

H1 There was an ould ladd rode on an ould padd

Notes. This poem is one of two ballads on the Essex divorce and the Overbury affair set to well-known contemporary tunes. While no explicit evidence of musical performance survives, the significant number of variants and corruptions suggest that oral transmission may have played some role in the ballad's circulation. Both Lindley (99) and Bellany (Politics 103-06, 155-56, 165, 237) discuss various elements of the ballad's political significance. Knowles ("Crack Kisses" 146) also comments on the depiction of Essex's sexuality in a segment of the poem.

"A proper new ballett to the tune whwpe doe mee no harme good man or the Cleane Contrary way
which you plese as your voice and lyne can best agree"¹

There was an ould ladd rode on an ould padd²

Unto an old Punke³ a wooinge

Hee layd the ould Punke uppon an ould trunke

O there was a good ould dooinge

There was an ould mayd scarce swete as they sayde

5

In a place that I dare not to mension

She in an odd humor lay with a presumer⁴

O there was an odd invention

The Punk and the mayd they sunge and they sayd

That marriage was a servility

10

If marry you must for Change of lust

O well fare a tricke of nullity⁵

There was a Madam a did study to frame a

Devise to draw upp a perpuse⁶

She drew itt so narrow a Carr⁷ might go through

15

O there was a slender sluice.

Her Earle⁸ did appoint her they say such a jointure⁹

As was of noe validity

Above twice in a night hee could her noe right
O ther was a strange frigidity 20

But when as her Earle had an other girle
His wimble¹⁰ could pierce her flanke
His nagg proved able by Changing his stable
O there was a quo ad hanc.¹¹

This dame was inspected butt fraud interjected 25
A mayd of more perfection¹²
Whome the Midwives dooe handle while the Knight houlds the kandle
O there was Cleere inspection

Now all forrein writers Cry out of there miters
That allow this for a virginity 30
And talke of erection and wante of ejection
O there was sound divinity¹³

There was a young Lord¹⁴ asumed on his word
Hee would bee a Parliament maker
Butt see how thinges alter hee feareth the halter¹⁵ 35
O ther was an Undertaker¹⁶

Hee had a swete freind¹⁷ that hee did Commend
To the keepinge of sweete ser Gervius¹⁸
They Gavie him a Glister¹⁹ his belly did blister
O there was a swete peece of service 40

This freind denyd and Could not abide
A mach that hee Sayd would Shame us²⁰
Betwixt this Matron and this grave pateron
O Patterne of Ignoramus²¹

Now West and thorne and turner²² dooe turne 45

And say that theise plotts were fraudes

They may say ther pleasure toe thinke itt hard mesure

O Knaves and Punkes and bawdes

finis quoth Sir Thomas Person Knight of the sonne

Im Printed in Paules Church yard att the signe of the yellow Bande and Cuffes by Adam Arsnik Robart
Roseaker and are to bee sould att the signe of Andromada Liberata in Turnebull streete²³

Source. “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 66-68

Other known sources. Bodleian MS Firth d.7, fol. 164r; BL Add. MS 15891, fol. 245v; BL Add. MS 74734, item K; CCRO MS CR 63/2/19, fol.14v; V&A MS D25.F.39, fol. 97v

H1

¹ *A proper...agree*: the two tunes given as options were “Whoop! do me no harm good man” and “The Clean Contrary Way”, both of which were commonly known at the time, and both of which were used for libels written in the 1620s. Simpson (109, 777-780) has transcriptions of both tunes.

² *padd*: horse.

³ *Punke*: whore.

⁴ *presumer*: “perfumer” is a variant.

⁵ *nullity*: a nullification of a marriage by a church court—referring here to the nullity of the marriage of Frances Howard and Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex in 1613, which enabled Frances Howard to marry Robert Carr.

⁶ *perpuse*: BL Add. MS 15891 reads “prepuse” (i.e. prepuce, a term for the foreskin). In this context, however, the term seems more applicable to the female genitalia. One slur on Frances Howard was that she was able to fake the physical symptoms of virginity at the nullity hearing in 1613, despite her assumed adulterous relationship with Carr.

⁷ *Carr*: Robert Carr, royal favourite and Earl of Somerset.

⁸ *Her Earle*: Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex. Frances Howard’s petition for nullity claimed that Essex was unable to consummate their marriage.

⁹ *jointure*: a sexual pun on the settlement made on a wife by a husband to provide for her widowhood

if she should survive him.

¹⁰ *wimble*: a gimlet, boring tool, with an obvious bawdy meaning here.

¹¹ *quo ad hanc*: as a face-saving compromise at the beginning of the nullity proceedings, Essex claimed to be sexually impotent only towards Frances (“quo ad hanc”). Hence his ability to “pierce” the “flanke” of “an other girle”.

¹² *This dame...perfection*: as part of the nullity hearings, Frances Howard was inspected by a panel of midwives for the physical evidence of her virginity. Those who could not believe that the Countess was a virgin rumoured that another girl had been fraudulently substituted for the inspection.

¹³ *Now all forrein...divinity*: this stanza attacks the bishops who sat on the nullity commission: both for finding Frances Howard still a virgin, and for their embarrassing discussion of the mechanics of Essex’s sexual dysfunction.

¹⁴ *young Lord*: Carr.

¹⁵ *halter*: hangman’s rope.

¹⁶ *Parliament maker...Undertaker*: an allusion to Carr’s alleged role in attempting to manipulate the 1614 Parliament (“undertaking”, in contemporary parlance).

¹⁷ *swete freind*: Overbury, Carr’s longtime political counsellor and freind.

¹⁸ *ser Gervius*: Sir Gervase Elwes, Lieutenant of the Tower of London, later convicted as an accessory in Overbury’s murder.

¹⁹ *Glister*: clyster; an enema. Overbury was allegedly finished off by a poisoned enema.

²⁰ *This friend...Shame us*: Overbury virulently opposed the Carr-Howard marriage.

²¹ *Ignoramus*: the verdict returned by a Grand Jury in a case where the evidence is insufficient to support an indictment. The term may refer more specifically to the eponymous lawyer of George Ruggles’ university play, *Ignoramus*, first performed in 1614. As a tale of opposition to marriage (see note 20) and sexual intrigue the allusion to the play may be intended to comment upon the events leading up to Overbury’s murder, or might be intended to shed light upon the case itself, as a satire upon the quiddities of contemporary legalese. The possibility that the play was readily associated with the affair seems strong since “Ignoramus” also makes an appearance in another libel concerning Overbury (see “from Cathernes docke theer launcht A pritty Pinke”).

²² *West and thorne and turner*: this is clearly a scribal corruption; cf. BL Add. MS 15891, which has “Weston and Thorne & Turner”. Weston is Richard Weston, tried and convicted as principal in

Overbury's murder. Turner is Anne Turner, confidante of Frances Howard, tried and convicted as an accessory to Overbury's murder. Thorne makes no sense in this context, and is perhaps best read as a corruption of Forman (CCRO MS 63/2/19 has "Weston & Former & Turner"). Forman was Simon Forman, the magician-astrologer to whom Frances Howard and Anne Turner had allegedly turned for love potions and sexual inhibitors. He died in 1612.

²³ *Im Printed...streete*: this mock imprint apes those typically found on printed ballads. Aside from "Paules Church yard", the centre of the London book trade, all the details in the imprint are allusions to elements of the Overbury scandal. The "signe of the yellow Bande and Cuffes" alludes to Anne Turner's supposed invention of the controversial fashion for starched yellow ruffs; "Arsnik and Roseaker" were two of the poisons allegedly used on Overbury; "Andromeda Liberata" was the title of George Chapman's poem written in defence of the Somerset marriage; and "Turnebull streete" was a street in London noted for its bawdy houses.
