

# Power Politics and Essex's Myth

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## 1. Power Politics: The Cecils and Essex

In early September 1588, Leicester died of a fever at his country house at Cornbury Park. He was travelling in the countryside to recuperate after the rigours of the Armada campaign. Elizabeth was so upset by the news of her favourite's death that she locked herself away for several days, until Burghley and other councilors ordered the doors broken open.<sup>1</sup>

After Leicester's death, Lord Chancellor Hatton stood alone as the queen's senior favourite and Walsingham, a long-time ally of Leicester, became the leading advocate of the Protestant cause in English politics. As Secretary of State since 1573, Walsingham had been burdened by illness and died in April 1590. With Walsingham's death, Burghley assumed the burden of Secretary of State in addition to the treasureship. As the two senior members of the privy council, Burghley and Hatton dominated a decisive role in advising the queen on major policies. With a string of deaths of their colleagues in the council—Leicester in 1588, Mildmay in 1589, and Walsingham, Croft and Warwick in 1590—Burghley and Hatton consciously sought to regulate the transfer of power to a new generation. The larger agenda behind their actions was to ensure stability when Elizabeth herself finally died and the uncertain matter of the succession had to be settled.

The younger generation they chose as the potential leaders at court were Burghley's younger son, Robert Cecil, and Leicester's step-son, the earl of Essex. During the 1580s, Essex became increasingly identified with his step father, Leicester. After his return from the battle of Zutpen at the end of October

1586, Essex made rapid progress towards obtaining the queen's favour. With Leicester's strong support, Essex was promoted to Master of Horse, a post Leicester had held since the first days of Elizabeth's rein. This appointment showed that Essex was allowed the privilege of regular attendance at court. The queen bestowed upon Essex largesse which was being withheld from the majority of her servants.

Walter Raleigh was another young favourite at court. Raleigh had initially begun his career at court in the late 1570s as a follower of the earl of Oxford. Like Oxford, Raleigh had mixed with a group of Catholic courtiers who supported Elizabeth's marriage to the French duke of Anjou, in opposition to Leicester, Walsingham and Sidney. When Oxford turned against the Catholic party and denounced them as traitors, Raleigh followed suit and attached himself to Leicester.<sup>2</sup> This abrupt change of attitude secured him a military command in Ireland. Raleigh's service in Ireland was the springboard to reach the status of the queen's favourite.<sup>3</sup> The growing importance of Raleigh in the West Country and a series of lucrative grants in the mid-1580s<sup>4</sup> depended entirely on Elizabeth's favour and generosity. These rewards aroused jealousies and created new enemies at court. The worst enemy was Leicester. By 1585, Leicester was openly hostile towards Raleigh and close followers of Leicester echoes their patron's views. Arrangement of a peace treaty with Spain, which Raleigh played a part in negotiation at Elizabeth's command, added another personal bitterness to court politics in 1587 and provoked Leicester's anger. Raleigh's desire to maintain royal favour made him stand against the Protestant cause advocated by the Leicester group. Raleigh's rivalry with Essex over the queen's favour was intimately connected with the larger question of English foreign policy.

The rivalry of Essex and Raleigh continued unabated during the late summer and autumn of 1587. In mid-December 1587, Essex's position at court received a major boost when Leicester returned from the Netherlands campaign. Over the winter of 1587-88, Essex acted in support of Leicester's efforts to forestall the formal opening of peace talks with Spain. In April 1588, at the age of twenty-two, Essex was elected a knight of the garter with the votes of Leicester, Howard, Burghley, Worcester and Huntingdon.<sup>5</sup> By the time the Spanish fleet sailed for England, Essex was an established figure at Elizabeth's court. With Leicester's support, Essex had got the upper hand over Raleigh, obtaining sub-

stantial material rewards from the queen. In October 1587, the queen granted him parsonages and tithes worth 300 pounds a year. By early 1588, Essex was allowed use of York House. During Elizabeth's reign, York House was normally occupied by the lord chancellor or lord keeper,<sup>6</sup> Hatton already had a grand town-house, Ely Place at Holborn, when he was appointed lord chancellor in mid-1587. That's why Essex was able to obtain a lease of York House. In June, Essex also obtained a warrant for grant of lands from the attainted estate of Sir Francis Englefield. By September 1588, this grant embraced most of the estate. After Leicester's death in early September 1588, Essex assumed his stepfather's role as the queen's chief host to visiting foreign dignitaries. In January 1589, Elizabeth granted Leicester's farm of the customs on sweet wines for a term of five years. Twice later renewed, this was to provide a vital support for Essex's finances throughout the next decade. Essex also obtained the parallel grant formerly held by Leicester for the port of Southampton. Leicester's death also gave Essex the large and diverse body of clients which Leicester had established over several decades. As Essex had established himself securely as the queen's prime young favourite, a new court-based group of clients began to seek support from Essex. They saw Essex's rising fortunes as their ticket to crown appointments.

The co-ordination between Burghley and Hatton during 1590-1 in matters of transference of power to a new generation centred on Essex and Cecil had not always been well under way. The death of Walsingham in 1590 encouraged Burghley to raise the issue of appointing a new secretary of state and Hatton put forward Robert Cecil. However, Essex stood against this appointment by recommending William Davison, ex-second secretary who had been disgraced by Elizabeth for his part in the execution of Mary Queen of Scots. Essex's support for Davison was a token of his continuing personal commitment to Davison,<sup>7</sup> Yet Davison was clearly too inexperienced for so vital a post as the secretary of state, especially when there were a number of alternative candidates superior to him. Among them named as contenders for the post were Thomas Wilkes, Sir Edward Stafford, Edward Dyer and Edward Wotton. As a consequence, Elizabeth refused both Davison and Cecil to win the secretaryship in 1591. Despite his failure to promote his younger son, Burghley's entertainment of the queen at Theobalds won Cecil a knighthood in May 1591.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Hatton's direct lobbying as Cecil's chief supporter won Cecil a seat on the privy council.<sup>9</sup> Although Essex

stood against Cecil's advancement, Burghley came out in support of Essex's candidacy for the Rouen command. It was Essex's first over-all command and was, therefore, given strict instructions and a short commission. Elizabeth and Burghley also surrounded the earl with a number of advisers: Sir Henry Unton, who went as the queen's ambassador, Sir Thomas Leighton, Henry Killigrew, and Sir Thomas Sherley. Sherley was a treasurer for English forces in the Low Countries and was also appointed treasurer for this expedition.<sup>10</sup> As well as ensuring a check upon excesses, these advisers offered a useful hedge against the French king who would use the English army for the benefit of his own purposes as he had in 1589. Moreover, Essex and Unton were expected to send back full reports on their actions at least once a week.<sup>11</sup> Essex understood these limitations and respected them in his actions, as he wrote to Burghley with gratitude that he appreciated Burghley's 'wyse, favorable and fatherly instructions' and concluded thus: 'I confesse myself bound infinitely for them [Burghley's instructions] and I will with all duty and service desesrve your lordship's precious favour'.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, Essex's own ambitions in this venture were far greater. He wanted to prove himself the epitome of martial virtue. The expedition to Roen was for Essex the quest for honour.

Essex's command in Normandy swelled his reputation on the international scene. In France, in particular, his aristocratic bearing and martial zeal had a powerful impact and firmly cemented his friendship with the French king, Henry IV. Essex could lay claim to the role of Leicester as the leading advocate of the overseas Protestant cause in English politics.

Despite these advances, Essex won no great victory in Normandy. Elizabeth had become thoroughly hostile to the Rouen expedition and to the responsible commander himself. Essex's hopes of glory and consequent political influence came to nothing. When the chancellorship of Oxford again fell vacant after Hatton's death in late November, Elizabeth denied Essex the chancellorship in order to punish him for his continuing unwillingness to give up his command in France.

Hatton's death in November 1591 radically changed the political balance at the heart of the Elizabethan Court. The co-operation among men who had long become accustomed to working together for the queen's service was dead. Burghley was the last fully active survivor of the old generation working with

Hatton. With Hatton's death, Burghley no longer had any equals in the council. No lord steward was ever appointed to replace Leicester and no lord chancellor was chosen to take the place of Hatton. So many deaths among the old councillors accelerated the transfer of political power to younger generation to sustain the burden of work at court. Robert Cecil had been appointed to the council in August 1590 and Walter Raleigh obtained an office at court, succeeding to the post of captain of the guard.<sup>13</sup> Essex's promotion to the council became increasingly inevitable. The council had declined precipitously both in numerical strength and in the quality of its membership. The composition of the privy council at the beginning of the 1590s was striking for the absence of the higher nobility. There had been four earls on the council in 1588, but in 1591 there was only the old earl of Derby, who was a regular absentee. In 1590, for example, Derby only once signed a council letter.<sup>14</sup> By 1592, When Burghley was branded as a deliberate suppresser of the ancient nobility,<sup>15</sup> impending noble appointments to the council became more urgent to restore the social standing the membership of the council. Ironically, Burghley's unprecedented dominance in the queen's counsels opened up possibilities of promotion for Essex.

During February 1593, Burghley was ill, which meant that the privy council was losing the queen's chief parliamentary manager and declining in the House of Lords. Essex's appointment would give the council a voice among the senior nobility, and his supporters in the Commons would be made available to support the council's demand for a large, new subsidy. Essex began building an extensive parliamentary patronage in 1593. In the parliament of 1593, thirteen members owed their seats to Essex's backing. Six sat for the Welsh boroughs where Essex's local influence was strong; four for boroughs where Essex was high steward. Of these two were adjacent to clusters of his estates, Tamworth and Leominster; and the other, Reading and Dunwich, were places where Essex had newly acquired influence. In background and occupation, the members fall into two main groups: veterans of the Low Countries and Rouen, and servants of the earl such as his secretary, Thomas Smith, and family lawyer, Richard Broughton.<sup>16</sup>

Essex also could offer valuable political resources for the council. His sponsorship of intelligence-gathering not only saved Elizabeth money but also helped to increase her understanding of events overseas. The public and official sources

of foreign intelligence that the English government possessed were in the Low Countries and in France. In the Netherlands, Thomas Bodley was the official English agent. He sat on the Council of State and moved freely in Dutch circles. Bodley and his assistant, George Bilpin, as well as the commanders of the English Garrisons at Flushing, Brill, and Ostend, had many sources of information both in the United Provinces and in the southern provinces. Essex opened up a regular correspondence with these English officials as well as with the English military commander in the Netherlands, Francis Vere. Essex also corresponded with the English agents in France and maintained contact with the leading Huguenot lords, such as the Duke of Bouillon. Essex had established a direct and personal link with the king of France himself since 1591. The network of spies built up under the direction of Walsingham had been largely dissipated on his death. Horatio Palavicino played a role of spymaster in the following years after Walsingham's death and supervised payments to various informers.<sup>17</sup> Essex exploited the existing intelligence network and also to build one of his own reporting directly to him.<sup>18</sup> Once Essex set about building up a network of intelligence outside the realm, the kings of France and Scotland, the Stadtholder of the United Provinces, or the Grand Duke of Tuscany looked him as an influential intermediary with the English queen.

Essex's vehement commitment to war also coincided with the needs of a regime struggling to cope with a conflict in the continent. The council was critically short of men with military experience. Such a military leader as the late Leicester had never been replaced and no new master of ordinance was appointed after Warwick's death in 1590. Besides the lord admiral, the only genuine soldier on the council was the lord chamberlain, Lord Hunsdon, who was old and increasingly unable to undertake vigorous activities. The decline in martial leadership at the highest level came at the time when the demands of war were steadily expanding and the privy council was exerting an ever greater control over all aspects of the war effort. These reasons were sufficient enough to persuade Elizabeth to allow Essex a place on the council board. In February 1593, Essex at last became a privy councillor.

Essex's enthusiasm for martial matters soon gave him unprecedented influence over war policy and military administration. By 1595, Essex was widely recognised as playing a central role in military matters. At the same time, by

1594, Essex had the greatest single intelligence apparatus in England. The earl was able to receive news from an impressive range of contacts across Europe. Essex's involvement in the intelligence networking began in the early months of 1591, when he was approached by Thomas Phelippe and Francis Bacon about employing an agent who could deal with English Catholic exiles in Flanders. Phelippe and Bacon had been involved in intelligence matters with Walsingham for a long time. Bacon had acted as an interrogator of suspects, and Phelippe had been Walsingham's chief decipherer and a controller for some of his key agents.<sup>19</sup> When Essex joined the Privy Council in 1593, Elizabeth gave special encouragement to his work in the gathering of foreign intelligence. Offering information gathered by intelligence opened new political possibilities for Essex to influence royal policies. The private audiences at which intelligence was imparted to the queen would give Essex the chance to emphasize special subjects of his concern without interjection from other councillors. Intelligence, therefore, became a central feature in Essex's political endeavour. Essex invested a great deal of time and money in pursuit of fresh information.

Yet, of course, Essex was not the only councillor who operated broad intelligence networking. As secretary of state, Burghley gathered information by his network of intelligence for the benefit of the queen. Under Walsingham, the secretary's post had been the focal point of intelligence-gathering. But Burghley's concern for finance had allowed Essex and other members of the council to take up the slack by employing more agents themselves.<sup>20</sup> Essex seems to have used his intelligence activities to further his ambition of succeeding Burghley as Elizabeth's chief adviser. Burghley and his younger son faced a series of provocations from Essex in 1593. For example, Essex's manoeuvring over Anthony Sanden in June 1593 was an open affront to Burghley. Standen had been an agent in Italy and Spain for Walsingham, and still remained active through partnership with Anthony Rolston, who was based on the Franco-Spanish border. In June 1593, Standen's cover was blown and he returned to England to find a cold reception from Burghley. Anthony Bacon, who had been working as intelligent under Essex, was a close friend of Standen. Bacon prevailed upon Essex to take Standen into his protection. In the event, Standen's career as a spy was finished but his long experience proved a useful resource for the earl's service.<sup>21</sup> At another occasion, Essex took more subtle actions against

Burghley. During 1593, Burghley was involved in co-ordinating secret overtures to Rome over possible peace talks and he produced no concrete result.<sup>22</sup> Cardinal Allen received a report that the failure had been resulted from Burghley's opposition to further dealings in the matter in spite of Essex's urge for talks to continue.<sup>23</sup> Whether or not this was true, blaming Burghley for the impasse and portraying Essex as tolerant negotiator would reinforce hostility in Rome towards Burghley. Moreover, such reports could further encourage English Catholics to believe that their only hope for the future lay in support for Essex.

The tensions between Burghley and Essex in matters of intelligence persuaded Elizabeth to encourage specialisation in their intelligence. In effect, the queen's intervention not only reduced the potential for conflict over the next few years but also enabled Essex and Burghley to pursue their own, different views of foreign policy. Essex's intelligence activities were primarily directed towards Continent and the earl employed new agents in Italy, central Europe, and Spain. Contacts in Scotland were also very important for Essex. In 1593, Essex established contact with the Scottish king by Anthony Bacon through the intermediation of David Foulis. King James looked on Essex as his best supporter in England. In his letter of 1594, James asked for continuance of the earl's affection and promised reward in proper time and place.<sup>24</sup> By contrast, Ireland was vitally important to Burghley, forming his intelligence triangle with Scotland and the Low Countries.<sup>25</sup> Outside these areas, Burghley had relatively few agents.<sup>26</sup> Intelligence activities cost enormous and Burghley left Essex to pursue intelligence in expensive locations such as Venice and Florence, while he concentrated on Flanders, Scotland and Ireland. Despite their rivalry over policy-making, there was occasionally active co-operation between Burghley and Essex in matters of intelligence. They shared information by the queen's diplomats abroad. As far as Burghley was concerned, it only became concerned if a diplomat seemed to be becoming a partisan of Essex, at the expense of his own influence. From Essex's point of view, it enabled him to see much of the information which Burghley was reporting to Elizabeth and the formulation of his policy advice. Cultivating the queen's ambassadors also enabled him to seek their support for his operations abroad. Essex prevailed upon Thomas Edmondes, ambassador to France in 1591–2, to provide the earl with copies of his dispatches. By 1595, Edmondes was writing separate reports for Essex as well as sending copies of



dispatches to Burghley. Essex had the same dealings with the queen's representatives in the Low Countries. Essex began receiving reports from the English agent there, Thomas Bodley, by May 1593, and later from his deputy, George Gilpin. Essex's preeminence among the queen's suppliers of intelligence continued by the end of 1597, when Burghley's younger son, Robert Cecil, at last obtained the place of secretary of state.

As secretary of state, Cecil was now able to establish himself as the overseer of governmental intelligence gathering. Cecil also played a greater role in co-ordinating intelligence gathered by other members of the council. In 1596, the lord admiral recommended his agent Edmund Palmer to Cecil's patronage. Thereafter, they ran Palmer jointly. Lord Cobham, as Cecil's father-in-law, had always been an important source of information for Cecil and Burghley. This intelligence connection was reinforced by Cobham's rivalry with Essex. Cecil's new competitiveness was also reflected in his extravagant expenditure on hiring new agents of his own. Behind the rapid expansion of intelligence networking was the threat of Spanish naval activities for the first time since 1588. Despite the spectacular victory at Cadiz, England at the end of 1596 awaited Spanish invasion fleet. While Essex involved himself in readying the defending armies, Cecil launched a crash programme to hire spies. Cecil continued to expand his intelligence apparatus, although the Spanish fleet was, in the end, destroyed by a storm. By the end of 1597, Cecil was spending over 900 pounds a year on wages for only ten of his more than twenty agents in Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Flanders, Sweden, Scotland and England.<sup>27</sup> Anthony Bacon reported Essex the low quality of Cecil's new agents<sup>28</sup>; and yet Essex's pre-eminence among the queen's suppliers of intelligence was over.

Throughout his career, Essex endeavoured to make himself the pre-eminent patron of English soldiers. After February 1593, he was able to capitalise on the privy council's growing control over all aspects of the war effort—appointment to military commands, pay, leave and contracts for supplies of every kind.<sup>29</sup> Leicester dominated military patronage in the Low Countries in the mid-1580s. No councillor was ever able to achieve such control again. Competition for commands and contracts for military supplies increased sharply in the 1590s. Almost every captaincy and contract involved struggles between rival candidates supported by different members of the council. Essex had a decisive

influence in these contests. He also had a powerful voice in the selection of officers for the army abroad. Essex was also able to exert himself in the dispensing of military patronage through his friendship with the queen's leading officers, many of whom were his clients. These men came to depend upon Essex's ability to win additional supplies for their commands and leave for themselves. These officers also cultivated links with other councillors, especially Burghley and Cecil. Their power to appoint certain subordinate officers was most regularly taken advantage of by Essex. For example, Essex won a promise from Robert Sidney, Francis Vere, Lord Bugh, and Edward Norris.<sup>30</sup> In Ireland, Essex sought favour from William Russell for his servants and followers there, promising his support for Russell's appointment as lord deputy.

Throughout his career, Essex endeavoured to make himself the pre-eminent patron of English soldiers. A number of captains sought to associate themselves with Essex. Many gentleman volunteers accompanied each of the armies which Essex formed. Lacking any formal appointment or pay, these men served with Essex in the hope of winning some profit from the venture. Essex's ability to draw large numbers of volunteers to the queen's standard increased the efficacy of her forces without any extra burden to her exchequer. This drawing power immensely strengthened Essex's own personal status, both as the general for a particular campaign and as Elizabeth's conciliar expert on land warfare. Yet Essex's drawing power also saddled him with an enormous burden of expectation. Going on Campaign was an extremely expensive business and those who followed Essex ultimately expected material benefit for the great risk and expense. In consequence, Essex always sought to ensure some reward for his followers.

Essex's reputation as the special patron of soldiers rode higher after every expedition. Each success increased the numbers of hopeful soldiers who sought to win reward and honour. Such expectations affected Essex's stance on the privy council. While Elizabeth and Burghley became increasingly reluctant to maintain English troops on the Continent, Essex insisted on staunch advocacy of anti-Spanish campaign. Essex's major concern was that Elizabeth might be withdrawing England into an increasingly passive role in the war against Spain. The growing insistence of Burghley that English resources must be transferred to Ireland opened up the prospect that England's war effort could be turned away

from the Continent altogether. This could discourage professional soldiers who expected material benefit from the war campaign.

Essex had received intelligence about Spanish activities from the news about current events in Italy, the Ottoman Empire and southern Europe. Such information enabled him to place Spanish actions in a larger context.<sup>31</sup> For Essex, Spain was such a giant enemy that England alone could not stand up to. So common cause had to be made with allies, and support had to be won from them. Essex's contact with France, Florence, and Venice, by exchanging intelligence was one important means by which bonds of amity between states could be nourished. Essex's role as the purveyor of royal hospitality for important visitors to England contributed to deepen the bond.

While Essex despaired about England's growing estrangement from the Protestant cause in the Continent, new political developments began to challenge the realm of England. In 1595, Essex began to send agents to spy in Spain itself. Before that time, the great bulk of Essex's Spanish intelligence came from other countries, especially from Antonio Perez in France. The first-hand Spanish intelligence improved the quality of information; and consequently Essex became alarmed by reports about the growth of the Spanish naval power threatening England and Ireland.<sup>32</sup> Essex insisted that England's main effort should be directed at Spain and its ports. Yet Burghley dismissed Thomas Wright's early report of a new Spanish Armada, by blaming that Essex was exaggerating the Spanish threat. To convince Elizabeth of the Spanish invasion, Essex had to provide her with information that could prove the Spanish naval activities against England. Essex's establishing agents at port cities in Spain was intended to provide evidence to convince Elizabeth of the practicality of Essex's Spanish arguments.

In fact, Spanish naval preparations in 1595 were primarily defensive measure aimed against the long-delayed new expedition of Drake and Hawkins.<sup>33</sup> Burghley and Cecil criticised that Essex played up the danger of a new Armada. However, the pattern of ship movements and the strength of their flotillas suggested that England faced genuine danger. Spain's fleet had become stronger since 1589, and in late July 1595, Spanish ships launched a small raid on Cornwall, confirming the dangers of which Essex had warned. Spanish ships again posed a direct threat to England. The growing rebellion in Ireland also sug-

gested a Spanish fleet might find a way to take advantage. Suddenly the danger seemed very real and preparations began for a pre-emptive strike against Spain, which grew into the Cadiz expedition. Essex prepared the Cadiz operation with great care by collating intelligence about Spanish naval dispositions.<sup>34</sup> The Cadiz expeditions in 1596 and 1597 demonstrated Essex's competence as a military organiser.<sup>35</sup>

Essex's success in winning command of the Cadiz and the subsequent Azore ventures in 1596 and 1597 was the culmination of a long and consistent commitment to his profession of arms. Essex spent time on campaign in every year between 1585 and 1597. The money Essex spent on war was also prodigious: 4,000 pounds in the Netherland, 3,500 pounds for the Armada emergency in 1588, 7,000 pounds in Portugal and 14,000 pounds for the Rouen expedition.<sup>36</sup> A total of 28,500 pounds expenditures came out of Essex's own pocket. Essex was never ignorant of the precariousness of his financial position. Yet he continued to spend heavily on matters relating to war. Essex staked his credit on the success of the venture.

Although eager to dominate military patronage, Essex was at the centre of efforts to reform and modernize England's war effort. For the Cadiz expedition, Essex abandoned the traditional practice of 'dead pays'.<sup>37</sup> In Star Chamber, Essex "inveighed with great force"<sup>38</sup> against abuses in the levy system, and urged the death penalty for malefactors. Essex argued that specific military abuses should be treated as felonies and even draw up a draft in parliament bill.<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth recognized Essex's zeal for reform and, in March 1597, the queen appointed him master of the4 ordinance with specific directions to control this notoriously corrupt military administration. In a tribute to his efficiency and probity, the term of his appointment was for life.<sup>40</sup>

As a military commander, Essex was a strict disciplinarian. In contrast to the prevailing opinion that soldiers were the scum of society,<sup>41</sup> Essex claimed that a camp should be "the best schoole to make religion truely felt, and piety and honestie to be duly practised".<sup>42</sup> Essex's insistence that civilians must be treated with respect also won him great plaudits.<sup>43</sup> During his military apprenticeship in the Netherlands, under the influence of Sidney and Leicester, Essex made plain his commitment to fighting for the Protestant cause. Essex learned that the Protestant communities of northern Europe, and the religious truth

which they represented, must be defended from the forces of the Counter-Reformation. From the start of his military career, Essex's view of war were dominated by a crusader's religious zeal. The whole notion of the Protestant cause gave him a sense of mission on an international scale.

Therefore, the financial inquisition into the Cadiz expedition by the council proved deeply wounding to Essex's martial and aristocratic pride. Elizabeth expected great riches from the victory at Cadiz and thus got furious when so little money reached her coffers and so much went to her soldiers. Burghley and Cecil placed the chief blame for the poor return on Essex rather than the lord admiral. The Cecils explicitly blamed Essex in the presence of the queen for the low quantity of prize goods recovered from the fleet after its return, even though this task had been deputed to various friends and associates of the Cecils.<sup>43</sup> Burghley and Cecil attacked Essex over the booty obtained by Essex's soldiers and the potential profits lost to the queen by failing to capture either of the Spanish treasure fleets. The attack on Essex's probity produced bitterness among his followers, who feared the political consequences of this criticism. For many Essexians, it seemed that Elizabeth was being led to disregard to victory at Cadiz and to impugn the whole field of martial honour.

The criticism of Essex threatened to expose fundamentally divergent views about war and honour between Essex and Burghley. Contrasts were drawn between the bold spirit of men who ventured their lives in the service of their country and those who only accounted for financial success of the expedition. The financial inquisition into the Cadiz expedition moved men of virtue in an open campaign against the corruption which they believed was imperiling England's ability to wage war. Burghley's long stewardship of the royal finances was characterized by a profound conservatism, which inhibited the efficient use of crown resources, exacerbated the steady decline in the rate of tax collection and allowed internecine warfare among officials in the exchequer.<sup>44</sup> Essex and his followers clearly recognized the need for financial reform.

After Cecil's appointment as secretary of state, the growing rivalry between Essex and the Cecils had a disturbing impact upon national politics. The nation's political elite became divided by this rivalry, and the divisions between the two sides grew bitter. In pushing forward the Cadiz expedition, Essex and the Cecils were co-operated for the sake of military necessity. However, the expedition re-

sulted in the collapse of Essex's relationship with the Cecils. During 1596 and 1597, the Elizabethan court saw the outbreak of factionalism.

## 2. Honour Culture and Essex's Myth

After his return from Irish expedition in 1599, Essex provoked Elizabeth's anger and lost her favour, which resulted in the earl's expulsion from the English court. In an attempt to gain access to the queen again and to defeat those who were hostile to him, Essex and his followers endeavoured to seize the court by forcible occupation of Whitehall. Essex's scheme involved the Scottish king. In his uprising, Essex also asserted that his 'enemies' were taking advantage of the uncertainties of the succession to the ruin of the realm and were pressing the cause of the Spanish infanta in an attempt to seek peace with Spain and to consort with papists for the benefits of themselves. Essex attempted to lead James to the front line and urged the king to declare his right to the English crown. In his letter to James sent before the uprising, Essex wrote who stood against James's right for the English throne: Raleigh in the West Country, Cobham in Kent, the second Lord Burghley as lord president of the North, Carew in Ireland, all of whom were closely tied to Robert Cecil. The rivalry with the Cecils forced Essex to take the plunge of abetting the coup.

Essex's desperate uprising failed. His revolt was not only a material failure but also a moral one in terms of the honour-culture with which Essex had always been identified. After the failure in London uprising and the retreat to Essex House, the decision left for Essex to take was how he was to die. Even before the surrender, Essex seemed determined on his own death. In the course of the surrender negotiations, he told Robert Sidney that "For as to my life . . . I hate it . . . Death will end all, and death will be welcome to me."<sup>45</sup> At the trial, one of Essex's closest associates gave evidence against him; then the others followed suit. When confronted by confessions already made by his closest associates, revealing all the details of the plans to seize the court, and to take the Tower, Essex conceived himself betrayed by them. At first, at his trial, Essex defended himself in terms of the honour-culture. However, his resentment against his associates incited him to undergo a violent revulsion, and to repudiate almost all the positions he had taken up at his trial. Essex's aristocratic lineage, his military career, and the tradition he inherited all had created the earl the paradigm

of honour. Essex attracted to himself a following whose influence extended to over a dozen counties, which included representatives of leading gentry families and a number of peers. Yet the behaviour of his associates and Essex himself at the trial revealed that the moral front of the honour revolt had been crumbled.

After his condemnation and return to his cell in the Tower, Essex determined to take the whole responsibility for the revolt upon himself, requesting the lord admiral "to desire Her Majesty to inflict all the torments upon him that could be invented, for the punishment of the rest to be diminished."<sup>46</sup> Essex insisted that his plot to seize the court had intended as a means of access to the queen and his entry into the City had been merely to defend himself against his enemies. Therefore, at the trial, Essex was willing to be accounted "law's traitor, and would die for it."<sup>47</sup> Essex saw himself as a man of arms, ruled by the sanctions of the military culture and its code of honour. In his eyes the law represented pedantry, which was alien to heroic greatness. Thus after his condemnation for treason, he could insist that he was nevertheless "the low's traitor" and the victim of the "rigour and quirks" of the lawyers.<sup>48</sup> In terms of honour-culture, the condemnation had no validity. At his trial, Essex asserted: "I have done nothing but that which by the law of nature and the necessity of my case I was enforced into."<sup>49</sup> The law of nature formed the basis of the various continental codes of honour,, but not to the common law.<sup>50</sup>

Essex saw himself as chosen, both by lineage, and by his tenure of the office of earl marshal, to be the natural leader of a community of honour. Essex inherited pride of ancestry from his father; and he was told at the beginning of his career by his father's secretary, Edward Waterhouse, that the aristocratic qualities of fortitude, temperance, courtesy, affability, and constancy were innate in his blood.<sup>51</sup> The consciousness of distinguished ancestry remained with Essex throughout his career. The sense of ancestry struck a self-confidently arrogant note and enhanced a sense of being trodden underfoot by "base upstarts." At the surrender of Essex House Essex told Robert Sidney that "whether it can be brief to a man descended as I am, to be trodden underfoot by such bases upstarts."<sup>52</sup> Essex's followers had similarly experienced the competitive pressure and had seen their long-established place in their county hierarchies challenged by the rise of new families enriched most commonly by lawyer or courtier fortunes.<sup>53</sup> The sense of political frustration, of being unjustly slighted and so their honour

defaced, was an experience shared by many of the Essex's followers.

The Essex circle was also bound together by a web of blood relationship. The ties of mutual loyalty and support were based on kinship and affinity. The earl of Southhampton asserted at his trial, "the first occasion that made me advance into these causes was the affinity between my lord Essex and me, I being of his blood, so that for his sake I would have hazarded my life."<sup>54</sup> The earl of Rutland, whose wife was Essex's niece, "resolved to live and die with him."<sup>55</sup> Sir Edward Lyttleton of Pillaton, Staffordshire, had been brought into the Essex circle by his Devereux alliance.<sup>56</sup> The Essexians regarded the Cecilians as tied together by their natural greed characteristic of the low-born: the Cecilians exploited their corrupt monopoly of the Queen's favour to bar the natural elite, the nobility, from access to her person.<sup>57</sup>

In the beginning of his trial, Essex intended to underwrite the traditional dissidence of honour which bound men of lineage and lordship to each other in the obligation to confront unworthy ministers. It was from this standpoint that the earl was able to reassure Archbishop Whitgift soon after his arrest. Essex told him that "the sincerity of my conscience, and the goodness of my cause, both comfort me."<sup>58</sup> Essex believed that his status 'earl marshal' gave him warrant to reform the state and to judge his enemies by using the summary jurisdiction of a court of chivalry.<sup>59</sup> Essex placed great emphasis of his own role on his office of earl marshal, which made him believe his role as the guardian and overseer of honour.<sup>60</sup>

Yet within twenty-four hours of his condemnation, Essex abandoned the canons of honour and presented himself as an abject penitent. He drew up a self-inculpatory confession, revealing details of the proposed Whitehall coup d'état, admitting responsibility for the action. Essex's confession went further to denounce the close associates who had been involved in planning the revolt, naming Southhampton, Danvers, Lyttleton, Davies, and Blount whose guilt had already been established by their own confessions.<sup>61</sup> Essex also inculcated others previously thought to have been only marginally involved, such as Henry Duffe, Penderope Rich, Henry Neville, Mountjoy and Sandys. What motivated this extraordinary change of attitude was the disintegration of the honour community of which Essex had been the centre. The persisting tension within the group between the claims made on honour by loyalty both to the queen and their leader



had surfaced to the earl's disadvantage. While the bonds of friendship and the union of minds and hearts had bound them in honour to Essex; and yet honour also had raised the issue of faithfulness to the queen. As the leaders of the court faction, Southhampton, Blount, Mountjoy, and Essex himself were all inseparable from the court-based honour structure. Their resources, their mode of wielding political power, their capacity to translate aspiration into the pattern of a career, even their inherited status, were all unthinkable apart from the organs of the monarchical state. For such political elites, the source of honour could no longer be conceived as inherent in locally orientated communities of honour centering on the lord, after the older medieval pattern. They had derived their status and fortune from the rewards of service to the monarchical state. The queen had been the source of honour system. Their coup d'état had revealed the self-image of the group as dissident and conformist, which honour could not resolve.

After all, the honour community of which Essex had been the centre had already, by the end of his trial, disintegrated under the stresses of failure and the fear of death. Essex conceived himself betrayed by those whom he had thought "are engaged with me, and whose hearts are purely affected. . .",<sup>62</sup> for whom he had prepared himself to die. He saw himself forced into a hopeless insurrection and then abandoned by those who had been most vehement in its instigation. "A man's friends will fail him; all popularity and trust in men is vain, as I have had experience"<sup>63</sup> —Essex's despair and denunciation of his friends proved his own unfaithfulness in the end. The Essexian claim to reform the commonwealth, based on lineage, faithfulness, arms, the appeal to heroic and aristocratic charisma, and to popularity, had achieved nothing beyond a political and moral collapse, which compelled Essex himself into a total self-repudiation. Essex's image as the paradigm of honour, the chivalric and Protestant hero, was defaced.

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Writings about 'honour' circulated in England and Scotland at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. They shared the common view that blood and lineage predisposed to honourable behaviour. *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry*, translated by William Caxton sometime between 1483 and 1485 from a French version of Ramon Lulla "Le libre del orde de cauayleria," referred to lineage as of the essence of knighthood.<sup>64</sup> *The Boke of Saint Albans*, reprinted again and

again between 1486 and 1610, followed the tradition which divided mankind into the descendants of Japheth, who was ennobled by the paternal blessing conferred on their ancestor Noah, and the descendants of Ham, who was rendered ignoble by Noah's curse.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, the Bartolan view, which was circulated particularly among the meritocratic nobilities of Western Europe, emphasized the nature of honour as the reward of virtue.<sup>66</sup> For both Lulla and *St Albans* author, the nobility's lineage needed to be supplemented by virtue. *The Boke of Saint Albans* listed the virtues which should cultivate: fortitude, prudence, wisdom, hope, and steadfastness, all of which related to conduct in war and battle. *The Book of the Ordre of Chyvalry* regarded virtue as essentially prowess and the nobility of his courage by which the knight proved his noble origin.<sup>67</sup> A martial and warlike emphasis was significant and there was no reference in these early expositions of honour to learning as a qualification for nobility. Alexander Barclay, for example, differentiated the man of honour from the man of the robe or the ecclesiastic by insisting that the former was the man of deeds, not of the book. Barclay wrote in *The Mirour of Good Maners* (1570) thus: "A straw for thy study, thy reason is but blind, / To waste time in words, and on no deed to muse, / . . . / Therefore reader refuse / Superfluous study and care superfluous, / And turne thy chief study to deeds virtuous."<sup>68</sup> Gerard Legth in his *The Accedens of Armony* in 1562 defined the 'virtue' which conferred honour as a "glory not by courage of manhood," "martial prowess" as "the chief advancer of gentry."<sup>69</sup> The martial reference, with its framework of heroic values and chivalry, thus imparted a hint of violence to the deeds which honour was earned. Yet the man of honour did not need to be a soldier, nor did honour necessarily require a setting of battle. In peace time, honour could become self-assertiveness, the capture of the attention of public esteem.

Aggressiveness was always latent in the relationship of men of honour, although subject to the restraints imposed by the solidarities of honour, namely, by lordship, kinship, and friendship. In an honour society, violence, or the ever-present possibility of violence, was a way of life. The competitiveness was veiled by the routines of good manners and courtesy, which helped to contain the latent violence within acceptable limits. But violence was always liable to escalate from its latent to an actual state, when its expression was the armed conflict of the

duel. This became extremely popular from the mid-sixteenth century by the introduction of the new art of fence after the Italianate style, using the rapier.<sup>70</sup> Consistency in standing by a position once taken up was basic to the honour code. This took the form of promise and oath, the giving of one's word, the word of honour. Once this had been done, the man of honour could withdraw only at the expense of the diminishment involved in dishonour.<sup>71</sup>

The political culture of the world of honour was essentially pluralist. Honour societies revered kingship, but there implied the possibility of changing one's master, if he could no longer be freely and honourably served.<sup>72</sup> Kingship constituted one authority among a number. What such authorities had in common was the institution of lordship, and the king was the greatest of lords. The king's court was the largest, richest and most brilliant of all honour communities. It was during the Tudor period that the realm and the community of honour came to be identical, presided over by a crown whose sovereign authority constituted the only kind of lordship. During the reign of Henry VIII, the kingship took a powerful initiative to establish itself as "the found of honour," the source not only of "dignity" and office within the crown's gift, but also of gentility itself.

Lordship emphasized the hierarchical character of honour. For the man of honour 'lorship' implied a relationship of faithfulness to his master, which was owing as long as the latter showed himself a good lord, who was just, rewarded, and took counsel. Lordship deployed itself in the household of a landed magnate or of the king with its inner circle of officers and servants, and its outer circle of client gentry of the affinity, who called themselves 'followers' or 'friends'. The code of honour required faithfulness to friends as well as to one's lord. The notion of friendship commonly indicated a relationship between equals, and often arose out of "chamber companionship—the sharing of lodgings by young men serving at court or in great household. A lord's friendship showed itself in the special trust, good will and 'favour' extended to dependent, requiring a response of fidelity and gratitude from him. Friendship, trust, and fidelity were closely linked. Where a dependant's faithfulness could never be called in question, the natural response of the lord was 'friendship.' The most obvious expression of this would be the grant of office and favours. Honour implied a pressure towards the consistency of public attitude which faithfulness to lords and friends involved. Therefore, when lords confronted unworthy or tyrannical rulers, the political

conflict most likely resulted in war and battle to remove them. The War of the Roses was among such movements.<sup>73</sup>

By the end of sixteenth century, there were the social changes which had dissolved the kind of society in which the traditional politics of violence could be practiced. The expansion of the gentry class and changes in its structure had undermined the relationship of dependence upon and affinity with the nobility. The rise of the grammar school with its humanist and religious emphasis, caused to end the aristocratic household and its honour culture as the typical educational environment for lay members of the ruling class.

It was the Erasmians and humanists who gave priority to virtue over lineage and learning over arms. A prime influence at work was that of the Florentine neo-Platonists, reaching England by way of Erasmus, Thomas More, Thomas Starkey and Thomas Elyot, then through such handbooks of morals and honour as those of Castiglione and Romei.<sup>74</sup> Plato saw wisdom as the supreme virtue, placing it above the drive of the will and urge to glory appropriate to fighters. The Platonic stress on wisdom emerged from a culture of Florentine humanism. Thomas More had deployed the concept in his *Utopia*, where the rule of wisdom shone the more brightly against the 'ignorance' of the nobility and the 'idleness' of the traditional communities of honour.

But it was Thomas Elyot who successfully steered the course from the older primacy of 'prowess' in the culture of honour to a style of chivalry which also implied learning. In *The Boke named the Governour* Elyot outlined the formation of a learned knighthood. Sidney's *Arcadia*, written for those ruled, intended to show that the magnanimity of the Aristotelian hero was ineffectual to set "a stay upon the exorbitant smilings of chance,"<sup>75</sup> unless transcended by wisdom and religion. *Arcadia* defined the background for the new-style honour community: one which was romantic and positive, but also humanist and protestant. In *Arcadia*, Honour required the Protestant knight to extend himself "out of the limits of a man's own little world, to the government of families and maintaining of public societies." he made "his chief ends . . . above all things the honour of his Maker, and the service of his Prince, or coutrey."<sup>76</sup> *Arcadia* remodelled chivalry found its appropriate symbol in the Elizabethan Accession Day Tilts, in which Philip Sidney and his circle played a prominent role. Through the courtly jousts, the ancient allegiances of chivalry were drawn close to the queen and there occurred

an imaginative re-feudalization of society. The Queen's Accession Day itself was built up as a great national festival, a day on which her subjects were reminded of the Protestant triumph over the papal. The festivities on the Day were both courtly and popular. At court there was a ceremonial tournament in which Elizabeth received the homage of her lords and gentlemen, who came to the tilt in disguise, often riding upon pageant cars attended by allegorical personages who in prose, verse, and song paid the queen tribute. All over England, Elizabeth's subjects expressed their joy in her government by prayers and sermons, bell-ringing, bonfires and feasting.

The courtly chivalry of the jousts, the Accession Day Tilts, were begun by Henry Lee at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. In 1571, the first year recorded in the tiltyard, Lee was appointed Lieutenant of the Royal Manor of Woodstock. In 1574, he was appointed Master of the Leash. Thenceforward, Lee appeared in all court fetes until 1580 when he was made Master of the Armoury. Lee's personal appearance at, and supervision of, the Queen's Day shows continued until his retirement in 1590.<sup>77</sup>

Appearance at the tilts cost much; yet the occasion was politically effective to gain the queen's favour. After Lee's official resignation in 1590, Essex dominated the tilts. The eight tournaments during the first seven years of Elizabeth's reign appear to have served primarily as an opportunity for some of her aspiring courtiers to vie for her favour by impressing her with feats of arms and lavish display. Particularly prominent were the two Dudley brothers: Ambrose, the earl of Warwick, and Robert, soon to be the earl of Leicester. At the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, the Dudley family was in a precarious position. After their treasonous involvement in the Lady Jane Grey conspiracy, it had only been because of their conspicuous military service at the siege of St. Quentin that in 1557 Queen Mary lifted from them the act of attainder that had marred the fortunes of the entire family. Both Ambrose and Robert had been friendly with Elizabeth in earlier days, and her accession to the throne enabled their political fortunes to flourish. For the Dudley brothers, the tiltyard offered opportunities for public displays of loyalty and martial talent. Such motives were to set a pattern for future young hopefuls at Elizabeth's court. In the 1570s and early 1580s, the most memorable was Philip Sidney, who was Leicester's nephew; and in the 1580s and 1590s, the earl of Essex, Leicester's stepson.

Young aspirants such Sidney and Essex were attracted by the chivalric ideals so colourfully passed on to them in the literature of the romances. Sidney's first appearance at an English tournament was in the Whitehall tiltyard on Accession Day in 1577. he was twenty-three years of age, and had already a certain amount of experience following his recent service with his father in Ireland and on an important European mission for Elizabeth. Sidney appeared in the shape of shepherd, attended by a group of ploughmen.<sup>78</sup> When he arrived in front of the gallery, one of the ploughmen recited the poem 'Philisides, the Shepherd good and true.' It tells how Philisides called upon Menalcha, the husbandman, to persuade him to set aside his plough in order to celebrate the forthcoming Accession Day. The ploughman's recital was followed by a song in praise of Elizabeth. Sidney's entry into the tiltyard provided him with the perfect stage to dramatize his ideals of romantic chivalry. Sidney saw himself as the self-appointed saviour knight of Protestantism. The image of Protestant knight, cultivated by his successive appearances in the tiltyard, was strengthened by his daring opposition to Elizabeth's possible marriage to a Catholic prince, and ultimately mythified by his death in Zutphen expedition in the service of the Protestant cause in the Continent.

Essex first made his appearance at an English tournament in November 1586, just after he had returned from Zutphen in the black-draped ship bearing Sidney's body. Thereafter, when not serving overseas and when not in disgrace at court, Essex appeared at virtually every English tournament until his uprising and the subsequent execution in 1601. By the time Essex first began tilting before a public audience in 1586, the political value of creating a strong impression in the tilt-yard had long been recognised.<sup>79</sup> Essex was a particularly energetic and accomplished jouster. At the Accession Day tilts of 1588, 1590, 1594 and 1596, Essex acted as a principal challenger, showing himself to the world as a dashing young knight and the queen's particular favourite. All the magnificence of his appearance, and the elaborate praise of the speeches which accompanied it, were ostensibly in Elizabeth's honour. Essex exploited these occasions to enhance his public reputation. He constantly sought to stand out from other competitors as a way of emphasising his pre-eminence in martial affairs. Essex also mounted increasingly elaborate entertainments to accompany his appearances in the tilt-yard. The importance which Essex attached to his public displays in the

tilt-yard can be seen in the time and money which he invested in them. Essex spent heavily to display himself appropriately on these occasions. He primarily sought to impress observers with the size and magnificence of his display, the traditional symbols of a great nobleman. Clearly, he viewed these occasions as essential investments for advancing and sustaining his reputation as Elizabeth's great chivalric favourite. By indulging in martial display, Essex also encouraged popular support for the war and for his own pre-eminent role in it. Above all, such open display of martial virtue was part of Essex's dedication to the cult of honour. At the heart of this code was the idea that noble virtue should be both displayed and recognized publicly. In cultivating his public image, Essex was therefore constantly proclaiming his conformity to this code.

In the manner of Sidney, Essex modeled his behaviour on the ideals of chivalric romance. His enthusiasm for self-dramatization was demonstrated in many events of his career. On the English expedition to Portugal in 1589 in 1589, Essex displayed his knightly valour by being the first Englishman to wade ashore; at Lisbon he offered to fight all-comers in honour of the queen; and at the siege of Rouen in 1591 he challenged the enemy commander to single combat. During the campaign in the Low Countries Essex became the closest friend of Philip Sidney, who bequeathed his best sword to Essex as he lay dying in the battle of Zutphen, pleading with Essex to marry his pregnant wife, Frances Walsingham, and to protect his young daughter. Thereafter, Essex assumed the role of Sidney as self-proclaimed Protestant activist hero, the knightly champion of English Church and state against the threat of Rome and Spain. The political stance with which Sidney enthusiastically identified himself was that of the Leicester-Walsingham policy of Protestant activism, which was also inherited by the earl of Essex.

The Elizabethan vogue for tilts and tournaments was the outcome of conflicting interests of the crown and her aristocratic courtiers as well as a mediation of factional and personal conflicts among the courtly ranks.<sup>80</sup> Through its conventions of feudal loyalty and romantic devotion, Elizabethan chivalry confirmed Tudor sovereignty. Tournaments provided the queen with a means of consolidating and maintaining domestic unity and regal authority at home. Queen's warriors's prowess in feats of arms was duly reported by foreign visitors in their dispatches to other European courts. Tournaments thus played important func-

tion in building Elizabeth's reputation abroad. But they also gave vent to aristocratic aggression and competition for the courtly honour and reward. Essex stood and died for the martial and aristocratic values that had been essential to chivalric romance.

For the contemporaries, Essex emerged as the new Sidney. George Peele, for instance, linked the two military heroes when he wrote *An Eclogue Gratulatorie* to welcome Essex home from the Portugal expedition in 1589. The tributes to Essex during the years from 1587 to 1590 when he was emerging as a major public figure all paid homage to Essex in the same way as Peele's. Essex was praised for his love of chivalry, his zeal for the Gospel, his boldness in the cause of his faith and the queen.<sup>81</sup> *The 1590 Faerie Queene*, the epic poem which Edmund Spenser published but never finished, reintroduced into Elizabethan courtliness the radical Protestant doctrine which had been promoted by the Leicester-Walsingham faction. Spenser's association of courtiership with activity flattered the expansionist impulses of courtiers such as Walter Raleigh and the earl of Essex. From the beginning of his epic, the poems to the individual books had traced different and more personal search for masculine self-affirmation from that of the courtier. In his narrative emphasis upon the male courtier, the *Faerie Queene* could exercise her power only through a masculine intermediacy. The poem's title showed that Elizabeth in her persona of the *Faerie Queene* was both the poem's chief protagonist and its principal theme; and, as Spenser's statement later in his letter addressed to Walter Raleigh implied, the mythic English hero, Arthur, was introduced as the prototype of Spenser's perfected noble person.

In *The Faerie Queene*, Arthur contained within himself the twelve Aristotelian moral virtues which were to be the themes of his epic twelve books. Each of these virtues was to be explored in turn, through the quests of a series of knights. Both Arthur and these knights linked the dimension of chronological time with an eternal other world, that is, the golden-walled city of Cleopolis at the centre of faerieland where Queen Gloriana resides. Gloriana is the 'true glorious type' of all of these various virtues. Yet it is Arthur and the other questing knights who are Gloriana's earthly imitators and applying her individual and composite qualities. The quests of the knights parallels the Neo-Platonic concept of soul's progressive separation from deity, taking them away from the Queen



and the heart of fairy. In contrast, Arthur's quest progressed in the movement of return to spiritual source, leading him toward the Faerie Queene. On the level of political allegory, the possible meeting and marriage between Arthur and Gloriana would seemingly have represented Arthur's initiation into kingship as ruler of the immortal body politic of England signified by Gloriana. This restoration of a masculine political authority by marriage to the powerful female monarch was foreshadowed in the epic by the story of Britomart and Artegall. The story implied a serious criticism of the Elizabethan cult by the portraiture of Elizabeth's gender as political authority seriously restricting the potential of her male courtiers for action.

The scholars, writers, and dramatists who had attached themselves to the Essex's circle, presented the image of honour in a sophisticated and glamourized way. Henry Cuff, ex-Oxford professor and one of the Essex's secretaries, aimed at a revival of honour through its alliance with letters, in the sense of Tacitean and humanistic scholarship, with a view to a martial society in which "learning and valour would have the pre-eminence."<sup>83</sup>

George Chapman was among the Essexian dramatists who aimed at a revival of honour and heroic virtue. Chapman dedicated his translation of *Iliad* in 1598 to the earl of Essex, describing him as "most true Achilles, whom by sacred prophecy Homer did but prefigure."<sup>84</sup> Samuel Daniel saw Essex as destined to lead the chivalry of Europe in a renewed crusade against the infidel.<sup>85</sup> A historical work, *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV* by John Hayward, was also an outstanding instance of the Tacitean school of historiography, which flourished in the Essexian circle. Essex himself was acquainted with Tacitus, and occasionally quoted him in his correspondence. A cultivation of Tacitean styles and attitudes was a characteristic of the Essex circle.<sup>86</sup> Hayward was a Cambridge civil lawyer who was not a member of the circle, but who aspired to join it, and hoped that *The First Part* would attract Essex's patronage. It was published in 1599, just before Essex's departure for Ireland. The real theme of *The First Part* was the fall of Richard II, and the role of Henry of Lancaster in bringing it about. Essex had a great interest in the history of Richard II. The earl had patronized and applauded a play of Richard II, whether Shakespeare's or another.<sup>87</sup>

At the beginning of his work, Hayward presented honour as the motive

force of history.<sup>88</sup> In his narratives, history was written to eternalize honour.<sup>89</sup> Then, why in the reign of Richard did the polity become unnaturally distorted, and the king a tyrant? It was because, in Hayward's analysis, the natural political class, conceived as those qualified by lineage and inherited honourable status to rule, were excluded from the king's confidence. Thus Henry of Lancaster in Hayward's history said: "The king regarded not the noble Princes of his blood and Peeres of the Realm . . . instead of these he was wholly governed by certaine new-found . . . favourites, vulgar in birth, and corrupt in qualities, having no sufficencie eyther of counsell in pece, or of courage war."<sup>90</sup>

How, then, was this state of affairs to be remedied? It was by the common action of the nobility under their natural leader, Henry Lancaster. What united them in resistance to Richard's corrupt regime was, of course, the bond of honour. The political leader must always be ready for the bold, heroic initiative; and willing to stake all in the gamble with Fortune. Richard, seeking safety in surrender to his enemies instead of ending his life with glory in battle against them, failed in heroic initiative and had to endure the shame of his fall and subsequent abject fate.<sup>91</sup> Hayward's analysis of the fall of Richard II shaded the view with which Essex and his friends saw their relationship to the Cecilian regime, and the continued disfavour with which they were regarded by Elizabeth.

The writers and intellectuals who had attached themselves to the Essex circle were building up Essex into the image of the charismatic hero, heightening the hopes and expectations which centred on him. Essex was the pre-eminently successful courtier who could always seize Fortune's forelock and turn failure into success up until his desperate Irish campaign in 1599.

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Within a few weeks of Essex's execution, William Barlow publicized in Paul's Cross sermon the details of Essex's confession at his trial.<sup>92</sup> Barlow intended to complete the earl's disrepute by this, which, however, was "very offensively taken of the common sort."<sup>93</sup> Essex's supporters disseminated the view that the earl's confession at his trial "concerned only great repentance for the sins of his youth."<sup>94</sup> From the political point of view, the Essexians began to reconstruct their political base to exercise power in the new reign. Soon after Elizabeth's death and the enthronement of the new king, the image of Essex as

the chivalric Protestant hero was restored. Poets, dramatists, and ballad-writers who rallied around such survivors of the Essex faction as Southhampton and Mountjoy, glorified Essex and presented him once more as the victim of the law's pedantry and of the envy of his base-born enemies. Robert Prickett's long elegiac poem, "Honour's Fame in Triumph Riding, or the Life and Death of the Late Honourable Earl of Essex" written in 1604 was dedicated to Southhampton and Mountjoy. Samuel Daniel's play *Philotas* in 1605 depicted its hero as an example of injured innocence. University and Inns of Court students also wrote poems related to the fall of the earl of Essex.<sup>95</sup> They portrayed Essex as a patriotic supporter of the queen, a military hero, and a popular leader disgraced by his political enemies such as Robert Cecil, who urged that Essex be sent on the disastrous Irish expedition. Many of Essex's partisans were in the Inns of Court and they shared his ambition and his frustration. The pro-Essex literature emphasized the saintliness of the earl's death and the errors which had led him into treason to the provocations of his opponents. Even Essex's enemies were compelled to accept his rehabilitation. Both Cecil and Nottingham admitted that Essex had died like a Christian.

The rehabilitation of Essex's honour and the consequent revival of his popularity at the advent of James's reign demonstrated the change in the political climate. James not only forgave the partisans of Essex but showered honours upon them. Even before reaching London, James had signed a warrant for Southhampton's release from the Tower. Southhampton immediately sped north and joined the court at Huntingdon where he was given the office of carrying the ceremonial sword of state.<sup>96</sup> Francis Bacon, Fulke Greville, Henry Savile, and Henry Wotton, all of whom Essex had patronized, were knighted. Robert Sidney became a baron, and Mountjoy, who was Essex's lieutenant and successor in Ireland, became the earl of Devonshire. Essex's young son was proclaimed by James to be the eternal companion of his eldest son the Prince of Wales.

King James's general lionization of Essex's family and followers influenced the composition of the queen's court. James had issued a proclamation that Lady Rich's precedence would be that of the oldest earls of Essex, that is, over all daughters of all earls except those of the earls of Arundel, Northumberland, Shrewsbury, and Oxford.<sup>97</sup> The ladies in the queen's household were drawn from women related to members of the Privy Council and gentlemen of the king's and

prince's households; and inevitably the queen's household was dominated by former followers of the earl of Essex.

In May 1603, James issued an order which showed respect to the English ancient nobility. James noted that the "ancient nobility whose birth and merit makes them more capable than others."<sup>98</sup> Through the secret correspondence with the earl of Northumberland while in Scotland, James had been informed of Elizabeth's unjust evaluation of the ancient nobility and the consequent discontentment among them. Such nobilities as the Essexians had strong consciousness of distinguished ancestry. The sense of ancestry, in their context, was marked by a nostalgia for past glories, and a sense of being under siege. They felt, as Essex had complained, that the base upstarts had trod them underfoot. Under the reign of Elizabeth, they had seen their long-established place in their county hierarchies challenged by the rise of new families. The sense of political frustration, of being unjustly slighted and so their honour defaced, was an experience shared with such peers as the Essexians. The king's order in 1603 thus presented his political answer for competing demands of the English nobility. The rehabilitation of the Essexians, who had risen against Elizabeth for the great cause to save their honour, was James's political maneuvers to satisfy the discontented English nobilities and to balance the political power between the ancient nobility and the upstarts such as the Cecilians. The revival of Essex myth and the restoration of the honour culture was a repercussion of the late Elizabethan political defeat of the Essexians.

To Cecil, the revival of the Essex interest could pose a significant long-term threat. The revival of the Bedchamber in the court of James as a focus of influence and patronage undercut Cecil's previous near-monopoly of influence. Under Elizabeth, power had been concentrated in the hands of the Privy Council. Elizabeth's ladies of the Bedchamber rarely meddled in politics, though occasionally they attempted to advance the careers of relatives and friends. King James,, on the other hand, was surrounded by the gentlemen of his Bedchamber, all of whom had followed the king from Edinburgh. Cecil had survived the immediate transition into the new reign; and yet he could not rely on the automatic continuance of his position. Cecil would have to prove his worth afresh, adapting to James's wishes if he was to remain in power. After the death of Essex, there had been no voice in the council nor at court that could speak with the authority of

the secretary of state. All the public business at court had been in Cecil's hands. James had been fully aware of Cecil's power at court as he described Cecil as 'king there in effect' when corresponding with Cecil while in Scotland. Yet James had strong opinions of his own and a very high estimate of his kingly abilities. On learning of Elizabeth's death, James at once sent Cecil from Edinburgh an informal interim ratification of the position of all Elizabeth's council.<sup>100</sup> James set Cecil against those of preeminent nobility of rank and blood such as the old Essexians in order to keep them under control. Elizabeth had handled the faction leaders by competing them for her favour. James used the same tactics to maneuver the power struggle between Cecil and the other leading peers of ancient birth. The rehabilitation of the Essexians at James's court was one of the faction-maneuver strategies of the new king.

Notes

1. Paul E. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 77.
2. D. C. Peck, "Raleigh, Sidney, Oxford and the Catholics, 1579", *N & Q* 223 (1978), pp. 427-31.
3. S. W. May, *Sir Walter Raleigh* (Boston, 1989), pp. 4-6.
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5. J. G. Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, 3 vols, (London, 1823), III, p. 23.
6. B. M. Ward, *The Seventeenth Earl of Oxford* (London, 1928), p. 383, n 1.
7. Hammer, *Polarisation*, p. 101.
8. W. Murdin, *A Collection of State Papers relating to affairs in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, from the year 1571 to 1596 . . .* (London, 1759), p. 796.
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58. During Essex's imprisonment in the Tower after the revolt, the dean of Norwich, Thomas Dove, asked the earl what his warrant had been to seek to "remove such evils, as the commonwealth is burthened with." To this, Essex replied that he was earl marshal of England, and thus needed no other warrant. [William Barlow, *A Sermon Preached at Paules Crosse, on the First Sunday of Lent, Martii, 1600 With a short discourse of the late Earle of Essex, his confession and penitence, before and at the time of his death* (London, 1601, S. T. C. 1454).]
59. Barlow, *Ibid.*
60. Since the Constable's office had been vacant since the death of the earl of Derby in 1504, the earl marshal, as his deputy, could claim the exercise of his powers and functions in this respects. [Kevin Sharpe, 'The Earl of Arundel, his Circle, and the Oppositions to the Duke of Buckingham' in *Faction and Parliament: Essays in Early Stuart History*, ed. K. Sharpe (Oxford, 1998), p. 218; see also J. G. Bellamy, *The Law of Treason in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1970), pp. 158 ff.]
61. Essex's confession has not survived, and only an abstract of it remains among the *State Papers and the Hatfield Manuscripts* [*California State Papers, Domestic, Eliz.*,

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