

## VERNACULAR TEXTS

*The Cruel Midwife. Being a True Account of a Most Sad and Lamentable Discovery that has been Lately Made in the Village of Poplar in the Parish of Stepney. At the House of one Madame Compton alias Norman a Midwife, wherein has been discovered many Children that have been Murdered ... Also an Account of the Seizing or Apprehending, Behaviour, and Commitment to Newgate, of Madam Compton alias Norman, the Midwife, on the Account of Murthering these Infants* (London, R. Wier, 1693). British Library shelfmark 1132.f.66.

*The Man-Midwife Unmasqu'd: Being the Case of a certain Young Lady, who Apply'd to the noted Doctor D— for his Advice. Containing, the Discourse that Pass'd between the Fair Patient, and the Doctor – His Inspection into her Case – Her Attempts to Indict him for a Rape – The Questions ask'd her by the Jury, with, the Lady's Answers – The Deceit Discover'd, and the Bill Returned Ignoramus, &c. &c. &c.* (London, J. Dormer, 1734). British Library, shelfmark 1607/5444.

For centuries midwives have been associated with infanticide, witchcraft, drunkenness, prostitution, illegitimacy, thievery and other lewd and illegal acts. With the proliferation of cheap print in the 1640s and 50s, and rising concerns about political and social institutions during the Civil War and Interregnum, a new wave of vernacular texts about cunning midwives, murderous mothers, headless babies and unnatural births began to appear. *The Cruel Midwife* aligns with these texts as it links midwifery to serial murder, child abandonment and neglect, and the trafficking of bastard children.

After opening with religious rhetoric, the story of the midwife and the unfortunate children under her care unfolds in a matter-of-fact fashion, much like a newspaper story. Left alone in the house to care for an infant, a young boy 'almost starved' cries out and arouses the attention of a neighbour boy who subsequently seeks help, and the story of the murderous midwife is discovered. Bodies of numerous children lay scattered throughout the house and property, and while the cause of the deaths is not revealed – starvation and neglect seem likely – their suffering is apparent. In some texts of this genre, the scenario is reversed, and the midwife or mother is the one who suffers, not the children.

Anne Green, a servant who gives birth to a stillborn illegitimate child in W. Burdet's broadside *A Wonder of Wonders* (1651), is hanged, viciously beaten, falls into a coma, dramatically recovers, and praises God's goodness. Sent to trial and condemned to death, Green's story is retold in another pamphlet, *A Declaration from Oxford, of Anne Green* (1651), with additional material included on her near-death experience, 'the great handiwork of God' in her recovery, and an additional short tale of a young woman who died in child-bed, was buried, and was delivered of a son in her grave. The text reprinted here, *The Cruel Midwife*, which ends with the midwife's arrest, also has a companion piece or sequel: *A Particular and Exact Account of the Trial of Mary Compton* (1693), a broadside poem which focuses on Compton's subsequent trial and the role of the two women who allegedly functioned as her accomplices. Additional broadsides of this genre include *The Cruel Mother* (1670), about a mother who murdered her child, spent time in prison and was executed, and *The Mistaken Mid-Wife, or, Mother Midnight Finely Brought to Bed* (1674–9), which relates the story of a barren woman who procured a dead infant and pretended she had delivered it, only for her scheme to be discovered and for her to be sent to prison. These types of sensational texts not only illustrate the public's fascination with death and the topic of murderous mothers and midwives, but they reveal a certain callous attitude toward children – a petty, or lesser, offense is the midwife's charge for serial murder in *The Cruel Midwife* – as well as anxiety and hostility toward women and their sexual and reproductive functions. Women, it seems, are like animals. They cannot be trusted to control their sexual bodies or their dangerous impulses, and even when they give birth, as in the example of the woman in the grave, they cannot seem to follow the rules of nature. Punishment, imprisonment and death keep them in check and the society around them safe.

By the turn of the eighteenth century, vernacular texts that emphasized mothers' and midwives' pernicious and dangerous qualities largely died out, only for these qualities to reappear in new forms in the fiction of Defoe, Richardson, Sterne and other writers. The rise of empirical midwifery treatises, by contrast, tended to refashion the image of female midwives away from sexuality, murder and overtly transgressive behaviour to seemingly more innocuous traits such as incompetence, ignorance and drunkenness. Moreover, particularly after the Mary Toft case of 1726, vernacular literature had a new object to examine: male midwives. We see this shift in *The Man-Midwife Unmasqu'd*. First published in 1733, it is a bawdy verse set in couplets that aligns male midwives with lechery and female patients with sexual extortion. Everything is turned upside down in this poem, as the beautiful young woman who seeks the male midwife's assistance in terminating her pregnancy is really a calculating whore who wants money. The doctor in question, Doctor D—, is James Douglas (bap. 1675–1742), the famed anatomist and man-midwife who was involved in the Mary Toft case in 1726.

After the Toft hoax was exposed, Douglas wrote his own self-serving reaction to events, *An Advertisement Occasion'd by Some Passages in Sir. R. Manningham's Diary* (1727), which spawned a sexually-scripted satire levied against him – *A Shorter and Truer Advertisement ... or, Dr. D—g—l—s in an Extasy* (1727). Both texts are included in Volume 2 of this collection. *The Man-Midwife Unmasqu'd* reads like a companion piece to these earlier works, particularly the satire, since sex is the common topic in both works. In *The Man-Midwife Unmasqu'd*, the doctor says he will help the woman but, inflamed by desire, he turns his clinical examination into an opportunity to have sex with his patient. Much fun is made with double meanings: the clinical inspection of the woman's reproductive organs becomes foreplay, cunnilingus and sexual penetration; what the doctor will 'put in with Ease, with Ease will come out' (below, p. 163) suggests both an abortifacient as well as the doctor's penis; the woman vowing she will be passive and obedient suggests both a docile patient, and, with her 'case' open, a woman who allows the man sexual freedom over her body.

Douglas probably cringed to see this satire published since it renewed public awareness of his association with Toft, something he likely wanted to forget. That said, he might have taken some comfort in the fact that *The Man-Midwife Unmasqu'd* is a more diffuse sexual satire than the earlier one levied against him. Both the man-midwife and the female patient are presented as objects of derision, and as the satire's title suggests, the piece can be read as a critique of all male midwives, not just Douglas. The woman clearly has no shame, invites the doctor's sexual advances, and has her case thrown out of court; still, just seeing the woman's beauty inflames the man-midwife to such a degree that all semblance of professional duty is lost, and lust overtakes his reason. The perceived impropriety and indecency of male midwives seeing women unclothed, and the fear that this would lead to sexual arousal and women's sexual violation is a common argument against male midwives throughout the eighteenth century, and is more fully explored in texts on the male/female midwifery debates found in Volume 7 of this collection.



## The CRUEL MIDVVIFE.

Being a True Account of a most Sad and Lamentable DISCOVERY that has been lately made in the Village of POPLAR in the Parish of S T E P N E Y.

At the House of one *Madame Compton* alias *Norman* a Midwife, wherein has been discovered many Children that have been Murdered. Particularly Two that were lately found in a Hand-Basket on a Shelf in the Sellar, whose Skins, Eyes, and part of their Flesh were eaten by Vermin: The Skeliton of Six others that were found buried in the Sellar; with the design of digging for others in the Garden. With the manner of the Discovery.

A L S O

An Account of the Seizing or Apprehending, Behaviour, and Commitment to NEWGATE, of *Madam Compton* alias *Norman*, the Midwife, on the Account of Murthering these Infants.

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Licensed according to Order.

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L O N D O N,

Printed for R. *Wier* at the *White Horse* in *Fleet-Street*, 1693

[ 2 ]

*The Cruel Mischise of Poplar, &c.*

EVERY thing is carried on by a natural Instinct, to the Preservation of it self in its own Being: And by the same Law of Nature even the most brutish amongst the Brutes themselves, may be observed to retain a special Kind of Indulgence and Tenderness towards the young The Monsters of the Sea draw out their Breasts, and give Suck to their Young ones. The barbarous Cruelities of some Midwives, Nurses, and *even* Parents to young Children, may assure us That there are greater Monsters upon the Land than are to be found in the Bottom of the Deep; and if some of these may extenuate their Inhumanities, by I know not what Veracious Pretences, yet the Barbarities of the rest must be wholly imputable to their savage Nature, and the blindness of their Disposition.

The Gentlewoman, who is the chief Subject or Occasion of the following Narrative is by Name *Crompton*, or least generally known among the Neighbour-hood by no other Name than *Madam Crompton*; she came to live at *Poplar*, which is near *Stepney*, about Two Years since, taking a large House, where none but  
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Persons of considerable Rank had lived before, bringing with her at first only a Maid Servant, going for a Midwife of great note to Persons of Quality; here she had not continued long, before she was observed to have several Children of divers Ages; but all the time of her living in this Place has been very private, not in the least associating herself with any of the Neighbourhood, or coming to Church, &c. but her Maid Servant would often be in Discourse with some of the adjacent Neighbours Maids, being always very inquisitive with them, but she would never communicate any thing of her Mistresses Domestick Affairs. The Midwife herself was scarce ever seen in the Neighbourhood, not so much as to stand at the Door, but stepping into the Coach early in the morning, and coming home in a Coach in the Night, and seldom or never were any Visitants seen to come thither, but only some Gentlemen and others often in the Evening or Night, except it were some of the Parish for the Kings Taxes, the Ministers, Poor or other Duties, which generally, if she hapen to be at home she readily paid them at the Door, or sent the Maid to them with the money and many complefant Words; she was observed to be often from home for several days together, yet so much was

## [ 4 ]

was her maid servant her Confederate & Creature, that the Affaires of the House was kept so private and obscure from the Neighbours, that they could not tell how many Children she had in the House, or how often changed, or otherwise disposed of: *Mrs. Crompton* is between Fifty and Three core Years of Age, and her maid has often declared upon several Occasions, That her mistress has been a Midwife above Thirty Years; and 'tis generally said that she she has followed this barbarous Infant murdering Trade so long, the truth of which is best known to the Omnipresent God, the searcher of Hearts, who can bring the most hidden Things of Darkness to light, and from whom no Secret is hid, who for Reasons best known to his Providence, permits some Persons Sins to go before to Judgment, that is to be punished in this Life, and others to come after, that is, reserved to the Tribunal of the great Day.

*Mrs. Crompton* going out of Town the beginning of the last Week, on *Friday*, pretty early in the Morning, the Maid-Servant no doubt by the Order and Appointment of the Mistress left the House likewise, leaving at home a Boy about Seven Years of Age, and a Girl about Six Years Old, with a little Infant  
in

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in the Cradle, leaving with them for Food only a piece of Cheefe and Water, not any Beer or Bread, but bid the Boy, in case the young Child cryed, to give it some Water, and she would return in a little time; all which the Boy has since related: The Children continuing in the House alone most part of the Day, and no Maid returning, grew very impatient, and particularly for want of Sustenance, &c. and the Boy bringing of it into an outward Room next the Street, a Neighbour's Son passing by, and hearing the Child cry, called to the Boy to know what was the matter, to whom he declar'd after some time, the Reasons: That they were left all day alone in the House, without Victuals, and that the young Child was almost starved; after which, Neighbours being called, the Constable and Masters of the Parish were sent for, some of whom coming and entering the House, examined the two Chilgriens, who declared as before mentioned; and farther, besides the Infant in the Cradle, the Boy declared there were two more that lay Dead in a Hand-basket upon a Shelf in the Cellar; another lay Buried in the Garden, and a Fourth in the Cellar: Upon present search, they found the Two Children in the Hand-basket as the Boy had said,

they

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they being most lamentable Objects of Humane Misery, looking at first sight, were liker the Carcasses of Catts or Doggs, than Humane Creatures, all their skin being off, as likewise their Eyes and part of their Flesh eat with Vermin, stinking in a lamentable manner.

On *Monday* being 21<sup>st</sup>. Instant, the Coroners Inquest were Impanell'd, and coming to the House where the Dead Bodies lay in the Basket, after viewing of them, they ordered some Labourers (according to the Words of the Boy) to Dig in several soft places of the Cellar where they perceived the ground had been broken, where, after some time, they Dug up six several Skeletons of Children of several Ages; upon which Night coming on, the Coroner Adjourn'd the Jury till the next Day, resolving to have the ground in the Garden likewise to be broken up before they brought in their Verdict, many of the Spectators took several of the Bones and carried them away, some of which are now to be seen at the *Ben-Johnson's Head*, near *St. Brides Church* by *Fleetstreet*.

Who were the Parents of these Children, or upon what account this Midwife had the keeping of them, is not certainly known, though  
it's

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it's generally conjectured, and that not without a great deal of Reason; that these were those commonly called *By-blows*, or *Bastards*, which she undertook, for a certain Sum of Money agreed on, to ease the Parents of, by keeping them as long as they lived. It's hoped our Grandfire Time, that brings all things to light, will unveil the Darkness of this hidden Mystery of Iniquity, and expose the Truth as the Sun at Noon-day; In the mean time great care is taken and search made in order to discover the Midwife or her Maid.

*Postscript.*

**T**uesday, August 22. This Day the Coroner's Inquest met again, but were adjourned till Monday, on the Account that they had done digging in the Garden, and other parts for Children, and for other Reasons. This Day likewise about One in the Afternoon, our Madam *Compton*, alias *Norman*, was Apprehended near *Covent-Garden*, and with the Assistance of the Constables and Beadles, being led between two Men, attended with a numerous Croud of People; she was carried to the Petty Sessions of *Bloomsbury*, where she was Examined before their Majesties Justices  
of

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of the Peace there sitting; who likewise took several Affidavits, by which she is vehemently suspected (if not positively charged) to have Murther'd several Children that were put to her to Nurse; upon which she was from thence Committed to *Newgate*, by the Warrant or *Mittimus* signed by the Worshipfull Justices of the Peace then on the Bench.

When our Doughty Midwife was first seized, all the way she went to the Justices, and when she came before their *Worships*, she was observed to carry her self with a great deal of Confidence, not seeming in the least concern'd, or much denying the Fact. It has been observed that several Gentlemen and others have been seen to enquire at some of the Adjacent Ale-houses concerning some particular Children.

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E N D

THE  
MAN-MIDWIFE  
UNMASQU'D:  
BEING

The CASE of a certain *Young Lady*,  
who apply'd to the noted Doctor  
D—— for his Advice.

CONTAINING,

The Discourse that pass'd between the Fair  
Patient, and the Doctor — His *Inspection*  
into her Case — His Attempt to *Tu-*  
*dit* him for a *Rape* — The *Questions*  
ask'd her by the *Fury*, with the *Lady's*  
*Answers* — The *Deceit* discover'd, and  
the *Bill* return'd *Ignoramus*, &c. &c. &c.

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L O N D O N,

Printed and Sold by *J. Dormer* at the Printing-  
Office, the Green Door, in *Black and White*  
Court in the *Old Bailey*. 1734.



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T H E

# MAN-MIDWIFE

## UNMASQU'D, &c.

To the Tune of *Lumps of Pudding*;

I.

**T**IS needless the Records of Time to explore,  
 Our own present Age has Examples in Store,  
 Of Mischief that has by a Woman been  
 done,

The worst Sort of Mischief now under the Sun ;  
 Philosophers, Lawyers, and Statesmen agree,  
 And ev'ry Divine too of ev'ry Degree,  
 At the *Bottom of Mischief* is always a *Woman*,  
 And *Mischief at Bottom of Woman* is common.

II.

This Maxim allow'd then, we now shall proceed  
 To mention a comi and farcical Deed ;  
 The primary Thought was a Trick, and no more,  
 A Device carried on by a plotting young W—— ;  
 The Scheme being laid, she was sure of the Prize,  
 Mistake not, I don't mean the *Scheme of Exercise* ;  
 She wanted some Money, 'tis true, and some —— ,  
 She fail'd of the first, but the latter had Luck in.

III.

Clad nice in Apparel, away trips my Lady,  
 In Fancy as fine as a Queen on a *May-Day* ;

To

## [ 4 ]

To a famous *Man-Midwife* Mock-majesty came,  
 And ask'd for \_\_\_\_\_ for whom? Dr. D\_\_\_\_\_ by Name.  
 She soon gain'd Admittance, nor had the young Fair  
 Scarce sat herself down, when the Doctor came there;  
 Surpris'd at her Beauty, the young *Don* did eye her,  
 And wish'd he might so happy prove, as to try her.

## IV.

With Looks now demur, like a *Puritan Sinner*,  
 Who reflects on the Time when she was a *Beginner*;  
 Now blushing, now sighing, with Tears trickling  
 down,

Inclining, yet fearful, her Cause to make known;  
 Half Sentences utter'd, then seem'd to recant;  
 Quoth the Doctor, fair Lady, what is it you want?  
 Then squeezing her Hand, said, your Mind, pray  
 discover,

I find o'er your Heart something heavy does hover.

## V.

Says she, since I find that I nought must conceal,  
 My dread Apprehensions I now will reveal;  
 And therefore, good Doctor, the Truth I now tell y',  
 Merhinks there is *Something alive in my Belly*.  
 You easily guess by what Means, quoth the Fair,  
 This Guest, that's so troublesome, got Footing there,  
 'Tis a *Slipp'ry Trick*, Mother Eve led us to it,  
 The *Critical Minute* soon tempts us to do it.

## VI.

She blush'd, and immediately *hung down her Head*,  
 And look'd as with *Shame* she had been half dead;  
 The Doctor perceiv'd it, and laugh'd in his Sleeve,  
 Well pleas'd he had met with this Daughter of *Eve*;  
 His Blood was inflam'd, by her powerful Charms,  
 He wish'd to expire a While in *her Arms*;  
 Then, pausing, concluded, that he must carress *Her*;  
 And quickly did find out a Way to possess *Her*.

VII. Says

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VII.

Says he, *I perceive, Lady fair, that your Case  
May soon be attended with Shame and Disgrace,  
Unless 'tis prevented; I'll do what I can,  
And may venture to say, you will find me a Man:  
A Man both of Judgment and Skill I do mean,  
By Judgment and Skill I my Credit maintain:  
But then in each Point you must follow Direction,  
And as your Case lies, must admit of Inspection.*

## VIII.

The Nymph then reply'd, I'll be rul'd, Sir, by you,  
What *Method* you judge the most proper pursue;  
But first I desire, before you begin,  
To think on the *hapless Condition* I'm in.  
The Doctor then answer'd, you need not to doubt,  
What I *put in with Ease, with Ease will come out.*  
I do nothing *rashly*, but always at *Leisure*,  
Then start not when I shall *search into your Treasure.*

## IX.

Good Doctor, you'll find me a Patient, quoth she,  
That's all over *Passive*, as *passive* can be;  
Yet if you shou'd venture too far to advance,  
Perhaps you may make me to twitter and prance;  
But do what you will, I am at your *Devotion*,  
And when you direct me, will follow your *Motion*;  
*Resistance* I hate, and for ever disclaim,  
But *Passive-Obedience* was always my Aim.

## X.

Up Stairs the grave Doctor with Joy did conduct her,  
And now I will tell you how fairly he ——— ;  
Then into a Chamber, the Nymph, by him led,  
Was, with her Consent, quickly laid on the Bed.  
Well-pleas'd in his Mind, with a fluttering Heart,  
The Doctor resolv'd now to shew all his Art;  
To give Demonstration that he did respect Her,  
He kneel'd down before her, and then did *Inspect Her.*

## XI. He

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XI.

He first did begin *here and there* for to peep,  
 As mute lay the Nymph, as if she were a-sleep;  
 Temptation was strong, and he cou'd not forbear,  
 But with Vigour attack'd, in the Center, the Fair.  
 In a Minute he found she began for to move;  
 All o'er he was fire, all o'er she was Love.  
 O, Doctor! said She, fie, what is it you're doing?  
 I prithee give over, for now — now — *I'm going.*

## XII.

The Battle once over, the Danger was past,  
 As the Doctor imagin'd, but reckon'd too fast;  
 Half breathless a While he did lie on the Spot,  
 And the Figure he made, sure, will ne'er be forgot.  
 The Nymph, as with Reason you well might suppose,  
 To cover her Legs, quickly pull'd down her Clothes,  
 Yet heartily wish'd he *once more* wou'd *Inspect Her*,  
 Her Wish was in vain, for he now did *neglect her.*

## XIII.

She view'd him all o'er, with an Air of *Disdain*,  
 What gave her some *Pleasure*, soon gave her more *Pain*:  
 She was, it is certain, well *Harriesmpong'd*,  
 But vex'd to behold him so suddenly *coop'd*.  
 The Doctor *recover'd*, and offer'd his *Hand*  
 To lead her down Stairs; like a Mute she did stand.  
 She refus'd him with Rage in her Looks I assure y',  
 And now was the *Venus* chang'd into a *Fury*.

## XIV.

Surpriz'd was the Doctor, but wou'd not complain,  
 What he eagerly sought, he with Ease did obtain;  
 Yet still there was *one Thing* in which he was scant,  
 For *Money* was what the *Nymph* chiefly did want.  
 His Time he had *wasted*, nor wou'd he *spend more*,  
 He deem'd her a *surly*, an *ill-natur'd* ———;  
 His *Appetite* cloy'd, she's no longer regarded,  
 But us'd with *Contempt*, and with *Shame* was discarded.

## XV. Thus

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XV.

Thus bauk'd of her Prey, and ill-treated withal,  
To aid and assist her on Hell she does call;  
*Revenge* she does vow, nothing less will suffice  
Her *Rage* to assuage, than his *Life* to *Extrick*.  
'Tis readily granted she was not a *Maid*,  
But still for her Labour she ought to be paid.  
The Doctor must own she at first did *kick-under*.  
What then? why Ingratitude is not a Wonder.

## XVI.

Observe now what Method this Creature did take,  
A Method that soon made the Doctor to quake;  
Who wish'd he had given what'er she requir'd,  
Or double the Sum that her Heart had desir'd.  
He now tries the Time he *Inspected That same*,  
Or play'd at *All Fours*, so common a Game.  
*A Bill of Indictment* she brings in a *Fury*,  
And swore, *she was ravish'd*, before the *Grand-Jury*.

## XVII.

This Matter a While did admit of Debate,  
At length she was order'd her Tale to relate.  
The Questions were gravely put to her, which she  
As gravely did answer, for grave she cou'd be.  
Pray Madam, said one, tell us where was the Place,  
When first to the Doctor you *open'd your Case*?  
What was it he said, and where did he *abuse* you?  
Remember you swore he did *shamefully use* you.

## XVIII.

I went to the Doctor, and made my *Complaint*,  
He look'd so *demure*, that I thought him a *Saint*  
But oh! a mere *Devil* he soon did appear,  
By him I'm undone, as you *quickly shall hear*.  
Young Lady, quoth he, I will tell you, your *Case*  
Must by me be examin'd, but not in this Place:  
I say, 'tis a *Thing that requires Inspection*,  
And you must with *Patience* abide my *Direction*.

## XIX. Then

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XIX.

Then up to his Chamber, by him I was led,  
 And gently he laid me along on the Bed  
 And I, a poor Innocent, thought it no Harm,  
 Till I felt something in me, which prov'd to be warm.  
 I struggled, and did *All I cou'd* — but in vain,  
 For great was my Sorrow, and greater my Pain:  
 I strove to cry out, but no Noise cou'd I make,  
 He Tipt me the Uelbet, and I cou'd not speak:

## XX.

Quoth the Don, Your Expression to us pray explain,  
 And say what, by Tipping the Uelbet, you mean.  
 He put, Sir, his Tongue in my Mouth, she reply'd,  
 And I verily thought, that I then shou'd have dy'd.  
 Says the Don, Have you Teeth? why did you not bite?  
 Quoth she, That wou'd sure have been look't on as Spite.  
 The Jury returned the Bill Ignoramus,  
 And the Doctor has now got a Name that is famous!

F I N I S.

