

Ballad: The Periwinkle Girl

In the whimsical "Ballad: The Periwinkle Girl" from **The Bab Ballads**, the narrator playfully critiques the rush to judgment and the follies of youth through a tale that intertwines love, status, and the humble winkle. The protagonist starts by reflecting on his youthful disdain for winkles, based on the notion that they offer none of the pleasures of flirting, dancing, or smoking. This perspective shifts dramatically upon the introduction of Mary, a charming seller of winkles whose beauty and allure make the winkles almost come alive under her gaze. It's through Mary that the narrative explores notions of societal standing and the absurdity of linking worth to material wealth.

Mary, adored by all from commoners to noblemen, becomes the center of affection for two Dukes, Duke Bailey and Duke Humphy, and an Earl. Their standing and worth are humorously depicted through their financial stability and the extravagance of their attire--Duke Bailey owns golden boots and silver underclothing, indicating immense wealth, while Duke Humphy's attire, though costly, signifies a slightly lesser status with silver boots and pewter underclothing. The Earl, conversely, is scorned by Mary for his lower status, highlighted by his leather shoes and cambric underclothing. Mary's rejection of the Earl, despite two dukes vying for her hand, satirizes the social hierarchy and the value placed on material possessions.

The ballad concludes with Mary's derision towards the Earl's proposal, showcasing not only her high standards but also the absurd importance placed on outward symbols of wealth and status. Through this, the narrator illustrates the folly of jumping to conclusions and the value judgements made based on appearances and social standing, all wrapped in the light-hearted, humorous style characteristic of **The Bab Ballads**. The tale serves as a critique of societal values and the youthful error of mistaking what truly matters, all while maintaining a playful tone and rhythmic charm.