

## H19 Me thinks I see a lady sitt and mourne

*Notes.* This poem, copied in the commonplace book of John Holles, 2nd Earl of Clare (BL MS Harley 6383), invites readers to decode the thinly veiled contemporary identities of its Homeric characters. Lindley (190) prints the poem in full and places it in the context of other attacks on Frances Howard, noting the slight strains of sympathy for the widely calumniated Countess.

“A libell of the Countess of Summersett”

Me thinks I see a lady sitt and mourne

like Hellen,<sup>1</sup> whose hott lust sett fyer on Troy,

Paris<sup>2</sup> lyes wounded, Menelaus<sup>3</sup> doth scorne

his amorous spouse, and makes her grieffe his joy,

ould Tindarus<sup>4</sup> sitts mourning all in black,

Castor and Pollux<sup>5</sup> hide their heads with shame

on every side her Trojans go to wrack

and the wide world exclames on Hellens name

eache drunken Greeke makes her his tale of mirth

and with her shame fills every strumpets eares,

whylst shee poore soule sitts cursing of her birth

seasoning each word with sighs, each sighe with teares,

and to oblivious grave would gladly fly,

to steale away from the world's calumny.

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**Source.** BL MS Harley 6383, fol. 78r-v

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<sup>1</sup> *Hellen*: wife of the Spartan Menelaus. Helen's elopement with Paris to Troy sparked the Trojan war. Here she represents Frances Howard, Countess of Somersset.

<sup>2</sup> *Paris*: the Trojan prince who stole Helen away; here, Robert Carr, Earl of Somersset.

<sup>3</sup> *Menelaus*: Helen's husband; here, Frances Howard's first husband, Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of

Essex.

<sup>4</sup> *Tindarus*: Tyndareus, husband of Helen's mother, Leda; here, Thomas Howard, Earl of Suffolk, Frances's father.

<sup>5</sup> *Castor and Pollux*: Helen's brothers; here, referring to two of Frances Howard's brothers, perhaps the eldest brothers Theophilus and Thomas Howard.

