

D18 At Hattfeilde neere Hartforde there lyes in a coffin

Notes. Croft (“Reputation” 53, 55, 59) discusses and contextualizes a number of the charges levied in this libel on Cecil. Many of the charges—physical deformity, political cunning and deception, sexual transgression and loathsome disease—are common to the attacks on Cecil. This poem’s damaging charge of religious hypocrisy, however, is less common and deepens the impact of this powerful evocation of court corruption.

At Hattfeilde¹ neere Hartforde there lyes in a coffin
A harte griping Harpie;² of shape like a Dolphin³
Whose plotts and whose projects⁴ did all of them tende
To cousin⁵ the king, and the state to offend
His mynes, and his countermynes,⁶ and his bravadoes⁷ 5
Were all to endanger by close Ambuscadoes⁸
With tricks and devises of legerdemaine
He playde like a juggler with France England Spayne
He fayned religion and zealous affection
Yet favored the Papists and gave preists protection 10
By swearing, protesting, and damnable lyes
He stole the kings favour still blinding his eyes
But yet though he had all the slights of a fox⁹
He coude nott prevent her that gave him the pox¹⁰
Twixt Suffolk and Walsingham of¹¹ did he jorney¹² 15
To tilte att the one place, at the other to tourney¹³
In which hot encounter he gott such a blowe¹⁴
That he coude nott be cured by Atkins nor Poe¹⁵
Noe nor the rare Frenchman¹⁶ that easde his owne maister
Coude doe him noe good with his bath¹⁷ nor his plaister 20
For this his disease was given by a freinde
And therefore had reason to keepe itt to his end.

Source. BL MS Egerton 2230, fol. 34r-v

Other known sources. “Poems from a Seventeenth-Century Manuscript” 42; Bodleian MS Firth d.7, fol. 156r; Bodleian MS Tanner 299, fol. 11r; Huntington MS HM 198, 2.126

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¹ *Hattfeilde*: Hatfield House, Cecil’s grand residence in Hertfordshire, built in the early seventeenth century, and the Lord Treasurer’s final resting place.

² *Harpie*: mythological winged monster.

³ *Dolphin*: Croft (“Reputation” 55) notes that dolphins were “always depicted heraldically as curved”. Thus “Dolphin” here alludes to Cecil’s crooked back.

⁴ *projects*: this term may have an additional meaning here. Projects were controversial financial schemes that ceded royal powers to private entrepreneurs who would then supposedly raise revenue for both their own personal profit and the royal coffers. Cecil presided over many such projects as Lord Treasurer.

⁵ *cousin*: i.e. cozen.

⁶ *mynes...countermynes*: plots and counter-plots.

⁷ *bravadoes*: boasts.

⁸ *Ambuscadoes*: ambushes.

⁹ *slights of a fox*: allusion to Cecil’s cunning.

¹⁰ *pox*: syphilis.

¹¹ *of*: probable scribal error; read “oft”.

¹² *Twixt Suffolk...journey*: a pun on the names of the English county, Suffolk, and the famous Norfolk pilgrimage site, Walsingham. Cecil had allegedly had affairs with both Audrey, Lady Walsingham, wife of Sir Thomas Walsingham and Mistress of the Robes to Queen Anne (Croft, “Reputation” 58), and Catherine Howard, Countess of Suffolk, wife of Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk.

¹³ *Tilte...tourney*: bawdy use of the language of the joust to describe sexual intercourse.

¹⁴ *blowe*: wound in the joust; and here the syphilitic infection acquired during sexual intercourse.

¹⁵ *Atkins nor Poe*: Henry Atkins and Leonard Poe were well-known doctors who treated Cecil during his last illness.

¹⁶ *rare Frenchman*: Theodore de Mayerne, a famed Swiss-French court physician who attended James I (Cecil's "maister") and examined Cecil in 1611.

¹⁷ *bath*: Cecil died on his return journey from taking the waters at Bath.
