

F5 Essex bird hath flowen hir cage

Notes. A common variant of this bawdy poem includes only the final four lines of this slightly longer version, while one collection includes a version consisting only of the opening couplet. Lindley (117) and Bellany (Politics 169) discuss and contextualize this verse.

Essex bird¹ hath flowen hir cage,

And's gone to Court to ly with a Page.²

She was a lady fyne of late,

She could not be entred shee was soe streight.³

But now with use⁴ she is soe wyde

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A Car⁵ may enter on every side.

Source. Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 17v

Other known sources. CCRO MS CR 63/2/19, fol. 11r; Folger MS V.a.162, fol. 50v; Folger MS V.a.345, p. 290; Houghton MS Eng. 686, fol. 34r

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¹ *Essex bird*: Frances Howard, wife of Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex.

² *Page*: Robert Carr had arrived at the Court of James I in England as a page to the Earl of Dunbar.

³ *She...streight*: this line refers to Frances Howard's virginity, that was assessed by the nullity commissioners through a physical examination performed by a panel of matrons. The examination found her still to be a virgin; this poem, along with a number of other commentators at the time, is clearly unconvinced.

⁴ *use*: i.e. sexual activity.

⁵ *Car*: a carriage; Robert Carr.
