

ROUTLEDGE REVIVALS

The Fancies, Chast and Noble

Volume XII

J. Ford



Routledge Revivals

**The Fancies,
Chast and Noble**



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by **J. Ford**

A critical edition
edited by
Dominick J. Hart

The Renaissance Imagination
Volume 12



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Important Literary and Theatrical Texts
from the Late Middle Ages
through the Seventeenth Century

Stephen Orgel
Editor



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CHAPTER ONE

I

John Ford was born in 1586. The date of his birth and the fact that he was the eldest son of a fairly wealthy landowner are all we know of his youth until 1601, when he apparently entered Oxford.¹ His stay there, if he was there at all, was very brief, as in 1602 he was enrolled as a member of the Middle Temple, drawn there, probably, by an uncle who was a member of high standing. How long he was there, and whether or not he actually completed his studies for a law degree is unknown. We do know that in 1610 he was expelled from the Middle Temple for failure to pay his buttery bill, and that in 1617 he joined in a protest against the requirement to wear caps in the dining room of the Temple. The fact that he was there on these two dates does not imply a continuous residence, but the conjecture is that he was a fairly regular member of the Temple and that he probably did obtain his law degree.

Ford's father died in the year 1610 and bequeathed to Ford ten pounds a year, but to each of Ford's two younger brothers he bequeathed twenty pounds a year. What this may reflect upon Ford's character we can only guess. However, in 1616, Ford received an additional bequest from his uncle of twenty pounds yearly. This combined with the

ten pounds received from his father would have given Ford a somewhat meager income, though an amount sufficient to live.

Any attempt to describe what type of person John Ford was must rest on a shaky foundation. The only direct allusion to Ford's personality is the following small couplet from The Times Poet, a whimsical book of verse on some of the public figures of the day.

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

Some critics have attempted to construe this statement to indicate that Ford was a reserved, shy and melancholy individual.² Such a conclusion, weakened by the meager support the couplet would give to any conclusion, is further weakened by the fact that the author of the couplet may not have been referring to Ford himself, but to his work which, as we shall see, makes wide use of Burton's theory of melancholy. It would be wise, therefore, in discussing Ford's personality to disregard this couplet and turn to the testimony of one who furnishes us with rather slim but authoritative evidence - Ford himself.

The dedications which precede Ford's plays are remarkable for their lack of sycophantic tone. At a time when many of his contemporaries were filling their dedications with hyperbolic praise in attempts to secure patronage, Ford's dedications were unusually honest, direct

and independent. Also unlike most of his contemporaries, Ford did not seem to have a patron. Two of his dedications, Love's Sacrifice and The Lover's Melancholy, are addressed to his very good friend, cousin and namesake, John Ford. Others, like The Fancies, though addressed to persons of rank, are typically independent, and make clear that Ford was not seeking patronage. The dedication to The Fancies reads in part as follows. "Endeavour of being knowne to your Lordship by such meanes, I conceive no Ambition; the extent being bounded by Humility, so neither can the Argument appeare ungracious, nor the Writer, in that, without allowance." From this practice it seems likely that Ford was either an extremely honest and sincere individual, or that he had a fairly substantial source of private income. As much as we may wish to corroborate the former, the latter seems to be the most acceptable conclusion. Ford did come from a financially comfortable family, was probably a lawyer, and did have, from his father and his uncle, a yearly income of thirty pounds. This, combined with statements in a few of his dedications to the effect that his plays were merely the product of his leisure hours, does seem to indicate that Ford did have a private and sufficient source of income, and did not rely on his writing to provide his livelihood.³

The date of Ford's death is a mystery. He disappears from almost all records after writing his The Lady's Trial in 1638. Theories have ranged all the way from placing his death in the late 1630's or early 1640's to sometime after the Restoration. The only actual evidence we have is two epigrams dated 1639 and 1641 which seem to indicate that Ford was still alive at those times.⁴

His literary career itself can conveniently be divided into three periods. The first period, during which he wrote prose and poetry, runs from 1606 to 1615. During this period his work reveals a marked interest in love, especially among those of aristocratic birth, and in the cult, or the conventions, which surrounded the aristocracy. Fames Memorial, for example, is a poem in honor of the Earl of Devonshire, the lover and later the husband of Lady Rich. His prose and poetry of this period, however, are of little literary value today, though they do serve to show us the early inclination of Ford's mind toward the theories of love and aristocracy which were to have a profound effect on his later dramatic work. The works of this period are:

Fames Memorial (1606) - a poem

Honor Triumphant (1606) - a prose pamphlet

Christes Bloodie Sweat (1613) - a poem

The Golden Meane (1613) - a prose pamphlet

Sir Thomas Overburyes Ghost (1615) - a prose pamphlet
(now lost)

A Line of Life (1615) - a prose pamphlet

The second period of Ford's career runs from 1621 to 1625. During this period he worked on plays, but only in collaboration with older and more well-known dramatists. Ford's collaborative efforts include:

The Witch of Edmonton (1621) - Ford, Dekker, and
Rowley

The Spanish Gypsy (1622-3) - Ford, Middleton, and
Rowley

A Late Murther of the Sun Upon the Mother (1624) -
Ford, Dekker, Webster, and Rowley (now lost)

The Bristowe Merchant (1624) - Ford and Dekker (now
lost)⁵

The Faire Maid of the Inne (1625) - Ford and Fletcher

It appears that in most of his collaboration Ford worked chiefly with single scenes or characters. The detailed and sometimes delicate work of creating and developing the plot was more often than not left to a more experienced collaborator.⁶ It is without much doubt that this is one of the major causes of the careless or skimpy plots which some critics hold often mars his own best dramatic work.⁷

The third period of Ford's career, during which he produced his own dramatic work unaided, runs from 1628 to 1638. We do not have a date for his last play The Queen, but it was probably written soon after The Lady's Trial. All his plays were produced by either the Queen's or the King's Men at either the Phoenix, the Blackfriars, or the Cockpit. As an examination of his plays reveals, and as he himself tells us in his dedications, all of Ford's plays were directed at the higher class of audience, that is, at the educated, middle, and aristocratic classes, the type of audience which may have formed a regular clientele for the indoor theaters of the period.⁸ When compared to his predecessors, Ford's work usually contains a minimum of comic buffoonery designed to please the tastes of the lower classes. This is fortunate since when Ford does employ such buffoonery, it is often inept, indicating either a lack of ability or a lack of concern on the part of the artist, or its comic potential takes second place to a primary function of reinforcing, albeit weakly, the main plot. An exception to this tendency, however, is 'Tis Pity. Here all the subplots are integrated with and necessary to the main plot. They are used to present Annabella's suitors as foils for Giovanni. Also, though Ford's plays were produced by adult companies at both public and private theaters, there was, during Ford's career, a

considerable narrowing of the gap that had previously existed between public and private theaters. Thus it is not strange that Ford directed his plays, often performed on the public stage, to the higher classes. The audience of the public theater, was, during the 1630's, fairly well sprinkled with individuals who formerly could be found only at the private theaters.⁹

The following is a list of Ford's own dramatic works. The years assigned to The Broken Heart, Love's Sacrifice, and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore are conjectural. All three of these plays were published in 1633, but it is unlikely that Ford wrote them all in one year. The Fancies, though published in 1638, must have been written before May 12, 1636, the date on which the Queen's Majesties Servants ceased to play at the Phoenix.¹⁰

The Lover's Melancholy (1628)

The Broken Heart (1631-2)

Love's Sacrifice and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore (1632-3)

Perkin Warbeck (1633-4)

The Fancies: Chast and Noble (1635-6)

The Lady's Trial (1637-8)

The Queen (?)

II

Every age has its own particular prejudices. As the neoclassicists favored Jonson, so the romanticists favored Shakespeare. Even so, the Victorians, unable to accept Ford's themes, could not delve beyond them into a full appreciation of his work. These critics were appalled by the themes of adultery, incest, and illicit love which crowd Ford's work. Apparently they did not look beyond the themes. Affronted by the subject matter of his plays, they almost immediately condemned Ford. They did not seem to seek either for any legitimate reasons as to why Ford chose such themes, or for any dramatic value which the themes may have had. They combined this fault with his loose plots and his occasional use of sensationalism, two weaknesses which Ford was guilty of, and dismissed him as, at best, a second-rate dramatist. This is somewhat ironic as Ford indicates in his dedications that his plays are intended for a thoughtful audience - an intention recognized and seconded in Edward Greenfield's commendatory poem which precedes The Fancies.

These Fancies chast and noble, are no straines
Drop't from the itch of over-heated braines.

They speake unblushing truth,
The guard of Beauty, and the care of youth;
Well relish't, might repayre
An Academy, for the young, and faire.

(To Master John Ford 7-12)¹¹

Similarly, in Ford's own prologue to The Broken Heart there is the following.

The title lends no expectation here
Of apish laughter, or of some lame jeer
At place or persons; no pretended clause
Of jests fit for a brothel courts applause
From vulgar admiration: such low songs,
Tuned to unchaste ears, suit not modest
tongues.

(Prologue 3-8)¹²

Thus, if those who charge Ford with "decadence" are correct, either Ford was not as honest as he seems to have been and the lines from The Broken Heart were a deliberate attempt to mislead the audience, or such critics failed to evaluate Ford properly and ignored the warning he himself gives in these lines.¹³ The latter case seems to be the most likely.

More recently, however, readers have sought for and found some possible reasons as to why Ford chose the themes that he did and what inducements of his period led him to his choice. Thus they have been able to comprehend more fully what Ford's intentions were and have come to a better understanding of his work, and through this understanding to a greater appreciation. They have also discovered that Ford is particularly a product of his age.¹⁴

Ford was heir to a dual Jacobean dramatic tradition. On the one hand there was the drama of the Fletcherian type with emphasis on beautiful light lyric verse, melodramatic situations and sudden and surprise reversals of

fortune. On the other hand there was the drama of the type characteristic of Middleton, which was more psychological than melodramatic, and whose verse was not as lyrical as it was realistic.¹⁵ Ford's drama, for the most part, took the direction of Middleton's.¹⁶ He was often melodramatic, but in his better moments melodrama was incidental to his psychological analysis of character. This is fortunate as Ford's genius was in analysis and inquiry, not in incident. During this time, however, dramatists were becoming increasingly aware of the value of their work as literature. The psychological studies of Stendhal, Flaubert and Joyce had not yet been written, and literature to the Jacobean, at least fiction, necessarily implied a tight plot structure.¹⁷ This view may have been partly the cause of Ford's attempt to fuse the earlier form of action drama with his own psychological drama. One of the results of this attempted fusion is Ford's adoption of the sometimes unfortunate technique of many of his contemporaries, that of the spectacular scene. Examples of this technique are only too numerous in his work: the Chair device used to trap Spadone in The Fancies, and Ithocles in The Broken Heart; Giovanni carrying Annabella's heart on his dagger in the last scene of 'Tis Pity; and Fernando rising from the tomb in Love's Sacrifice. Lamentable as these scenes may be, the most

regrettable effects of this attempted fusion were that it prevented Ford from fully developing his genius and that it did contribute (though when compared to many of his contemporaries it was a very small contribution) to the decay of the unified play into the contrived scene.

Ford's genius for psychological inquiry makes it important to examine the view which Ford had of man and which he exploited in his drama. The early years of the seventeenth century saw the emergence of a new science in which man attempted to find the physical laws of his behavior. Ford could not help but be aware of this new movement and, more than being just aware, he incorporated many of its principles into his dramatic work. The version of the new science with which he was most familiar and which most influenced his work is that contained in Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy. It is true that this was a popularized version of the new science of Ford's day filled with many precepts which did not accurately reflect the views of Burton's more academic peers.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Burton's intention was the same as that of his peers, that is, to explain man's behavior in physical terms.¹⁹

In its early years the new science had concerned itself with man's ethical as well as his physical behavior, but by the seventeenth century, especially through the

influence of the immensely popular Burton, it had evolved into an amoral guide devoted almost exclusively to physical behavior. According to Burton man is controlled by his humours which, in turn, are themselves completely controlled by any object which a man covets. This object may be either good or bad. Since man is so controlled, he has no free will and is, therefore, completely dominated by the object which he covets. It is essential to man's well-being that he obtain the object which he desires, for if he does not, his humour involved will burn and produce a substance called adust. This adust is a poison to man's system, and its continued presence will yield sickness and eventual death.²⁰ Burton's work concerns itself with all of man's humours and with all of their effects upon man; but Ford's work betrays a primary interest in the humour which controls passionate love, and with the effects which passionate love has upon man.²¹

In Burton there are two categories of passionate love - heroical love and jealousy. Heroical love is the passion which precedes marriage; jealousy is the passion which follows marriage. Though interested in both, Ford was primarily interested in heroical love. Burton's explanation of heroical love essentially follows his concept which covers his whole theory of the humours. The individual who desires to possess another man or woman

must attain his goal if he is to prevent his humour from burning and producing the deadly adust. The control which this passion would have over him is such that he would not rest until he obtains the object of his desires, or unless, through some extraordinary means, the object of his desires is somewhat changed. The pursuit which he would undertake would not stop at reasonable means, but, if necessary, would turn to the irrational. This irrational behavior is one of the consequences of adust. Assuming that the individual's passion can not be again subjugated to his reason through diversion to another more accessible object, or through the power of prayer and grace, there is only one possible cure, and that is the possession of the one he desires.²² There is only one socially acceptable way in which he may possess this individual - marriage, according to Burton "... the last and best refuge and cure of Heroical love...."²³ Marriage, however, may, when impediments exist, be a threat to the established moral order.²⁴ In fact, this threat of disorder is one of the traits which distinguish heroical love from a normal and natural love free of any impediments.²⁵ In such a case the victim must either accept the consequences of sickness and death, or indulge in a socially illicit relationship. In view of the dire consequences which would follow the frustration of a passion, Burton questions

the social conventions which would prevent a cure.²⁶

However far-fetched this theory may sound to the modern mind, much credence apparently was given to it by Burton's contemporaries. In view of Ford's wide use of this theory there is little room to doubt his acceptance of it. However, his acceptance of Burton's scientific theory does not imply that he shared Burton's skeptical view of the value of the socially imposed moral standards of the day. Ford makes no moral judgement in his work. He merely portrays the dilemma into which this widely accepted theory might eventually place man. For this Ford can not be condemned.²⁷

The dilemma, of course, does not always occur. There is sometimes the possibility of a cure for the passion, and when a cure does take place, as in Ford's The Lover's Melancholy, the result is a comedy or, at least, a tragic-comedy. In this play there are no insurmountable barriers to the unions of the three pairs of lovers. Eroclea is brought back to the pining Duke; Thamasta is eventually reconciled to her lover Menaphon; and Cleophila, once released from the necessity to care for her father Meleander, is free to marry Amethus.

When the dilemma does occur, when there is no possibility of a cure, as in 'Tis Pity She's a Whore and The Broken Heart, the result is tragedy. In 'Tis Pity

Giovanni can not cure his passion for Annabella through marriage as they are brother and sister. Neither is he cured through the Burtonian advice of the friar who first recommends prayer and submission to moral principles, and who, as a last resort, suggests that Giovanni cool his lust with a woman of the streets rather than with his sister. The two, therefore, take the only course open to them and become involved in an illicit and incestuous relationship. This temporarily cures Giovanni's passion until Annabella is discovered to be pregnant. In order to avoid any suspicion arising from her condition, Annabella marries the notorious Soranzo. A marriage arranged, in part, by the friar as a means of ending the affair between Giovanni and Annabella. Presumably it will divert Annabella's passion from her brother to her new husband. This tactic is, however, thwarted by her nurse Putana who discloses Annabella's illicit relationship with Giovanni to Annabella's husband, Soranzo. Their relationship revealed, and Giovanni unable to further indulge his passion, he becomes a victim of the poisonous adust and eventually kills both himself and Annabella. Likewise, in The Broken Heart, Orgilus, unable to relieve his passion for Penthea because of her marriage to Bassanes, murders Ithocles, the brother who arranged Penthea's marriage and comes to grief himself. Also, Calantha, deprived of her love by Ithocles' murder,

Again, in The Lover's Melancholy, we find the physician Corax prescribing Burtonian cures to ease Meleander's sorrow for his missing daughter Eroclea, and Palador's passion of heroical love. Corax's prescription for Palador involves an abandonment of ease, pleasure and courtly life, the principal inducements, according to Burton, of heroical love; and the performance of exercise and other activities designed to divert the Prince's mind from his passions - one of the possible cures suggested by Burton.³¹ Likewise, in The Fancies, Flavia's marriage to Julio took place because

'Twas thought
By his Physitians, that she was a creature,
Agreed best with the cure of the disease,
His present new infirmity then labour'd in.
(I. i, 49-52)

Though it is never made explicit what the "infirmity" was, the marriage was probably a cure, the best one according to Burton, for Julio's love melancholy.³²