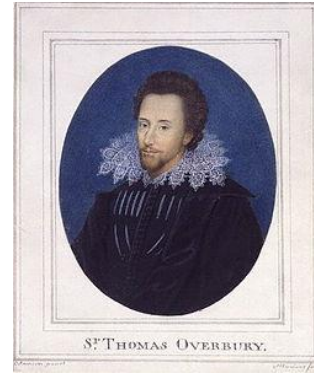


https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Overbury



Sir Thomas Overbury -- My 10th Great-Uncle

Brother of My 9th Great-Grandfather Sir Giles Overbury - by David Arthur

Sir Thomas Overbury (baptized 1581 – 14 September 1613) was an English poet and essayist, also known for being the victim of a murder which led to a scandalous trial. His poem *A Wife* (also referred to as *The Wife*), which depicted the virtues that a young man should demand of a woman, played a large role in the events that precipitated his murder.

<http://www.edavidarthur.net/Quotes.htm> Quotes attributed to Sir Thomas Overby

Background

Thomas Overbury was the son of Mary Palmer and Nicholas Overbury, of Bourton-on-the-Hill, Gloucester. He was born at Compton Scorpion, near Ilmington, in Warwickshire. In the autumn of 1595, he became a gentleman commoner of Queen's College, Oxford, took his degree of BA in 1598 and came to London to study law in the Middle Temple. He soon found favour with Sir Robert Cecil, travelled on the Continent and began to enjoy a reputation for an accomplished mind and free manners.

Robert Carr

About 1601, whilst on holiday in Edinburgh, he met Robert Carr, then an obscure page to the Earl of Dunbar. A great friendship was struck up between the two youths, and they came up to London together. The early history of Carr remains obscure, and it is probable that Overbury secured an introduction to court before his young associate contrived to do so. At all events, when Carr attracted the attention of James I in 1606 by breaking his leg in the tilt-yard, Overbury had for some time been servitor-in-ordinary to the king.

In June 1608, Overbury was knighted by the king. From October 1608 to August 1609 he traveled to the Netherlands and France, staying in Antwerp and Paris. Upon his return he began following Carr's fortunes very closely, and "such was the warmth of the friendship, that they were inseparable,... nor could Overbury enjoy any felicity but in the company of him he loved [Carr]." When the latter was made Viscount Rochester in 1610, the intimacy seems to have been sustained. With Overbury's aid, the young Carr caught the eye of the King, and soon became his favorite. Overbury had the wisdom and Carr had the King's ear into which to pour it. The combination took Carr swiftly up the ladder of power. Soon he was the most powerful man in England next to Robert Cecil.

Court intrigues and death

After the death of Cecil in 1612, the Howard party, consisting of Henry Howard, Thomas Howard, his son-in-law Lord Knollys, and Charles Howard, along with Sir Thomas Lake, moved to take control of much of the government and its patronage. The powerful Carr, unfitted for the responsibilities thrust upon him and often dependent on his intimate friend, Overbury, for assistance with government papers, fell into the Howard camp, after beginning an affair with the married Frances Howard, Countess of Essex, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk.

Overbury was from the first violently opposed to the affair, pointing out to Carr that it would be hurtful to his preferment, and that Frances Howard, even at this early stage in her career, was already "noted for her injury and immodesty." But Carr was now infatuated, and he repeated to the Countess what Overbury had said. It was at this time, too, that Overbury wrote, and circulated widely in manuscript his poem *A Wife*, which was a picture of the virtues which a young man should demand in a woman before he has the rashness to marry her. Lady Essex believed that Overbury's object in writing this poem was to open the eyes of his friend to her defects. The situation now turned into a deadly duel between the mistress and the friend. The Countess tried to manipulate Overbury into seeming to be disrespectful to the queen, Anne of Denmark. James I was instigated to offer him an assignment as ambassador to the court of Michael of Russia. Overbury declined, as he sensed the urgency to remain in England and at his friend's side. James I was so irate at Overbury's arrogance in declining the offer that he had him thrown into the Tower of London on 22 April 1613, where he died on 14 September.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wade_\(English_politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wade_(English_politician))

Sir William Wade, MP (MP stands for Member of Parliament)
Son of Armagil Wade, MP and Alice Wade - was Alice Patten
Later life

He retired from public life in 1613, at the instigation of Frances Howard, Countess of Essex. She wanted Wade replaced with a less honest Lieutenant of the Tower, Sir Gervase Helwys, as part of her scheme to murder the prisoner Thomas Overbury, who was opposed to her affair with Robert Carr.

William Wade is my 10th Great-Grandfather on my Father's mother's line
<http://www.edavidarthur.net/AncestorsAndDescendantsfEdwardWade.pdf>

Beginnings of scandal

The Howards won James's support for an annulment of Frances's marriage to Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, on grounds of impotence, to free her to remarry. With James's assistance, the marriage was duly annulled on 25 September 1613, despite Essex's opposition to the charge of impotence. The marriage two months later of Frances Howard and Robert Carr, now the Earl of Somerset, was the court event of the season, celebrated in verse by John Donne. The Howards' rise to power seemed complete.

Rumours of foul play in Overbury's death began circulating. Almost two years later, in September 1615, and as James was in the process of replacing Carr with new favourite George Villiers, the governor of the Tower sent a letter to the King, informing him that one of the warders had been bringing the prisoner "poisoned food and medicine." James showed a disinclination to delve into the matter, but the rumours refused to go away. Eventually, they began hinting at the King's own involvement, forcing him to order an investigation. The details of the murder were uncovered by Edward Coke and Sir Francis Bacon who presided over the trial.

Trial

In the celebrated trials of the six accused in late 1615 and early 1616 that followed, evidence of a plot came to light. It was very likely that Overbury was the victim of a 'set-up' contrived by the Earls of Northampton and Suffolk, with Carr's complicity, to keep him out of the way during the annulment proceedings. Overbury knew too much of Carr's dealings with Frances and, motivated by a deep political hostility to the Howards, opposed the match with a fervour that made him dangerous. The Queen had sown discord between the friends, calling Overbury Carr's "governor."

It was not known at the time, and it is not certain now, how much Carr participated in the first crime, or if he was ignorant of it. Lady Essex, however, was not satisfied with having had Overbury shut up; she was determined that "he should return no more to this stage." She had Sir William Wade, the honest Lord Lieutenant of the Tower, removed to make way for a new Lieutenant, Sir Gervase Helwys; and a gaoler, Richard Weston, of whom it was ominously said that he was "a man well acquainted with the power of drugs," was set to attend on Overbury. Weston, afterwards aided by Mrs Anne Turner, the widow of a physician, and by an apothecary called Franklin, plied Overbury with sulfuric acid in the form of copper vitriol.

It cannot have been difficult for the conspirators to secure James's compliance because he disliked Overbury's influence over Carr. John Chamberlain (1553–1628) reported at the time that the King "hath long had a desire to remove him from about the lord of Rochester [Carr], as thinking it a dishonour to him that the world should have an opinion that Rochester ruled him and Overbury ruled Rochester". Overbury had been poisoned.

Frances Howard admitted a part in Overbury's murder, but her husband did not. Fearing what Carr might say about him in court, James repeatedly sent messages to the Tower pleading with him to admit his guilt in return for a pardon. "It is easy to be seen that he would threaten me with laying an aspersion upon me of being, in some sort, accessory to his crime". The couple were found guilty and sentenced to death; nonetheless, they were eventually pardoned. Four accomplices - Robert Weston, Anne Turner, Gervaise Helwys, and Simon Franklin - were also found guilty and, lacking powerful connections, were hanged.

The implication of the King in such a scandal provoked much public and literary conjecture and irreparably tarnished James's court with an image of corruption and depravity.

Literary and cultural references

Overbury's poem, *A Wife*, was published in 1614 (see 1614 in poetry), and ran through six editions within a year, the scandal connected with the murder of the author greatly aiding its success. It was abundantly reprinted within the next sixty years, and it continued to be one of the most widely popular books of the 17th century. Combined with later editions of *A Wife*, and gradually adding to its bulk, were *Characters* (first printed in the second of the 1614 editions), *The Remedy of Love* (1620; see 1620 in poetry), and *Observations in Foreign Travels* (1626). Later, much that must be spurious was added to the gathering snowball of Overbury's works.

Tragic stage play, *Sir Thomas Overbury*, by Richard Savage 1724

Jean Plaidy's *Murder in the Tower* in 1964 tells of the love triangle between Overbury, Carr and Lady Francis Howard.

For an alternative account of the trial, see Anne Somerset's *Unnatural Murder* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997).

Marjorie Bowen wrote a fictionalised account of the case and trial in *The King's Favourite*.

Rafael Sabatini's novel about the rise and fall of Robert Carr, *The King's Minion* (1930), argues Overbury's poisoning was ordered by James I and carried out by his personal physician after the failed attempts by Lady Essex and her conspirators.

The dramatist John Ford wrote a lost work entitled *Sir Thomas Overbury's Ghost*, containing the history of his life and untimely death (1615). Its nature is uncertain, but Ford scholars have suggested it may have been an elegy, prose piece or pamphlet.

Nathaniel Hawthorne mentions this murder in his book *The Scarlet Letter*.

Charles Mackay devoted much of the chapter on "The Slow Poisoners" in the second volume of *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* to Overbury's death and the various fates of his murderers.

Miriam Allen deFord wrote *The Overbury Affair*, which involves events during the reign of James I of Britain surrounding the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. For the latter work she received a 1961 Edgar Award from the Mystery Writers of America for Best Fact Crime book.

Brian Harris QC offers a radical new approach to the poisoning conspiracy and suggests that Overbury may not have died at the hands of Francis Essex. See *Passion, Poison and Power*, Wildy, Simmonds & Hill, 2010. (ISBN 9780854900770)

<http://www.eldritchpress.org/nh/sl09-n.html>

Notes to Ch 9

The Scarlet Letter

Sir Thomas Overbury --- Hawthorne gives us the essential facts of this case of possible poisoning by an alchemist, as part of a rather famous adultery scandal and trial in 1615, thirty years before this time. Here Hawthorne associates Chillingworth with the alchemist Dr. Forman, who was charged with making up potions for the adulterous wife to give to both her husband and her lover. Overbury, the friend of the lover, was apparently poisoned while in the Tower of London. The lover and the adulterous wife escaped but were ostracized. The husband, the Earl of Essex, is said to have given money to support the child of his wife--as Chillingworth eventually does after his death in this book. Although some critics have argued that this case really serves as the model for this novel, there are too many discrepancies to explain, and the setting is entirely different.

From the Scarlet Letter

"And the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale's best discerning friends, as we have intimated, very reasonably imagined that the hand of Providence had done all this, for the purpose--besought in so many public, and domestic, and secret prayers--of restoring the young minister to health. But--it must now be said--another portion of the community had latterly begun to take its own view of the relation betwixt Mr. Dimmesdale and the mysterious old physician. When an uninstructed multitude attempts to see with its eyes, it is exceedingly apt to be deceived. When, however, it forms its judgment, as it usually does, on the intuitions of its great and warm heart, the conclusions thus attained are often so profound and so unerring, as to possess the character of truths supernaturally revealed. The people, in the case of which we speak, could justify its prejudice against Roger Chillingworth by no fact or argument worthy of serious refutation. There was an aged handicraftsman, it is true, who had been a citizen of London at the period of Sir Thomas Overbury's murder, now some thirty years ago; he testified to having seen the physician, under some other name, which the narrator of the story had now forgotten, in company with Doctor Forman, the famous old conjurer, who was implicated in the affair of Overbury. Two or three individuals hinted, that the man of skill, during his Indian captivity, had enlarged his medical attainments by joining in the incantations of the savage priests; who were universally acknowledged to be powerful enchanters, often performing seemingly miraculous cures by their skill in the black art. A large number--and many of these were persons of such sober sense and practical observation, that their opinions would have been valuable, in other matters--affirmed that Roger Chillingworth's aspect had undergone a remarkable change while he had dwelt in town, and especially since his abode with Mr. Dimmesdale. At first, his expression had been calm, meditative, scholar-like. Now, there was something ugly and evil in his face, which they had not previously noticed, and which grew still the more obvious to sight, the oftener they looked upon him. According to the vulgar idea, the fire in his laboratory had been brought from the lower regions, and was fed with infernal fuel; and so, as might be expected, his visage was getting sooty with the smoke."