual licentiousness, and the legitimate continuance of a male line was, generally speaking, a great source of anxiety to early modern men. As women gained more economic and social power, and more women participated in trade in cities, there was increasing anxiety about legitimacy.
Instead of rounding on him for clearly insulting women, as she will do later, Clara turns on the visibly weaker of the men and makes a bet that her aim with her sword is so exact that she can hit him on what seems to be the fabric of his codpiece, though the word “prepuse” also means the foreskin of his penis. Clara relates to Bobadilla, man to man, by displaying her skill in swordplay, making sexual jokes, and ignoring slights on women. Clara still thinks of herself as a man.

Immediately after this scene Bobadilla insults Clara by saying she is neither a good man nor a good woman and she should know her place. She takes him to task in an unladylike manner:

First do I break your Office o’re your pate,  
You Dog-skin-fac’d rogue, pilcher, you poor John,  
Which I will beat to Stock-fish.  

[Beats him.]

(II.ii.106-108)

Clara beats him for daring to insult her. She operates under a typically masculine code of honor that demands retribution for a verbal slight, even as her brother quails under Bobadilla’s railing. Clara takes Lucio in hand to teach him to be a man: she tells him to kick Bobadilla as she is doing. She is so much a man that she is able to impart masculine skills to her brother.

The play sets up the one-sex model only to destroy it later in the play. As Howard indicates, a division of gender for a division of labor was a necessary part of the social structure of early modern England. She discusses Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of the one-sex model versus Philip Stubbes’s 1583 work *Anatomie of Abuses*:

Stephen Greenblatt has recently argued that modern notions of sexual difference originate later than the Renaissance and that in at least some Renaissance
discourse there appears to be only one sex, women being but imperfectly formed or incomplete men…If dominant medical discourses such as those cited by Greenblatt saw only male genitalia in both men and women and so, in some sense, authorized the view that there was one sex, the Bible provided authority, seized by Stubbes, for a two-sex gender system: ‘Male and female created He them’ (Genesis 1:27). In some discourses masculine and feminine identity were seen as points on a continuum, not separate essences, but in works such as the antitheatrical tracts the language of two kinds predominates, and the injunction from Deuteronomy against wearing the clothes of the other sex is repeated with tiresome frequency.

*Love’s Cure* is an excellent text to investigate the possibilities of how early modern people processed change. Women were gaining greater social prominence in the late 1500s. The one-sex model is especially apparent in how Alvarez and Eugenia treat their children: Clara is praised for male behavior, while Lucio is tormented and threatened by the steward and his own father. Rather than the privileging of biological difference, masculine behavior is marked as superior. However, while Clara’s masculine behavior is what earns her credit amongst men, her own honor code is superior. That being said, masculinity is still privileged. Berek sums up the dichotomy:

Notably, the play’s attitude toward female cross-dressing is very different from its attitude toward male cross-dressing. Lucio is a ridiculous spectacle in female disguise, but Clara’s mannishness makes her more admirable. She exemplifies strength, courage, and devotion to honor.

While masculinity is seen as superior, the male characters nonetheless insist that Clara immediately accept her new, feminine role. Bobadilla is especially vocal:

I have like charge of you Madam, I am as well to mollify you, as to qualify him: what have you to doe with Armors, and Pistols, and Javelins, and swords, and such tools? remember Mistress: nature hath given you a sheath only, to signify women are to put up men’s weapons, not to draw them… (II.ii.85-89)

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30 Howard, 422-423.
31 Berek, 362.
Bobadilla tells Clara that it is his job to subordinate her as it is to retrain Lucio. He engages the language of swordplay, a “masculine” art, and the inversion of the phallus, to denote her femininity. Women have “sheathes,” not swords. Ultimately Bobadilla is right; the women do “put up” the men’s weapons. His words foreshadow the ending of the play.

Eugenia and Alvarez discuss their children when they meet again after many years of separation. Each explains the logic behind how they have raised the children:

Alvarez.

Why I have bred her up thus, at more leisure
I will import unto you: wonder not
At what you have seen her do, it being the least
Of many great and valiant undertakings
She hath made good with honor.

Eugenia

The joy I have in her, with one as great
To you my Alvarez: you, in a man
Have given to me a daughter: in a woman,
I give to you a Son: this was the pledge
You left here with me, whom I have brought up
Different from what he was, as you did Clara,
And with the like success; as she appears
Alter’d by custom, more then woman, he
Transform’d by his soft life, is less then man.
(I.iii.159-173)

Clara has just performed honorably in a fight, and clearly Eugenia is surprised that her daughter is so successful as a man. Eugenia notes that Clara is “more then a woman,” and Alvarez says she has done “many great and valiant undertakings” and is honorable by masculine standards. Lucio, however, has led a “soft life” and is “less then man.” He is definitely at a disadvantage in this situation. Both parents agree that they did what they
had to do to keep their children safe, but Lucio is the only one punished. He is also the only one learning his new gender publicly. Very little of Clara’s reeducation is done on stage—what goes on between her and her mother seems to be private. Clearly, Beaumont and Fletcher thought there was greater comedy to be found in Lucio learning to be a man than Clara learning to be a woman.

In the interest of not disrupting the gendered system and the activities associated with each gender, like swordplay and needlework, Clara must act like a woman. Alvarez defines for his wife and himself what needs to be done for their children:

Now our mutual care must be
Implo’ed to help wrong’d nature, to recover
Her right in either of them, lost by custom:
To you I give my Clara, and receive
My Lucio to my charge: and we’l contend
With loving industry, who soonest can
Turne this man woman, or this woman man.
(I.iii.176-183)

Although Alvarez “gives” Clara back to her mother, we do not see any of this retraining on stage, other than the possibility of Clara’s one comic attempt to dress more femininely and a scene where Clara is working on embroidery. Clara seems to have even more trouble than Lucio with gender reassignment—another sign that masculinity is privileged in the beginning of the play:

Clara. Sir, I know only that
       It stands not with my duty to gain-say you,
       In any thing: I must, and will put on
       What fashion you think best: though I could wish
       I were what I appear.

   Alvarez. Endeavour rather
       To be what you are, Clara, entering here
As you were born, a woman.
(I.iii.35-42)

This passage is indicative of Clara’s feelings in the beginning of the play: she wishes that she could be what she seems and longs to change her biological self in order to be what she was raised and how she is comfortable. While love will eventually disrupt custom’s hold on her “true” nature, as it does with her brother, the process is certainly difficult. She performs in a liminal space: she is neither truly a woman nor a man for the first few scenes of the play.

The one-sex model is set up through these passages, then challenged throughout the course of the text, and finally replaced by the two-sex model as marriage becomes the object of the plot of the play. This arc is similar to the culture of early modern England, as marriage and women gained an increasingly vital role in the Protestant culture of Elizabethan society. Celibacy was replaced by marriage as the ideal state of being. This fits with Rose’s idea of the shifting nature of heroism:

Heroic survival can range from witty triumph over obstacles to resigned acceptance of limitations and can appear as a manifestation of both the heroics of action and the heroics of endurance. Thus the surviving hero can occupy both male and female subject positions.\(^{32}\)

We see Clara and Lucio develop over the next acts of the play, as both accept their new roles. Clara’s focus changes from heroic action to the heroics of survival, not only for her own life but for the lives of her family and her future husband. The definitions of heroism shift over the course of the play, from the heroic action that is privileged in the beginning of the play to the heroism of survival the women employ in the final act.

\(^{32}\) Rose, *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature*, 54.
Chapter Two
A (Wo)Man of Honor: Clara Performs Justice

Although Lamorall has explained what martial feats Clara is capable of in the first scene of the play, she later gives an example of her ability. While she will need to discontinue swordplay—her father has asked her to stop acting like a man and start behaving like a gentlewoman—she is still eager for a fight. Vitelli attacks Sayavedra, a compatriot of Alvarez’s, and he, Bobadilla, and Clara all run to his rescue. Clara especially is keen to join the fight and sees a last opportunity to use her hard-won skills—and her sword: “Fortune I give thee thanks / For this occasion once more to use it” (I.iii.83-84).

Vitelli fights with passion, although he is outnumbered three to one, and Clara is instantly impressed by and attracted to his skill and conviction. This conviction is reflected in Vitelli’s use of the language of religion to reinforce his desire for revenge:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Alvarez.} & \text{Assault my friend} \\
&\text{So near my house?}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Vitelli.} & \text{Nor in it will spare thee,} \\
&\text{Though ’twere a Temple: and I’ll make it one,} \\
&\text{I being the Priest, and thou the sacrifice,} \\
&\text{Ile offer to my uncle.}
\end{align*}
\]

(I.iii.90-95)

Vitelli attacked Sayavedra outside Alvarez’s house with the express purpose of insulting him and drawing Alvarez into a fight for his family’s honor, though the king has legally pardoned Alvarez. There are elements of religious language in this section; a pre-Christian element at work in Vitelli’s speech, as if he plans to sacrifice an enemy (Alvarez) to pagan gods or to his slain uncle. Additionally, there are echoes of the
Hebraic tradition of sacrificing animals to Jehovah, and an oblique reference of Christ’s sacrifice—but no amount of Christian charity or rules of good conduct will keep Vitelli from having his revenge. While Clara and the other women of the play will eventually convince the feuding men that their actions are dishonorable, the element of religion in this passage reinforces our sense of Vitelli’s lack of Christian virtue. Fencing master Vincentio Saviolo writes in *His Practice* that

Combat was ordained for justifying of a truth, and not to lay open a way for one man to revenge him of another, for the punishment of such things resteth in the Prince for the maintenance of peace in the realm, which if it should be severely executed, no doubt but there would be fewer quarrels by many degrees. And in troth, the offence is the greater in this Realm, where we know God, and hear his Gospel daily preached, which expressly forbiddeth manslaughter: by how much that he that killeth maketh a massacre of the very true image of the living God.  

Saviolo quite bluntly states that quarrels such as Vitelli’s vendetta should not be continued if the judgment of the law or the prince has intervened. The king pardoned Alvarez, and Vitelli should respect the law. Saviolo would agree that Vitelli is out of bounds, and later in the play Vitelli will be forced to understand the destructive nature of personal vengeance. Through love he will recognize that to quarrel as little as possible is the most honorable and the most Christian path.

Clara has her own clearly defined sense of honor and justice and always prefers to even out an inequitable fight. She deems it unfair for her side to team up on Vitelli:

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`Twas put bravely by,
And that: and yet comes on, and boldly rare:
In the wars, where emulation and example
Join to increase the courage, and make less
The danger; valor, and true resolution
Never apprear’d so lovely: brave again:
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33 Saviolo, *Honorable Quarrels*. Excerpted from Jackson, 389.
Sure he is more then man, and if he fall,  
The best of virtue, fortitude would die with him:  
And can I suffer it? forgive me duty,  
So I love valor, as I will protect it  
Against my Father, and redeem it, though  
’Tis forfeited by one I hate. [She joins Vitelli.]  
(I.iii.95-105)

Clara is impressed with Vitelli’s skill even though she is fighting against him. She notes his ability in parrying the blade of his opponent: “’twas put bravely by.” “Brave” means beautiful or ornamented as well valorous, and she says his courage is “lovely.” Vitelli’s skill is attractive, even beautiful. This fight puts Clara in mind of her experience of combat: fighting with other soldiers enhances the performance of all, and Vitelli inspires her. She sees something extraordinary in Vitelli—virtue, fortitude and valor. She also feels that he is “more than man” just as her skills make her “more than a woman.”

Virtue transcend gender, which is certainly true of Clara, who contrasts duty and honor. She values that honor, and that initial sense of sympathy, over filial responsibility. When she tries to take his side in the fight, Vitelli is initially confused by her desire to assist him:

Vitelli [to Clara]. Come on,  
All is not lost yet: You shall buy me dearer  
Before you have me: keep off.

Clara. Fear me not,  
Thy worth has took me Prisoner, and my sword  
For this time knows thee only for a friend,  
And to all else I run the point of it.  
(I.iii.106-112)

34 Clara is “Alter’d by custom, more then woman” (I.iii.172).
Clara explains that she is on his side, and she anthropomorphizes her sword by telling him that it has recognized Vitelli as an ally because of his skill and bravery. Vitelli’s “virtue” as a swordsman and her sense of honor has her captive. Through a “masculine” art Clara is taken prisoner, and this foreshadows Clara’s eventual decision to give up traditionally masculine behavior.

Clara’s father and his friend Sayavedra are astounded at Clara’s about-face as they are fighting Vitelli:

Sayavedra. Defend your Fathers Enemy?

Alvarez. Art thou mad?

Clara. Are you men rather? shall that valor, which
Begot you lawful honor in the wars,
Prove now the parent of an infamous Bastard
So foul, yet so long liv’d, as murder will
Be to your shames?
(I.iii.111-117)

Sayavedra is amazed, and Alvarez questions Clara’s sanity. She, in turn, doubts their masculinity. They are all warriors, and Clara, drawing on the language of progeny and illegitimacy, reminds them that they have gained honor for their valor and that defeating Vitelli in a situation where he is greatly outnumbered will shame them all. She draws a distinction between their “lawful” fighting in the wars and the kind of battle they are waging against Vitelli:

have each of you, alone
With your own dangers only, purchas’d glory
From multitudes of Enemies, not allowing
Those nearest to you, to have part in it,
And do you now join, and lend mutual help
Against a single opposite?
(I.iii.117-122)
Teamwork is a vital part of warfare. They have collectively struggled against an enemy army, and Clara is ashamed that her father and his friend would team up against a single enemy. She sees this unfairness as dishonorable, and she is correct; the reason for protocols in dueling is to avoid just this situation. She is also angry that her father and Sayavedra would kill Vitelli, as Alvarez has just been pardoned for a similar offense, and against the same family:

\begin{verbatim}
Hath the mercy
Of the great King, but newly wash’d away
The blood, that with the forfeit of your life
Cleav’d to your name, and family like an ulcer,
In this again to set a deeper dye
Upon your infamy?
(I.iii.121-126)
\end{verbatim}

She insists that if they kill Vitelli under these circumstances it will amount to murder. There is also the unspoken but important addition to the argument that it was Clara’s heroic actions that led to her father’s pardon and their return to Seville. She calls the actions that caused their flight from Seville an “ulcer” and bids her father not to make the same mistake.

Clara’s obvious skill and reputation secure her a traditionally male role in the parent/child relationship. Her father’s response to that language is confirmation of her status:

\begin{verbatim}
Clara. …in this i’le presume to teach my Father,
And this first Act of disobedience shall
Confirm I am most dutifu.

Alvarez [aside]. I am pleas’d
With what I dare not give allowance to.--
Unnatural wretch, what wilt thou do?
\end{verbatim}
Clara makes a clear distinction between filial duty and obedience, and she openly acknowledges that her father is wrong. Her greatest priority is her family, and in disobeying her father she “confirms” she is “most dutiful”—even more, perhaps, than her father has been to their family. Clara is not just the most honorable but also the most dutiful man in the play. Alvarez, surprisingly, takes this set-down from his daughter without complaint. He is actually “pleas’d” with her behavior and with her conception of honor, though he does call her “wretch” as an expression of affection. Alvarez is not angry after Clara defends Vitelli; he merely turns to his wife and comforts her with the knowledge that because he has letters from the king that prove his pardon, they will not be attacked again. Alvarez thinks that he will be instantly reintegrated into society with the pardon—he does not know that Vitelli vowed to have revenge outside the law.

If duty and obedience function separately in Love’s Cure, so do duty and honor. Honor seems to have its own definition, which Clara generally represents in the play. Although Clara is more than willing to fight and perform remarkable feats of arms for her country and, even more for her family, she is unwilling to besmirch her family’s honor with Vitelli’s murder, and is thus disobedient. She offers Vitelli an escape, though warns she him that it is only circumstance that protects him—she still considers him an enemy. Clara is attracted to him, either romantically or as an intriguing opponent and partner in combat, but she allows that he is the sworn enemy of her family.
While some critics argue that romantic love cures Clara and Lucio of their aberrant gendered behavior, love actually rehabilitates the entire community. Love eventually cures Vitelli not just of his consuming hate but also of his immoral conduct. Even though he is deeply steeped in his own honor code, which compels him to revenge his uncle, he keeps a mistress with whom he has a complicated and verbally abusive relationship, and whom he will never marry and has promised to love only as long as she “remain’d / The woman [he] expected” (III.iii.97-99). An honorable love, and eventual marriage to Clara, cures Vitelli of his rage and of his morally questionable relationship with Malroda,

Surprisingly, knowledge of Vitelli’s mistress does not diminish Clara’s love. She is well acquainted with the foibles of men, having grown up in the army, and she accepts that the love she bears for Vitelli will eventually lead to marriage. Comically, Sayavedra begins to court her, but Clara makes a comment that obliquely reveals her feelings about Vitelli:

The fairest Ladies like the blackest men:
I ever lov’d the colour: all black things
Are least subject to change.
(III.iv.30-41)

She knows if his temperament is unlikely to change that she is secure in his professed love. Clara’s needlework is the typically female equivalent of swordplay; the author of

35 “The notion of a love which conquers all, which smoothes out all gender aberrations, is instated, and miraculously ‘restores’ Clara to femininity, Lucio to masculinity.” Marea Mitchell, introduction to Love’s Cure, or The Martial Maid (Nottingham: Nottingham Drama Texts, 1992), iii.
*Hic Mulier* complains that women have swapped “for Needles, Swords.” Clara’s newfound domestic pastime is associated with her skill with swordplay, and the language of embroidery provides an amusing platform for banter with the enamored Sayavedra. He gets in the way of her stitching, and Clara becomes irritated with him.

> Clara. ’Twill hinder me my work sir: and my Mother
> Will chide me, if I doe not doe my task.

> Sayavedra. Your Mother, nor your Father shall chide: you
> Might have a prettier task, would you be rul’d,
> And look with open eyes.
> (III.iv.46-49)

This is one of the few domestic scenes in which we see Clara’s participation. She tries to get rid of Sayavedra by telling him she needs to concentrate on her work reintegrating as a woman, or her mother will be cross. Clara’s parents have approved of Sayavedra’s courting of Clara, however, and he tells her that life will be more comfortable if she will choose to be ruled by a man. Clara patently refuses his advances and rails at him.

> Eugenia [apart]. Her old fit.

> Sayavedra [aside]. Sure, this is not the way.----Nay, I will break
> Your melancholy.
> Clara. I shall break your pate then,
> Away, you sanguine scabbard.

> Eugenia. Out upon thee
> Thou’lt break my heart, I am sure.

> Sayavedra. She’s not yet tame.
> (III.iv.66-73)

Eugenia seems nothing more than exasperated with Clara’s intransigence—clearly this is not the first time Clara has had trouble with the behavior required of the women of their

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36 *Hic Mulier*, excerpted by O’Malley, 266.
Sayavedra meets Clara’s irritation with the threat to break her “melancholy.” This amounts to an attempt to break her will; melancholy is a humor, and part of her physiology and the makeup of her personality. She, in turn, warns him that she will return any violence. He calls her melancholy and she calls him sanguine, which means that his temperament is out of balance. She thinks he has too much blood, which makes him overly amorous. Clara also calls him a scabbard, just as Bobadilla tells Clara that woman have “a sheath only” (II.ii.88). She describes him as the inversion of the sword, implying his weakness, and Sayavedra complains that Clara is not tame. Love has not “cured” Clara of anything—her sense of masculine honor is intact, and she refuses to be patient with Sayavedra’s ridiculous courtship.

While Clara is learning domestic tasks, Lucio is taking a fencing lesson, and it does not progress well. As we see from Sayavedra’s clumsy courtship, Clara’s fundamental responses have not changed, and she is unwilling to watch her brother bullied during his fencing lesson. Alvarez tells Piorato to give Lucio “a good knock.”

Clara. 'Heart: nere a rogue in Spain shall wrong my brother Whil' st I can hold a sword. [She turns on Piorato.]

Piorato. Hold, Madam, Madam.

Alvarez. Clara.

Eugenia. Daughter.

Bobadilla. Mistress.

Piorato. Bradamante. Hold I pray. [They part.]
(III.iv.97-94)
Clara has taken to the role of older sibling with relish, and she refuses to see her family dishonored while a servant beats up on her brother. She is a warrior, unused to being subjected to courtship and domestic labor like embroidery. Perhaps Clara is eager for a swordfight—the kind of fight she knows she can win. The staccato language of this passage reflects the fencing lesson, and each word punctuates a blow in the verbal and physical fencing match. Piorato is terrified of Clara, and he calls her “Bradamante,” the warrior heroine of Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. Clara is firmly set in the tradition of warrior women.

Vitelli finds himself in love with the valiant Clara and has trouble courting a woman who can clearly best him in a fight. However, he attempts to sweep her off her feet by conventional means, and tells her he loves her and asks her for a “favor”—an article of clothing, fabric or jewelry he can keep. Clara, who dislikes the traditions of the courtier, will not give him a ribbon, glove or feather, as Vitelli asks, but says her smile and her good opinion should be enough. She quickly changes her mind, however, as she realizes what a martial maid can bestow as a favor to the man she loves:

Clara. This sword.

... As ere it was to me: I have kept it long, And value it next my Virginity: But good, return it, for I now remember I vow’d, who purchas’d it, should have me too.

(II.ii.230-242)

Clara proves her love by divesting herself of the phallic symbol. Although she claims to hate the flowery language of courtiers, she plays a game with Vitelli, offering him her sword, then taking it back, only to give it to him again. Her sword not only represents
her masculine qualities and her ability and willingness to fight like a man but also her ability to protect her virginity. This is what makes her viable as a spouse and not a mistress like Malroda. Offering her sword, then taking it back, saying that she can only give it to the man she will marry, prompts Vitelli to renew his vow of love:

Vitelli. I’ll not infringe an Article of breath
My vow hath offer’d to ye: nor from this part
Whilst it hath edge, or point, or I a heart
(II.i.246-248)

Vitelli’s attraction was first to Clara’s swordsmanship and sense of honor when he thought she was a man. His love for her is still tied to her actions with swordplay. Vitelli says he will not part from the sword while it is still sharp and functional: it has an edge and a point and is deadly. Just as an audience may begin to think that his love is conditional, like his love for Malroda, he continues that the sword will not be parted from him while he has a heart. Vitelli has made a true, unconditional commitment to Clara.

Clara’s gift constitutes a binding commitment. While many tokens were gifts from men to women, women often gave favors to men. David Cressy writes:

Courtship gifts…though not necessarily of such high value, are frequently mentioned in the course of disputes over frustrated, questionable, or clandestine marriages. They were taken to demonstrate the progress of courtship and to corroborate other evidence of matrimonial intent…But it was no easy matter to determine whether the proffering and acceptance of a gift was in jest or in earnest, whether it should be understood as a token of goodwill or as a sign of matrimonial consent.37

Gifts between unmarried men and women could be understood as a sign of matrimonial intention and constitute a material record for historians, as they often figure in disputes. These gifts often acted as a seal between courting couples, as Clara’s gift does for her relationship with Vitelli. The sword is more valuable than any ring or token, as it acts not just as a signifier of a binding commitment but also as a promise on Clara’s part to alter her actions. Vitelli seems to be concerned that she is the better warrior, and that if they marry she will wear the trousers in the family:

Vitelli. …to take you for a wife
Were greater hazard, for should I offend you
(As ’tis not easy still to please a woman)
You are of so great a spirit, that I must learn
To wear your petticoat, for you will have
My breeches from me.

Clara. Rather from this hour
I here abjure all actions of a man,
And will esteem it happiness from you
To suffer like a woman: love, true love
Hath made a search within me, and expel’d
All but my natural softness, and made perfect
That which my parents care could not begin.
I will show strength in nothing, but my duty,
And glad desire to please you, and in that
Grow every day more able.
(IV.ii.179-194)

Vitelli says that Clara has a “great spirit”; he admires her, but he is worried. She responds with a commitment to change her behavior. For a woman like Clara, who has lived life with the agency of a man, this vow is very important—it means a radical
change. Cressy writes that “marriage for a woman was, perhaps, the major defining moment of her life, determining her social, domestic, and reproductive future.”

Critics assume that Clara is debasing herself by saying she will stop acting like a man, which greatly oversimplifies the complicated understanding of gender in Love’s Cure. Assuming that to be a woman is to be less privileges masculinity, and Clara’s language does not suggest that she plans to change much about her actions. Jennifer Low writes:

Clara’s capitulation may seem to modern readers an unnecessary lowering of herself. But if we accept that play’s presentation of Vitelli as inherently desirable, we must recognize why Clara must renounce her martial skills and masculine ways. Clara unsettles Vitelli’s gender assumptions but cannot entirely overturn them.

Herobrism and honor in Love’s Cure are in reality on a sliding scale, which does not necessarily privilege masculinity over femininity. If Clara renounces her masculine ways, it does not mean she is not a warrior and cannot be honorable or heroic. While Low is correct that readers and audiences must keep in mind that Vitelli is indeed very attractive and that Clara makes Vitelli question his assumptions about women, she is not renouncing her masculine behavior entirely. She says that she will “abjure the actions of a man,” which she has already agreed to do anyway—her father has asked her to take up the role of a gentlewoman. To “suffer” also means to act—she will act like a woman. She will show strength in nothing but her “duty,” but she has also called freeing Vitelli from an unfair fight her duty as well. Since she has drawn a distinction between obedience and duty, Clara will still do what she feels is right. Her duty is conflated with

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38 Cressy, 287.
39 Low, 162.
honor, and even after this oath Clara will continue to act in an honorable fashion and will follow the honor code she has abided by from the beginning of the play. Since she is clearly the best “man” in the play, doing her duty need not diverge from her “masculine” sense of honor, even if it means giving her sword to Vitelli. Her honor is also part of how she performs as a woman—she is still a warrior, no matter what her medium.

I am a woman, and must learn to fight
A softer sweeter battle, then with Swords.
(II.i.239-252)

*Love’s Cure* can be read as protofeminist—Clara certainly sets a heroic example for the male characters. Some critics see it as the exact opposite, as a text that reinforces traditional gender roles as it presents a strong woman who is rehabilitated into her community by giving up the strength that she accesses through masculine behavior. Berek writes that “*Love’s Cure* renders as both natural and charming a woman’s learning of a submissive sex role.”40 However, there is no real evidence that Clara is ever submissive—only that she learns to use tools other than her sword. Berek suggests that early modern people, and especially Beaumont and Fletcher, understood strength as a masculine trait only—a supposition which is entirely incorrect.

Mary Beth Rose posits an understanding of heroism and strength that is not based solely on the masculine. The rise of the Protestant religion in England came with an emphasis on marriage, as opposed to the Catholic understanding of celibacy as the ideal. The emphasis on marriage created a shift in the understanding of the role of women:

when English Protestant reformers construct a new idealization of marriage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they represent marriage as an epic endeavor

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40 Berek, 363.
and describe its undertaking in military terms common to the male heroics of action. Marriage becomes “this one and absolutely greatest action of a man’s whole life,” requiring unwavering commitment and assuming the properties of inevitable destiny” “as thereon depending the future good or evil of a man’s whole aftertime and days.” It provides the arena where an individual can struggle and meet death or defeat, triumph or salvation: “for marriage is an adventure, for whosoever marries, adventures; he adventures his peace, his freedom, his liberty, his body; yea, and sometimes his soul too.” Marriage is a perilous odyssey, a voyage on a dangerous sea, “wherein so many ship wreck for want to better knowledge and advice upon a rock.”

If we take Rose’s definition of heroic marriage as true, then Clara is not ceding herself. She is not self-sacrificing, nor is she really changing her nature; she is merely embarking upon another kind of adventure with a different set of tools. This is confirmed by how Clara and Genevora respond to the realization that their lovers plan a fight. As Anne Duncan notes, “It is this ‘masculine’ action by the women that stops the double duel—not a threat of suicide, significantly, but a threat of murder.”

41 Rose, XV.
42 Duncan, 405.
Chapter Three
Female Power as Resolution and Rehabilitation

Love does not cure Vitelli’s drive for revenge. Even though he is ostensibly committed to marry Clara and in love with her, he still wants revenge on her father. He has successfully petitioned the king for a judicial duel, and though Vitelli now seeks legal recourse, it is still a personal vendetta. He seeks out Lamorall in a state of feverish excitement to ask him to be his “second,” the person who will fight with him, take over if he is killed or maimed and who will act as his general support for the event. Lamorall lost his sword to Lucio in a fight, and is still embarrassed. Though Lamorall and Lucio parted on fairly amicable terms, with Lucio “merely asking to be regarded as an equal,” Vitelli frames this judicial duel as an opportunity for Lamorall to redeem himself:

But I’ll tell thee
’Gainst whom thou art to fight, and there redeem
Thy honor lost, if there be any such:
The King, by my long suit, at length is pleas’d
That Alvarez and my self, with eithers Second,
Shall end the difference between out houses,
Which he accepts of. I make choice of thee;
And where you speak of a disgrace, the means
To blot it out, by such a public trial
Of thy approved valor, will revive
Thy ancient courage. If you embrace it, doe;
If not, I’ll seek some other.
(V.i.118-129)

Vitelli speaks of his “long suit”—we have to wonder how long his complaint has been lodged if Alvarez has just returned to Seville recently. Vitelli does not know that Lamorall is ashamed of having lost the duel to Lucio, but he knows his friend is suffering

43 Low, 164.
from some kind of perceived emasculation. Vitelli explains that the judicial duel will end
“the difference between our houses”—those of Vitelli and Alvarez. The violence
previously seen in the play has been brawling. There is a sharp distinction between street
fighting and a judicial duel. Craig Turner and Tony Soper explain that:

Previously, and in sharp contrast to the duello alla macchia, the judicial duel of
the Middle Ages had been a useful part of a centuries-old chivalric tradition in
England. The judicial duel sanctioned personal combat as an embodiment of
much higher values than personal glory or gain. As an honored, even mythic,
institution within English medieval culture, it utilized the oversight of judges, the
approval of authorities, and, ostensibly, the will of God. 44

While Vitelli does not recognize the king’s judgment and pardon, perhaps he will accept
God’s verdict. This judicial duel illustrates that the power play is not between merely
Vitelli and Alvarez and their various family members and retainers; it is also with the
king, even though he does not literally figure. Vitelli is a nobleman, and he has refused
the justice meted out by the king. King Philip would have had a good reason to want to
stop the violence between two of the major families of Seville: they are essentially
ignoring his edict as they continue to brawl, and they undermine his authority. There is a
real context for this anxiety as private duels and brawling were a major issue in early
modern Europe, as evidenced by Queen Elizabeth’s edict to restrict rapier lengths.

Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger, surprisingly, include a full proclamation.
The audience does not need to take for granted that the king has given his sanction to the
duel:

Herald reads. Forasmuch as our high and mighty Master, Philip, the potent and
most Catholic King of Spain, hath not only in his own Royall person, been long,
and often solicited, and grieved, with the deadly and uncurable hatred, sprung up

44 Turner and Soper, xxii.
betwixt the two ancient and most honorably descended Houses of these his two dearly and equally beloved subject, Don Ferdinando de Alvarez, and Don Pedro de Vitelli: (all which in vain his Majesty hath often endeavored to reconcile and qualify:) But that also through the debates, quarrels, and outrages daily arising, falling, and flowing from these great heads, his public civil Government is seditiously and barbarously molested and wounded, and many of his chief Gentry (no less tender to his Royall Majesty then the very branches of his own sacred blood) spoiled, lost, and submerged, in the impious inundation and torrent of their still-growing malice: It hath therefore pleased His sacred Majesty, out of His infinite affection to preserve his Common-wealth, and general peace, from father violation, (as a sweet and heartily loving father of his people) and on the earnest petitions of these Arch-enemies, to Order, and Ordain, That they be ready, each with his well-chosen and beloved friend, arm’d at all points like Gentlemen, in the Castle of St. Iago, on this present Monday morning betwixt eight and nine of the clocke; where (before the combatants be allowe this to be read aloud for the public satisfaction of his Majesties welbeloved Subjects.

(V.iii. 6-29)

This proclamation sounds much like one Elizabeth could have announced. There is an emphasis that the combatants be “arm’d at all points like Gentlemen” in the public space. The duel is a show, which reinforces the power of the monarch, and they are to be costumed accordingly. There is harsh language about the behavior of Vitelli and Alvarez—they are lumped in with those subjects who disrupt the “public civil Government” and “seditiously and barbarously” molest the populace and the peace. This was a serious legal issue for early modern monarchs. It is no wonder the Prince Philip of Love’s Cure would seek to reconcile and stop the ongoing violence in Seville by arranging for a judicial duel to declare the winners. That course of action would be far better than watching generation after generation of potential military and civic leaders die in senseless duels. As Vitelli tries to revenge his uncle, so Lucio would seek to revenge his father, and so on and so forth, *ad infinitum*. 

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The “canker” that is on both Vitelli and Alvarez is set to be cured through legally sanctioned bloodshed. Of course, the title of the play is not “Blood’s Cure” but *Love’s Cure*, so clearly another resolution is necessary. Surprisingly, the revenge-seeking honor code to which Vitelli adheres somehow still has more power than the king’s mandate:

Assistente: Kings, nor authority can master fate;  
Admit ’em then, and blood extinguish hate.  
(V.iii.3134-35)

These lines support Peter Berek’s assertion that *Love’s Cure* means to question royal authority, but it also speaks to the strength of honor codes. If an honor code equates with fate, then there is little that is more powerful—only love or, as this essay argues, an alternate honor code, will stop this duel.

Vitelli is bloodthirsty and plainly wrong in his reasoning and application of honor. Even though he is committed to Clara, he is determined to revenge himself in the worst possible way on Alvarez:

    upon thy death I’ll build  
       A story (with this arm) for thy old wife  
       To tell thy daughter Clara seven years hence  
       As she sits weeping by a winter fire,  
       How such a time Vitelli slew her husband  
       With the same Sword his daughter favor’d him,  
       And lives, and wears it yet: Come Lamorall,  
       Redeem thy self.  
       (V.iii.58-65)

Vitelli paints a picture of suffering not only for Eugenia but also his beloved Clara. He rubs his intentions in Alvarez’s face by telling him that he will to kill him with his daughter’s weapon—the daughter Alvarez has carefully trained in these masculine arts. The women take the stage, however, and interrupt Vitelli’s plans for revenge, and
Alvarez’s hopes for martial success and proof of his superiority. The women demand attention:

Eugenia. Hear us.
Genevora. We must be heard.
Clara. We will be heard.

(V.iii.79-81)

The staccato nature of the women’s speech reflects the intention of the duel. Their language is used as a weapon against the duel. While Eugenia, who is well used to feminine behavior, entreats the men to listen, Genevora, who has some power over Lucio as he courts her, tells them that they “must be heard.” Clara, who has always commanded respect from men, tells them that they will listen. The women have hatched a plot, but they first entreat the men to lay down their weapons and adopt a less violent code of honor. Clara addresses Vitelli and asks him to desist:

Why will you fight? why do’s an uncles death
Twenty year old, exceed your love to me
But twenty days? whose fore’d cause, and faire manner
You could not understand, only have heard.
Custom, that wrought so cunningly on nature
In me, that I forgot my sex, and knew not
Whether my body female were, or male,
You did unweave, and had the power to charm
A new creation in me, made me fear
To think on those deeds I did perpetrate,
How little power though you allow to me
That cannot with my sighs, my tears, my prayers
Move you from your own loss, of you should gain.

(V.iii.86-98)

Clara makes a salient point: Vitelli is revenging an uncle whom he probably did not know very well. He died twenty years ago, presumably when Vitelli was still very young.

Clara believes that their relationship, which he has promised will lead to marriage, should
take precedence over revenge. She appeals to his self-importance, saying that he
“unweave[d]” her gender confusion and helped her to become a “real” woman. She
acknowledges that he has a great deal of power over her.

Clara was told by her father directly that she would have no need of her sword, as
her womanly virtues and arts, like “sighs,” “tears” and “prayers” would have ample effect
on men (I.iii.30). That is patently untrue, and Clara now needs to again take up arms for
the sake of justice and honor and for a peaceful resolution. Vitelli explains to Clara that
his vengeance takes precedence over their love.

I must forget you Clara, ’till I have
Redeem’d my uncle’s blood, that brands my face
Like a pestiferous Carbuncle: I am blind
To what you doe: deaf to your cries: and Marble
To all impulsive exhortations.
When on this point, I have pearch’d thy fathers soul,
Ile tender thee this bloody reeking hand
Drawn forth the bowels of that murderer:
If thou canst love me then, I’ll marry thee,
And for thy father lost, get thee a Son;
On no condition else.
(V.iii.98-109)

These are harsh words from a man who has just recently promised undying love. He is
“blind” and “deaf” to those arts that Clara was promised were all she needed to survive in
her world. Vitelli has the gall to tell her that once he has killed her father, he will be
happy to marry her if she will have him. He forgets that her sense of honor is defined by
her service as a soldier, and there is no way she could stomach marrying her father’s
murder. Vitelli has put Clara in an awful bind. They are committed, not just to each
other, but in the eyes of the law as well:

Clara. So well I love my husband, for he is so,
They have made promises, she has given him a valuable possession, and Vitelli has announced that he has Clara’s sword. A contemporary audience would have understood that there are legal implications to this situation. Clara would have a difficult time finding another husband under these circumstances; they are essentially precontracted. Clara has already made her commitment and she must use “masculine” arts to resolve the situation. Vitelli does not keep to the spirit of his commitment to Clara as he seeks his revenge, and she must bend the rules of her commitment to keep everyone alive.

Clara is powerful to the very end of the play. This text strongly supports Jean Howard’s argument that female crossdressing can be “a strong site of resistance to the period’s patriarchal sex-gender system.” Howard goes on to argue, however, that crossdressed women often divest themselves of what makes them strong:

Ironically, rather than blurring gender difference or challenging male domination and exploitation of women, female crossdressing often strengthens notions of difference by stressing what the disguised woman cannot do, or by stressing those feelings held to constitute a “true” female subjectivity. While some plots do reveal women successfully wielding male power and male authority, they nearly invariably end with the female’s willing doffing of male clothes and, presumably, male prerogatives.45

*Love’s Cure* both supports and contradicts her argument. Throughout the play Clara has performed male and female authority successfully, first by disobeying her father for the sake of her honor code, then by working with Genevora and Eugenia to show the men the ignorance of their vengeance. There is nothing she “cannot do” in this play, but Clara does, as Howard suggests, willingly dress as a woman. Howard does not define what

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45 Howard, 439.
makes a male prerogative, but Clara’s prerogative, from the beginning to the end of
*Love’s Cure*, is to protect her family and live and perform honorably.

*Love’s Cure* could have had a very different ending. Beaumont and Fletcher’s
*The Maid’s Tragedy* deals with similar issues—those of betrothals and precontracts,
warring factions, and a virtuous woman juxtaposed with a woman of loose morals.
However, the heroine of *The Maid’s Tragedy*, Aspatia, chooses to die by her lover’s
sword in a duel with the man to whom she was promised, whereas Clara chooses to fight
with any tools available and wins the day, as well as the opportunity to marry Vitelli.

Lucio has made promises to Genevora, and when Vitelli refuses to put down his
sword she pleads with him to stop the duel. With his newfound hardheaded masculinity,
he too is unwilling to give up the fight:

Mistress, you know I do not wear a vein
I would not rip for you, to doe you service:
Life’s but a word, a shadow, a melting dream,
Compar’d to essential, and eternal honor.
(V.iii.122-125)

Even though he is willing to die for her, he is not willing to give up the fight. Lucio sums
up the masculine attitude of the play: life means nothing without honor. The male
characters in the play are presented as misguided, as they seek revenge and bloody
resolution above the commitments they have made to their wives, daughters, and lovers.
Other early modern men would agree with the standpoint of the women, who beg the men
to desist and tell them that the most honorable path is to stop the judicial duel.

Saviolo would argue that life is much more important than honor. Joan Holmer
sums up the main thrust of his argument:
Saviolo insists on the exact opposite of “might makes right,” urging that the truly honorable man be godly, rational, and virtuous. Saviolo laments the contemporary abuse of the true purpose and methods of the duello: the “duello was not instituted for the honor of chiualrie, as our late combators have wrested it, but onely for the sifting out of truth” (399).  

Even Eugenia, who seems a tractable wife, tells her husband to give up the fight. He has a patently insulting response; he tells her to get back into the kitchen where she belongs:

   Go, get your home, and provide dinner for Your Son, and me: we’ll be exceeding merry…
   (V.iii.31-32)

This is a humorous moment that is also tinged with horror: Alvarez is completely clueless. His wife and daughter stand before him, one with a sword aimed at her heart, the other with a gun pointed at her chest, and he still relegates Eugenia to a purely domestic role. Eugenia ignores Alvarez’s quip, and Genevora nicely sums up the women’s thoughts about the duel:

   Throw down your sword; he is the most valiant That herein yields first.
   (V.iii.141-142)

This is one of the main arguments of the text: the man who holds love and Christian charity above his own self-importance is truly the most valiant. This is an attempt to recode honor and “masculine” virtue in terms of valuing human life. The women in the play are not devaluing masculine honor, nor are they passive, but they are emphasizing

46 Joan Ozark Holmer, “”Draw, if you be Men’: Saviolo’s Significance for Romeo and Juliet,” Shakespeare Quarterly 45 (1994), 179.
human life. Berek suggests that the women in the play perform traditionally “feminine” roles:

While cross-dressing in Shakespeare is often a strategy for enhancing a woman’s ability to discover her own mind, cross-dressing in Beaumont and Fletcher sometimes enacts a male fantasy about women’s unthreatening devotion to men and sometimes enacts a parallel fantasy—really an anxiety—about the instability of gender identity. Both fantasies, I suggest, reveal anxiety about the nature of power itself.47

Berek’s generality is not true of Love’s Cure. The women’s devotion is far from unthreatening—it in fact interrupts the men’s expression and conception of honor. The play presents gender identity as an anxiety and also suggests the “masculine” conception of honor is incorrect. This play is a warning, an illustration of how honor should properly function and how dangerous society has become with an emphasis on honor culture that is tied inextricably to violence.

Clara loses patience with Vitelli’s attitude and determines to force him to reconsider another way. He has threatened to murder her father with her sword. Therefore, she asks for it back. He seems to ignore her, and the on-stage audience, friends and retainers of the duelists and the proctors of the judicial duel, seem to be shocked by how the men ignore the women’s pleas:

Assistente. Are you men, or stone.

Alvarez. Men, and we’ll prove it with our swords.

Eugenia. Your hearing for six words, and we have done.-----Zancho come forth.-----We’ll fight our challenge too…

(V.iii.173-176)

47 Berek, 360.
Alvarez gives a stereotypical response; they will continue to blunder on with their phallic symbols, no matter the cost. It is no wonder he was banished for a similar crime years ago. While the men plan to continue with their arranged plan, other men on stage, like the Assistente, recognize a problem with the duel. Jennifer Low points out:

The protocols of the duel are, surprisingly, viewed as negative by most of Alvarez’s former comrades-in-arms. His friend Sayavedra perceives the legal duel as lowering men to the level of beasts; he calls in “[b]eyond the bounds of Christianity” (V.iii.2046.) Clara, too, regards this practice as more bloodthirsty than honorable.48

Low notes that the “protocols” are negative. Most on-stage viewers of the judicial duel are troubled by the women’s intrusion. Not every man in the play perceives the traditional honor codes as correct, though the women are the ones who hold up a mirror to the men’s actions. Genevora announces that as soon as the duel starts the women will “sheath these swords / In one another’s bosoms” (V.iii.174-175). The women take control of the situation through theatrics and through their parallel duel challenge. Duels—in reality or in show—always have elements of theater or metatheater. Fencing requires separate props and space, and usually an audience. Love’s Cure has theater within a theater within theater. But when the women appear onstage threatening to kill each other they supersede the metatheatrical element of the masculine duel to redefine honor.

Jennifer Low believes that the women’s actions make the men realize the reality of their violence:

48 Low, 167.
…far from making men redundant, the women’s pledge to kill one another holds up to the men a mirror of their senseless violence, showing its failure to make good on several of the premises underlying it. 49

A contemporary of Beaumont and Fletcher would agree. Shakespeare said it best when he wrote Hamlet:

…the purpose of playing,  
whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature: to show virtue her feature, scorn her own image…(III.ii.20-23) 50

By turning the metatheatrical duel scene in on the men and forcing them to witness their own violence, the women show not only the men but also the audience of playgoers the real cost of the degeneration of a culture that bases honor on dueling. Violence was a constant problem in early modern England, and this play is instructive with a message to value life over honor. Beaumont, Fletcher, and Massinger—through the women of Love’s Cure—seek to redefine honor culture by recasting honor as respect for life.

Jennifer Low explains that the duel in Love’s Cure finds social equilibrium when the women take up arms:

First, the men’s decision to fight has been based on the assumption that the duel will bring honor to the winners and shame to the losers. In contrast, the women’s suicide pact promises that both parties will die, thereby transforming “loss” into honorable martyrdom. Yet the pointlessness of the pact makes it monstrous, just as the pointlessness of the duel makes it barbaric. 51

49 Low, 165.


51 Low, 165.
There is another consideration at work: the third brand of heroism that Rose suggests, survival. Low fails to recognize that as the women recast honor the duel is not pointless in the least. Unnecessary loss of life is pointless, but the judicial duel is one step closer to a more “civilized” society—the civilization that the women represent. Masculinity is not the only way to access honor.

In forming the pact, the women also criticize the men’s desire for honor, recalling Lucio’s comment two scenes earlier that “’tis a bastard courage / That seeks a name out that way” (V.i.1889-90). Moreover the women’s pact undermines the notion that the men can prove their manhood through enacting the duel. As the women demonstrate, the willingness to risk death is not an exclusively male prerogative. If women too die “in combat,” how can that combat define or indicate one’s masculinity?

The emphasis of Low’s argument is on the construction of masculinity, while a more important consideration is the construction of honor. She is correct that a critical concern is masculinity, but we have to understand that the play not does not just function in terms of the binary of male/female, or, rather, the absence of the female, but also in terms of heroism and honor. A lack of female characteristics is what defines maleness in *Love’s Cure*, but femininity is often more important than masculinity. Clara initially lacks female characteristics and is seen as honorable when she performs “masculine” behavior. Lucio, who performs female characteristics, becomes male when he ceases to act like a woman. Becoming a woman makes Clara even more honorable, and ceasing to act like a woman makes Lucio less honorable.

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52 Low, 165-166.
As Clara and Genevora point swords at each other, the men become the audience and the women the actors. Some critics, however, think the women have a passive role in the play. Peter Berek writes:

Effacing most suggestions of wit or playfulness from cross-dressed characters, the Beaumont and Fletcher plays instead invented a new kind of “femaleness” that encodes passive version of male virtue, and in doing so implies a redefinition of maleness that conflates passivity with heroism. 53

Nowhere in *Love’s Cure* is Clara passive. Even when she gives up her sword, she is still able to control her destiny. The play recodes virtue by presenting the women’s manifestation of honor as superior. This play is a cautionary tale of how revenge can get out of control and how it can be reined in. Alvarez is indignant at the women’s actions. He called Clara mad early in the play for saving Vitelli and adhering to her own sense of honor—that which has a sense of fair play. He now says the women are mad (V.iii.183).

The women get ready to kill, Genevora and Clara to run each other through with swords and Eugenia to be shot with a pistol by Bobadilla. With the imminent threat of violence, the men stop the judicial duel, and the women are victorious. Clara immediately asks for her father’s permission to marry Vitelli. He replies:

Take her: if ye bring not
Betwixt you, boys that will find out new worlds,
And win ’em too I’m a false Prophet.
(V.iii.190-192)

Alvarez imagines heroic future progeny when Clara’s virtue and strength is married with Vitelli’s skill—a formidable combination to be sure.

53 Berek, 372-373.
This ending is still troubling and complicated. Clara must be aware that the match she has made is with a dangerous and powerful man who is now aware of what lengths she is willing to go to win the day. Marea Mitchell argues that this ending is too neat to question any social constructions:

The silencing of Clara and the willingness of all the women to self-slaughter supports Catherine Belsey’s historical analysis that “the stability of the family requires the subjugation of women to the point where they must be willing to efface themselves finally in order to preserve it.” The explicit ways in which the play discusses masculinity and femininity, the role of women in the maintenance of domestic and political order make the play a thought provoking and unusual negotiation of contemporary ideas, despite the attempt to tidy the issues away at the end.54

Clara is certainly not silenced, nor is Eugenia and Genevora; if anything, their voices are the loudest. The women are concerned with the “stability of the family,” but they use honor to stabilize the family, not self-effacement. Mitchell does not recognize that women, too, can have a sense of honor. The women clearly have a major role in domestic and political order; it is through their actions that extra-legal as well as legal concerns are resolved. The issues are not tidy in the end. Rather, the end is a disturbing conclusion where the men have been coerced into actions that do not fit their honor codes. Peter Berek writes:

The feud between Alvarez and Vitelli is resolved when the loving women of the play threaten suicide if the men fight. Love, in the end, trumps honor. Honor is less real, and more a costume, than sexual desire.55

54 Mitchell, iii.  
55 Berek, 365.
Love does trump the honor of the men, but not the honor code of the women, which values life over vengeance. The love of life is what resolves the play, and the women do not threaten suicide. They threaten to kill each other in a mock duel.

*Love’s Cure* is about value systems. Most critics seem to have decided that women do not engage with an honor system, which is incorrect. The reality is that in *Love’s Cure* the women’s honor system values life over vengeance. While some critics, such as Peter Berek, argue that the issues of the play are tidied away at the end, the last lines of the play are ambiguous. Alvarez recognizes the instructive nature of the message of the play:

Here may all Ladies learn, to make of foes
The perfect’st friends: and not the perfect’st foes
Of dearest friends as some doe now a days.
(V.iii.254-256)

This is another moment of metatheater: by using the word “here,” Alvarez draws attention to the enclosed nature of the play. The play has ended, and he and Vitelli sum up the action, and the intention, of the play. Alvarez knows that any women watching the play will get several ideas from the action: that threats do work on men, and foes can quickly turn into friends, and vice versa. As Vitelli says,

Behold the power of love: lo, nature lost
By custom irrecoverably, past the hope
Of friends restoring, love hath here retriv’d
To her own habit, made her blush to see
Her so long monstrous metamorphoses.
May strange affaires never have worse success.
(V.iii.254-262)

On the surface, these lines seem to be a summary of the plot: romantic love has turned Clara and Lucio back to their “proper” genders, which were obfuscated by “custom.”
Vitelli uses the word “irrecoverably,” and says that the loss of nature is “past” “restoring.” He is right, and Clara cannot be fully changed. She has her own sense of honor, which employs “masculine” traits and manifestations through swordplay, but she also utilizes language as a tool in a typically “feminine” way. Clara is able to recode honor in *Love’s Cure.*
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