

THE SESSION OF LADIES

[*April, 1688*]

Obviously written in imitation of "The Lovers' Session," the following "session" satire depicts a gathering of lecherous ladies: half a dozen duchesses, a covey of countesses, and a miscellaneous huddle of harlots. All are competing for the favor of "Adonis," who represents Cardell Goodman, a famous actor and Gentleman of the Horse to the Duchess of Cleveland. Appropriately the scene is a playhouse, with the contestants crowding the pit and Cupid and Adonis enthroned on the stage. The outcome, when Venus interferes and gives Adonis to the Duchess of Cleveland, would have been no surprise to the Court of James II; everyone knew that Goodman was the duchess's "stallion." The poet carefully avoids any political allusion.

The date is probably April, 1688, not long after the Duke of Grafton's return from his nautical mission in the Mediterranean. It must have been before May 28, 1688, when the Duchess of Monmouth owned her secret marriage to Lord Cornwallis.

The copy text is Harleian MS. 7319, p. 557. It is there dated 1688, as it is also in Harleian MS. 7317, p. 148, and in Bodleian MS. Firth c. 25, p. 292. It is undated in Dyce MS. 43, II, 816, and "A Choyce Collection," p. 280.

A session of ladies was held on the stage,
And Cupid himself was judge of the court,
Adonis the beauty for whom they engage,
And did from each corner in legions resort.

2.

Though such an Adonis before was not known,
He exceeded the other in beauty and grace;

5

With age and diseases though impotent grown,
He resembled the other exactly in face.

3.

To this new Adonis, in park and at plays,
Whose eyes had the power of life and of death, 10
Each beautiful lady an altar did raise,
But all their perfumes could not sweeten his breath.

4.

Here none were debarred at the purchase to strike;
A boundless commission the court did unfold,
Where all might put in their pretenses alike, 15
The young and the handsome, the ugly and old.

5.

And therefore the ladies of every degree,
From the miss of the Court to the bawd of the stews,
To win our Adonis a mercury fee,
His pockets each night stuffed with *billets a doux*. 20

6.

The gallery vizer, the mask of the pit,
The great ones who take in the boxes their place,
At the tavern appointed would afterward sit,
And prostrate their honor to purchase his grace.

7.

There were monkeys in top-knots and owls in settee, 25
High jilts in sultana and bulkers in crepe,

Who flocked from each quarter Adonis to see,
Admiring his beauty, his person and shape.

8.

There was pockey lewd Hinton and Howard's pert Mall,
With Grafton's chaste widow of Worcester Park, 30
Fantastical Brandon and her sister Doll,
Who had many a bout with his grace in the dark.

9.

There was chestnut-maned Boutell, whom all the Town fucks,
Lord Lumley's cast player, the famed Mrs. Cox,
And chaste Mrs. Barry, i'th'midst of a flux, 35
To make him a present of chancre and pox.

10.

The old and the ugly, the youthful and fair,
All flew at the sound of Adonis his name.
Poor Cuffley, alas, broke her neck in a chair,
Making overmuch haste to put in her claim. 40

11.

The whores by profession and whores in religion,
All summoned, appeared at the deity's call;
The Court parakeet and the citizen widgeon;
There were whores of Whitechapel and whores of Whitehall.

12.

That harridan Cromwell and Silence, the bawd, 45
Like mayor and recorder had brought an address;

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Betty Mackerel, a favorite of the blind god,
In behalf of her function procured 'em access.

13.

One took him for Pompey, another for Caesar;
That he Alexander was another straight swore, 50
And thought he could do as great wonders to please her
As the great triumvirate mentioned before.

14.

Chaste Norfolk the first was that put in her claim,
A privilege due to her person and place.
The court had respect to her title and name, 55
And was at the point to comply with her grace,

15.

But Cupid, recalling the German to mind,
Said 'twas pity Adonis should e'er be her prize,
Whose lust the Town stallions, though never so kind,
And all the whole family could not suffice. 60

16.

Next Richmond the relic, once youthful and fair,
With matronly modesty put in her claim;
Adonis, she thought, would have fall'n to her share
Out of very regard to her honor and name.

17.

But Cupid replied, it should not be so; 65
Adonis must never expect to prevail

Where Howe and proud Mulgrave and Houghton the beau
 Could not as yet lay the heat of her tail.

18.

Her sister Sophia the next crowded in,
 At which Adonis damned, hector'd, and swore 70
 That he loved adultery, because 'twas a sin,
 Yet he loathed in his heart so religious a whore.

19.

Another grave widow, in sables' deep veil,
 Did send in by proxy her claim to the court;
 She pleaded, since Monmouth his project did fail, 75
 None could but Adonis make recompense for't.

20.

But she was soon answered that she had her choice
 Of Stamford, Cornwallis, and brawny Dunbar;
 Or take 'em all three, if one could not suffice,
 For Adonis never should fall to her share. 80

21.

Next Grafton in vizor did put in her plea,
 Saying none had such weighty pretenses as she;
 Since lusty Tarpaulin was sent out to sea,
 Her Grafton, her Mord[aun]t, Adonis should be.

22.

This plea would have took, but the court was informed 85
 That his grace was with Duncan arrived in the Downs;

At the name of that hero, Adonis he stormed,
Being scarcely recovered of his dressing-room wounds.

23.

Her prettiness thus for this reason set by,
A foreign-built duchess stepped in her place; 90
Such a claim, such a beauty, what god could deny,
Much less anything of inferior race?

24.

But all these temptations of birth and high blood
Would never go down with Adonis's palate;
His prick to a courtesan never yet stood, 95
Who is fucked by her black and frigged by her valet.

25.

North[umber]land, ashamed of her ill gotten grace,
Yet proud of new conquests, came in with fresh charms;
But wisely Adonis removed from his place,
For fear of a philter to die in her arms. 100

26.

Pert Mulgrave, well flustered with brandy and sack,
To Cupid in passion her story applied;
Since her lord was grown feeble and weak in the back,
She might purchase Adonis to lie by her side.

27.

But Cupid replied in Adonis his praise, 105
Though he had an esteem for a lecherous punk,

The pox or the plague he could freely embrace,
 But could not dispense with a whore would be drunk.

28.

Old Bellas[yse] next with the number did thrust,
 But Cupid provoked rose up in a rage, *110*
 And since she was nothing but wrinkles and lust,
 To allay her rank itch, bid her fuck with her page.

29.

With her, Lady Clifford sneaked out of the pit,
 Ashamed to behold how the former had sped;
 The god smiled to think she should have a sweet bit, *115*
 Who scarce had remaining a tooth in her head.

30.

Witty Dorchester next, like a queen took her place,
 And bragged she a monarch subdued to her arms,
 "If Jove in a shower does court my embrace,
 Can Adonis deny to submit to my charms?" *120*

31.

But Cupid, who always in mischief took pleasure,
 Returned her this answer, and did not dissemble,
 "If the full royal standard falls short in the measure,
 What can you expect from Adonis's wimble?"

32.

The tall Lady Mary next mounted the stage, *125*
 The spawn of a stroller and sperm of a king,

Who has married a viscount, yet fucks with her page,
For which she's advised to abandon the ring.

33.

Her natural mother came in for a snack,
That ballocking squirter and shitten arsed whore, *130*
But she an old Frenchman has got by the back,
And of that poor Adonis enough had before.

34.

Old Freschville, for drinking and hunting so fit,
With Lowther her crony, for swiving so famed, *135*
By the court for the crime they do daily commit,
Were to catso and dildo forever condemned.

35.

Here Villiers, who passed for a Maid of the Queen,
Came ramping along to supply her great need;
But Cupid advised her behind the new scene
To leave off her lewdness or she never would speed. *140*

36.

Next Frazer, the old and deformed enough,
And had for that cause juster claim to admit,
But she from the court did receive a reproof
For pretending to beauty, to conduct, or wit.

37.

Unfortunate South did approach in the rear, *145*
She never yet ventured but met a mishap;

But the court did advise her to come no more there
 Until she was perfectly cured of her clap.

38.

Roscommon with passion even ready to burn,
 Adonis had much, much ado to appease her; 150
 But he told her a poor whore was ne'er for his turn,
 And bid, to recruit her, keep close to Sir Caesar.

39.

Kildare, of whose beauty the palace does ring,
 Did make him a present, in hope he would sieze her;
 But what would she do with a poor chitterling, 155
 When a thousand stiff Irish pricks could not please her?

40.

Lady Orrery, once both a beauty and wit,
 With the box and [the] dice had great hopes to prevail;
 But she had a trick, when she was in her fit,
 To throw off with her hand what she got with her tail. 160

41.

Last fair Mrs. Luck did bring up the rear,
 But she was soon told of her folly before;
 And since she had made so wise a choice there,
 She never should choose for herself anymore.

42.

While thus from all nations and lands they resort, 165
 Of every humor, complexion, and age,

Dame Venus herself arrived at the court,
And thus she bespoke the blind god in a rage:

43.

“Am I thy own mother, from Jove’s mighty race?
And this fair Adonis, the amorous boy? 170
Such beauty is fit for a goddess’s embrace,
A blessing for mortals too great too enjoy.”

44.

This said, he laid by both his bow and his dart,
Which at his own mother he drew to the head;
And with one word she (resigning her heart) 175
To Cleveland put rakehelly Goodman to bed.

45.

This startled the court, to see her so pleased,
From a dish for a monarch and feeding so nice,
But all in a moment the court was appeased,
Since the goddess had made so equal a choice. 180

3. *Adonis*. Cardell Goodman (1653–c.1714), actor, highwayman, and Jacobite conspirator; for details of his life, see J. H. Wilson, *Mr. Goodman, the Player*, 1964. We may be sure that he was not as ugly, old, or diseased as he is represented by the satirist, who seems to be angry that a mere player should dare to become the lover of a duchess.

18. *miss*. Kept mistress, prostitute.

19. *a mercury fee*. This phrase, plus the following stanza, seems to mean that besotted women would “prostrate their honor” in taverns to get money to pay Adonis’s medical bills.

21. *the gallery vizer*. Poor whores, wearing masks, sat in the theatre galleries, paying eighteen pence for a seat; more prosperous trollops sat in the pit, paying two shillings and sixpence.

25. *monkeys*. In his *The Female Fireship*, 1691, Richard Ames listed three kinds of whores: kept mistresses, playhouse punks, and "the cracks of the night." Apparently the "monkeys" were playhouse punks. *top-knots*. Elaborate head dresses. According to Mary Evelyn (*Mundus Muliebris*, 1690) this was called a "Fontange . . . so called from Mademoiselle de Fontange, one of the French king's mistresses, who first wore it." *Owls in settee*. Ames wrote of nightwalkers,

Like owls all day they still remain within,
And seldom are until the twilight seen.

A "settee" was a caplike head dress, "the double pinner," according to Mary Evelyn.

26. *sultane*. "A gown trimmed with buttons and loops" (Mary Evelyn). *bulkers*. Whores who performed at night on empty bulks, or stalls, before shops.

29. *Hinton*. Mall Hinton; see Appendix, *per Mall*. Mall Howard; see Appendix.

30. *chaste widow*. Anne, Lady Brandon (Gerard), was a widow because she was separated from her husband. For her affair with "his grace," the Duke of Grafton, see above, "Julian's Farewell to the Coquets."

31. *Doll*. Lady Brandon's sister, Dorothy Mason.

33. *Boutell*. Elizabeth (Ridley) Boutell, actress and wife of Lieutenant Barnaby Boutell. She was with the King's Company c. 1670-78; the United Company 1688-90; and the Lincoln's Inn Fields Company 1695-96.

34. *Lumley*. Richard, Lord Lumley (c. 1650-1721). *Cox*. Elizabeth Cox, an actress with the King's Company 1671-82.

35. *Barry*. Elizabeth Barry (1658-1713), the greatest actress of the seventeenth century. She was on the stage from 1675 to 1708. Her reputation as an actress was equalled by her notoriety as a mercenary strumpet.

39. *Cuffley*. A well-known woman of the Town; see the verse epistles between "B---" and "Mr. E --" in Rochester's *Poems on Several Occasions*, ed. James Thorpe, 1950, pp. 77-87. Mrs. Cuffley was so notorious that in 1680 the editor of *The Courant Intelligence* (April 17) was obliged to apologize because he had reported that a witness in a trial was "Mrs. Cuffly of Scotland Yard," when in fact she was Mrs. Cufeler, widow of one Dr. Cufeler (*The True Protestant [Domestic] Intelligence*, April 25, 1680).

43. *parakeet*. A gaudy bird as opposed to the dull grey and brown of "the citizen widgeon," a duck.

45. *Cromwell and Silence*. Two well-known bawds. For Cromwell see "Jenny Cromwell's Complaint against Sodomy. 1692/3," in Harleian MS. 7315, f. 224. For Silence see Nahum Tate's "The Battle of the B[aw]ds in the Theatre Royal, December 3, 1680," an account of a hair-pulling match between Mesdames Silence and Stratford (*Poems Written on Several Occasions*, 1684, p. 153).

46. *recorder*. The Recorder of London was a counsellor experienced in the law, one who spoke in the name of the City, and read and presented addresses and petitions to the King.

47. *Betty Mackerel*. A famous trollop and orange girl. By this date she functioned also as a bawd.

49. *Pompey*. etc. Cardell Goodman was celebrated as Alexander in Lee's *The Rival Queens*. He certainly played *Julius Caesar* in a revival in 1684, and may have played the role earlier. It is unlikely that he ever played Pompey, unless in a revival of *Pompey the Great* (1664), by Sedley, Waller, Dorset, et al.

53. *Norfolk*. For the amorous exploits of Mary (Mordaunt), Duchess of Norfolk, see Appendix. In January, 1688, the duchess was legally separated from her husband, Henry Howard, seventh Duke of Norfolk.

57. *the German*. John Germaine, a Dutch adventurer, professional gambler, and the Duchess of Norfolk's lover.

61. *Richmond*. Frances Teresa, widowed Duchess of Richmond; see Appendix.

67. *Howe*, etc. John Grubham Howe; John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave; John Holles, Lord Houghton. The poet is merely repeating earlier charges; see above, "A Ballad to the Tune of Cheviot Chace."

69. *Sophia*. Sophia (Stuart), wife of Henry Bulkeley, Master of the Household, was a Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Marie.

73. *grave widow*. Anne, daughter of Francis, second Earl of Buccleuch, and widow of James Scott, Duke of Monmouth.

78. *Stamford*. Thomas Grey, Earl of Stamford. His wife, buxom Elizabeth (Harvey), died on September 7, 1687. *Cornwallis*. Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Stephen Fox and first wife of Charles, third Baron Cornwallis, died February 28, 1681. As his second wife, Cornwallis married privately, on May 6, 1688, Anne, the widowed Duchess of Monmouth. The marriage was widely known by or before May 28 (*Clarendon State Papers*, II, 45). *Dunbar*. The first wife of Robert Constable, third Viscount Dunbar, was Mary (Belasyse). In July, 1687, she gave birth, and under pressure admitted that the infant's father was not Dunbar but her own confessor. She seems to have died soon afterward (*Rutland MS*, II, 115, July 21, 1687).

81. *Grafton*. Isabella (Bennet), Duchess of Grafton. The "lusty tarpaulin" was Henry, Duke of Grafton. Adonis would be the substitute for Grafton, and for Charles, Viscount Mordaunt, reputedly the duchess's lover.

86. *his grace*. The Duke of Grafton, with a small fleet, left England on July 5, 1687, to convoy Mary Elizabeth, Princess Palatine and bride of Peter the Second of Portugal, from Holland to Lisbon. After that he was ordered to make a show of force before Algiers. His fleet returned to England about March 19, 1688 (Luttrell, I, 434). *Duncan*. Duncan Abercromy; see Appendix.

88. *wounds*. According to John Dryden, the duel between Goodman and Duncan Abercromy took place, not in a dressing room, but in Covent Garden, "where they say Alexander the Great [Goodman] was wounded in the arm" (*Letters*, ed. C. E. Ward, p. 27, February 16, 1687).

90. *a foreign-built duchess*. Hortense, Duchess Mazarin, was still beautiful and should have been tempting to a mere actor, a member of an "inferior race."

96. *her black*. Mustapha, page to the Duchess Mazarin.

97. *Northumberland*. Katherine, Duchess of Northumberland, formerly widow of Captain Thomas Lucy. *ill-gotten* suggests that she used mean devices to snare George Fitzroy, Duke of Northumberland, in March, 1686.

100. *a philter*. Usually a love potion.

101. *pert Mulgrave*. On March 11, 1686, Ursula, the widowed Lady Conway, married John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave. The marriage was not happy, and apparently the countess took to drink. The author of "A Faithful Catalogue of Our Most Eminent Ninnies," c. 1687 (*POAS*, Yale, IV, 197), asserted that

But now, poor wretch, she lies as she would bust,
Sometimes with brandy and sometimes with lust.

108. *dispense with*. Accept.
109. *Bellasy's*. Susan (Armine), widow of Sir Henry Bellasy's and once mistress of James, Duke of York. She was created Baroness Bellasy's of Osgodby in 1674. Died March 6, 1713.
113. *Lady Clifford*. Probably (because she is old) Elizabeth (Martin), widow of Thomas, Baron Clifford of Chudleigh, who had been Lord High Treasurer, 1672-73. Lady Clifford died on September 21, 1709.
117. *Dorchester*. Katherine Sedley, created Countess of Dorchester by her lover, King James II.
124. *wimble*. A gimlet or auger.
125. *Lady Mary*. On August 18, 1687, Lady Mary Tudor, daughter of King Charles II by the actress Moll Davis, married Edward, Viscount Radcliffe, later second Earl of Derwentwater.
129. *natural mother*. On December 4, 1686, Moll Davis took out a license to marry a French musician, James Paisible. She gave her age as "abt 25," and Paisible claimed to be "abt 30" (*Marriage Allegations, Vicar-General*, 1890). The epithets echo the tradition that Nell Gwyn gave Moll a purgative dose before she was to have a night with the King.
133. *Old Freschville*. Anne Charlotte (De Vic), widow of John, Baron Freschville, and a Lady of the Bedchamber to Princess Anne, died in 1717.
134. *Lowther*. Probably Katherine (Thynne), 1653-1713, wife of Sir John Lowther of Lowther, Westmorland, created Viscount Lonsdale in 1696.
136. *catso*. *Membrum virile*. *dildo*. An artificial priapus.
137. *Villiers*. Mary, a daughter of Sir Edward Villiers and a Maid of Honor to Queen Marie (and later to Queen Mary), married in April, 1691, William, Lord O'Brien.
141. *Frazer*. Mary (Carey) Frazier, widow of the royal physician, Sir Alexander Frazier, was a dresser to Queen Dowager Catherine. Lady Frazier died in January, 1696.
145. *South*. Elizabeth South, a Maid of Honor to the Queen.
149. *Roscommon*. Isabelle (Boynton), c. 1654-1721, widow of Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, 1637-85, had been a Maid of Honor to Marie, Duchess of York and was now a Lady of the Bedchamber to the Queen. Her poverty is vouched for in "News from Whitehall," Harleian MS. 7317, p. 154,
- Though 'tis too well known she hath ne'er a penny,
And that sneaking Sir Ceasar is all her revenue.
152. *Sir Caesar*. Sir Caesar Wood Cranmer, one of the Queen's equeries.
153. *Kildare*. Elizabeth (Jones), 1665-1758, wife of John, Earl of Kildare (Ireland), was often accused of promiscuity.
155. *chitterling*. A piece of entrail, stuffed with meat; i.e., a small sausage.
155. *Orrery*. Mary (Sackville), 1642-1710, widow of Roger Boyle, second Earl of Orrery, seems to have been a compulsive gambler; hence she threw off "with her hand" at the gaming tables what she earned abed.
166. *Mrs. Luck*. In Harleian MS. 7317, p. 148ff, this lady's name is given as "Mrs. Luke," with the marginal note, "Sir John Maynard's Lady," not his wife. For more about Anne (or Nancy) Luck, see above, "The Lovers' Session."
176. *Cleveland*. Barbara (Villiers), Duchess of Cleveland.