

L5 Listen jolly gentlemen

Notes. We cannot yet establish an exact composition date for this song about King James I and his merry men. Anthony Weldon (84-85), writing in the 1640s, dates the beginning of the King's fondness for court fooleries performed by some of the men mentioned in this libel—Finet, Zouche, Goring and Milliscent—to the period of Villiers's first ascent at court (early 1615). Other details in the libel—particularly allusions to masquing—and the continued presence of these men both as participants in court entertainments and as members of the Buckingham circle, suggest a plausible composition date of some time around 1619 or 1620. Knowles (“To ‘scourge the arse’” 82-83) comments tellingly both on the poem's depiction of the “court masque as a homosocial if not homoerotic form”, and on the possibility that the musical performance of the song might possibly “undermine the satiric potency”. See, too, McRae (Literature 45-46) and P. Hammond (140).

Listen jolly gentlemen

Listen and be merrie

A word, or two faine would I speake

To the praise of old king harry¹

But hee would sware, and he would stare

And lay hand on his dagger

And would swive² while hee was a live

From the Queene unto the begger

Then lett him alone he's dead and gone

And wee have in his place

Our noble king of him letts sing

God save King James his grace

With hey derrie downe downe &c³

King James hath meat, king James hath men

King James loves to be merry

King James too is angrie nowe and then

But it makes him quickly wearie

hee dwells at Court where hee hath good sport

5

10

15

Att Christmes hee hath danceing⁴
In the summer tyde abrode will hee ryde⁵ 20
With a guard about him pranceing
With a hey downe downe &c.

Att Royston and newmarket⁶ hele hunt till he be leane
But hee hath merry boys that with masks, and toyes
Can make him fatt againe 25
Nedd Zouch,⁷ Harrie Riche,⁸ Tom Badger⁹
George Goring,¹⁰ and Jacke Finett¹¹
Will dance a heate till they stincke of sweat
As if the devill weere in it.
With a hey downe &c. 30

But Jacke Maynard¹² Jacke Milliscent¹³
Two Joviall boyes of the Rout
For a maske or play beare the bell away¹⁴
If Jacke Milliscent be not out
Alas poore Jacke money didst thou lacke 35
When thou wert out at Saxum¹⁵
Thou wer't wont to have boldnes
A pox on thy coldnes
Was cause that thou did'st lacke some
With a hey downe downe &c 40

There are Lords too cann daintely doe
But they must have a wench by the hand
And then they will too't, and lustily foot
As long as they cann stand
'Tis a lovely grace to dance with a lasse 45
When a man may kisse, and court
But to dance with A man like a puritan¹⁶

Tis a drie and ugly sport

With a hey downe downe &c.

And nowe that you¹⁷ who the madd boyes bee

50

That make King James soe merry

Why keeps his grace such a foole, or an asse

As Archie or Tom Derrie¹⁸

But fooles are things for the pastime of kings

Fooles still must be about them

55

Soe must Knaves too, where ever the goe

They seldome goe without them

With a hey downe downe &c.

Of the graver sort, I will make noe report

Theire Noses abide noe Jeast

60

With poore officers too, Ile have nothing to doe

Onely one among the rest

'Tis the brave Knight Marshall,¹⁹ hee is not partiall

In the place bestowed on him

For your whores and your knaves

65

And your merry drunken slaves

Cry a plague, and a pox upon him

With a hey downe downe &c.

Before I have done, of the kings brave sonne²⁰

I should sett forth the praise

70

England never had a more likelier ladd

To prolonge our happie daies.

But I made this songe

And it must not be longe

For good king James his sake

75

God blesse King James his kingdome, and Realme

And soe an end Ile make

With a hey downe downe &c.

Source. Bodleian MS Malone 23, pp. 19-22

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Malone 19, p. 87; BL Add. MS 29879, fol. 26r

L5

¹ *old king harry*: King Henry VIII.

² *swive*: have sex.

³ *With hey derrie downe downe*: by the eighteenth century at least, this refrain was in common ballad usage. Simpson (172-76) prints and discusses the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century tune “Derry Down” that probably accompanied ballads with this refrain.

⁴ *Att Christmes...danceing*: alluding to the dancing and masquing held at court during the Christmas season.

⁵ *summer tyde...hee ryde*: James and the court would usually progress out of London during the hotter summer months.

⁶ *Royston and newmarkett*: James had hunting lodges at Royston and Newmarket.

⁷ *Nedd Zouch*: Sir Edward Zouche, Knight Marshall. Weldon (84-85) alleges that Zouche used “to sing bawdy songs, and tell bawdy tales” to the King. Chamberlain (2.129) reports that Zouche performed in a play for James at Theobalds in January 1618.

⁸ *Harrie Riche*: Sir Henry Rich, Viscount Kensington and later Earl of Holland, appointed Captain of the Guard in 1617. Chamberlain has reports of Rich’s masquing activities from February 1617 and January 1620 (2.56, 2.282).

⁹ *Tom Badger*: Sir Thomas Badger. Chamberlain has reports of his masquing and other court theatrical performances in February 1617, January 1618, and January 1620 (2.56, 2.129, 2.282).

¹⁰ *George Goring*: Sir George Goring, client of the favourite Buckingham. Chamberlain has reports of his masquing and other court theatrical performances in February 1617, January 1618, and January 1620 (2.56, 2.29, 2.282). Weldon (84-85) lists Goring with Zouche and Finet as one of the “chiefe and Master Fools” at James’s court; he was the “master of the game for Fooleries” who staged mock piggy-back

tilts and “antick dances” for the King’s delectation.

¹¹ *Jacke Finett*: Sir John Finet, assistant Master of Ceremonies at James I’s court. Weldon (84-85) asserts that Finet, one of James’s “chiefe and Master Fools”, composed the “bawdy songs” that Edward Zouche would sing to the king. Chamberlain (2.131) reports in January 1618 that Finet had spoiled an interlude at James’s palace at Theobalds by singing “a certain song...of such scurrilous and base stuffe that it put the King out of his goode humor, and all the rest that heard it”.

¹² *Jacke Maynard*: John Maynard, who was noted for his dancing in the Twelfth Night masque for January 1619, performed in a masque for the French ambassador a year later, and actually composed at least two masques in 1623-24 (Chamberlain 2.200, 2.282, 2.527, 2.577). Chamberlain thought him “a very proper man but that he is extreme poreblind” (2.200).

¹³ *Jacke Milliscent*: Sir John Milliscent. In his bitter assessment of James I’s taste for fooleries and the men who satisfied it, Anthony Weldon noted that “Sir John Milliscent (who was never known before) was commended for notable fooling, and so was he indeed the best extemporary foole of them all” (85).

¹⁴ *beare the bell away*: to be the best. Chamberlain’s report on the 1619 Twelfth Night masque noted that John Maynard “beares away the bell for dauncing” (2.200).

¹⁵ *Saxum*: probably an allusion to Sir John Crofts’ house at Saxham Parva, close to James’s hunting retreat at Newmarket, and a site of frequent court visits (see, e.g., Chamberlain 2.288, 2.417, 2.424).

¹⁶ *puritan*: term for the “hotter sort of Protestant”, here used in its original pejorative sense.

¹⁷ *you*: “you see” is a better reading.

¹⁸ *Archie or Tom Derrie*: Archie Armstrong was a well-known court jester or fool; Tom Derry was presumably another “professional” fool.

¹⁹ *Knight Marshall*: Sir Edward Zouche.

²⁰ *kings brave sonne*: Prince Charles.
