

Classic Poetry Series

**John Fletcher**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**  
2012

**Publisher:**  
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# John Fletcher(20 December 1579 - 29 August 1625)

John Fletcher was a Jacobean playwright. Following [William Shakespeare](http://www.poemhunter.com/william-shakespeare/) as house playwright for the King's Men, he was among the most prolific and influential dramatists of his day; both during his lifetime and in the early Restoration, his fame rivalled Shakespeare's. Though his reputation has been eclipsed since, Fletcher remains an important transitional figure between the Elizabethan popular tradition and the popular drama of the Restoration.

## Biography

### Early Life

Fletcher was born in December 1579 in Rye, Sussex, and died of the plague in August 1625. His father Richard Fletcher was an ambitious and successful cleric who was in turn Dean of Peterborough, Bishop of Bristol, Bishop of Worcester, and Bishop of London (shortly before his death) as well as chaplain to Queen Elizabeth. As dean of Peterborough, Richard Fletcher, at the execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, at Fotheringay "knelt down on the scaffold steps and started to pray out loud and at length, in a prolonged and rhetorical style as though determined to force his way into the pages of history". He cried out at her death, "So perish all the Queen's enemies!"

Richard Fletcher died shortly after falling out of favour with the queen, over a marriage the queen had advised against. He appears to have been partly rehabilitated before his death in 1596; however, he died substantially in debt. The upbringing of John Fletcher and his seven siblings was entrusted to his paternal uncle [Giles Fletcher](http://www.poemhunter.com/giles-fletcher-the-elder-2/), a poet and minor official. His uncle's connections ceased to be a benefit, and may even have become a liability, after the rebellion of the Earl of Essex, who had patronised him.

Fletcher appears to have entered Corpus Christi College, Cambridge University in 1591, at the age of eleven. It is not certain that he took a degree, but evidence suggests that he was preparing for a career in the church. Little is known about his time at college, but he evidently followed the same path previously trod by the University wits before him, from Cambridge to the burgeoning commercial theatre of London.

### Collaborations with Beaumont

In 1606, he began to appear as an author for the Children of the Queen's Revels, then performing at the Blackfriars Theatre. Commendatory verses by Richard Brome in the Beaumont and Fletcher 1647 folio place Fletcher in the company of Ben Jonson; a comment of Jonson's to Drummond corroborates this claim, although it is not known when this friendship began. At the beginning of his career, his most important association was with Francis Beaumont. The two wrote together for close to a decade, first for the children and then for the King's Men. According to a legend transmitted or invented by John Aubrey, they also lived together (in Bankside), sharing clothes and having "one wench in the house between them." This domestic arrangement, if it existed, was ended by Beaumont's marriage in 1613, and their dramatic partnership ended after Beaumont fell ill, probably of a stroke, the same year.

### <b>Successor to Shakespeare</b>

By this time, Fletcher had moved into a closer association with the King's Men. He is commonly assumed to have collaborated with Shakespeare on Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen, and the lost Cardenio, which is probably (according to modern scholarly consensus) the basis for Lewis Theobald's play Double Falsehood. A play he wrote singly around this time, The Woman's Prize or the Tamer Tamed, is a sequel to The Taming of the Shrew. In 1616, after Shakespeare's death, Fletcher appears to have entered into an exclusive arrangement with the King's Men similar to Shakespeare's. Fletcher wrote only for that company between the death of Shakespeare and his own death nine years later. He never lost his habit of collaboration, working with Nathan Field and later with Philip Massinger, who succeeded him as house playwright for the King's Men. His popularity continued unabated throughout his life; during the winter of 1621, three of his plays were performed at court. He died in 1625, apparently of the plague. He seems to have been buried in what is now Southwark Cathedral, although the precise location is not known; there is a reference by Aston Cockayne to a single grave for Fletcher and Massinger (also buried in Southwark).

His mastery is most notable in two dramatic types, tragicomedy and comedy of manners, both of which exerted a pervasive influence on dramatists in the reign of Charles I and during the Restoration.

### <b>Stage History</b>

Fletcher's early career was marked by one significant failure, of The Faithful Shepherdess, his adaptation of Giovanni Battista Guarini's Il Pastor Fido, which

was performed by the Blackfriars Children in 1608. In the preface to the printed edition of his play, Fletcher explained the failure as due to his audience's faulty expectations. They expected a pastoral tragicomedy to feature dances, comedy, and murder, with the shepherds presented in conventional stereotypes – as Fletcher put it, wearing "gray cloaks, with curtailed dogs in strings." Fletcher's preface in defence of his play is best known for its pithy definition of tragicomedy: "A tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants [i.e., lacks] deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy; yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy." A comedy, he went on to say, must be "a representation of familiar people," and the preface is critical of drama that features characters whose action violates nature.

In that case, Fletcher appears to have been developing a new style faster than audiences could comprehend. By 1609, however, he had found his stride. With Beaumont, he wrote *Philaster*, which became a hit for the King's Men and began a profitable connection between Fletcher and that company. *Philaster* appears also to have initiated a vogue for tragicomedy; Fletcher's influence has been credited with inspiring some features of Shakespeare's late romances (Kirsch, 288-90), and his influence on the tragicomic work of other playwrights is even more marked. By the middle of the 1610s, Fletcher's plays had achieved a popularity that rivalled Shakespeare's and cemented the preeminence of the King's Men in Jacobean London. After Beaumont's retirement and early death in 1616, Fletcher continued working, both singly and in collaboration, until his death in 1625. By that time, he had produced, or had been credited with, close to fifty plays. This body of work remained a major part of the King's Men's repertory until the closing of the theatres in 1642.

During the Commonwealth, many of the playwright's best-known scenes were kept alive as drolls, the brief performances devised to satisfy the taste for plays while the theatres were suppressed. At the re-opening of the theatres in 1660, the plays in the Fletcher canon, in original form or revised, were by far the most common fare on the English stage. The most frequently revived plays suggest the developing taste for comedies of manners. Among the tragedies, *The Maid's Tragedy* and, especially, *Rollo Duke of Normandy* held the stage. Four tragicomedies (*A King and No King*, *The Humorous Lieutenant*, *Philaster*, and *The Island Princess*) were popular, perhaps in part for their similarity to and foreshadowing of heroic drama. Four comedies (*Rule a Wife And Have a Wife*, *The Chances*, *Beggars' Bush*, and especially *The Scornful Lady*) were also popular.

Yet the popularity of these plays relative to those of Shakespeare and to new productions steadily eroded. By around 1710, Shakespeare's plays were more

frequently performed, and the rest of the century saw a steady erosion in performance of Fletcher's plays. By 1784, Thomas Davies asserted that only *Rule a Wife* and *The Chances* were still current on stage a generation later, Alexander Dyce mentioned only *The Chances*.

Since then Fletcher has increasingly become a subject only for occasional revivals and for specialists. Fletcher and his collaborators have been the subject of important bibliographic and critical studies, but the plays have been revived only infrequently.

### **<b>Plays</b>**

Fletcher's canon presents unusual difficulties of attribution. He collaborated regularly and widely, most often with Beaumont and Massinger but also with Nathan Field, Shakespeare and others. Some of his early collaborations with Beaumont were later revised by Massinger, adding another layer of complexity to unravel. Fortunately for scholars and students of English literature, Fletcher also used highly distinctive mannerisms in his creative efforts that effectively identify his presence. He frequently uses *ye* instead of *you*, at rates sometimes approaching 50%. He frequently employs *'em* for *them*, along with a set of other particular preferences in contractions. He adds a sixth stressed syllable to a standard pentameter verse line—most often *sir* but also *too* or *still* or *next*. Various other specific habits and preferences reveal his hand. The detection of this pattern, this personal Fletcherian textual profile, has allowed researchers to penetrate the confusions of the Fletcher canon with good success—and has in turn encouraged the use of similar techniques more broadly in the study of literature.

Careful bibliography has established the authors of each play with some degree of certainty. Determination of the exact shares of each writer (for instance by Cyrus Hoy) in particular plays is ongoing, based on patterns of textual and linguistic preferences, stylistic grounds, and idiosyncrasies of spelling.

The list that follows gives a consensus verdict (at least a tentative one) on the authorship of the plays in Fletcher's canon, with likeliest dates of authorship, dates of first publication, and dates of licensing by the Master of the Revels, where available.





# 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





# 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

# Drinking Song

DRINK to-day, and drown all sorrow,  
You shall perhaps not do it tomorrow.  
Best, while you have it, use your breath;  
There is no drinking after death.

Wine works the heart up, wakes the wit;  
There is no cure 'gainst age but it.  
It helps the headache, cough, and tistic,  
And is for all diseases physic.

Then let us swill, boys, for our health;  
Who drinks well, loves the commonwealth.  
And he that will to bed go sober,  
Falls with the leaf still in October.

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:  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;God of youth, let this day here  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;Enter neither care nor fear.

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



# Love's Emblems

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

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

John Fletcher



# Melancholy

HENCE, all you vain delights,  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;As short as are the nights  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;Wherein you spend your folly!  
There 's naught in this life sweet,  
If men were wise to see't,  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;But only melancholy--  
&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;O sweetest melancholy!  
Welcome, folded arms and fixed eyes,  
A sight that piercing mortifies,  
A look that 's fasten'd to the ground,  
A tongue chain'd up without a sound!

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Are warmly housed, save bats and owls!  
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&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;&nbsp;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

# Orpheus I Am, Come From The Deeps Below

Orpheus I am, come from the deeps below,  
To thee, fond man, the plagues of love to show.  
To the fair fields where loves eternal dwell  
There's none that come, but first they pass through hell:  
Hark, and beware! unless thou hast loved, ever  
Beloved again, thou shalt see those joys never.

Hark how they groan that died despairing!  
Oh, take heed, then!  
Hark how they howl for over-daring!  
All these were men.

They that be fools, and die for fame,  
They lose their name;  
And they that bleed,  
Hark how they speed!

Now in cold frosts, now scorching fires  
They sit, and curse their lost desires;  
Nor shall these souls be free from pains and fears,  
Till women waft them over in their tears.

John Fletcher

# Philaster

To give a stronger testimony of love  
Than sickly promises (which commonly  
In princes find both birth and burial  
In one breath), we have drawn you, worthy sir,  
To make your fair endearments to our daughter,  
And worthy services known to our subjects,  
Now loved and wondered at; next, our intent  
To plant you deeply our immediate heir  
Both to our blood and kingdoms. For this lady  
(The best part of your life, as you confirm me,  
And I believe), though her few years and sex  
Yet teach her nothing but her fears and blushes,  
Desires without desire, discourse and knowledge  
Only of what herself is to herself,  
Make her feel moderate health; and, when she sleeps,  
In making no ill day, knows no ill dreams.  
Think not, dear sir, these undivided parts  
That must mold up a virgin, are put on  
To show her so, as borrowed ornaments  
To talk of her perfect love to you, or add  
An artificial shadow to her nature.  
No, sir; I boldly dare proclaim her yet  
No woman. But woo her still, and think her modesty  
A sweeter mistress than the offered language  
Of any dame, were she a queen, whose eye  
Speaks common loves and comforts to her servants.  
Last, noble son (for so I now must call you),  
What I have done thus public is not only  
To add comfort in particular  
To you or me, but all, and to confirm  
The nobles and the gentry of these kingdoms  
By oath to your succession, which shall be  
Within this month at most.

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

# The Dead Host's Welcome

It is late and cold; stir up the fire;  
Sit close, and draw the table nigher;  
Be merry, and drink wine that's old,  
A hearty medicine 'gainst a cold:  
Your beds of wanton down the best,  
Where you shall tumble to your rest;  
I could wish you wenches too,  
But I am dead, and cannot do.  
Call for the best the house may ring,  
Sack, white, and claret, let them bring,  
And drink apace, while breath you have;  
You'll find but cold drink in the grave:  
Plover, partridge, for your dinner,  
And a capon for the sinner,  
You shall find ready when you're up,  
And your horse shall have his sup:  
Welcome, welcome, shall fly round,  
And I shall smile, though under ground.

John Fletcher

# The Faithful Shepherdess (Monologue)

Through yon same bending plain,  
That flings his arms down to the main,  
And through these thick woods have I run,  
Whose bottom never kissed the sun  
Since the lusty spring began;  
All to please my master Pan,  
Have I trotted without rest  
To get him fruit, for at a feast  
He entertains this coming night  
His paramour, the Syrinx bright.-  
But behold, a fairer sight!  
By that heavenly form of thine,  
Brightest fair, thou art divine,  
Sprung from great immortal race  
Of the gods; for in they face  
Shines more awful majesty  
Than dull weak mortality  
Dare with misty eyes behold,  
And live. Therefore on this mold  
Lowly to I bend my knee  
In worship of thy deity.  
Deign it, goddess, from my hand  
To receive whate'er this land  
From her fertile womb doth send  
Of her choice fruits, and but lend belief to that the satyr tells:  
Fairer by the famous wells  
To this present day ne'er grew,  
Never better nor more true.  
Here be grapes, whose lusty blood  
Is the learned poets' good,  
Sweeter yet did never crown  
The head of Bacchus; nuts more brown  
Than the squirrel's teeth that crack them.  
Deign, O fairest fair, to take them!  
For these black-eyed Dryope  
Hath oftentimes commanded me  
With my claspéd knee to climb-  
See how well the lusty time  
Hath decked their rising cheeks in red,

Such as on your lips is spread!  
Here be berries for a queen-  
Some be red, some be green;  
These are of that luscious meat  
The great god Pan himself doth eat;  
All these, and what the woods can yield,  
The hanging mountain, or the field,  
I freely offer, and ere long  
Will bring you more, more sweet and strong,  
Till when, humbly leave I take,  
Lest the great Pan do awake,  
That sleeping lies in a deep glade  
Under a broad beech's shade.  
I must go, I must run  
Swifter than the fiery sun.

John Fletcher



# The Power Of Music

Orpheus with his lute made trees,  
And the mountain-tops that freeze,  
Bow themselves when he did sing:  
To his music plants and flowers  
Ever sprung; as sun and showers  
There had made a lasting spring.

Everything that heard him play,  
Even the billows of the sea,  
Hung their heads, and then lay by.  
In sweet music is such art,  
Killing care and grief of heart  
Fall asleep, or, hearing, die.

John Fletcher

# To His Sleeping Mistress

Oh, fair sweet face! oh, eyes, celestial bright,  
Twin stars in heaven, that now adorn the night!  
Oh, fruitful lips, where cherries ever grow,  
And damask cheeks, where all sweet beauties blow!  
Oh, thou, from head to foot divinely fair!  
Cupid's most cunning net's made of that hair;  
And, as he weaves himself for curious eyes,  
'Oh me, oh me, I'm caught myself!' he cries:  
Sweet rest about thee, sweet and golden sleep,  
Soft peaceful thoughts, your hourly watches keep,  
Whilst I in wonder sing this sacrifice,  
To beauty sacred, and those angel eyes!

John Fletcher

## To Venus

Oh, fair sweet goddess, queen of love,  
Soft and gentle as thy doves,  
Humble-eyed, and ever ruing  
Those poor hearts, their loves pursuing!  
Oh, thou mother of delights,  
Crowner of all happy nights,  
Star of dear content and pleasure,  
Of mutual loves and endless treasure!  
Accept this sacrifice we bring,  
Thou continual youth and spring;  
Grant this lady her desires,  
And every hour we'll crown thy fires

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