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978-0-521-10301-5 - Cyrus Hoy: Introductions, Notes, and Commentaries to texts in 'The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker', Volume IV

Edited by Fredson Bowers

Excerpt

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THE SUN'S DARLING

INTRODUCTION

'*The Sun's Darling*; in the nature of a masque by Dekker, and Forde' was licensed by Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 'for the Cockpit Company' on 3 March 1624.¹ An older generation of scholars, beginning with J. P. Collier, considered this work to be a revision by Ford or by Dekker and Ford jointly of Dekker's lost *Phaeton*,² known from entries in Henslowe's Diary, which record the purchase of the play from Dekker on 15 January 1598 and payments to him on 14 and 22 December 1600 for altering it for court performance.³ But *The Sun's Darling* is not about Phaeton, as E. K. Chambers pointed out,⁴ and the argument against assuming it to be a revision of the lost play has been set forth in detail by W. L. Halstead.⁵ This has had a considerable influence on later views of the work, and there is now general agreement that *The Sun's Darling* was a new play when Herbert licensed it in the spring of 1624, and thus represents another product of the collaboration between Dekker and Ford in the early 1620s that had already produced *The Witch of Edmonton* (with William Rowley) in 1621, that had – presumably a few months before *The Sun's Darling* – produced *The Welsh Ambassador*, and that later in 1624 was to produce three plays now lost: *The Fairy Knight*, *The Bristow Merchant*, and (with Rowley and Webster) *The Late Murder of the Son upon the Mother, or Keep the Widow Waking*.⁶

¹ Herbert, p. 27.

² J. P. Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare* (London, 1831), III, 354, note; Gifford (ed.), *Works of Ford*, I, xxii–xxiii and III, 102; A. C. Swinburne, *Complete Works* (Bonchurch Edition), ed. E. Gosse and T. J. Wise (London, 1926), XII, 392; Fleay, I, 122, 232; A. W. Ward, *A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne*, rev. ed. (London, 1899), II, 470; F. E. Pierce, 'The Collaboration of Dekker and Ford: the Authorship of *The Sun's Darling*', *Anglia*, 36 (1912), 151ff.; W. W. Greg (ed.), *Henslowe's Diary* (London, 1908), II, 190; M. Joan Sargeaunt, *John Ford* (Oxford, 1935), p. 62; R. Davril, *Le drame de John Ford* (Paris, 1954), p. 133; Hunt, pp. 52–53. ³ *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 86, 137.

⁴ Chambers, III, 300. ⁵ 'Dekker's *Phaeton*', *Notes and Queries*, 175 (1938), 380–385.

⁶ For Dekker's collaboration with Ford, see the Introduction to *The Witch of*

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G. E. Bentley considered 'the masque as a whole' to be 'an odd piece for a London Theatre',¹ and Professor Bowers in his Textual Introduction concurs: '*The Sun's Darling* is no ordinary play, certainly not one that would have been written for the public theatre directly.'² Bowers found it 'tempting to speculate that *The Sun's Darling* was written for performance at Whitehall in 1623 sometime after Prince Charles's return from Spain on 5 October, that it was intended basically as a compliment to James I and his son Prince Charles, and that it was subsequently produced at the Cockpit, probably in March 1624, as indicated by Sir Henry Herbert's Office Book'.

This theory may account for the claim made on the titlepage of the first issue (dated 1656) of the quarto text, to the effect that the play had 'been often presented at *Whitehall*, by their Majesties Servants; and after at the Cock-pit in *Drury Lane*', but the theory in itself is improbable. I doubt that any dramatist (or pair of dramatists) would be either naive enough or daring enough to greet Prince Charles on his return from his flighty jaunt to Spain in the dubious company of Buckingham with a morality play about a prodigal son who, squandering the gifts of a bounteous father, rambles capriciously and self-indulgently through three-quarters of his earthly sojourn in the company of Folly, a dissolute clown, and Humor, a whore whose whim decrees his every move. As a welcome home to Prince Charles, *The Sun's Darling* could only be a devastatingly satiric greeting, and it is not to be imagined that anything of the sort was ever intended by the authors. The kind of masque that was in fact written to celebrate the Prince's safe return from Spain can be seen in Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*, prepared for the occasion.³

Though Bentley and Bowers may well note the unusual quality

Edmonton, 111, 233ff. Scholars who view *The Sun's Darling* as a new play in 1624 include Bentley, 111, 460–461; Jones-Davies, 11, 405–406; H. J. Oliver, *The Problem of John Ford* (Melbourne, 1955), pp. 39–40; Price, p. 110; D. K. Anderson, jr, *John Ford* (New York, 1972), p. 37.

¹ Bentley, 111, 461.

² Bowers, IV, 12.

³ It was planned for presentation on Twelfth Night, 1624, but a dispute concerning precedence among the diplomatic members of the intended audience caused the performance to be cancelled. See Herford and Simpson, *Jonson*, 11, 328.

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of *The Sun's Darling* as a vehicle for the public theatre, its nature has been sufficiently accounted for by W. J. Lawrence, who finds in it an example of what he has termed a 'substantive theatre masque': one designed for performance, not at Court, but in the public theatre.¹ Lawrence would account for the rise of this comparatively novel form of theatrical fare by seeing in it a sort of entertainment that could be staged during Lent, when more conventional kinds of dramatic works were banned. The desire on the part of theatre owners for forms of entertainment – not plays – that would qualify for Lenten dispensation and so help to keep theatres occupied during the Lenten season may or may not have been a principal factor in the rise of the substantive theatre masque, which Lawrence places in the years just before 1620. I suspect that by this time the fame of the great Jonsonian masques presented at Court had become sufficiently widespread so that there was bound to have been an audience for such spectacles among theatre-goers who did not have the *entrée* to Whitehall. The earliest example of a substantive theatre masque that Lawrence is able to point to is Middleton and Rowley's *The World Tossed at Tennis*, which was, to be sure, originally intended for performance before Prince Charles at Denmark House during the winter of 1619/20; for reasons that remain obscure, the intended performance never took place, and the masque was subsequently acted in a Bankside theatre.²

The Sun's Darling is a principal exhibit in Lawrence's effort to establish the substantive theatre masque as a distinctive dramatic form. Its date of licensing for the Cockpit company (3 March 1624) suggested to him a Lenten production, and Lawrence can announce firmly: 'There is absolutely no warrant for the belief that it was originally a court masque.'³ The nearest parallel to *The Sun's*

¹ 'The Origin of the Substantive Theatre Masque' in Lawrence's *Pre-Restoration Stage Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), pp. 325–339.

² Bentley, iv, 910. According to an entry of 4 July 1620 in the *Stationers' Register*, *The World Tossed at Tennis* was 'acted at the Princes Armes, by the Prince his highnes servant[es]' (*ibid.*, iv, 907). Lawrence (*Studies*, p. 335) took this to refer to the yard of the Prince's Arms Inn in Leadenhall Street, a view that Bentley considered 'highly improbable' (iv, 910). W. W. Greg's suggestion that it may have been acted at the Swan theatre seems to Bentley more plausible. For a critique of Lawrence's views concerning Lenten performances, see Bentley, vii, 6–9.

³ A belief, Lawrence acknowledges, that he once shared: 'That impression arose

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Darling that Lawrence can adduce is Thomas Nabbes' *Microcosmus*, entered in the Stationers' Register on 6 August 1636 and presented, according to the titlepage of its 1637 quarto, 'at the private house in Salisbury Court'; like *The Sun's Darling*, *Microcosmus* is described on its quarto titlepage as 'A Morall Maske', a feature that, to Lawrence, suggested 'that with the view of propitiating the Puritans . . . care was taken to emphasize the morality of Lenten masques'.¹ The titlepage of *Microcosmus* also states that it is 'heere Set down according to the intention of the Authour'. Lawrence took this to mean 'that the masque was not performed exactly as it was written and contrived' and that its scenic effects were simplified in the Salisbury Court production.² Bentley, while acknowledging that the production may not have equalled the playwright's expectations, nonetheless reasonably infers that something in the way of stage spectacle must have been provided. As he notes, *The Sun's Darling* 'appears to have been revived at the Phoenix in 1638 or 1639, possibly in rivalry with *Microcosmus* at the Salisbury Court'.³ But Bentley rather inconsistently is of the opinion that to have mounted a production of *The Sun's Darling* – a far less elaborate piece than *Microcosmus* – at the Cockpit, or Phoenix, would have placed unusual demands on the theatrical resources of the day. In its present form, he declares, *The Sun's Darling* would certainly have 'required scenery and quite a bit of the spectacle ordinarily associated with the court masques',⁴ a view that Bowers rightly questions.⁵

The Sun's Darling makes no scenic demands that could not have been satisfied by the resources of the Jacobean public theatre. Perhaps the most striking visual effect called for in the text (apart from the sheer display of the sundry dances) is the stage direction at III.iv.36.1, which reports that '*The Sun by degrees is clouded.*' Allardyce Nicoll quotes what sounds like a direction for a reverse effect that occurs at the end of 'The Triumph of Time' in *Four Plays, or Moral Representations in One*, in the Beaumont and through a misreading of its title-page. The title-page says that it had first been acted by Beeston's Boys at Whitehall and afterwards at the Cockpit, true enough as far as it goes, but the licensing entry shows that it had been publicly acted years before the King's and Queen's Young Servants was organised' (*Studies*, p. 338).

¹ Lawrence, *ibid.*, p. 338.³ Bentley, IV, 938.⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 461.² *Ibid.*, pp. 338–339.⁵ Bowers, IV, 10.

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Fletcher canon: 'One half of a cloud drawn. Singers are discovered: then the other half drawn. Jupiter seen in glory' (1647, p. 47). This is but one of a number of stage directions calling for 'scenic display of a masque-like nature' that Nicoll cites, and he may justly conclude: 'If nothing else, these references prove conclusively that on occasion the ordinary public stages were capable of introducing something of that scenic display which had been made familiar in the productions at Whitehall.'¹

Though one may be unconvinced that substantive theatre masques were quite so nearly related to the need of theatrical managers for acceptable Lenten entertainment as Lawrence would have us believe, there is no doubt at all that masques designed along the lines of the Stuart Court masques but intended for presentation in the public theatre had something of a vogue in the 1620s and 1630s. 'There are numerous signs that dramatists were considering ways of adapting the court masque for a wider audience', John Russell Brown has written in connection with another of Nabbes' masques, *The Spring's Glory*.² Brown cites *The Sun's Darling* as an example of one such adaptation: a 'full-length, moral play with songs and dances, including the popular "Morris" (II,i,82 ff.) and a gay spectacle of "Country-fellows and Wenches" (III,iv, S.D.); in its last scene, "The Masquers [are] discovered" immediately before the Sun enters "above" to give judgment'.³ The extent of the vogue for theatre masques may be indicated by the continued

¹ *Stuart Masques and the Renaissance Stage* (London, 1937), p. 142. The altar called for in the opening scene of *The Sun's Darling* is a familiar property in plays of the period. Nicoll notes its appearance in Ford's *The Broken Heart* and Shirley's *St. Patrick for Ireland*.

² In *A Book of Masques in Honour of Allardyce Nicoll*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer and S. W. Wells (Cambridge, 1967), p. 320.

³ *Ibid.* Brown also cites Heywood's *Love's Mistress, or the Queen's Masque*, published in 1636, as 'another occasional piece which was subsequently "Publicly Acted" by the "Queen's Comedians, at the Phoenix in Drury-Lane"', (*ibid.*, p. 320) and he notes Shirley's *Contention of Honour and Riches* (published in 1633) – 'a morality play with a single concluding dance' – as an attempt 'to find a place for the masque in public theatres' (*ibid.*, p. 321, n. 1). Dekker and Ford's lost *Fairy Knight* (licensed by Herbert on 11 June 1624) is sometimes referred to as a masque (e.g., Ward, *Dramatic Literature*, II, 470; *Annals*, where it is typified as a masque but with a query; Sargeaunt, *Ford*, p. 18; Jones-Davies, II, 408), but Herbert did not use the term in licensing it, as he did in the case of *The Sun's Darling*.

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popularity of *The World Tossed at Tennis* and *The Sun's Darling*. Both appear on the list of titles that the Lord Chamberlain, acting on the request of William Beeston, protected for the Phoenix company on 10 August 1639.¹

It had been but a short time before this that the last 3 lines of Act IV and the first 140 lines of Act V of *The Sun's Darling* had been revised. Since W. J. Lawrence pointed out the relation of these passages to the troubles between King Charles I and his Scottish subjects and the preparations for the first Bishops' War in late 1638 or 1639 it has been clear that the extant text of *The Sun's Darling* includes a revision undertaken subsequent to the 1624 licensing date.² In his Textual Introduction, Bowers has suggested

Since Charles's entry into Scotland is anticipated, the date of writing is very likely between 28 November 1638 when the Duke of Hamilton dissolved the Scottish assembly and 30 March 1639 when Charles arrived in York on his way to Scotland. That the date was perhaps in late 1638 may be indicated by Folly's remark to Time in I.i.137, 'Farewell 1538, I might have said five thousand, but the others long enough a Conciencie to be honest Condition'd.'

Bowers interpreted Folly's remark 'to be a sarcastic reference to Time as a century old (although Folly might have said 5000 years, the approximate time of the creation of the world)'. He acknowledged that 'Folly may be using the legal year rather than the calendar dating', but thought it 'tempting to associate a revision

¹ The list is printed in Bentley, 1, 330–331. The title of *The Sun's Darling* is given in full. *The World Tossed at Tennis* is represented on the list only by the words "The World", but since they immediately follow such other Middleton and Rowley attributions as *The Changeling*, *A Fair Quarrel*, and *The Spanish Gypsy*, they are generally assumed to stand for Middleton and Rowley's masque. See Bentley, IV, 910; Lawrence, *Studies*, p. 337. Concerning 'the attempt to adapt the masque to the requirements of the theatre' and the results of this attempt, Enid Welsford writes:

'In the first place it led to the production of a type of play with something of the didactic abstract character of the earlier moralities, and secondly it led to a loosening of the form of the masque, and consequently to the occasional use of the term as a designation for any masque-like play or entertainment, particularly such as were acted by "gentlemen of quality" at private houses instead of by players on the public stage. The most notable instance of this vague use of the term masque is Milton's *Comus*, which he calls a masque, but which Sir Henry Wotton describes more appropriately as a "dainty piece of entertainment"' (*The Court Masque* (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 215–216).

Welsford discusses *The Sun's Darling* on p. 211.

² 'The Problem of Lyly's Songs', *T.L.S.* (20 December 1923), 894.

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with performance at court during the Christmas festivities of 1638 and early 1639 before Charles had left London'.¹

The interpolated passage at the beginning of Act V, with Winter's rebuke of the northern rebels and the elaborate compliment to King Charles in the vision of Raybright's expected victory over them, may be the work of Ford, revising his own previous collaboration with Dekker some half-dozen years after his collaborator's death, or it may be the work of another hand, as yet unidentified and probably unidentifiable. There is a possible parallel with Ford's work at V.i.6–7 (see the Commentary), but this cannot be viewed as establishing Ford's claim to the whole passage; it may be but a part of Ford's original work, unaffected by the interpolation. I am assuming that the interpolation ends at line 140 of V.i;² Ford is the author of the remainder of Act V, as he is, for the most part, of Acts I and IV, though it would be a mistake to assume that there is no trace of Dekker in these acts. The speech of the Sun which closes Act I, for example, has seemed the work of Dekker to many students of the play;³ and there are traces of his presence in Acts IV and V which, as M. Joan Sargeant has remarked, clearly exhibit 'Ford's verse structure, [but] contain many ideas more likely to be Dekker's'.⁴ As an example, she quotes Autumn's speech at IV.i.202–218. Dekker's work, however, is most evident in Acts II and III; and while correspondingly it would be unwise to declare that these contain no traces of Ford (at least one has been detected, at II.i.173), they represent Dekker's principal contribution to the play.

The play's many songs have been seen as the work of one or the other of the collaborating dramatists. Davril compared the opening

¹ Bowers, IV, 11. Bentley (III, 461) has noted that the King's journey to the north 'was evidently attractive to the company at the Phoenix, for in May 1640 the company was suppressed for treating the same subject in an unlicensed new play'. Sir Henry Herbert reports of it (in part): 'The play I cald for, and, forbiddinge the playinge of it, keepe the booke, because it had relation to the passages of the K.s journey into the Northe, and was complaynd of by his M.^{tye} to mee, with commande to punish the offenders' (*Herbert*, p. 66; reprinted in Bentley, I, 333).

² As suggested by Price, p. 110. This point is discussed further on p. 12, below.

³ For example, Gifford, *Works of Ford*, III, 117; Sargeant, *Ford*, p. 60; Pierce, 'Collaboration', p. 154. For a tabulation of the pioneering efforts undertaken by Pierce and H. Dugdale Sykes to determine the authorial divisions of the play, see Jones-Davies, II, 406.

⁴ Sargeant, *Ford*, p. 60.

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one ('*Fancies are but streams / of vain pleasure*') to the words of Ithocles at IV.i.37–50 of Ford's *The Broken Heart*:¹

Look 'ee, uncle,
Some such there are whose liberal contents
Swarm without care in every sort of plenty;
Who, after full repasts, can lay them down
To sleep. And they sleep, uncle; in which silence
Their very dreams present 'em choice of pleasures,
Pleasures (observe me, uncle) of rare object:
Here heaps of gold, there increments of honors,
Now change of garments, then the votes of people,
Anon varieties of beauties, courting
In flatteries of the night, exchange of dalliance.
Yet these are still but dreams. Give me felicity
Of which my senses waking are partakers,
A real, visible, material happiness.

With this passage should be compared not alone the song (I.i.5–16) that opens *The Sun's Darling*, but also the sundry lines addressed by the Priest to Raybright following the song, wherein he is reminded of the many gifts lavished on him by his 'grand patron the Sun': 'honors' (line 37), 'rich habits' (line 45), 'choice / Of beauties' (lines 50–51), 'Pleasures of every sence' (line 57).

Sargeant frankly admits that the lyrics in Ford's plays fall into two classes: 'the beautiful, slow-moving songs' of, for example, *The Broken Heart*, and his comic songs, 'generally as lacking in humour as his comic characters'.² She has in mind the song of 'the lithping lass' in *The Lady's Trial* or – on much the same level – Folly's song beginning '*I will rore and squander*' at I.i.90ff. of *The Sun's Darling*.

Much has been made of the fact that the song beginning '*What bird so sings, yet so does wail, / 'Tis Philomel the Nightingale*' at II.i.48ff. occurs in a different form in the 1632 edition (but not in earlier texts) of Lyly's *Campaspe*. This has prompted some scholars to argue that the song is Dekker's, and to argue as well that all the songs printed for the first time in Blount's edition of Lyly's *Six Court Comedies* in 1632 are Dekker's. Since with the exception of two songs from *The Woman in the Moon*, all the songs in Lyly's

¹ Davril, *Le drame de Ford*, p. 135 and n. 69. The comparison is also made by Anderson, *Ford*, p. 39.

² Sargeant, *Ford*, p. 61.

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plays were published for the first time by Blount in 1632, those who would attribute them to Dekker are claiming for him virtually all the lyrics in the corpus of Lyly's dramatic works. I think there is no doubt at all that the version of the nightingale song that appears in II.i of *The Sun's Darling* is of Dekker's own devising; it displays some verbal affinities with passages from two of Dekker's non-dramatic pamphlets – *The Ravens Almanacke* and, especially, *A Knight's Conjuring* – that are suggestive (see the Commentary on II.i.48–59). But to claim for Dekker all but two of the songs in Lyly's plays on this slender evidence is extravagant.¹ The song may well represent a popular favorite that was introduced into *The Sun's Darling* and (according to some critics) spoiled in the process.² Or what is even more likely, the Dekker version of the song is 'a reconstruction from inaccurate memory of the Lyly version, which Dekker could have heard sung by some of the old Paul's Boys who had played in *Campaspe*'.³

The song of the 'Country-fellows' at the beginning of III.iv has been much admired.⁴ Ernest Rhys (quoting III.iv.1–4) considered that 'one can forgive the mixture of musk-roses and daffodils, haymaking and hurting, lambs and partridges, in defiance of all rustic tradition, for the sake of its catching tune'.⁵ The verse of the play itself has come in for praise. Hunt speaks of 'the sweetness and

¹ The argument underlying the attribution of the songs to Dekker maintains that, because the original lyrics were lost when Blount set about printing his 1632 collection of Lyly's plays, he hired some contemporary poet (perhaps Dekker) to supply new ones. The suggestion was first made by Fleay (1, 232), elaborately developed by W. W. Greg, 'The Authorship of the Songs in Lyly's Plays', *M.L.R.*, 1 (1905), 43–52, and supported by J. R. Moore, 'The Songs in Lyly's Plays', *P.M.L.A.*, 42 (1927), 623–640. It is effectively refuted by W. R. Bowden, *The English Dramatic Lyric*, 1603–1642 (New Haven, 1951), pp. 105–108. The authorship of the songs is the subject of an appendix in G. K. Hunter's *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (London, 1962), pp. 367–372. Hunter tends to the opinion (essentially that of R. W. Bond in 'Lyly's Songs', *R.E.S.*, 6 (1930), 295–299 and 'Addendum on Lyly's Songs', *R.E.S.*, 7 (1931), 442–447) that Blount found the lyrics for the songs in the music library of the Paul's boys, whose acting company had – half a century before – performed the original productions of the six Lyly plays that Blount was publishing.

² As Oliver, *Problem of Ford*, pp. 40–41, has suggested; Gifford was of the opinion that the song 'has received no improvements from Delight', who sings it (*Works of Ford*, III, 120).

³ Bowden, *Dramatic Lyric*, p. 106.

⁴ For example, by Hunt, pp. 55–56.

⁵ In the introduction to his Mermaid edition of *Dekker* (London, 1894), pp. xl–xli.

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spontaneity' of Dekker's share;¹ and 'the gaiety and outdoor freshness' of his lines at their best are regularly noted.² These qualities have figured, indeed, in the differentiation of authorial shares. Gifford attributed to Dekker 'without scruple, all [such] incidental glimpses of rural nature' as the passage about the lark at II.i.227–230.³ And Sargeaunt was of the opinion that 'all the simple out-door similes and descriptions and the more simple kinds of conceits must be Dekker's'.⁴

Hard things, however, have been said about *The Sun's Darling*. Swinburne, who doubted that it ever could have amounted to much, was prepared to acknowledge that the extant text 'has doubtless suffered from the incongruous matter loosely sewn on to it' – ('the intrusion in the fifth act of political satire and adulation is singularly perverse and infelicitous') – but he was nonetheless of the opinion that 'the masque as it stands is too lax and incoherent in structure to be worth much as a sample of its slight kind, or to show if there was anything of more significance or value in the first conception'. The only things he found to praise were 'some scattered lines of great sweetness' in Dekker's share, specifically the 'lament for the dead spring' at III.i.5–11.⁵ Sargeaunt pronounced *The Sun's Darling* to be 'of little value as a work of art'. She admitted that Dekker's share contains 'passages of some beauty and lyric charm', but concerning Ford's contribution, she declared: 'The blank verse technically reaches his usual high level, but such a subject was not one to interest him, and inspiration is consequently lacking.'⁶ H. J. Oliver, noting that 'the play has aroused little enthusiasm', strives hard to give it its due, but ends by persuading himself 'that Ford's share in 1624 was slight, perhaps no greater than his share in *The Welsh Ambassador* a year before'.⁷ T. S. Eliot, in an essay on Ford, called it 'a dull masque'.⁸ One of Dekker's editors of another day, Ernest Rhys, while finding many 'suggestions of beauty' in individual

¹ Hunt, p. 56.² Sargeaunt, *Ford*, p. 59, who wrote in the conviction that *The Sun's Darling* derived from Dekker's *Phaeton* of 1598.³ *Works of Ford*, III, 128.⁴ Sargeaunt, *Ford*, p. 59; so too Davril, *Le drame de Ford*, p. 134.⁵ *Complete Works*, XII, 392–393.⁶ Sargeaunt, *Ford*, p. 63.⁷ Oliver, *Problem of Ford*, pp. 37, 40.⁸ *Selected Essays* (New York, 1950), p. 172.