

**Classic Poetry Series**

# **John Fletcher**

**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

### **John Fletcher (1579 - 1625)**

John Fletcher's father William Fletcher is famous as the chaplain who tormented Mary, Queen of Scots at her execution. Little is known of the playwright's early life, except that he entered Bene't (now Corpus Christi) College, Cambridge, at the age of eleven. Sometime around 1606 he began writing for the London stage, working first for the Children of the Queen's Revels. He later moved on to Shakespeare's company, the King's Men, where he eventually became chief playwright.

Drama was a very popular form of entertainment in the Jacobean age, and there was a constant demand for new plays. Some idea of Fletcher's rate of production can be gathered from the 1679 folio edition of the plays he wrote with Beaumont; it does not contain everything he wrote (and may well contain much that he did not write), but the total of fifty-two plays is impressive - sixteen more than the 1623 Shakespeare Folio.

Realistic characterisation and plot was not Fletcher's strong point, but his plays contain some fine poetry, and satisfied his audience's taste for sensation and emotional dilemmas. His successful career was cut short by the great London Plague of 1625. Most people who could afford to fled to the safety of the country, but Fletcher was infected when he stayed in town to be measured for a new suit, and died soon afterwards.

## **Aspatia's Song**

LAY a garland on my herse  
Of the dismal yew;  
Maidens, willow branches bear;  
Say, I died true.

My love was false, but I was firm  
From my hour of birth.  
Upon my buried body lie  
Lightly, gentle earth!

John Fletcher

## **Away, Delights**

AWAY, delights! go seek some other dwelling,  
For I must die.  
Farewell, false love! thy tongue is ever telling  
Lie after lie.  
For ever let me rest now from thy smarts;  
Alas, for pity go  
And fire their hearts  
That have been hard to thee! Mine was not so.

Never again deluding love shall know me,  
For I will die;  
And all those griefs that think to overgrow me  
Shall be as I:  
For ever will I sleep, while poor maids cry--  
'Alas, for pity stay,  
And let us die  
With thee! Men cannot mock us in the clay.'

John Fletcher

## **Beauty Clear and Fair**

BEAUTY clear and fair,  
Where the air  
Rather like a perfume dwells;  
Where the violet and the rose  
Their blue veins and blush disclose,  
And come to honour nothing else:

Where to live near  
And planted there  
Is to live, and still live new;  
Where to gain a favour is  
More than light, perpetual bliss--  
Make me live by serving you!

Dear, again back recall  
To this light,  
A stranger to himself and all!  
Both the wonder and the story  
Shall be yours, and eke the glory;  
I am your servant, and your thrall.

John Fletcher

## **Bridal Song**

CYNTHIA, to thy power and thee  
We obey.  
Joy to this great company!  
And no day  
Come to steal this night away  
Till the rites of love are ended,  
And the lusty bridegroom say,  
Welcome, light, of all befriended!

Pace out, you watery powers below;  
Let your feet,  
Like the galleys when they row,  
Even beat;  
Let your unknown measures, set  
To the still winds, tell to all  
That gods are come, immortal, great,  
To honour this great nuptial!

John Fletcher

## Care-charming Sleep

Care-charming Sleep, thou easer of all woes,  
Brother to Death, sweetly thyself dispose  
On this afflicted prince; fall like a cloud  
In gentle showers; give nothing that is loud  
Or painful to his slumbers; easy, sweet,  
And as a purling stream, thou son of Night,  
Pass by his troubled senses; sing his pain,  
Like hollow murmuring wind or silver rain;  
Into this prince gently, oh gently slide,  
And kiss him into slumbers like a bride.

John Fletcher

## God Lyaeus

GOD Lyaeus, ever young,  
Ever honour'd, ever sung,  
Stain'd with blood of lusty grapes,  
In a thousand lusty shapes  
Dance upon the mazer's brim,  
In the crimson liquor swim;  
From thy plenteous hand divine  
Let a river run with wine:  
God of youth, let this day here  
Enter neither care nor fear.

John Fletcher

## Hear, ye Ladies

HEAR, ye ladies that despise  
What the mighty Love has done;  
Fear examples and be wise:  
Fair Callisto was a nun;  
Leda, sailing on the stream  
To deceive the hopes of man,  
Love accounting but a dream,  
Doted on a silver swan;  
Danae, in a brazen tower,  
Where no love was, loved a shower.

Hear, ye ladies that are coy,  
What the mighty Love can do;  
Fear the fierceness of the boy:  
The chaste Moon he makes to woo;  
Vesta, kindling holy fires,  
Circled round about with spies,  
Never dreaming loose desires,  
Doting at the altar dies;  
Ilion, in a short hour, higher  
He can build, and once more fire.

John Fletcher

## **Hence, All You Vain Delights from the Nice Valour**

Hence, all you vain delights,  
As short as are the nights  
Wherein you spend your folly:  
There's nought in this life sweet,  
If man were wise to see't,  
But only melancholy,  
O sweetest melancholy!  
Welcome, folded arms, and fixed eyes,  
A sigh that piercing mortifies,  
A look that's fastened to the ground,  
A tongue chained up without a sound;  
Fountain-heads, and pathless groves,  
Places which pale passion loves;  
Moonlight walks, when all the fowls  
Are warmly housed, save bats and owls;  
A midnight bell, a parting groan:  
These are the sounds we feed upon;  
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley,  
Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy.

John Fletcher

## Hymn to Pan

SING his praises that doth keep  
Our flocks from harm.  
Pan, the father of our sheep;  
And arm in arm  
Tread we softly in a round,  
Whilst the hollow neighbouring ground  
Fills the music with her sound.

Pan, O great god Pan, to thee  
Thus do we sing!  
Thou who keep'st us chaste and free  
As the young spring:  
Ever be thy honour spoke  
From that place the morn is broke  
To that place day doth unyoke!

John Fletcher

## Love's Emblems

NOW the lusty spring is seen;  
Golden yellow, gaudy blue,  
Daintily invite the view:  
Everywhere on every green  
Roses blushing as they blow,  
And enticing men to pull,  
Lilies whiter than the snow,  
Woodbines of sweet honey full:  
All love's emblems, and all cry,  
'Ladies, if not pluck'd, we die.'

Yet the lusty spring hath stay'd;  
Blushing red and purest white  
Daintily to love invite  
Every woman, every maid:  
Cherries kissing as they grow,  
And inviting men to taste,  
Apples even ripe below,  
Winding gently to the waist:  
All love's emblems, and all cry,  
'Ladies, if not pluck'd, we die.'

John Fletcher

## Melancholy

HENCE, all you vain delights,  
As short as are the nights  
Wherein you spend your folly!  
There 's naught in this life sweet,  
If men were wise to see't,  
But only melancholy--  
O sweetest melancholy!  
Welcome, folded arms and fixed eyes,  
A sight that piercing mortifies,  
A look that 's fasten'd to the ground,  
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These are the sounds we feed upon:  
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley,  
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John Fletcher

## Sleep

COME, Sleep, and with thy sweet deceiving  
Lock me in delight awhile;  
Let some pleasing dreams beguile  
All my fancies; that from thence  
I may feel an influence  
All my powers of care bereaving!

Though but a shadow, but a sliding,  
Let me know some little joy!  
We that suffer long annoy  
Are contented with a thought  
Through an idle fancy wrought:  
O let my joys have some abiding!

John Fletcher

## **Take, Oh Take Those Lips Away**

Take, oh take those lips away,  
That so sweetly were forsworn,  
And those eyes, the break of day,  
Lights that do mislead the morn:  
But my kisses bring again,  
Seals of love, but sealed in vain.

Hide, oh hide those hills of snow,  
Which thy frozen bosom bears,  
On whose tops the pinks that grow  
Are yet of those that April wears.  
But first set my poor heart free,  
Bound in those icy chains by thee.

John Fletcher

## **Weep no more**

WEEP no more, nor sigh, nor groan,  
Sorrow calls no time that 's gone:  
Violets pluck'd, the sweetest rain  
Makes not fresh nor grow again.  
Trim thy locks, look cheerfully;  
Fate's hid ends eyes cannot see.  
Joys as winged dreams fly fast,  
Why should sadness longer last?  
Grief is but a wound to woe;  
Gentlest fair, mourn, mourn no moe.

John Fletcher