

F2 Letchery did consult with witcherye

Notes. This scathing attack on the Essex nullity brands Robert Carr and Frances Howard as sexual transgressors, suggests Frances Howard might have used witchcraft to render the Earl of Essex impotent, and charges that the commissioners who voted to grant the nullity collaborated in an act of “impiety” in order to win office and favour. Lindley (118) prints and very briefly discusses this poem.

Letchery did consult with witcherye¹

how to procure frygiditye²

upon this ground a course was found

to frame unto a nullatye

And gravitye³ assuming lenytye

gave strength to this impietye

hoping thereby a way to spye

to rise to further dignitye

But whats the end both foe and frend

cry shame on such austerytye

And booke and bell⁴ do dam to Hell

the Lord and Ladyes lecherye

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Source. Bodleian MS Rawl. D. 1048, fol. 64r

Other known sources. Folger MS V.a.339, fol. 187v

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¹ *witcherye*: libellers in both 1613 and 1615 alleged that Frances Howard had caused her husband’s sexual impotence with spells or sorcery. During the first phase of the nullity hearings, the Countess’s supporters had suggested that Essex’s curiously selective impotence—he was supposedly unafflicted in the arms of other women—was the result of a witch’s curse.

² *frygiditye*: Essex’s impotence.

³ *gravitye*: the lawyers and bishops who voted to grant the nullity.

⁴ *booke and bell*: here means something like “the Church” or “the Christian religion”. The phrase derives from the traditional ritual of ceremonial excommunication involving the closing of a book, the ringing of a bell and the quenching of a candle (thus the usual phrase “bell, book and candle”).