

F10 Tis painefull rowing gainst the bigg swolne tide

Notes. This rich verse from 1613-14 powerfully explores many of the politico-moral anxieties raised by the Essex nullity and the marriage of Frances Howard to Robert Carr. It appears, however, to be the only libel from this period that suggests either that Sir Thomas Overbury's death was suspicious or that it was closely connected to the events of the Essex nullity. Bellany (Politics 6, 71, 177) and McRae (Literature 48-49) offer differing but essentially complementary readings of the poem.

Tis painefull rowing gainst the bigg swolne tide
Nor dare wee say why Overburye dide¹
I dare not marry least when I have layde
Close by my wife seven yeare shee prove a mayde²
And that her greatness or the law consent 5
To prove my weapon insufficient³
Some are made greate by birth some have advance
Some clime by witt some are made greate by chance
I know one made a lord for his good face⁴
That had no more witt then would bare the place. 10

Source. BL MS Egerton 2230, fol. 69r

F10

¹ *why Overburye dide:* Sir Thomas Overbury died a prisoner in the Tower of London in September 1613. At the time, his death was widely attributed to natural causes; two years later, it was determined to have been the result of poison administered by his prison keeper on the orders of Frances Howard and Robert Carr.

² *I dare not...mayde:* allusion to the marriage of Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex to Frances Howard, from 1606-1613, which was nullified on the grounds—fraudulent to many observers—that the marriage had never been consummated.

³ *prove...insufficient:* prove me sexually impotent.

⁴ *one made...face*: Robert Carr, favourite of James I, who was elevated to the earldom of Somerset in November 1613.
