

F9 The fayre and famous mayde is gone

Notes. The only surviving version of this opaque, scabrous poem is transcribed among a collection of libels on Frances Howard and Robert Carr, suggesting that at least one contemporary might have believed that the “fayre and famous mayde” in question was the Countess of Essex. While some allusions in the verse may seem to support this identification, several others—including the arresting final couplet—do not. On balance, it seems fair to conclude that this poem originated with another scandalous marriage, though which one is now very difficult to determine. We include it here as an example of how a seventeenth-century reader could appropriate a libel from one context and apply it to another.

The fayre and famous mayde is gone

And stolne a marryage all a lone

Some say that seeme to know the truthe,

She was ashamed to wedd a youth

For she knew well what did belonge

5

Unto a man; els they her wronge

And was Limbde naked to the twist¹

I would the paynter there had Kist

Butt now my Lordes the noble teller²

Putts downe their hoers in a seller

10

Why? you would none; yett loe hee rights her

In spight of those that most did spight her
see how his thinne nose droppes rose nobles³

What wantes in crownes in wordes hee doubles

The Irish coyne in bagges runnes sweatinge

15

To this rich weddinge gott by cheatinge

The Goodly house and landes in Kent

All to this danty wench is ment

And all his suites worke for his darkinge

What thinke you his leane chappes starveling?

20

But soft? we lost the lovely bride

She and her mate to bed are hied

She in her lovers armes girt round

Where must bee lost what hee never found

Most happy bee his chance for hee

25

Injoyes her now from hedd to knee

from lippe to hippe from side to side

And that which hee found woman wide

full fruitfull prove Shee as her grandame

To bring a Sonne though gott at randome

30

And glory youth that hast pervailed

Since many mist that were entayled

And when thou art amidst her cranny⁴

Wish well to Watson and trelany⁵

Source. “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 70-2

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¹ *Limbde...twist*: painted (limned) naked to the waist (the “twist” is the junction of the thighs with the body).

² *teller*: counter of money, probably here referring to one of the four Tellers of the Exchequer.

³ *rose nobles*: gold coins issued in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

⁴ *cranny*: literally, notch or crevice; here clearly a bawdy reference to sexual penetration.

⁵ *Watson and trelany*: Watson and Trelawney. The allusion here is obscure—Thomas Watson was a Jacobean Teller of the Exchequer, and if this Watson is indeed him, then the allusion would fit with earlier lines on the “noble teller” and on the receipt and spending of money.
