

## H20 Looke, and lament behould a face of Earth

*Notes.* These twinned answer-poems stage a debate on whether the king should execute or pardon Frances Howard for her part in the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury. Howard was convicted and sentenced to death in late May 1616; however, by mid-July James had decided to pardon her, and it is possible to read the “Petitio” as evidence of some of the arguments that might have swayed the king’s judgement. Lindley (187-88) prints the poems in full and briefly explores their arguments, while Bellany (Politics 242-43) explores the poems’ arguments in the context of discourse on justice and mercy during the Overbury affair.

### “Petitio”

Looke, and lament, behould a face of Earth,  
In bewtie heavenly, great in place, & birth.  
Nor is her soule in bewtie less excellinge,  
In whome soe manie Vertues have their dwellinge.  
Much Noble Nature, Bewtie, Charitie,  
Much in goodnes, witt, and pietie,  
Nor is the fayrest peece without a staine,  
In fayrest peeces spotts appeare most plaine.  
Sence of dishonour, in best myndes most stronge,  
Made her desire, t’avenge soe vile a wronge<sup>1</sup>  
By meanes unlawfull, which have given offence,  
To Lawe, to God, to Kinge; In recompence  
of one Soule lost, the Lawe hath taken fowre,<sup>2</sup>  
And this hath suffer’d much by Legall Powre.

God doth shew mercie for the fowlest thinge  
to penitents.<sup>3</sup> Doe thou soe Mightie Kinge.

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### “Respontio”

It’s strange to se a face soe highe in birth,  
And heavenly, to converse soe much with earth,

Naye more with hell; her soule noe less excellinge  
 In what? In Vice where all these had their dwellinge.  
 Much brybinge, broakinge, Pride, & Infamie, 5  
 Much of her Mother,<sup>4</sup> new adulterie,  
 This ugly soule hath yet a fouler staine;  
 Though in foule soules, greate synns appeare least plaine.  
 Murther a Cryinge sin, in her more stronge,  
 for drawinge bosome frends,<sup>5</sup> into the wronge. 10  
 Then blame not God, nor kinge to take offence,  
 Nor yet our Lawes to take in recompence.  
 For owne<sup>6</sup> soule lost, soe lost, wer't foure tymes foure,  
 And this of all deserves strickt Legall power.  
     The Livinge Lorde still suffers in this thinge 15  
     Were't but for that. Proceede in Justice Kinge.

**Source.** BL Add. MS 25707, fol. 46r

**Other known sources.** CUL Add. MS 29, fol. 18r

## H20

<sup>1</sup> *Sence of...wronge*: the argument here is that Overbury's bitter attacks on Frances Howard wounded her honour and inspired her to kill him to avenge the insult.

<sup>2</sup> *the Lawe...fowre*: by May 1616, four conspirators had been hanged for their parts in Overbury's murder: Richard Weston, Anne Turner, Sir Gervase Elwes and James Franklin.

<sup>3</sup> *penitents*: Frances Howard was the only one of the accused murderers to confess her guilt and show penitence during her trial.

<sup>4</sup> *Mother*: Catherine Howard, Countess of Suffolk, widely scorned as a woman of ill-repute, and rumoured to have been the mistress of Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury.

<sup>5</sup> *bosome frends*: presumably an allusion to Frances Howard's confidante, Anne Turner, who was hanged for her part in the murder conspiracy.

<sup>6</sup> *owne*: one.

