

A beautifully calligraphed manuscript of Fletcher's best-known play

John Fletcher, *The Woman's Prize*. Manuscript on paper, ca. 1630–40. 12 inches x 8 inches (305 x 203 mm), 104 pages.

After William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher were the leading dramatists of their age. Collaboration in the cinema and in architecture is an accepted fact—even essential to the result; the staging of plays involves a similar conjunction and interplay of talents and compromises, but actual literary composition is generally considered to be a more lonely business. “Beaumont and Fletcher” is a less solid construction than, say, Liddell and Scott or Somerville and Ross, but it is now customary to speak of “The Beaumont and Fletcher Canon” and to attempt to situate within that canon the possible contributions of George Chapman, Ben Jonson, Philip Massinger, William Shakespeare, and Cyril Tourneur. Much of what survives from John Fletcher's own hand (albeit in scribal versions) is the text of single songs, so often copied in that musical age. This scribal manuscript of *The Woman's Prize* is therefore something special, a complete text antedating the first publication of the play in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Comedies and Tragedies* (London, 1647). The calligraphy is exquisitely rendered in a copperplate hand.

This rarity, from The Folger Shakespeare Library, is bound in twentieth-century dark green morocco-backed marbled boards. A typewritten note at the end (dated 2 March 1956) indicates that “This play ... was, before being bound separately, the third of seven plays in the Lambarde collection.”

Octavo code: fletch