

## H16 A bird ill hatchd, from out a Cuckowes nest

*Notes.* The final four lines of this poem on Frances Howard are transcribed, in the only known source, as a separate poem, marked off from the preceding lines in the source by a horizontal line. In context, however, they are difficult to read independently, and are almost certainly part of the poem, possibly representing a late addition to an existing text, tacked on in November 1615 when rumours surrounding Frances Howard's pregnancy were most prevalent. Bellamy (Politics 169, 237) contextualizes the poem's depiction of the social derogation implied by Howard's second marriage, and its evocation of her execution.

A bird ill hatchd, from out a Cuckowes<sup>1</sup> nest  
flew from her mate, unto a pages brest.<sup>2</sup>  
Inconstant bird, and moste Adulterous girle  
To take a page, and leave a worthy Earle.  
But nowe her wings are limed,<sup>3</sup> staid is her flight.

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Within a place whilome blackfriers<sup>4</sup> hight.  
soe as att Randome, shee noe more muste flie:  
Unles ambitiously, she mount on hie,  
Some few degrees; and soe against her will  
A sodaine full<sup>5</sup> maie chance the bird to kill  
But nowe her Courses, Smith<sup>6</sup> doth overlooke  
Till shee Receave her sentence from a Cooke<sup>7</sup>  
Whoe mortall breakfasts liberally imparts  
To such as poyson honest men with tarts.<sup>8</sup>

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This bird some saie with yong one is growne bigg<sup>9</sup>  
Beleeve whoe list, moste hold it but a figg.<sup>10</sup>  
But if it proove and she in Childbed die  
Whoe Poyvind others, killd her selfe saie I.

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- <sup>1</sup> *Cuckowes*: a cuckoo is noted for laying its eggs in other birds' nests. This may be an allusion to the poor sexual reputation of Frances Howard's mother, Catherine, Countess of Suffolk, the rumoured mistress of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury.
- <sup>2</sup> *flew...pages brest*: allusion to the 1613 nullity of Frances Howard's first marriage to Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex, and her subsequent marriage to Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, who had arrived at James I's English court as a page to George Home, Earl of Dunbar.
- <sup>3</sup> *limed*: covered with birdlime, a sticky substance used to catch small birds. This refers to Frances Howard's arrest and imprisonment.
- <sup>4</sup> *blackfriars*: Frances Howard was held for a time at a house in Blackfriars.
- <sup>5</sup> *full*: probable scribal error; read "fall".
- <sup>6</sup> *Smith*: Frances Howard was held in the custody of Sir William Smith.
- <sup>7</sup> *Cooke*: Sir Edward Coke, Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench and lead investigator and prosecutor of the Overbury murder case.
- <sup>8</sup> *poyson...tarts*: the murderers had allegedly sent Sir Thomas Overbury gifts of tarts, laced with poison.
- <sup>9</sup> *with yong one...growne bigg*: Frances Howard in fact was pregnant at the time of her arrest—her daughter was born in December 1615.
- <sup>10</sup> *a figg*: a lie. All kinds of rumours about the pregnancy—including that it was faked—were rife in London in November 1615.
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