THE LADIES' MARCH

([Early] 1681)

In this blunderbuss of satire, the poet presents a procession of twenty-three Court ladies marching across a stage, as if seeking erotic prefer­ment and applause. The poem vaguely resemble a "sessions" satire, as if the ladies were candidates for the Duchess of Portsmouth's place as chief mistress to King Charles. Both the Duchess of Cleveland (who was living in France) and the Duchess of Portsmouth were omitted from the parade. Perhaps the poet was merely venting his spleen against a collection of known or suspected sinners.

The copy text, dated 1681, is Harleian MS. 7317, p. 28. The poem is dated 1681 in Harleian MS. 7319, p. 138; Dyce MS. 43, I, 312; MS. Don b. 8, p. 683; MS. Firth c. 15, p. 106; and "A Choyce Collection," p. 92. In Add. MS. 34,362, f. 20, it is dated "Feb 10 1681" (i.e., 1681 New Style). Internal evidence suggests that the satire was written early in 1681.

Stamford's countess led the van,
    Tallest of the caravan,
She who ne'er wants white or red,
    Or just pretense to keep her bed.
Lofty Richmond followed after;
    Richmond scorns to hold her water,
Piqued that Stamford should take place
    For height or lewdness of her grace.
She distills her heavenly dew
    On all that swear they will be true.
Then came pensive Orrery,
    "Oh, Lindano, why should'st thou die?
'Twas Fourcard killed thee and not I,
    Oh, destructive mercury!"
Behold a dame too old to chancre 'em,
  Vulgarly called my Lady Ancram,
Lodged in a garret at Whitehall,
  Hard by the Countess of Fingal.
Mazarin for St. Peter's glory
  Frigs King Charles and fucks with Lory.
Next Lory's dearest treads the stage,
  A hopeful matron for her age;
She whose spring resisted stoutly,
  In her autumn fucks devoutly;
Not improper, ne'ertheless,
  For Nan Hyde's Nancy's governess.
Middleton, where'er she goes,
  Confirms the scandal of her foes;
Quelled by the fair one's funky hose,
  Even Lory's forced to hold his nose.
Sailing Temple next comes on,
  Led by Corbet's Brereton,
Temple raised by just degrees
  To Manton's spouse from ale and cheese.
Next in order Richmond's sister,
  Recipient much of ballocks' glister,
But now her sins are wiped away,
  Godolphin fucks her every day.
Lawson, she who's disappointed,
  Grieves to lose the Lord's Anointed,
Follows next in the reverend clutches
  Of her old aunt and bawd, the duchess.
The next that followed in the rank
  Was Betty Felton led by Frank,
Betty Felton lewd and pocky,
  Lord have mercy on her jockey!
Next fair Lady Grey appears,
  Her charming eyes bathed in tears,
In such a pitiful condition
  That most men thought it was her Vision.
Next Berkeley's Harriet greets the eye,
   The females of which family,
By nature or by education,
   All love the act of generation.
She, though you catch the man upon her,
   Will swear not guilty upon her honor.
Fanshaw's princess posted after
   To take the place of a king's daughter,
Which royal privilege she got
   By gently stroking Mr. Trott.
Now view the lass with riveled belly,
   Some call her Nell, some Mrs. Nelly,
A saint to be admired the more
   Because a Church of England's whore.
A bouncing dame appears and laughs;
   Who should it be but Mrs. Crofts?
Though many think her an intruder,
   Appointed bawd to Lady Tudor;
Yet here she plies in hope of luck, sir,
   Still itching though St. Albans fucks her.
Old Mrs. Jennings next comes crawling,
   A lady too of Crofts's calling,
Who kindly holds the double clout
   And wipes the face at every bout.
The next that marched was Bellasis,
   She who can pox you with a kiss,
Bellasis, as famed for dryness
   As Churchill or his royal highness.
Lo, thy daughter, little Sid,
   She who lately slipped her kid,
Sure a hopeful babe 'twill be,
   Soaked in pox and Popery.
Next in place comes Mrs. Porter,
   But fools grow nice, not one would court her.
This short-lived princess owed her fall
   To the Principal of Ballock Hall.
The Lady Arundel went by,
   Led by her lover with one eye;
Thus nicely managing her prime,
   She may be duchess in good time. 90
Courteous Mall would fain pass by her,
   Lined by duke, lord, knight, and squire,
And eke by her confessing friar.
   All trades help to quench the fire,
Pricks as tall as Sarum spire,
   Daily plunged into her mire,
All too short to satisfy her.

1. Stamford. Elizabeth, buxom Countess of Stamford; see Appendix.
3. white. For white (or “whites”), see leucorrhea, a chronic vaginal infection. red. Menses, probably menorrhagia.
5. Richmond. Frances (Stuart), Duchess of Richmond; see Appendix.
11. Orrery. Mary (Sackvile), estranged wife of Roger Boyle (Lord Broghill), now second Earl of Orrery.
12. Lindano. Perhaps M. de Lindenau, Envoy Extraordinary from Denmark to England, 1668–72 (Sidney, Diary, I, 128). The mercury treatment for venereal disease was sometimes fatal.
15. Fourcard. Florente Fourcade, since December 20, 1672, had been chirurgeon in ordinary to King Charles II (PRO, Lord Chamberlain, 5/140, p. 155).
16. Ancram. Frances, wife of Charles Kerr, Earl of Ancram, and a Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen, was considered too old for copulation and its consequent venereal sores.
18. Fingal. Margaret, wife of Luke Plunkett, Earl of Fingal, was a Lady in Waiting to the Queen. In March, 1692, she accompanied the Dowager Queen abroad as Groom of the Stole (Luttrell, II, 403).
19. Mazarin. For an expanded version see Harleian MS. 6913, p. 166,

Mazarine pursues the track,
   Swived by tawny, white, and black;
Mazarine for the church’s glory,
   Friggs King Charles and fucks with Lory.

By 1681 the Duchess Mazarin was no longer the King’s mistress.
Princess Anne (1664-1714). In November, 1677, Lady Henrietta Hyde succeeded Lady Frances Villiers as governess of the Duke of York's children. John Aubrey's often quoted remark that Lady Denham "was poisoned by the hands of the Countess of Rochester with chocolate" referred not to Anne Wilmot but to Henrietta Hyde, Countess of Rochester. Her sister-in-law, Anne (Hyde), Duchess of York, was also suspected of poisoning her husband's mistress. See Pepys, January 8, 1667, and "Queries from the Protestant coffee-house in Amsterdam," 1682 (CSPD, 1682, p. 585). Apparently Lady Denham died of natural causes.

27. Middleton. Mrs. Jane Middleton; see Appendix.


31. Temple. Philippa Temple, a Maid of Honor to the Queen.

32. Brereton. It is possible that John, fourth Baron Brereton of Leighlin, Ireland (1659-1718) was "keeping" Mary Corbett, an undistinguished actress with the King's Company from 1675 to 1681 (Wilson, All the King's Ladies, p. 131).

34. Manton. Perhaps Dr. Thomas Manton (1620-77), a famous Presbyterian divine, whose services in private houses were often attended by people "of quality" (Bucleuch MS, I, 321). The sneer at Miss Temple ("spouse" is used in the sense of "bride of Christ") suggests that she had attended such "fanatic" meetings.

35. Richmond's sister. Sophia (Stuart), wife of Henry Bulkeley, Master of the Household; see Appendix, Bulkeley.

38. Godolphin. Sidney Godolphin (1645-1712), a Lord of the Treasury and one of the ministry of "chits" in 1679-81.

39. Lawson. Probably Elizabeth, third daughter of Sir John Lawson of Brough, Yorks., by his wife Catherine, sister of "Northern Tom" Howard; see Appendix, Lawson.

42. Old aunt. Her aunt by marriage, Mary (Villiers), Duchess of Richmond, had married, as her second husband, "Northern Tom" Howard, Miss Lawson's uncle. For the plot to get Miss Lawson as a mistress for Charles II, see "Flatfoot, the Gudgeon Taker," 1680, POAS, Yale, II, 190.

44. Betty Felton. Notorious Lady Elizabeth (Howard), wife of Thomas Felton, a Groom of the Bedchamber, died on December 14, 1681. Frank. Francis, "bold Frank," Newport. Her jockey was her husband, Thomas Felton, a horseman.

47. Lady Grey. Mary (Berkeley), wife of Ford, Lord Grey of Werke. Her "Vision" alludes to A True Relation of a Strange Apparition which appeared to the Lady Grey, published c. January, 1681 (Luttrell, I, 64). The apparition warned her that there was danger to the blood royal, but bade her not be concerned because her supposed lover, the Duke of Monmouth, had none of the blood royal in his veins.


57. Fanshawe. Mary (Walter), half-sister to the Duke of Monmouth and wife of William Fanshaw, a Master of Requests.

60. Mr. Trott. Jonathan Trott, said to have been cured of the King's evil by Mrs. Fanshaw's touch. A True and Wonderful Account of a Cure of the King's Evil by Mrs. Fanshawe, sister to the Duke of Monmouth, appeared in January, 1681 (Luttrell, I, 64).

62. Nell. Nell Gwyn. It is related that in 1681 a Whig mob mistook Nell's coach for that of her Catholic rival, the Duchess of Portsmouth. Nell stuck her head out of the window and said, "Pray, good people, be civil. I am the Protestant whore"
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(Wilson, Nell Gwyn, p. 240). The amanuensis who copied this poem into Harleian MS. 6913, p. 165, added a vulgar passage:

Whose cunt, arse, mouth and every hole
Has served for Rowley's prick's close-stool;
Torrents flow from Nelly's sluice,
Only Arundel can produce
An equal stock of wheyey juice.

66. Mrs. Crofts. Catherine Crofts (1637–86) spinster sister of Monmouth's former guardian, Lord Crofts, was guardian of Mary Tudor, daughter of King Charles by Moll Davis, until 1684 (Seventh Report, 376B).

67. though many. Var. Harleian MS. 6913, “The whores may think.”


71. Mrs. Jennings. Frances Jennings, widow of Richard Jennings of Sandridge, and a well-known Court bawd.

75. Bellasis. Susan (Armine), widow of Sir Henry Belasyse, was once mistress to the Duke of York. In 1674 Susan was created Baroness Belasyse of Osgodby. Her second husband, before 1684, was James Fortrey, a Groom of the Bedchamber. Lady Belasyse died January 6, 1713.


79. thy daughter. Katherine Sedley (1657–1717), daughter of Sir Charles Sedley (“little Sid”), became about 1678 a Maid of Honor to Marie Beatrice, Duchess of York, and mistress to the Duke, to whom she gave a daughter, Lady Katherine Darnley, born in March, 1679, and a son who was born in August, 1684, and died on April 26, 1685. On January 19, 1686, King James created Katherine Sedley Countess of Dorchester, and, at the behest of his priests, banished her from the Court. On August 20, 1696, she married Sir David Colyear, who became Earl of Portmore. Mrs. Sedley, no beauty, was famed for her caustic wit.


Porter 'mongst the lewd rabble may be thrown,
Her last retreat has fixed her doubtful fame,
A pocky babe's a mark of double shame.


87. Lady Arundel. Mary (Mordaunt), Countess of Arundel; see Appendix, Norfolk. MS. Firth c. 15, p. 106, adds this after line 88.
Who boldly brags of cods anointed,
With balm for Arundel appointed;
He, when the Lily Lass invites,
Undaunted launches into her whites.

88. *her lover.* Charles Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, had lost the sight of one eye.

91. *courteous Mall.* Mall Howard, Lady Arundel's companion and cousin by marriage.

95. *Sarum spire.* The spire of Sarum (Salisbury) Cathedral. Variant ending, from Harleian MS. 7319, p. 142, after line 94,

Yet still she burns, or men belie her;
Mall is scratched by every briar,
Hers is no common low desire,
If you wont believe me, try her,
Ask her but once, and she'll retire.
Nay, she'll beg, who can deny her?
Though to plunge into the mire.
Pricks as long as Sarum spire
Most devoutly, daily ply her,
All not enough to satisfy her.
Mall, adieu; you've lost your squire.