

D19 Passer by know heere is interr'd

Notes. In a fascinating and politically aggressive appropriation of anti-libel discourse, this verse on Cecil at first seems to diminish the allegations against the Lord Treasurer by repeating the commonplace charge that libellers are “base detractors”. The poem then, however, continues on both to repeat those charges and, in an extended pun at the end, to add a distinctive twist to one of the most commonly made allegations.

Passer by know heere is interr'd

The little great¹ that so was feard

who in his life none durst think evill

but being dead is said a divell

And monstrous Crimes laid to his charg

5

by base detractors, who at larg

did set them forth to his infamy

As a taper² of the Comonwealth touchd with sodomy³

An usurer, subtle and ful of trechery

And least of al his monstrous lechery

10

Why put the case twere al as they do say

[illegible: ms torn] gone the right way

And hath no doubt a place of heaven

at least if penitents may be forgiven

for he oft was knowen with zeal devine

15

To go a pilgrimag to our ladies shrine

At Walsingham and neare staid by the way

Save nowe and then in Suffolk lay.⁴

Source. BL MS Harley 6947, fol. 211r

¹ *the little great*: Cecil was both a powerful man (“great”) and of small physical stature (“little”). The same juxtaposition is made in the poem “Heere lyes Salisbury that little great comaunder”, and more sympathetically in Samuel Daniel’s “If greatnes, wisdom, pollicie of state”.

² *taper*: candle. The libel “This Taper, fedd, & nurst with court-oyle” also describes Cecil as a taper.

³ *sodomy*: this is the only extant verse on Cecil that explicitly makes this allegation.

⁴ *And hath...lay*: the last six lines of the libel develop a resonant and multi-layered pun to deliver the widely-repeated charge that Cecil had been the lover of both Audrey, Lady Walsingham, and Catherine Howard, Countess of Suffolk. The pun hints at Cecil’s possible religious unorthodoxy by presenting him as a Catholic penitent who performed penance for his sins by making the pilgrimage to the famous late medieval shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham.
