

J0. The Lake-Roos Affair (1617-1620)

These five poems arise from the series of tawdry scandals surrounding Lady Mary Lake (née Ryder), her husband, the royal Secretary Sir Thomas Lake, and their daughter Anne, wife of William Cecil, Lord Roos. The scandals were the consequence of the February 1616 marriage between Anne Lake and William Cecil, a match that began badly and never recovered. Within months of the wedding, the bride and her mother were rumoured to be blackmailing Roos into signing over property to his in-laws. Reports suggested that the two women threatened to charge Roos with impotence and then sue for an embarrassing nullity of the marriage. Late in 1617, after Roos had cut his losses and decamped abroad, Anne and her mother charged that Frances Cecil, Countess of Exeter, the youthful bride of Roos's grandfather Thomas Cecil, Earl of Exeter, had carried on an affair with Roos and had attempted to poison his aggrieved wife. The Earl and Countess of Exeter appealed to the King who, in the spring of 1618, sent the case to the Star Chamber. Nearly a year later, in February 1619, Star Chamber found Sir Thomas and Lady Mary Lake, Anne, and her brothers guilty of defaming the Earl and Countess of Exeter and of suborning witnesses and forging evidence. All were sent to the Tower and heavily fined. Anne confessed her crime in late June 1619 and was released early the following month. Her mother was more stubborn: she was finally released from the Tower during the following year, but not until May 1621 did she make her formal confession and submission in Star Chamber. Both women were widely vilified at the time—joining Frances Howard and Anne Turner as Jacobean icons of monstrous femininity—and many of the charges lodged in the libels are repeated in contemporary correspondence on the case. The scandal has not been systematically investigated, but Gardiner (3.189-194) provides a generally reliable narrative overview, while the articles in the 2004 edition of the *DNB* on Lord and Lady Roos and on the Countess of Exeter offer fresh perspectives on the affair. Bellany (*Politics* 252-54) considers the political significance of the scandal as a replay of some of the themes of the Overbury affair and offers brief analyses of the surviving libels.