

Classic Poetry Series

John Ford
- poems -

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John Ford(17 April 1586 - 1640)

John Ford was an English Jacobean and Caroline playwright and poet born in Ilsington in Devon in 1586.

 Life and Work

Ford left home to study in London, although more specific details are unclear — a sixteen-year-old John Ford of Devon was admitted to Exeter College, Oxford on 26 March 1601, but this was when the dramatist had not yet reached his sixteenth birthday. He joined an institution that was a prestigious law school but also a centre of literary and dramatic activity — the Middle Temple. A prominent junior member in 1601 was the playwright John Marston. (It is unknown whether Ford ever actually studied law while a resident of the Middle Temple, or whether he was strictly a gentleman boarder, which was a common arrangement at the time.)

It was not until 1606 that Ford wrote his first works for publication. In the spring of that year he was expelled from Middle Temple, due to his financial problems, and *Fame's Memorial* and *Honour Triumphant* soon followed. Both works are clear bids for patronage: *Fame's Memorial* is an elegy of 1169 lines on the recently-deceased Charles Blount, 1st Earl of Devonshire, while *Honour Triumphant* is a prose pamphlet, a verbal fantasia written in connection with the jousts planned for the summer 1606 visit of King Christian IV of Denmark. It is unknown whether either of these brought any financial remuneration to Ford; yet by June 1608 he had enough money to be readmitted to the Middle Temple.

Prior to the start of his career as a playwright, Ford wrote other non-dramatic literary works—the long religious poem *Christ's Bloody Sweat* (1613), and two prose essays published as pamphlets, *The Golden Mean* (1613) and *A Line of Life* (1620). After 1620 he began active dramatic writing, first as a collaborator with more experienced playwrights — primarily Thomas Dekker, but also John Webster and William Rowley — and by the later 1620s as a solo artist.

Ford is best known for the tragedy *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633), a family drama with a plot line of incest. The play's title has often been changed in new productions, sometimes being referred to as simply *Giovanni and Annabella* — the play's leading, incestuous brother-and-sister characters; in a nineteenth-century work it is coyly called *The Brother and Sister*. Shocking as the play is, it is still widely regarded as a classic piece of English drama.

He was a major playwright during the reign of Charles I. His plays deal with conflicts between individual passion and conscience and the laws and morals of society at large; Ford had a strong interest in abnormal psychology that is expressed through his dramas. His plays often show the influence of Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. While virtually nothing is known of Ford's personal life, one reference suggests that Ford's interest in melancholia may have been more than merely intellectual. The volume *Choice Drollery* (1656) asserts that

Deep in a dump alone John Ford was gat,
With folded arms and melancholy hat.

A Bridal Song

COMFORTS lasting, loves increasing,
Like soft hours never ceasing;
Plenty's pleasure, peace complying,
Without jars, or tongues envying;
Hearts by holy union wedded,
More than theirs by custom bedded;
Fruitful issues; life so graced,
Not by age to be defaced;
Budding as the year ensu'th,
Every spring another youth:
All what thought can add beside,
Crown this Bridegroom and this Bride!

John Ford

Oh, No More, No More...

Oh, no more, no more, too late
Sighs are spent; the burning tapers
Of a life as chaste as fate,
Pure as are unwritten papers,
Are burned out; no heat, no light
Now remains; 'tis ever night.

Love is dead; let lovers' eyes,
Locked in endless dreams,
Th' extremes of all extremes,
Ope no more, for now Love dies.
Now Love dies---implying
Love's martyrs must be ever, ever dying.

John Ford