

R1 Reader, Ile be sworne uppon a booke

Notes. Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, was an active statesman and poet in the reigns of Elizabeth and James. In September 1628, at the age of seventy-four, he met a violent death, which becomes the subject of this poem. A few months before his death, Greville added a codicil to his will granting annuities to many of his dependants, but neglecting an old servant named Ralph Haywood. Subsequently, Haywood confronted his master, and in the course of a heated exchange fatally stabbed him with a sword, and immediately afterwards took his own life. This event caused much comment, but elicited only one known libel. Moreover, this libel is notable for its lack of any political content, dwelling instead on Greville's alleged parsimony (for which there is no other contemporary evidence).

“On the death off the Lord Brookes”

Reader, Ile be sworne uppon a booke
here lyes the right vyle the Lord brooke
who, as I have a soule to save
did not deserve to have a grave.

For, would I might never goe further
he was accused off a horrible murther,¹
because it was thought, he begane
to cutt, one Raphe Stewarde his man;²
wich for my parte, by gods glydd³

I beleve he never did,
Ile naturde he was, eles let me nere wagge,
For he was never knowen, to lend his frend a nagge,
and would to heaven that I were fledd,
iff he locked not upp clippinges off bread,
besides, I would I never might stirre more

but for charge, he had lyen with a whoore
and it would make a man verie sicke
to thinke, how ill he rewarded the musicke;

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naye, there be a huge companie that thinke
 he writte noe legacies, for sparinge off Inke; 20
 and I protest as I hope to live
 off all thinges on earth he loved not to give;
 soe costive⁴ he was, and wearie of shifte
 that he would not helpe himselfe, at a dead lyfte;
 he calde his executer, Raggamuffine 25
 because he was soe expensive, as to buy a Coffine;
 for I praye (quoth he, to what intente
 should wormes be well howsed that never paide rentte;
 and by this blessed light that shines,
 he thought itt verie simple, to pay tythes to Devines; 30
 and when he was dyinge he disputed at large,
 whether, his soule, might travell without charge,
 and juste as his soule, was about to begonne,
 because, corne was deare, he eate browne bread att Communion;
 solytarie, he was, for goinge alone, 35
 noe bodie would goe with him, but that's all one;
 to fagotte in winter, by Dragon & Bell,⁵
 most men are off opinion he went to hell;
 well, I would I might never goe out of this roome)
 he will be verie melancholly, at the day off Doome. 40

Source. CCRO MS CR 63/2/19, fol. 72r

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¹ *he was accused...murther*: the accusation of “murther” is at best figurative, given that Haywood committed suicide after fatally wounding Greville. In the context of the poem, which charges Greville with outrageous parsimony, Haywood’s actions become an almost unavoidable consequence of Greville’s failure to provide for his servant. Hence, according to the poem’s strained logic, Greville commits murder.

² *Raphe Stewarde his man*: i.e. Ralph Haywood, Greville's servant. He may have been known as "Raphe Stewarde" because of his likely role in Greville's household.

³ *gods glydd*: unclear; possibly the poet intended "God's 'lid" (i.e. "God's eyelid"), a colloquial oath of the time.

⁴ *costive*: literally "constipated"; also, figuratively, "niggardly, stingy".

⁵ *to fagotte in winter...Bell*: unclear.
