Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher collaborated so intimately, on so many different plays, that they were long thought of as a single consolidated author, “Beaumont-and-Fletcher.” Modern scholarship and modern analytical techniques have done much and will surely do more to disentangle the separate contributions of the two fluent, facile young men to the mass of stagecraft that still passes under their joint names. For during the few short years of their collaboration, they wrote—either together, or separately, or with other collaborators—dozens of plays of every different kind—romantic comedies, pastoral tragedies, classical-historical melodramas, broad farces, heroic romances, and a whole inventory of other types. Tradition has it that Beaumont was more the theatrical architect, who laid out the structure of the plays and ordered the action, while Fletcher specialized in dramatic set-speeches and fanciful, extravagant scenes. But in one respect, they were equally matched—as lyric poets, and it is in this capacity that they are represented here.

On the stage, where it passes quickly over the audience and cannot be recalled for second thoughts or further study, poetry must charm at first hearing. It cannot tease the audience into prolonged meditation, or test its power to catch a distant allusion. A musical accompaniment will help enormously to give the poem weight, to make it stand out against the texture of the play proper as something special. But poetry must always be very discreet in the presence of music; if it makes too many demands of its own, it will end up choking and obstructing the mood that the music aims to create. The poetry of Beaumont and Fletcher, with its clear debt to Ben Jonson, is a model of poetic work which reconciles these various demands. Simple of syntax, and undemanding in its assertions, it builds toward the creation of a mood—effortless, liquid, and poised.

Songs from *The Faithful Shepherdess*¹

*Sing His Praises That Doth Keep*

Sing his praises that doth keep
Our flocks from harm,
Pan,² the father of our sheep;
And arm in arm

5 Tread we softly in a round,
Whilst the hollow neighboring ground
Fills the music with her sound.

Pan, O great god Pan, to thee
Thus do we sing:

10 Thou that keep’st us chaste and free
As the young spring,
Ever be thy honor spoke,
From that place the morn is broke
To that place day doth unyoke.

¹. By John Fletcher.
². The Roman god of nature, of fields, flocks, and streams.
Shepherds All and Maidens Fair

Shepherds all and maidens fair,
Fold your flocks up, for the air
'Gins to thicken, and the sun
Already his great course hath run.

See the dewdrops how they kiss
Every little flower that is,
Hanging on their velvet heads
Like a rope of crystal beads.

See the heavy clouds low falling
And bright Hesperus down calling
The dead night from underground,
At whose rising mists unsound
Damps and vapors fly apace,
Hovering o'er the wanton face

Of these pastures, where they come
Striking dead doth bud and bloom.

Therefore from such danger lock
Everyone his loved flock,
And let your dogs lie loose without,
Lest the wolf come as a scout
From the mountain, and ere day
Bear a lamb or kid away,
Or the crafty thievish fox
Break upon your simple flocks.

To secure yourself from these
Be not too secure in ease;
Let one eye his watches keep
Whilst the t'other eye doth sleep.
So you shall good shepherds prove
And for ever hold the love
Of our great god. Sweetest slumbers
And soft silence fall in numbers:
On your eyelids: so farewell,
Thus I end my evening's knell.

Do Not Fear to Put Thy Feet

Do not fear to put thy feet
Naked in the river, sweet;
Think not leech or newt or toad
Will bite thy foot when thou hast trod;

Nor let the water, rising high
As thou wad'st in, make thee cry
And sob; but ever live with me,
And not a wave shall trouble thee.
See the Day Begins to Break

See the day begins to break,
And the light shoots like a streak
Of subtle fire, the wind blows cold,
Whilst the morning doth unfold.

Now the birds begin to rouse,
And the squirrel from the boughs
Leaps to get him nuts and fruit.
The early lark, that erst was mute,
Carols to the rising day
Many a note and many a lay.

Songs from Valentinian

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.

Hear, Ye Ladies That Despise

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;
Danaë, in a brazen tower
Where no love was, loved a shower.

Hear, ye ladies that are coy,
What the might Love can do,
Fear the fierceness of the boy;

6. Once, formerly.
1. By John Fletcher.
2. The song is sung over Valentinian (“this afflicted prince”) in the play.
3. All three ladies were victims of Zeus. Callisto was vowed to the service of Diana, who demanded chastity of her followers; Zeus raped her, then, in the shape of a swan, seduced Leda, and in the shape of a shower of gold overcame Danaë, who had been locked up in a brass tower.
4. I.e., Cupid, who made Diana herself, goddess of the moon and of chastity, fall in love with Endymion.
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.

ca. 1612

Lovers, Rejoice!

Lovers, rejoice! your pains shall be rewarded,  
The god of Love himself grieves at your crying;  
No more shall frozen honor be regarded,  
Nor the coy faces of a maid denying,  
No more shall virgins sigh, and say, "We dare not,  
For men are false and what they do they care not."  
All shall be well again; then do not grieve,  
Men shall be true, and women shall believe.  
Lovers, rejoice! what you shall say henceforth  
When you have caught your sweethearts in your arms  
Shall be accounted oracle and worth;  
No more fainthearted girls shall dream of harms,  
And cry they are too young; the god hath said,  
Fifteen shall make a mother of a maid;  
Then, wise men, pull your roses yet unblown,  
Love hates the too-ripe fruit that falls alone.

ca. 1612

Songs from The Masque of the Inner Temple  
and Gray’s Inn

Shake Off Your Heavy Trance

Shake off your heavy trance,  
And leap into a dance,  
Such as no mortals use to tread,  
Fit only for Apollo  
To play to, for the moon to lead,  
And all the stars to follow.

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5. Here not the Roman goddess of that name, but a Vestal Virgin, vowed to chastity and faithful to her vows, who fades away as a result of longings unknown even to herself.

6. Set on fire. Troy ("Ilion") is said to have been destroyed by Cupid because he instigated the act of Paris in stealing Helen of Troy from her husband Menelaus, thereby setting off the Trojan War.

7. From Cupid’s Revenge by Beaumont or Fletcher or both, with the help of Philip Massinger and perhaps Nathaniel Field.


2. Are accustomed.

3. God of poetry in Greek mythology.
Ye Should Stay Longer If We Durst

Ye should stay longer if we durst. 
Away! Alas, that he that first 
Gave Time wild wings to fly away 
Hath now no power to make him stay. 
5  But though these games must needs be played, 
I would this pair, when they are laid,4 
And not a creature nigh them, 
Could catch his scythe as he doth pass, 
And cut his wings and break his glass,5 
10  And keep him ever by them.

Peace and Silence Be the Guide

Peace and silence be the guide 
To the man and to the bride! 
If there be a joy yet new 
In marriage, let it fall on you, 
5  That all the world may wonder. 
If we should stay, we should do worse, 
And turn our blessing to a curse, 
By keeping you asunder.

The Passionate Man’s Song1

Hence all you vain delights,  
As short as are the nights 
Wherein you spend your folly: 
There’s naught in this life sweet, 
5  If man were wise to see’t, 
But only melancholy, 
Oh sweetest melancholy. 
Welcome, folded arms and fixéd eyes, 
A sigh that, piercing, mortifies, 
10  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, 
15  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.

ca. 1620 1647

4. I.e., laid to rest.
5. Time traditionally carries a scythe and an hourglass, and flies on swift wings, because he mows things down, measures their duration, and flees away much too fast.
1. From The Nice Valor, by John Fletcher. This song clearly had an influence on both the form and thought of Milton’s L’Allegro and Il Penseroso.