

David Gunby, David Carnegie, and MacDonald P. Jackson, eds. *The Works of John Webster*, Vol. 4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Pp 642. Hardback £130. ISBN: 9780521766012.

José A. Pérez Díez
University of Leeds

The Cambridge Webster was planned in the early 1970s as the first critical edition of the whole body of writing by John Webster to be undertaken since that of F.L. Lucas (London, 1927). It would include his solo and collaborative work for the theatre, as well as his lesser-known poetry and prose, although four plays were excluded from the original plan to avoid duplication within the Cambridge University Press catalogue. The project, spearheaded by David Gunby and David Carnegie, was contracted in 1975, and Antony Hammond and Doreen DelVecchio were brought on board as Associate Textual Editors in 1984. Volume 1 finally appeared in 1995 and contained Webster's two most famous plays: *The White Devil* (ca 1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (ca 1613). Volume 2, published in 2003 with MacDonald P. Jackson joining the team following Hammond's death and DelVecchio's departure from the project, included Webster's only other solo play, *The Devil's Law-Case* (ca 1618), and the collaborative *A Cure for a Cuckold* (written with William Rowley and perhaps Thomas Heywood, 1624) and *Appius and Virginia* (perhaps written with Heywood, ca 1626). The 'third and final volume' appeared in 2007, edited by the same team, and featured an assortment of writings including a collaborative play, *Anything for a Quiet Life* (written with Thomas Middleton, ca 1622), as well as other dramatic, poetic, and prose works: *Monuments of Honour* (the Lord Mayor's Show of 1624), his induction and additions to John Marston's *The Malcontent* for the King's Men (ca 1604), the funeral elegy for Prince Henry, *A Monumental Column* (1613), plus shorter poems and the biographical sketches from *New Characters* (1615). The edition excluded Webster's four other collaborative plays, as they had already appeared in either of the two multivolume editions curated for Cambridge University Press by Fredson Bowers: three in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1953–61, rpt 1964 with commentaries by Cyrus Hoy), and one in *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, 10 vols. (Cambridge, 1966–96). Bowers's two landmark collections, however, focused almost exclusively on textual issues and, despite Hoy's commentaries for the 1964 Dekker reprint, they lacked the kind of all-encompassing attention to the literary and theatrical aspects of the plays that the Cambridge Webster embraced. As Gunby, Carnegie, and Jackson state

in their general preface to the present, unheralded volume 4, by 2007 they were 'having serious second thoughts' about the exclusion of the four plays, and thus in 2019, they have finally completed the Websterian canon turning 'this edition into a *Complete Works* of John Webster in substance if not in name' (xiii).

Three of the plays contained in this volume 4 are collaborations with Thomas Dekker (and other dramatists) dating from the first few years of the seventeenth century. *Sir Thomas Wyatt* probably conflates an earlier work commissioned by Philip Henslowe, the lost two-part *Lady Jane*, which dramatized the events following the death of Edward VI. The original texts were written by Webster and Dekker, possibly with Heywood, Henry Chettle, and Wentworth Smith, sometime between late 1602 and the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in November 1605. Given the brevity of the extant text, perhaps it was a reduced script devised for touring during 'the long closure of the London theatres from March 1603 to April 1604', when Queen Elizabeth's illness and death was followed by a severe outbreak of plague (25). The other two Webster-Dekker collaborations are *Westward Ho!* (1604) and *Northward Ho!* (1605), the two plays that they wrote for the Children of Paul's that form an interesting tryptic of city comedies with the better-known *Eastward Ho!* (ca 1605), which George Chapman, Ben Jonson, and Marston produced for the rival Children of the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars playhouse.

The volume closes with *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, which may have started as a collaboration between John Fletcher and Philip Massinger for the King's Men, but which was thwarted by Fletcher's unexpected death during the plague of 1625. Massinger completed the script in collaboration with Webster and Ford: typically, as in many of his collaborations with Fletcher, Massinger was responsible for the opening act and the beginning of the final scene (5.3); Webster wrote Act 2, a scene in 4, and most of 5, and Ford supplied Act 3 and revised Fletcher's draft for 4.1. The play was eventually licensed for performance in January 1626. Its entangled four-fold authorship has meant that the present edition is the third to appear in old spelling in a relatively short space of time: it is now available in the Bowers *Beaumont and Fletcher* (vol. X, 1996) and the Cambridge Webster, as well as in vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of John Ford* (ed. by Martin Wiggins and Eleanor Lowe, gen. ed. by Brian Vickers; Oxford, 2017). A play edited from different authorial perspectives is always interesting to read: as the present editors convincingly argue, the play 'proves that it belongs in the Webster canon more than the Fletcher canon (and not only because Webster wrote the largest share)' (xiv). Triplication might just be a bit too much, but these canonical overlaps are inevitable if the aim is to include everything that a certain author wrote.

From a technical point of view, the texts in this volume have been conscientiously edited to the highest standards of classic editorial practice. In this case, they are obviously reliant on 'the rigorous work of the leading editor of the New Bibliography' (xiii), Fredson Bowers. The collation of press variants in the surviving copies of the copy-texts, in particular, has been reproduced without amendment but has been checked where necessary with various copies and facsimiles. The old-spelling editorial principles, like the rest of the set, remain firmly grounded on Bowers's own practice, including the silent expansion and standardization of names in stage directions and speech prefixes, the emendation of erroneous or misleading punctuation to help the modern reader, and the regularization of orthography: *ij*, *u/v*, and long and short *s* have been standardized to modern orthography (so *lovinge* instead of *louinge*, *understandinge* instead of *vnderstandinge*, and so on). Given the healthy awareness of the theatrical dimension of these plays that Carnegie brings to the edition, and again following Bowers, editorial stage directions, speech directions, and asides have been added to make sense of passages that are particularly difficult to interpret. The texts are accompanied with useful and extensive commentary appended to the end of each play. The on-page textual notes appropriately bring together a historical collation of substantives and a record of the emendation of accidentals, transcending the stark division between the two sets that Bowers imposed in his editions, with accidentals listed separately at the back. Changes in lineation, however, are given on a list at the end of each play, after the tables of press variants, which feels somewhat odd: surely the scholarly reader will be as interested in tracing the editorial changes in punctuation as in those decisions affecting the structure of the verse. The back matter for each play is completed with a useful discussion of its literary sources.

Above and beyond, perhaps the most illuminating part of the contextualizing material for each play is the series of three essays that introduce them: a critical introduction by Gunby, a theatrical analysis by Carnegie, and a textual essay by Jackson. These are very fine pieces of scholarship that examine each play in minute detail and provide a wealth of information about the plays in the context of their original performances, the Webster canon, and the wider literary tradition. Apart from Gunby's insights into the literary aspects of the texts and Jackson's solid and rigorous textual scholarship, what I find perhaps more refreshing is Carnegie's detailed theatrical essays, which consider first the practicalities of the script as a performance text — overall length, the presence or absence of stage directions in the extant text, the balance of prose and verse, the genre, and the use of costume and diction as social markers — followed by sections on acting and dramaturgy, and a review of the play's stage history (such as it may be).

There is not much to contest or fault in this thoroughly useful and enjoyable volume. I personally think that the choice of old spelling for this kind of complete edition does not really serve the purpose of promoting the wider study and performance of these under-edited and lesser-known plays, as the unfamiliar spelling and punctuation may perhaps alienate non-specialist readers and, particularly, theatre practitioners. A number of old-spelling complete editions of some Renaissance dramatists, however, are still the best we have: in addition to Bowers's Dekker and Fletcher sets, I should mention the 1976 Oxford Massinger (Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, eds, 5 vols), as well as the recent Oxford Ford (3 vols; 2011–7) and the *Critical Reference Edition of the New Oxford Shakespeare* (Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan, eds [2017]). The Cambridge Webster joins that august pantheon of scholarly texts, and we can only congratulate and thank Gunby, Carnegie, and Jackson for their work of fifty years and the thoroughly commendable achievement of bringing the project to a happy end.