Robert Sidney and the Earl of Essex: A Dangerous Friendship Viewed Through the Eyes of Rowland Whyte

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Abstract: This article traces the personal and court relationship of Robert Sidney, later first Earl of Leicester, and Robert Devereux, second Earl of Essex, through the richly informative correspondence of Rowland Whyte with his employer Robert Sidney. Based upon the first complete edition of Whyte's surviving correspondence, it offers fresh insights and a wealth of specific detail about the rise and fall of Robert Devereux at the late-Elizabethan court. It traces how Sidney at first depended heavily on Essex for support at court and the development of his public career but also how eventually he found it necessary to distance himself from the earl as his discontents with Queen Elizabeth led to his treasonable and short-lived rebellion in February 1601. Whyte's detailed reports about Essex's behaviour and treatment by the queen and court officials reveal how heavily Sidney depended upon his employee's shrewd advice in both negotiating his relationship with Essex and seeking to develop other aspects of his own public career. The fortunate survival of Whyte's historically important letters in the Sidney family private archive provides a rich and illuminating perspective upon the complexities and vicissitudes of court life during the last decade of Queen Elizabeth I's reign.

Introduction[1]

The Sidney brothers, Philip, Robert and Thomas, had known Robert Devereux (1565-1601), second Earl of Essex, from their

[1] The scope of this article was originally prompted by numerous discussions of Robert Sidney's court career with my two co-editors, the late Noel J. Kinnamon and Margaret P. Hannay, of *The Letters (1595-1608) of Rowland Whyte* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 2013). I am grateful to Margaret Hannay for reading a draft of this article and for our stimulating discussions of Rowland Whyte's correspondence during the last decade; and to Elizabeth Goldring, Anders Ingram and Anthony Payne for their helpful advice and comments. This article draws upon Noel Kinnamon's comprehensive but unpublished catalogue of Robert Sidney's surviving outgoing and incoming correspondence, totalling over 2,500 individual letters and dating from September 1575 until June 1626. We had been collaborating on the compilation of this catalogue for a decade and, thanks to Noel's Kinnamon's pioneering archival research, it demonstrates that Robert Sidney's correspondence—although never previously studied in its entirety—provides one of the most informative first-hand insights into the late Elizabethan and Jacobean regimes. Noel Kinnamon died on 12 September 2012 during the final stages of the completion of *The Letters (1598-1608) of Rowland Whyte*. This article is respectfully dedicated to the memory of his lasting Sidneian scholarship and to his much valued friendship with Margaret Hannay and Michael Brennan.

childhood days; and Devereux's father, Walter, seems to have been keen, as he lay dying in September 1576, to foster a marriage between his daughter Penelope and Philip Sidney.[2] The Sidneys' uncle, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, had then married Walter Devereux's widow, Lettice, after she had become pregnant, at first secretly in spring 1578 at Kenilworth and then more publicly at Wanstead on 21 September 1578. It was commonly believed that their affair had started well before her first husband's death, perhaps as early as 1573.[3] Robert Devereux accompanied the Sidney brothers on the 1585/87 expedition of their uncle, the Earl of Leicester, to the Low Countries and was present at Zutphen when Sir Philip received his mortal wound.[4] He subsequently received in Philip's will the symbolic bequest as his military heir of one of his two "best" swords, and in an even more intimate bond, secretly married, probably in spring 1590, his widow, Frances Walsingham, who gave birth to their son, Robert, in January 1591.[5] It seems, therefore, inevitable that by the early 1590s Robert Sidney was closely affiliated with Robert Devereux within court circles, as Millicent Hay explains:

> He was tied by blood, friendship, and training to the earl's faction, which represented the intellectual heritage of Leicester, Walsingham, and Sir Philip Sidney—the extreme Protestant faction of the 1570s and 1580s. Most of those we now regard as members of the Sidney circle stood with Essex's party, including Robert, Lord Rich; Roger Manners, earl of Rutland (who married Sir Philip's daughter, Elizabeth); and Sir Edward Dyer.[6]

Hay goes on to note that others intimately associated with Essex included Leicester's sister, Katherine Dudley Hastings, Countess

[2] James M. Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney 1572-1577* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972), 424, 443-4. Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991), 196-201. Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney. A Double Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 162-3.

[3] Derek Wilson, *The Uncrowned Kings of England: The Black Legend of the Dudleys* (London: Constable, 2005), 205, 313-15.

[4] After Zutphen, the Earl of Leicester knighted Robert Sidney and made the Earl of Essex a knight banneret, the latter being the highest rank of knighthood conferred on the battlefield. G. B. Harrison, *The Life and Death of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex* (London: Cassell, 1937), 21.

[5] Paul E.J. Hammer, "Robert Devereux," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (on-line).

[6] Millicent V. Hay, *The Life of Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester (1563-1626)* (New York, London and Mississauga, Ontario: Associated University Presses, 1984), 163.

of Huntingdon; his sister-in-law, Anne Russell Dudley, Countess of Warwick; Essex's sister, Lady Penelope Rich (Lord Rich's wife and Sir Philip Sidney's "Stella"); Edward Somerset, Earl of Worcester; Charles Blount, Baron Mountjoy; Lord Henry Howard; John, Baron Lumley; Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton; and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland.

Much has already been written about the rise and fall of the Earl of Essex at the late Elizabethan court but the recent publication of the first complete edition of the surviving letters of Rowland Whyte to Robert Sidney, dating (in relation to Essex's activities) from 17 September 1595 until 30 October 1600, makes it possible to trace in detail how Whyte, an unusually astute and informed court observer, at first viewed Robert Devereux as one of Sidney's most influential supporters and then as a dangerous liability in his detailed and regular intelligence letters to his employer.[7] No other contemporary source supplies so much first-hand commentary on Devereux's activities at court at this period and his centrality to a large group of supposedly loyal courtiers and friends which included Robert Sidney. It is also fascinating to gain specific insights from these letters into how an ambitious individual such as Sidney carefully sought to cultivate the friendship and favour of a figure who, primarily through his intimacy with the queen, personal wealth and inherited aristocratic rank, was regarded as one of his most powerful and influential associates at court. Through Whyte's letters, we gain a vivid sense of the trials and tribulations, even for a man of Robert Sidney's family status, of both seeking and maintaining the favour of the queen and her closest advisors during the latter half of the 1590s when Elizabeth's health and hold over absolute power were visibly beginning to fail.

Whyte was probably about the same age as Robert Sidney and by the mid-1590s had become his most trusted family employee and personal advisor. They had first gotten to know each other well when the youthful Whyte had accompanied the twelve-year-old Robert to Oxford University in 1575 as one of his domestic servants. But such was Whyte's sharp intelligence, pragmatic shrewdness and absolute loyalty that, while Sidney was away from England for long periods as Governor of Flushing, he grew to rely heavily upon Whyte's advice and guidance in relation

[7] *The Letters (1595-1608) of Rowland Whyte*, ed. Michael G. Brennan, Noel J. Kinnamon and Margaret P. Hannay (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 2013). All page references supplied in brackets after quotations are from this edition.

to his personal affairs at court and the welfare of his family at both Penshurst and London. No other comparable collection of intelligence letters has survived among the Sidney family papers or elsewhere; and it seems likely that Whyte remained Sidney's key, and probably often only, source of reliable and closely informed intelligence about court life. The letters also reveal a great deal about the sharpness of Whyte's mind and observations and how such a discreet agent at court was required to possess numerous personal skills, enabling him to liaise readily with prominent court figures, to record his observations both accurately and dispassionately and, above all, to keep in mind that everything written in his letters might well be intercepted and secretly reported back to other (and perhaps hostile) individuals. In this sense, Whyte's role during the 1590s was one fraught with personal challenges and dangers. As far as can be assessed at this distance in time, his correspondence was probably highly unusual in terms of the sheer wealth of detail provided to Robert Sidney; his ability personally to access prominent court aristocrats, dignitaries and even the queen's own female entourage; and his resourcefulness and sheer ruthlessness in pursuing both useful individuals and interesting intelligence. Whyte served his employer loyally for over fifty years until Robert's death in 1626. His last act of personal service was the supervision of the funeral of his master, employer and friend.[8]

[8] Michael G. Brennan, "'Your Lordship's to Do You All Humble Service': Rowland Whyte's Correspondence with Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle and first Earl of Leicester," *Sidney Journal* 21.2 (2003): 1-37. Many (but by no means all) of Whyte's letters were first printed (either in full or only partially) in Arthur Collins, *Letters and Memorials of State* ..., 2 vols. (London: T. Osborne, 1746). Collins' handling of the Sidney papers bore little relation to modern editorial practice. He frequently suppressed what he regarded as unimportant materials (especially about domestic issues within the Sidney household) and was concerned in his editorial work primarily with an assertion of the public status and political importance of the Sidneys at this period. As recorded in his sometimes heavy annotations of the original manuscripts, he did not hesitate to "improve" both the style and, in some cases, the meaning of individual letters and regularly made numerous minor changes to phrasing and specific words. Many passages which seemingly proved difficult to read were simply omitted. These problems were compounded by the fact that the highly selective transcripts of these letters included in the Historical Manuscripts Commission's *Report on the Manuscripts of the Lord de L'Isle & Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place,* 6 vols. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925-66), were largely based upon the texts published by Collins and often silently and uncritically adopted his contentious, or obviously inaccurate, readings. Until now, most scholars have had to depend upon either Collins or the HMC volumes for the texts of these letters. For more detailed discussions of these textual problems, see, Robert Shephard and Noel J. Kinnamon, "The Sidney Family Correspondence During Robert Sidney's Continental Tour, 1579-1581," *Sidney Journal* 25.1-2 (2007): 43-66; and *The Letters (1595-1608) of Rowland Whyte,* ed. Brennan, Kinnamon and Hannay, 35-6.

September – December 1595

Many of Whyte's letters to Robert Sidney have probably been lost. The first reference to the Earl of Essex in the surviving ones appears in his report of 19 September 1595, revealing that Sidney had been tentatively promised lodgings for himself and his wife, Barbara Gamage Sidney, at Devereux's personal residence, Essex House (formerly named Leicester House since it had been purchased in 1570 by his step-father, Robert Dudley), on the Thames side of the Strand in London.[9] Whyte's letter concludes: "I am going with your letters to my Lord Essex and the rest at court" (41-2).[10] On 23 September, Whyte explained how Essex had been reading one of Sidney's letters and had asked Whyte for another which, presumably, was referred to in the first but had not been delivered. Fortunately, this lost letter soon turned up in a batch delivered to Sir Robert Cecil as Whyte explained: "[T]he next day Sir Robert Cecil brought him it from Theobalds as it should seem enclosed within my Lord Treasurer's packet" (42).[11] These comments provide an intriguing insight into the already delicate personal relations between Essex and Robert Cecil at this period because for most of 1595 Essex had been in open enmity with his aged and ailing father, Lord Burghley, whom he wished to succeed as Elizabeth's chief minister. At this period Robert Devereux and Robert Cecil, both of whom enjoyed regular access to the queen,

[9] Leicester purchased this mansion, then known as Paget Place, from Thomas, third Baron Paget, and embarked during the 1570s upon a scheme of extensions and rebuilding. See Elizabeth Goldring, *Painting and Patronage at the Elizabethan Court: Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and His World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, forthcoming, 2014), chapter 7.

[10] Ultimately, the Sidneys were not able to stay at Essex House because the promised lodgings were already occupied by Anthony Bacon. Whyte, *Letters*, 48.

[11] Sidney's earliest known personal letter to Essex dates from 8 February 1594 and was sent from Chartres during his embassy to King Henri IV of France. The National Archives (henceforth TNA) SP France, 78/33, f.84. Essex was to become one of the French king's staunchest supporters at the English court. Sidney had been writing regularly to Essex from Flushing during August and early September 1595. Historical Manuscripts Commission, Salisbury, V.308-9 (CP 33/103, 8 August); V.326-7 (CP 34/34, 17 August); V.340 (CP 34/51, 22 August); V.344-5 (CP 34.62, 24 August); V.373-3 (CP 20/23, 11 September); and V.382-3 (CP 35/19, 19 September). This last letter may have been the one mistakenly delivered to Robert Cecil. The large volume of Essex's correspondence, now among the Cecil papers at Hatfield House, suggests that Robert Cecil personally acquired much of Essex's surviving documents and correspondence after his execution.

seemed to be Sidney's most influential and friendly supporters at court. Hence Whyte's letters formed a crucial component in his employer's constant search during the 1590s for a means to escape his burdensome duties as Governor of Flushing by gaining alternative preferment back home in England and, preferably, in London or the south-east.

When news broke in May 1595 that Essex was the father of the illegitimate son of a maid of honour, Elizabeth Southwell, Burghley made a concerted but ultimately unsuccessful effort to have his son Robert named as Secretary of State in preference to Essex himself. Whyte was also soon alert to the dangers posed by Essex's well-known proclivity for womanizing. On 23 September 1595 he advised Sidney that "Sir William Cornwallis doth often trouble her Majesty's ears with tales of my Lord of Essex, who is thought to be an observer of all his doings, and to examine midwives, which breeds unquietness in the Queen and occasions the like in my Lord" (43).[12] In the same letter Whyte also highlights a similar weakness in Essex's close associate, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton (1573-1624), who "doth with too much familiarity court the fair Mistress Vernon [Essex's cousin whom he eventually married in August 1598], while his friends observing the Queen's humors towards my Lord of Essex do what they can to bring her to favour him, but "'tis yet in vain" (43). It seems likely that Whyte chose to report these scandals to Sidney as a veiled warning to his employer who depended heavily upon female relatives, friends and sympathizers in his attempts to solicit personal favour and leave from Flushing from the queen. On 27 February 1597, for example, he advised Sidney:

> Yesterday a principal follower of my Lord of Essex told me that he saw two letters of yours sealed with gold and the broad arrowhead directly to two of the maids, and that a knight who was too open had the charge to deliver them. I think it was told me of purpose because I should take notice of it. I humbly take my leave. (159)

Despite Whyte's respectful phrasing, this is a remarkably blunt warning for a servant to deliver to his employer and indicative of the deep trust which existed between the two men.

[12] Whyte refers here to Sir William Cornwallis (c.1551-1611) rather than to his nephew, the more famous essayist Sir William Cornwallis (c.1579-1614), who was not knighted until August 1599.

For much of the period covered by his surviving correspondence, Whyte had regular personal access to the Earl of Essex and was also used by him to ensure the safe delivery of his own correspondence with Sidney while he was based at Flushing. With his own letter of 27 September 1595 Whyte enclosed "a packet from my Lord of Essex" (46) and in his report sent on the following day, another "great packet of letters from my Lord of Essex" (49).[13] In the latter letter he also quietly noted that "[m]y Lady of Essex is with child" (49), an apparently casual remark which would have indicated to Sidney far more than a mere snippet of family gossip. Given that Essex's siring of an illegitimate child with Elizabeth Southwell had only been exposed in the previous May, this reference would have confirmed to Sidney that Essex and his wife were once again on intimate terms and that he could again approach her with some confidence in soliciting her husband's support for his own personal interests and official duties. This link, of course, had long been of crucial importance to Sidney since Essex's wife was Frances Walsingham who was not only the widow of his elder brother Sir Philip but also the daughter of the Sidneys' long-term friends, Sir Francis and Ursula St. Barbe Walsingham. Frances, Countess of Essex, was to prove a loyal, if long-suffering, wife to Robert Devereux and a much loved member of the Sidney family circle.

During autumn 1595 Robert Sidney depended heavily upon Essex, via Whyte as his trusted intermediary, for his personal support in attempting to persuade Queen Elizabeth to increase his munitions and essential supplies at Flushing and also to solicit for leave from this onerous and isolating posting. On 1 October 1595 Whyte cryptically observed of Essex's current potency at court: "His favor continues, *quamdiu se bene gesserit*" (52). This quasi-legal Latin phrase, meaning "as long as he will do well," seems to carry veiled advice to Sidney that he should continue to cultivate Essex only as long as his high but precarious favour with the queen was sustained—an implicit early warning which, in retrospect, seems especially prescient. But, for the moment at least, Essex was regarded by both Sidney and Whyte as the former's most influential ally at the English court. Consequently, on 6 October Whyte duly reported that "the Queen said she would bid my Lord of Essex write unto you to deal with the States to supply you of all wants [at Flushing]"; and "[f]or your Lordship's leave I have offered some speech of it to my Lord of Essex" (56-7). On 8

[13] These letters from Essex to Sidney are lost.

October Whyte noted that he had delivered Sidney's letter to "my Lord Treasurer" (Burghley) and "sent my Lord Essex his letter" (57). He also duly enclosed "a packet from … my Lord of Essex" (58), relating to Flushing munitions and Sidney's desired leave. He then promised to liaise personally with Essex, "my Lord Admiral" (Charles Lord Howard of Effingham, a cousin of Sidney's wife, Barbara, and one of their most loyal and influential supporters at court) and "the rest of your Honor's friends" (58), including Lord Rich, the husband of Essex's sister Penelope (Sir Philip Sidney's "Stella"), for whom he had also left a letter at Essex House (59). As a mere family servant, albeit an unusually talented and socially adept one, Whyte clearly enjoyed an invaluable level of personal access to most of those high-ranking individuals at court who mattered most to Robert Sidney during his exile at Flushing.

Communicating court and personal affairs by correspondence was often a fraught and dangerous process at this period. Although Whyte occasionally used simple ciphers to conceal the identity of individuals, a key consideration remained the security and safe delivery of letters to their intended recipients without covert interception or unexplained loss. Essex himself was very much aware of such dangers and on 15 October 1595 Whyte reported:

> [H]e asked me if I knew any trusty messenger going towards you. I told him that I used to send letters very safe by skippers of Flushing, and sometimes by other passengers of good credit, but if his Lordship had any occasion to impart unto your Lordship any matter of weight, I would either myself be the messenger or send one of your Lordship's own followers that should be honest and careful; he willed me to attend him at court upon Friday next which I will not fail to do. (62)[14]

On 18 October Whyte noted: "My Lord of Essex promises to write somewhat that he would have sent carefully and safely. I do attend it" (65). On the next day he duly reported (66) to Sidney that Essex had just sent a letter to him via Roger Manners (1576-1612), the young Earl of Rutland, who was then setting out to travel via the Low Countries on a continental tour (and in early 1599 was to

[14] Essex may have been intending to reply to Sidney's most recent letter. HMC Salisbury, V.408-9 (CP 20/42, 12 October). Sidney also wrote to Essex four days later, V.417 (CP20/56, 16 October).

marry Elizabeth Sidney, Sir Philip Sidney's daughter and Essex's step-daughter). By 29 October Whyte was able to report that he had met Essex at court who told him that he had just written to Sidney "and had sent it to the post who hath undertaken to deliver it safely." This letter apparently explained, presumably drawing upon Whyte's personal conversation with Essex, how "the wants of Flushing were argued and disputed at Council Table and so thought necessary that powder be sent." Less positively, Essex also advised Whyte that the moment was not yet ripe for requesting leave for Sidney from the queen but that "his care was and should be to find some occasion for her Majesty to call you home for a while" (69). Always alert to the dangers inherent in such covert correspondence, Whyte pointedly noted on 3 November: "[M]y Lord of Essex burnt your letter I gave him and promises to write" (75)— a clear warning that Sidney's letter, if it had fallen into the wrong hands, could have proved harmful to him at court.

Within the next two days, however, Essex experienced an unexpected blow to his relationship with Elizabeth. On 5 November Whyte described how court gossip was "full of unquietness" because the queen had angrily shown to Essex a copy of a recently circulated printed tract, *A Conference on the Next Succession to the Crown of England*, which contained a fulsome dedication to Essex, thereby implying that he supported its dangerous speculations on who might succeed Elizabeth. To make matters worse, its anonymous author, who used the pseudonym "R. Doleman" (most likely the Jesuit Robert Parsons who had either personally composed or arranged for the circulation of this tract claimed to be written from Amsterdam), insisted that Essex had previously been a generous patron of his friends and that no other man at court was better suited to be involved in deciding the succession.[15] This publication also offered "dangerous praises" of Essex's "valor and worthiness" and, as Whyte noted, "doth him harm here." For several days Essex remained "exceedingly troubled at this great villainy done unto him" and was reported to be "sick and continues very ill" (76) since, understandably, he feared that it would aggravate his deteriorating relationship with Lord Burghley and alienate him entirely from the queen's affections. Whyte concluded his report with some wise advice for Sidney who probably wished to obtain a copy of this controversial tract: "The book I spake of is dedicated to my Lord Essex, and

[15] Robert Lacey, *Robert Earl of Essex: An Elizabethan Icarus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 126-8. This papist propaganda tract prefigured the even greater scandal occasioned four years later by John Hayward's *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry IV*, 1599 (discussed later in this article).

printed beyond sea, and 'tis thought to be treason to have it. To write of these things are dangerous in so perilous a time" (78). By 12 November, however, he was able to report that Essex had begun to "put off the melancholy" occasioned by the publication of *A Conference* because the queen had generously confirmed her continuing trust and belief in his loyalty by sending to him various items of diplomatic foreign correspondence and instructing him to issue replies on her behalf (83).[16]

The imminent Accession Day Tilts on 17 November at Greenwich provided Essex with an ideal opportunity to reassert his loyalty and personal devotion to his monarch. Whyte duly provided Sidney on 22 November with a detailed, and presumably first-hand, account of the earl's ostentatious display which readily communicates the carefully stage-managed calculations behind Essex's performances:

> My Lord of Essex's device is much commended in these late triumphs. Some pretty while before he came in himself to the tilt, he sent his page with some speech to the Queen who returned with her Majesty's glove. And when he came himself he was met with an old hermit, a secretary of state, a brave soldier, and an esquire. The first presented him with a book of meditations, the second with politic discourses, the third with orations of brave-fought battles, the fourth was but his own follower, to whom to other 3 imparted much of their purpose before his coming in. But as now one, now another devised with him, persuading him to this and that course of life according to their inclinations … And with this dumb show our eyes were fed for some time. In the after-supper before the Queen, the first delivered a well-penned speech to move this worthy Knight to leave his vain following of love and to betake him to heavenly meditation, the secretary's all tending to have him follow matters of state, the soldier's persuading him to the war, but the esquire answered them all, and concluded, with an excellent but too plain English, that this knight would never forsake

[16] Sidney had continued to write regularly from Flushing to Essex during this troubled period. HMC Salisbury V.440-2 (CP 35/105, 6 November); V.442 (CP 20/72, 6 November); V.443 (CP 20/74, 8 November); V.450 (CP 20/78; 12 November); and V.456-7 (CP 20/80, 13 November).

> his mistress's love, whose virtue made all his thoughts divine, whose wisdom taught him all true policy, whose beauty and worth were at all times able to make him fit to command armies. He showed all the defects and imperfections of all their lives and therefore thought his course of life to be best in serving his mistress … The world makes many untrue constructions of those speeches, comparing the Hermit and the Secretary to two of the Lords, and the Soldier to Sir Roger Williams but the Queen said that if she had thought there had been so much said of her, she would not have been there that night, and so went to bed. (88)[17]

This letter also contained another more sombre warning to Sidney when Whyte remarked: "I fear me there is like to grow great unkindness between 1000 [Earl of Essex] and 2000 [Earl of Pembroke]. When I know the true cause, I will advertise your Lordship" (89).[18] This news would have been worrying for Sidney since Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke and the husband of his sister Mary, was, along with Essex and Lord Howard of Effingham, one of his most loyal and determined supporters at court.

Whyte also assiduously continued to seek supporters at court for Sidney's repeated requests for some leave from his governorship at Flushing. On 22 November 1595 he gloomily reported:

> My Lord of Essex told me in the presence of Mr. Massinger [Arthur, the father of the dramatist Philip] that he could do no good in the earth for your return: but my confidence is in my Lord Treasurer [Burghley] and my Lord Admiral [Howard of Effingham] and Sir Robert Cecil who promise to take a fit time to move her Majesty about it. (90)

[17] Sidney clearly expected as detailed as possible account of Essex's performance from Whyte. Similarly, in 1596 Whyte paid 2s 6d in order to send a copy to Sidney of a speech made by Essex before Queen Elizabeth. Centre for Kentish Studies, U1475, A.38/5 (formerly A39, containing Whyte's personal accounts for Sidney as Governor of Flushing, May 1596-March 1598), cited in Paul E.J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 202.

[18] This dispute was over their respective claims to the estate of Norwood Park, Nottinghamshire. See also Whyte, *Letters*, 100, 111, 117 and 123.

But only the next day, Whyte noted that Essex had called him over during dinner and lamented: "By God, I cannot persuade the Queen to give your master leave to return, though I told her, that he was troubled with an ague which might prove dangerous, and that it concerned him for to settle his own fortune to be here" (92).[19] Whyte also regularly sought advice on this matter from Anne Russell Dudley (1548/9-1604), the widow of Sidney's uncle, Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, but she repeated the advice that only Burghley had enough influence with the queen to persuade her to grant Sidney's request for leave (97). By 2 December Whyte was reiterating this sage council to his employer: "Your leave being denied to my Lord of Essex, I am advised not to [have] it moved again, but [by] my Lord Treasurer" (104); and on 7 December he noted: "I hear by diverse that the Queen was very angry when my Lord of Essex moved her for you" (110).[20] Nevertheless, Whyte continued to liaise closely with Essex, passing on another of his letters to Sidney on 20 December (122-3) and noting that on Christmas Eve 1595, Lady Essex spent three happy hours in the company of Barbara Gamage Sidney (128). The year 1595 drew to a close with the Earl of Essex, as Whyte's correspondence demonstrates, as still one of Robert Sidney's most influential and responsive allies at the royal court.

September 1596 – June 1597

There is a gap in Whyte's letters from early January until mid-September 1596 because Sidney was away from Flushing from 12 January until 29 August and, while back in England, would have been in regular personal contact with Whyte, the Earl of Essex and other key allies at court.[21] He would have witnessed how the first half of 1596 was marked by Essex's increasingly militaristic stance against the more cautious and financially minded international perspectives of both Queen Elizabeth and Burghley. While they sought to withdraw all remaining English troops from France, Essex was still actively cultivating his contacts with King Henri IV, arguing that only a strong Anglo-French and Dutch alliance could protect England from the ever-present threat of Catholic

[19] Sidney was himself also writing to Essex about his request for leave. HMC Salisbury, V.473-4 (CP 20/86, 27 November).

[20] See also Sidney's own letters to Essex, HMC Salisbury, V.494-5 (CP 20/93, 12 December); V.507 (CP 20/101, 23 or 25 December); and V.554-5 (CP 48/50, undated).

[21] Hay, *The Life of Robert Sidney*, 138.

Spain. Convinced that the Spanish were planning a major invasion (a theory conveniently fuelled by a minor Spanish incursion in Cornwall in late July 1595), Essex consistently argued for a bold pre-emptive strike against Spain. Eventually, an English naval force, led jointly by Essex and the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard of Effingham, left Plymouth on 3 June 1596. On 23 June it destroyed the Spanish fleet moored at Cadiz and successfully stormed, ransacked and torched the city, with Essex prominently leading both the naval assault and the land forces. Despite Essex's strategic plan to hold Cadiz as a permanent English fortification, the Lord Admiral insisted that the queen's specific orders against this stratagem should be adhered to and, ultimately, no military advantage was gained from this expedition. Indeed, it was entirely counter-productive from a military perspective since it so inflamed nationalist outrage in Spain that Philip II was prompted to launch a naval counter-attack in October which was only dispersed by bad weather. Panic over a Spanish invasion escalated during the rest of 1596 and Essex was able to cash in on these anxieties by playing a prominent role in supervising English defenses.

As soon as Sidney arrived back at Flushing he began writing again to Essex on 29 August.[22] Whyte's letters also resumed and on 23 September he issued a gentle reminder that Sidney's notoriously unclear handwriting was so difficult to decipher that most of his regular correspondents, with the notable exception of Essex, were asking Whyte to advise his employer to write more clearly (135). On the following day, Whyte noted that "my Lord of Essex gives great attendance here and is most careful to please and observe her Majesty's humors" (137) and that he, the Dowager Countess of Warwick and Sir Edward Dyer (the close friend of Robert's elder brother Sir Philip) were all actively working for Sidney's interests at court (138-9). Significantly, Whyte also spotted a potential role for Sidney as a mediator in the ever-present tensions between Essex and Sir Robert Cecil who, he remarked, "would very gladly be reconciled to 1000 [Essex] and now doth want such a peacemaker as you are" (140). Unfortunately, Whyte does not disclose how he came by this intriguing speculation unless, of course, it was Sir Robert Cecil himself who was now viewing Whyte as a useful intermediary with Essex. Nothing, however, came of this plan and Whyte probably saw much less of Essex during the remainder of 1596 when he was

[22] See HMC Salisbury, VI.353-4 (CP 44/28, 29 August); VI.364 (CP 44/49, 2 September); VI.383-4 (CP 44/87, 12 September); VI.391 (CP 44/108, 18 September); and VI.398 (CP 45/5, 24 September).

heavily preoccupied with English coastal fortifications against an anticipated Spanish invasion.[23]

Essex was prone to bouts of severe depression and stress-induced illness and by mid-February 1597, when it was apparent that his militaristic ambitions had been thwarted by the queen, Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil, he was clearly in a bad physical and mental state.[24] On 18 February Whyte reported, clearly at second-hand, that he had:

> kept his chamber and few have access unto him. He is said to be troubled with a looseness. Her Majesty visited him yesterday in the forenoon. Something there is that occasions this melancholy … What it is truly I cannot learn. I hear that the Queen uses him very graciously in his own person, but in all other things his desires prevail little, either in matters of great or little moment. (149)

At this period Sidney was actively lobbying to be considered for both the position of Lord Chamberlain of the Royal Household and the wardenship of the Cinque Ports since the incumbent of both posts, William Brooke, Lord Cobham, was dying. He was desperate to engage Essex's personal assistance (149), even sending an unsolicited gift of a wild boar to Essex House (151). They had also been secretly corresponding about this matter and on 21 February Whyte assured Sidney that Essex had, as requested, immediately burnt one of his letters after reading it (153). With Sidney so distanced from day-to-day court life, Whyte's tactical advice was proving absolutely crucial:

[23] Sidney, however, continued to be in regular personal contact with Essex via their correspondence for the remainder of 1596. HMC Salisbury, VI.438-9 (CP 45/79, 16 October); VI.446 (CP 45/93, 20 October); VI.448 (CP 45/97, 22 October); VI.452-3 (CP 45/105, 24 October); V.455 (CP 46/2, 26 October); VI.469-70 (CP 48/34, 3 November); VI.470 (CP 46/35, 3 November); VI.498 (CP 46/84, ? November) Lambeth Palace MS 660/138-9 (23 and 26 November); HMC Salisbury, VI.501-2 (CP 46/90, 2 December); VI.502 (CP 46/93, 2 December); VI.507-8 (CP 46/105, 5 December); VI.519 (CP 47/20, 12[?] December); VI.533 (CP 47/47, 12 December); and (probably to Essex) VI.537-8 (CP 47/52, 27 December).

[24] Sidney continued to keep in personal and frequent touch with Essex during January and early February 1597. HMC Salisbury, VII.12 (CP 37/59, 9 January); VII.13 (CP 37/61, 9 January); VII.27 (CP37/38, 10 January); VII.17 (CP 37/64, 11 January); VII.31 (CP 37/83, 21(?) January); VII.31-2 (CP 37/84, 21 January); VII.37 (CP37/99, 24 January); VII.44 (CP38/5, 28 January); VII.54 (CP38/16, 1 February); VII.56 (CP 38/20, 3 February); VII.62-3 (CP 38/33, 14 February); VII.83 (CP 38/63, 17(?) February); VII.81 (CP 173/47, 24 February); and VII.86 (CP 38/69, (?) February).

> Where you will find an assured friend to deal in this matter for you is the principal care. You know well enough how all they that have access to her Majesty are inclined. If my Lord of Essex would deal *tanquam pro se ipso* [as if for himself], he were the fittest man of all others, because fear to offend might make others fearful to deal for you. I beseech your Lordship pardon me for this overboldness I take in delivering my opinion unto you. Your Lordship's own wisdom can best tell what to do in it. (153-4)

Despite this shrewd suggestion, Whyte's personal frustrations in dealing with the increasingly unpredictable Essex often surfaced in his reports to his employer, as is apparent in his pointed phrasing in the conclusion of the same letter: "[Y]ou will me to attend my Lord of Essex's pleasure; I will do it by showing of myself every day unto him when he is to be seen" (154). On 22 February he noted that Essex had remained in bed for most of the previous day but that "one of his chamber tell me, he could not weep for it, for he knew his Lord was not sick." The queen was still regularly enquiring after his health and visiting him. Whyte was determined to "find some means to speak with him" about Sidney's suits. The inherent difficulties in this sustained long-distance communication between Whyte and his employer are also eloquently expressed in his apology for this necessary level of independent initiative: "I trust your Lordship will pardon me for it, though I be not warranted by your letters to do it. For much time is lost in staying for directions from you in such a case. I will keep it secret from all the world else" (154-5). Eventually, on 25 February Essex ventured out of his chamber "in his gown and night cap" and promised Whyte that he would write to Sidney (155-6). Two days later, Whyte again met with Essex in his private chamber and he promised to pursue the post of Lord Chamberlain for Sidney (157), although he still remained "so indisposed with melancholy" (161).

During March 1597 Essex made another concerted attempt to re-establish his former potency at court. Sir Walter Ralegh (a cousin of Robert Sidney's wife, Barbara) became involved in supposedly mediating more amicable relations between Essex and Sir Robert Cecil who, much to Essex's annoyance, had been appointed on 5 July 1596 as Secretary of State while Essex was away on the Cadiz expedition (163). Whyte continued to press Essex to put Sidney forward for the wardenship of the Cinque Ports but when he did so, as Whyte reported on 7 March, the

queen's "answer was that he is too young for such an office" and that, being still Governor of Flushing, he "could not be present to answer every sudden danger of the Ports" (166). Ironically, and much to Whyte's annoyance, it then became known on 8 March that Essex had nominated himself for this post but the queen still seemed set on appointing Henry Brooke, the new Lord Cobham. Sir Robert Cecil was also seeking to instigate this appointment since Brooke's sister, Elizabeth, was his wife. Essex threatened to storm out of the court but, as compensation, Elizabeth unexpectedly appointed him as Master of the Ordnance, a military post which Whyte recorded on 12 March, "he hath accepted and receives contentment by it."

Sidney then wrote personally to Essex in a letter which Whyte delivered on 16 March, pleading again for his support for securing the Cinque Ports now that he had landed the Ordnance for himself (175).[25] The sheer difficulty of accessing the queen's attention is eloquently demonstrated in Whyte's letter of 19 March when he details to Sidney how Essex had recommended that the Dowager Countess of Warwick would be the best person to present to the queen Sidney's personal letter seeking this post. But Lady Warwick turned out to be away from court and so Whyte then approached Sidney's aunt, Katherine Dudley Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon. Unfortunately, she was also planning to be away and, unhelpfully, recommended that Whyte should ask Essex to deliver the letter. Essex, however, was "somewhat sick" and again confined to his chamber and so his sister, Penelope, Lady Rich, agreed to present it to the queen. But she also failed to act on this promise and eventually Sidney's wife, Barbara, managed to persuade Lady Scudamore (an influential lady of the queen's privy chamber) to give the letter to Elizabeth. Despite these concerted efforts, the queen seemed, as Lady Scudamore reported, distinctly unimpressed by Sidney's suit and he remained no nearer to gaining the wardenship (178-9).

April and May 1597 proved just as frustrating months as March for both Whyte and his employer. On 3 April Whyte reported that Essex had been confined to his chamber yet again,

[25] Sidney sustained his intense level of correspondence with Essex over this appointment throughout late February March 1597. HMC Salisbury, VII.119 (CP 39/33, 10 March); VII.108-9 (CP39/6, 12 March); VII.109 (CP 39/8, 12 March); VII.115 (CP 39/17, 15 March); VII.116 (CP 39/21, 16 March); and VII.132-4 (CP 49/79-80, 28 March). Two letters (originals lost) from Essex to Sidney are also recorded in *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place*, 6 vols. (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925-66), II.235, 242.

this time "troubled with a great heat in the mouth, which happened by overmuch exercise at balloon" (187), a game played with an inflated leather ball struck by the forearm. Although Whyte was also actively canvassing support from Essex's wife, the earl now seemed largely preoccupied with his latest attempt to launch a pre-emptive attack on Spain. On 4 April he reported that Essex had mentioned to him that he was still keen to promote Sidney's request for leave from Flushing and his suit for the Cinque Ports (190) but Whyte's tone now seemed distinctly unoptimistic over any likely success. Instead, acting on his own initiative, Whyte came up with a new, if soon aborted, stratagem:

> I took occasion to move this to my Lord of Essex, that seeing your Lordship could have no preferment at home, I besought him as from myself to consider if it would not be a good reputation for you to be general of the whole troop now remaining and to go to France. His answer was that he saw no likelihood of any more to go, and thought it no fit command for you. And this was all he said unto me, which I am bold to impart unto you, and I trust you will not be offended withal, seeing I no kind of way engage you in it, being a mere motion of mine own. (192)[26]

While Lady Essex remained loyally supportive towards Sidney, and requested that Whyte should find her a "trusty messenger" so that she could write of "some secret" to him (194), Essex's absorption in his military preparations meant that he "hath yet no leisure to hear" Whyte's various supplications on behalf of his employer (194). By 16 April Whyte's growing frustrations were increasingly evident in his letters, even though he pointedly remarked: "I will not complain of the attendance I give upon him, and the time I lose by it. I have oft craved audience in your behalf,

[26] For further discussion of Essex's sometimes self-interested handling of Sidney's suit for the Cinque Ports, see D. McKeen, *A Memory of Honour: The Life of William Brooke, Lord Cobham*, 2 vols. (Salzburg: Salzburg Studies in English Literature, cviii, 1986), II.688-94; and Hammer, *Robert Devereux*, 325. Both of these sources argue that Essex's genuine friendship with Sidney was balanced by his personal dislike of the younger Lord Cobham and his desire to spite any rivals who opposed his preferences. It seems likely that Essex spun out Sidney's hopes of gaining the Cinque Ports long after he realised that the queen was fixed in her decision to award the post to the younger Lord Cobham.

that at leastwise I might but know his opinion, and be directed by him" (200).[27]

At a dinner held at Essex House on 18 April and attended by Sir Robert Cecil, the Lord Admiral and Ralegh, Essex finally received authorization to launch another military venture which aimed at seizing and securing a port in Spain. Whyte was also delighted to find that he could again personally access the earl and proudly advised Sidney: "This morning, the 19 of April I had audience with my Lord of Essex at Walsingham House" (203). But such hopes were short-lived and, as "martial men flock continually about him" (207), Essex found little time to focus on Sidney's needs. Instead, Whyte sought assistance from both the Countess of Essex and Sir Edward Dyer but neither had any significant influence with the queen or ability to access her personally. Once more attempting to solicit Essex's support on 17 May, Whyte reported that he had personally delivered to him Sidney's letter "about the wants of Flushing" and that he had carefully read through it over dinner and promised to "acquaint the Queen withal" (228). But even this attempt had ground to a halt by 19 May when Essex confirmed that he had passed on this information to Elizabeth but already knew that she had "no time to peruse it" (229). By 27 May, when it was publicly known that Essex would have overall command of this latest military venture, there seemed little chance that he would be able to do anything useful for Sidney at court; and on 29 May Whyte reported that the Countess of Essex had told a concerned Barbara Gamage Sidney that Essex would like Sidney to join him on the forthcoming voyage (242). By about 4 June (the date on this letter is unclear), Whyte had clearly decided that Essex, at least temporarily, could no longer be counted on as a productive ally at court and bluntly advised his employer: "You made very ill choice of my Lord of Essex to deal in it with the Queen considering the time and his intentions otherwise" (244).[28] It is noticeable that Sidney's personal letters to

[27] Sidney's personal correspondence with Essex continued unabated during April 1597. HMC Salisbury, VII.140 (CP 49/75, 2 April); VII.156 (CP 50.11, 12(?) April); VII.158 (CP50/15, 14[?] April); VII.164 (CP 50/60, 19 April); VII.176-7 (CP 50/52, 54, 27 April); VII.180 (CP 50/62, 29 (?) April); VII.181 (CP 50/65, (?) April); and TNA SP 84/54 (28 April).

[28] Sidney personally corresponded with Essex during May and early June 1597, with his last letter dated 8 June. HMC Salisbury, VII.192 (CP 50/95, 9 May); VII.198-9 (CP 50/106-7, 12 May); VII.201 (CP 51/1, 16 May); VII.207-8 (CP 51/15, 21 May); VII.201-11 (CP 51/24-5, 24 May); VII.217 (CP 51/36, 27 May); VII.222 (CP 51/46, 30 May); VII.225 (CP 51/55, 31 May); VII.228-9 (CP 51/62, 1 June); VII.243-4 (CP 51/92, 6 June); VII.245 (CP 51/98-9, 7 June); and VII.248 (CP 51/103, 8 June).

the earl seem to have abruptly ceased in June after his receipt of Whyte's brusque advice over Essex being an "ill choice" as an intermediary. After this date, Sidney addressed his letters about Flushing and his various suits mainly to Burghley and Sir Robert Cecil and seemed only to have resumed a distinctly sporadic personal correspondence with Essex in November 1597.[29]

October 1597 – March 1598

Apart from one short note, dated 28 July, there is an unexplained gap (perhaps because the loss or deliberate destruction of some letters) in Whyte's correspondence between 3 June and 4 October 1597. Essex's expedition sailed from Plymouth on 10 July but was soon driven back to port by storms. When the fleet again departed on 17 August, the earl's preferred stratagem of seizing a Spanish port had been dropped in favour of a privateering venture to ambush the Spanish New World silver fleet at the Azores. Whyte reported on 9 October: "Here are letters come this morning from my Lord of Essex that he with his whole fleet are all met at Terceira and in good health and that he purposes not to be at home yet this 6 weeks" (251). By 23 October Whyte had realised that Sidney's suits, which now also included the pursuit of a barony, must wait since "nothing will be done till the Earl of Essex return" (260). On 28 October he was able to report that Essex's own letters had arrived at court, notifying the queen of his safe landing at Plymouth. These missives claimed that the Azores expedition had been a great success and that Essex was planning merely to resupply his ships before putting to sea again (265) since "the Spanish fleet was said to be upon our coast" near Falmouth (266). In reality, however, this voyage had proved spectacularly unsuccessful since Essex's command had been marred by repeated clashes with Ralegh, and the English forces had managed to miss the Spanish treasure fleet at Terceira by only three hours. Although local storms soon dispersed the Spanish fleet off Falmouth, Essex's military reputation was significantly damaged when the queen realised that his expensive Azores expedition (which financially ruined several of its leading sponsors) had brought no substantial gains to the royal coffers. As Whyte duly reported on 5 November 1597 of current court gossip:

[29] HMC Salisbury, VII.475-6 (CP 57/4, 9 November); and VII.492 (CP 57/45, 24 November). It is possible that other letters from Sidney to Essex sent during June have been lost and, of course, he was away from communications on the Azores voyage from early July until late October.

> For himself [Essex] he is already disquieted, for this day he keeps in and went not to the Parliament, and I heard her Majesty is not well pleased with him for his service at sea, wherein it is alleged he might have done more than he did. Moreover, I hear that his proceedings towards Sir Walter Ralegh in calling his actions to public question before a Council of War, when his life was by a full court found worthy of death, is greatly misliked here. Sir Walter Ralegh is happy to have so good and constant friends that are able by their wisdom and authority to protect him and comfort him." (268)

Essex's personal insecurities were severely aggravated when on 22 October 1597 Elizabeth created the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard of Effingham, as Earl of Nottingham. Although Howard was one of her oldest and most trusted courtiers and friends, Essex took his elevation as a personal affront to his own military authority, interpreting it as a tacit crediting to Howard of the successful storming of Cadiz in the previous year. He petulantly withdrew from court on 9 November and Whyte's growing skepticism over Essex's uncertain position clearly seeps into his account of 20 December to Sidney of this embarrassing debacle:

> I hear that my Lord Essex desires to have right done unto him, either by a commission to examine it, or by combat either against the Earl of Nottingham himself, or any of his sons, or of his name that will defend it, or that her Majesty will please to see the wrong done unto him, and so will he suffer himself to be commanded by her as she please herself. Here is such ado about it, as it troubles this place and all other proceedings. Sir Walter Ralegh is employed by the Queen to end this quarrel and to make an atonement between them. (270)

It would be interesting to know Whyte's personal source (or sources) for this clearly well informed second-hand report but, as usual, he is characteristically reticent with this kind of information when detailing to Sidney such controversial developments. Rumours then spread at court that the queen would seek to appease Essex by creating him Earl Marshal but Whyte drily noted: "I see no appearance of it" (271), even though Elizabeth finally gave way

and granted him this post on 28 December. Henceforth Whyte's letters to Sidney often implicitly communicate just how dangerous it was for his employer to have to depend for his own interests so much upon this volatile and unpredictable figure.

Nevertheless, in January 1598 Essex and his wife still seemed to be seeking actively to support Robert Sidney, perhaps because the earl realised just how few genuine allies he still had at court.[30] On 19 January Whyte reported that Ralegh, now an implacable opponent of Essex, was seeking the Lord Chamberlain's post but that the earl was determined that it should go instead to Sidney (275); and on 25 January Whyte reported: "My Lady of Essex doth exceedingly love you, and protests that she desires nothing so much, as your being here with honor, that she knows my Lord Essex loves you more than any friend he hath" (280). On 1 February Whyte noted that Essex had again raised the issue of Sidney's barony with the queen (283) and also hoped to have him appointed as Vice-Chamberlain, concluding: "I did never know his Lordship deal so roundly and carefully in anything as he doth in this for you" (284). On the next day, Whyte assured Sidney that he was "every part of the day in my Lord of Essex's eye" (286) and that the now pregnant Countess of Essex was still assiduously "careful of you and your business" (287). Sir Robert Cecil was obliged to be abroad, conferring with the French and Dutch, between mid-February and late April 1598, and Essex took over much of his official paperwork and, as Whyte noted on 23 February, "doth exceedingly please the Queen by his diligence and care of her business" (299).[31]

A temporary problem arose when Essex's mother, the Dowager Countess of Leicester, came to court and sought to meet with the queen, who had never forgiven her for secretly marrying in 1578 Essex's step-father, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Whyte clearly regretted this lady's arrival since it was impeding attempts to solicit royal favour for Sidney and he wrote on 1 March: "It had been better it had not been moved, for my Lord of Essex by importuning the Queen in these unpleasing matters foreslows [neglects or hinders] the opportunity he might take to do good unto his ancient friends" (304). On the following day,

[30] Sidney also resumed a more regular correspondence with Essex during January 1598. HMC Salisbury, VIII.11 (CP 48/85, 10 January); VIII.22 (CP 174/109, 21/22 January); VIII.25 (CP 174/113, 25 January); and VIII.29-30 (CP 174/115-16, 29 January).

[31] In February 1598 Sidney seems to have written less frequently to Essex. HMC Salisbury, VIII.53-5 (CP 174/127, 129, 17 February); and VIII.56 (CP 174/134, 20 February).

however, Elizabeth relented and her apparent graciousness to Lady Leicester endowed Essex himself with added aura of confidence:

> My Lady Leicester was at court, kissed the Queen's hands and her breast, and did embrace her, and the Queen kissed her. My Lord of Essex is in exceeding favor here and you most bound unto him … My Lord of Essex read all your 4 letters, and burnt 3 of them and so he bid me tell you. The other he imparted to the Queen which hath brought you over. (306)[32]

Sidney had also finally been granted some home leave. He arrived back in England in late March 1598 and did not return to Flushing until early August 1599, resulting in another significant hiatus in Whyte's informative correspondence with his employer.[33]

August 1599 – October 1599

Soon after Sir Robert Cecil's return to England, the Franco-Spanish peace treaty signed at Vervins on 2 May 1598 had effectively neutralized Essex's identity as the leader of a militant court faction. Both Elizabeth and Burghley, however, suspected that he was still striving to embroil England in European conflicts and he was obliged to write an "Apologie," drafted as a private letter to Anthony Bacon and widely disseminated in manuscript. It claimed that Essex was innocent of the "ugly and odious aspersion" that he sought "to keepe the state of England in continuall warre" and mounted a strident defense of his own policies.[34] A crisis point was reached when at a meeting held on 30 June 1598 Elizabeth proposed to appoint Sir William Knollys, Essex's uncle and one of his most staunch supporters, as Lord Deputy of Ireland. Keen to keep Knollys at court, the earl instead suggested Sir George Carew, a close ally of the Cecils, and was angered by Elizabeth's outright dismissal of this proposal. In a gross breach of royal protocol, he turned his back on the queen and she angrily struck him on the head. He impetuously reached for his

[32] Although Whyte duly reported that Essex had burnt three of Sidney's letters, even including this kind of information in his own correspondence was highly dangerous. If Whyte's letter had been intercepted, his comment could have reflected very badly, at least to hostile eyes at court, on the potential contents of Sidney's personal correspondence with Essex.

[33] Clearly, Sidney could also be in regular personal contact with Essex during this period, although he did write at least two letters to him from London in late October. HMC Salisbury, VIII.414 (CP 65/10, 177/137, 30 October).

[34] Quoted in "Robert Devereux," *ODNB*. The "Apologie" was first printed in 1603.

sword and had to be restrained by his former co-commander on the Cadiz expedition, the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham. According to one account, he even rebuked the queen with the dismissive comment that "she was as crooked in her disposition as in her carcass."[35]

Astonishingly, Essex's inevitable withdrawal from court was short-lived since it seemed that neither the queen nor the Council could function efficiently without him. By August 1598 he was again involved, as Master of the Ordnance, in official discussions over the escalating military emergency in Ireland. After a convenient bout of fever, which enabled Elizabeth to act solicitously and even affectionately towards him, he resumed his seat at the council table on 10 September and was confirmed as the new Lord Deputy of Ireland on 30 December 1598. He finally arrived in Ireland on 14 April 1599 but his plans to crush the Earl of Tyrone's rebellion rapidly disintegrated through inadequate forces and the unexpectedly fierce resistance of the Irish. Predictably, Elizabeth was soon enraged by Essex's expenditure, profligacy with knighthoods and demands for ever more men and munitions. But he had already realised that a rapid suppression of the Irish was impossible and on 7 September Essex met with Tyrone and, contrary to the queen's orders, hastily negotiated a military truce.

Whyte's letters resume in early August 1599 and provide a fascinating narrative of these military events and Essex's personal position. On 4 August he noted that active preparations were being made in England "to withstand the Spanish invasion" (312); and on the following day he reported (but without citing his source):

> Here is newly come news from my Lord of Essex that he hath given some pretty overthrow to the rebel at Offaly, and that part of Connaught is revolted from the rebel and come to her Majesty's obedience. (314)

But by 18 August the news from Ireland was both more realistic and depressing for Essex's supporters at court. Whyte's curt commentary carried a clear warning for Sidney over the earl's now perilous status with the queen and her most trusted advisors:

[35] Quoted in "Robert Deverux," *ODNB*.

> We say also that my Lord of Essex hath yet done little or nothing, having made no war upon the greatest rebel in the north. It should seem my Lord himself hears of it, for I saw an apology he made of his own doings, and then your Lordship may judge in what state a man stands that is forced to do that. (320)

Given Whyte's own renowned facility with the pen, it would be fascinating to know whether he had merely seen a copy of this apology circulated at court or whether the Earl had even sought his advice while drafting it. On 24 August Whyte noted that Essex had sent a messenger to the queen "to make known the miserable state of that country" (321); and by 1 September he could only lament to Sidney: "What misery Ireland suffers by this rebellion, I made known in my last" (326).

Whyte no longer had any doubts over how dangerous Sidney's long-term intimacy with Essex had become to his reputation at court and in a letter of 12 September, which is striking for its blending of bluntness with sagacity, he counselled his employer:

> My Lord, though you have some friends here that are content to use you kindly in ordinary courtesies, I find none that you may boldly rely upon in any matter of honor or preferment unto you, for I was told by one that observes much here, that the hindrance of your good is the doubt they have of you, who hath been for many years most inward and great in all secrecy and factiously great with the Earl of Essex, that you are not to be trusted. (330)

He also noted that the familiar "unkindness" between Essex and Sir Robert Cecil had "grown to extremity" and that the ever impetuous earl "in his discontentments uses speeches, that may be dangerous and hurtful to his safety" (331). Clearly, in Whyte's eyes, the Earl of Essex had now become a damning but unavoidable liability to Sidney's hopes for preferment at the English court. The "particular discourse of the parley between the Earl of Essex and Tyrone" (339) was also a source of increasing controversy at court as Whyte detailed in his letter of 20 September.

The situation for Essex became even worse when on 28 September he arrived back at the royal court which was then at

Nonsuch. On the following day Whyte described, clearly at second-hand, the earl's impetuous behaviour in immediately seeking out the queen without any regard for royal protocol:

> [A]bout 10 o"clock in the morning my Lord of Essex lighted at court gate in post and made all haste up to the presence, and so to the privy chamber, and stayed not till he came to the Queen's bed chamber, where he found the Queen newly up, the hair about her face. He kneeled unto her, kissed her hands and her fair neck, and had some private speech with her, which seemed to give him great contentment, for coming from her Majesty to go shift himself in his chamber, he was very pleasant, and thanked God, though he had suffered much trouble and storms abroad, he found a sweet calm at home. 'Tis much wondered at here, that he went so boldly to her Majesty's presence, she not being ready, and he so full of dirt and mire, that his very face was full of it. (343)[36]

Essex had another more formal meeting with the queen at 11am which lasted until "half an hour after 12" and, at that point, "all was well, and her usage very gracious towards him." As the earl was leaving dinner, Whyte recorded how he "spied me and very honourably took me by the hand and very kindly taking me apart, he demanded of me how your Lordship did … He desired me to commend him very heartily unto you." A third meeting then took place but Elizabeth's attitude towards him had dramatically altered, probably because she had by then discussed the matter with the likes of Sir Robert Cecil and the Earl of Nottingham. Essex "found her much changed in that small time, for she began to call him to question for his return, and was not satisfied in the manner of his coming away and leaving all things at so great hazard." She brusquely ordered him to explain his actions to some of her council members and Whyte speculated that for his "disobedience" he might be "committed" to house-arrest or prison "but that will be seen either this day or tomorrow" (343). Essex was never again in the personal presence of Queen Elizabeth and,

[36] Whyte's personal source for this vivid account is unknown but it conforms to the major details known about this notorious incident from other reliable sources. It seems likely that it was described to him by someone at court with first-hand knowledge of these events, perhaps even by one of the queen's court ladies.

henceforth, Whyte's references to him in his letters to Sidney become distinctly more circumspect and distanced.

Whyte's letter of 30 September vividly conveyed the dire situation in which Essex now found himself—and, by implication, how dangerous this association had become for Sidney. He noted how late on the 28 September an order had been issued by the queen that henceforth Essex "should keep his chamber" (344). He then recounted his demeaning interrogation by the appointed council members, led by Sir Robert Cecil: "[M]y Lord stood at the upper end of the board, his head bare, to answer all that was objected against him"; after which he was returned to his chamber "where as yet he continues captive" (345). Clearly, Whyte could not have had first-hand knowledge of this interrogation and so he must have received or heard an account either directly from a member of the council or from someone who had been kept reliably informed through this route. Whoever was the ultimate source of this information, Whyte's primary concern remained the personal interests of his employer (and, it might be assumed, himself) at court. His anxieties over Sidney's vulnerability (and perhaps his own) through his formerly close association with Essex were now at fever-pitch:

> Now if you were here should you see the 2 factions flourish, and who are of the faction … It is a world to be here, to see the humors of the time. Blessed are they that can be away and live contented … I must beseech your Lordship to burn my letters, else shall I be afraid to write, the time is now so full of danger. And I beseech you be very careful what you write here, or what you say where you are, for I have some cause to fear that many things are written here that might very well be omitted. (345)

After his questioning by Cecil and the other council members, Essex was committed to the guardianship of Sir Thomas Egerton, the Lord Keeper, and effectively imprisoned at York House. Henceforth, Whyte's letters to Sidney describing the earl's situation now adopt a distinctive shift in their tone to ensure that, if any of his correspondence was intercepted, they should contain no hint of disloyalty to the queen or, for that matter, undue dismay at the Earl's treatment. The delicacy of Whyte's choice of wording in his letter of 2 October 1599, for example, is characteristic of this ultra-cautious tone since even to comment on Essex's dilemma in

private correspondence could now run the risk of being interpreted by hostile eyes as an act of disloyalty toward the monarch:

> At his going from court, few or none of his friends accompanied him. I hear he takes all things very patient, and endures the affliction like a wise man. It seems that his offenses towards her Majesty are great, seeing it is her will to have this done unto him. He is a most unfortunate man to give so great and gracious a Queen cause to disfavour or disgrace him. But God I trust in time will turn her heart again towards him, for it will not enter into my soul or conscience, but that he is an honest, true subject to her Majesty and her proceedings, though in some things he may have erred in his courses of Ireland. (346)

Whyte confirmed that Essex was still being held prisoner at York House (347) but also dutifully and pointedly noted in his letter of 4 October: "These are matters that I have nothing to do withal, far above my reach … God confound all her Majesty's enemies, whosoever they are" (348). He was especially careful to ensure that his direct references to Essex's incarceration were always accompanied by a corresponding assertion of the queen's unquestioned righteousness, as in his comment of 6 October: "It must needs be that his offenses are great, for it seems that her displeasure and indignation towards him is very great." Even when reporting that the request of old Lady Walsingham that Essex might be allowed to write to his newly delivered wife had been flatly rejected, Whyte's only comment on this harshness was to note: "This shows that her Majesty's heart is hardened towards him" (349).

Understandably, Essex's health began to break down under the mental strain of his situation and in the same letter Whyte noted that he was "very ill, and troubled with a flux" (349). But, by now, his concerns were primarily focused on the implications for his employer of Essex's catastrophic fall from royal favour:

> My Lord, I see no great desire, nor true desire in your nearest friends to further your good, everyone carried with the desire of his own good, and I would to God, that your heart were touched with the desire of growing rich for the quiet of your own mind, and the good of these your sweet children, God's blessing on

> this earth. To be poor doth hinder any man's preferment in this age. (350)

On 11 October Whyte thanked Sidney for promising to "burn my letters" (clearly, an empty promise since many of his letters still survive) and, therefore, aimed in his future correspondence to "leave no circumstances unwritten that I can hear of," noting that Essex now hoped to be granted his liberty so that he could "lead a private country life" (351). For the rest of October, Whyte continued to report regularly on the earl's imprisonment at York House and the ongoing process of the council's collecting evidence for formal charges against him in relation to his handling of Irish affairs. On 16 October he detailed how Essex had written in desperation "a very submissive letter to her Majesty but as yet no fruits of grace appears towards him" (357). As his sickness continued, the queen relented enough to allow one of her royal doctors, Dr. Brown, to confer with those treating Essex, although she did not go so far as to permit Brown personally to examine him (358).

Tactically, Whyte was acutely aware that Sidney needed not only to disassociate himself from Essex but now also to ally himself much more closely with Sir Robert Cecil. To this end he noted on 16 October: "It were to be wished that some good body would mediate a peace between the Earl and Mr. Secretary who surely hath done all good offices for him to the Queen in this time of his disgrace" (358). Such a comment is especially intriguing since it is just as feasible to argue that Cecil now saw, and was determined to make the most of, an opportunity to eradicate once and for all what he and his father, Burghley, had long viewed as Essex's undue and erratic personal influence over the queen. But whatever the truth of the matter, it is clear that Whyte wished pointedly to demonstrate in his letters his own admiration for, and loyalty towards, Cecil and to foster Sidney's awareness of the pressing need to cultivate personally Cecil's approval and support. Whyte was increasingly concerned over the possible interception of any of his letters; and, once again, his advice to Sidney seems remarkably prescient since, after Essex's execution, Sir Robert Cecil took possession of his surviving correspondence, including, presumably, numerous letters sent earlier to him by Robert Sidney.[37] On 25 October Whyte starkly outlined for Sidney the three key charges which were being drawn up against Essex:

[37] Essex burnt large amounts of potentially incriminating documentation at Essex House just prior to his capture in February 1601 but, clearly, earlier correspondence, including that with Robert Sidney, survived this conflagration.

> Her Majesty commanded that a brief might be made of his contempts towards her out of his letters, which were these: that he had knighted many contrary to her pleasure, that he had made Lord Southampton general of the horse contrary to her will, that he returned being expressly commanded not to do it. (360)

Whyte confirmed that under such duress Essex had "grown very ill and weak by grief and craves nothing more than that he may quickly know what her Majesty will do with him. He eats little, sleeps less, and only sustains life by continual drinking, which increases the rheum" (361). It is possible that this kind of information was supplied to Whyte by Essex's long-suffering wife, Frances Walsingham Devereux, or, if not, by someone directly involved in his house-arrest. He also reminded Sidney of the ever-present dangers involved in his reporting of this situation since if "it were not to please you, as God help me, I would shut my ears and be a stranger to all things, but follow and attend the service of my place, but I know to whom I write, else would I not write" (361).

November 1599 – October 1600

By 4 November Whyte was speculating that Essex might eventually be allowed to retire to his own house and even one day return to court, provided that he "shall no more be employed" in public affairs. Virtually all of his former supporters had now deserted him and Whyte poignantly noted: "What is wrought for his good is done by the ladies that have access to the Queen" (369). Almost as an aside, suggesting how deftly Whyte was able to compartmentalize the various elements of his complex duties and personal life, he briefly mentioned to Sidney in his letter of 10 November: "I was married 2 months agone, which for some private respects I kept from the world and my honourable frie[nd]s as long as I could" (372).[38] Focused as always on business and court affairs, on 13 November he reported rumours that the queen was considering issuing a warrant to place Essex in the Tower of

[38] Whyte married Lettice Besbets in about September 1599 and they had four sons (Henry, Rowland, Herbert and Gilbert) and four daughters (Sidney, Mary, Doulce and Barbara). See Whyte, *Letters*, 10.

London but that such draconian treatment of him was opposed even by the Privy Council (374):

> [I]t is marvelled at greatly why her Majesty's indignation is so extreme towards him. It may be that it is to make the world see, that her power here is so sovereign, that greatness in any can no longer be than during her pleasure, and so it is fit to be. And when it is her pleasure, she will give him liberty, but desires she is to have him called to public question. (379)

The implicit lessons of these wise musings as regards his own often problematic favour with the queen would have been readily apparent to Robert Sidney.

Throughout November 1599 Essex's wife, Frances Walsingham Devereux, was loyally attempting to assist him. Whyte described her pathetic appearance on 23 November: "My Lady of Essex is a most sorrowful creature for her husband's captivity. She wears all black of the meanest price, and receives no comfort in anything." She had been trying to visit Essex but he remained "resolved, as they say, to see no creature, but such as come from the Queen" (378). His health had also worsened and he was now "very sick of the stone and strangullion" [strangury, a urinary ailment]. Whyte ominously noted: "It is given out he cannot live. The world do pray that God may move her Majesty's heart to pity him" (378). On 24 November Whyte reported that the queen had rejected outright a gift of a valuable jewel from the Countess of Essex (379); and on 29 November that she had come to the court dressed entirely in cheap black clothes but had been sternly advised by the queen not to attend court again. Always aware of the danger of his letters being intercepted, Whyte carefully emphasised his employer's absolute loyalty to the queen: "I know how dangerous it is to meddle in these matters. I would not write so much as this to any man living but to yourself, who I know are a faithful servant to her Majesty and desires to understand every particular accident happening here" (382).

By 30 November there were signs of some slight improvement in Essex's health but his situation remained perilous and Whyte could only comment to Sidney: "In your own wisdom you may conceive what this is like to come to." He also included what was to become an often reiterated statement in his letters, noting that "[h]er Majesty is well, God of Heaven continue it ever so, for under her we live safely and blessedly" (385-6), as an overt gesture for any prying eyes of his own and Sidney's unwavering

loyalty to their monarch. On 1 December he reported that a Star Chamber action was being prepared against Essex and that his household at court had been dispersed with "every man to seek a new fortune." This led to Whyte's philosophical lament: "This is the greatest downfall I have seen in my days, which makes me see the vanity of the world" (386), perhaps directly recalling either Sir Philip Sidney's reputed words at his death: "All things in my former life have been vain, vain, vain," or the sentiments of the Countess of Pembroke's translation of Philippe de Mornay's *A Discourse of Life and Death*.[39] By 13 December little progress had been made and Essex was still under the charge of the Lord Keeper, although he had been allowed to receive communion on the previous Sunday. As a perhaps more positive sign, he had also submitted to the queen his patents for his masterships of the Horse and Ordnance but she had promptly returned them to him. Ominously, Essex's health also seemed to be again declining and Whyte reported how his wife had been allowed to visit him on the previous day but "found him so weak, as to be removed out of his bed. He was laid on sheets, his own strength being decayed and gone. Little hope there is of his recovery" (390).

By 15 December even Queen Elizabeth was beginning to relent. She allowed eight of her doctors to examine Essex and received their recommendations, even though Whyte remained pessimistic over his recovery:

> Her Majesty very graciously truly understanding the state he was in, was very pensive and grieved and sent Doctor James unto him with some broth. Her message was that he should comfort himself and that she would, if she might with her honor, go to visit him, and it was noted that she had water in her eyes when she spake it.
>
> Some comfort it brought to the Earl, but it is thought and feared that it comes very late, for nature is decayed, and he so feeble that to make his bed he is removed upon sheets and blankets.
>
> Her Majesty commanded he should be removed from that chamber he was in, to my Lord Keeper's

[39] George Gifford, "The Manner of Sir Philip Sidney's Death," in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan Van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 171. Philippe de Mornay, *A Discourse of Life and Death* (1592), *STC* 18138.

> own chamber in the same house. But this afternoon a general opinion is held that he cannot live many days, for he begins to swell, and he scours all black matter, as if the strength of nature were quite gone. (391)

By 22 December Whyte was reporting the false rumours that Essex had died and that the "bell tolled for him" as prayers were said in "London churches," even though Whyte knew that the earl's health had begun slowly to improve and that his wife was being allowed to spend each day with him "from morning to night" (395). But the queen, as always unpredictable, now suspected Essex's ailments "all to be cunning" and by 28 December had once more become cold and distant, even though it was (probably accurately) claimed that the earl was still suffering from dropsy (395-6).

These tribulations continued into mid-January 1600 and the relative curtness of Whyte's update on the situation in his letter of 12 January indicates just how little confidence he had in any happy resolution of these problems: "The Earl of Essex recovers. His gift is not accepted at court. The Queen is still very angry at him. He shall be removed to the Lord Archbishops, but many think it will be to the Tower" (404). He also remained careful always to blend these pessimistic reports with a deeply respectful obeisance towards the queen, as in his letter of 14 January: "Her Majesty's heart is more and more hardened towards the Earl which surely shows that his offenses are great towards her, who in nature is gracious, merciful, and pitiful towards very great offenders" (407). By 24 January Essex's health had recovered enough for a Star Chamber trial to be once again considered and Whyte was concerned that even his female relatives, especially his sister Lady Rich and mother the Dowager Countess of Leicester, could apparently now do nothing to ameliorate the queen's feelings towards him (415). To make matters worse, Whyte reported on 2 February how:

> Some foolish, idle-headed ballad-maker of late caused many of his pictures to be printed on horseback, with all his titles of honor, all his services, and two verses underneath that gave him exceeding praise for wisdom, honor, worth that heaven and earth approve it, God's elected, with such words as hath occasioned the calling of them all in again. (418)

Only another self-abasing personal letter from Essex finally persuaded Elizabeth to cancel the proposed Star Chamber

inquisition and Whyte noted on 14 February that Sir Robert Cecil "hath won much honor and love" because of this decision, pointedly adding "who in my conscience hath not been so adverse to the Earl as was supposed" (422). This statement yet again reminded Sidney that Cecil was now the man to be cultivated at court and it may even be the case the Whyte deliberately inserted this praise of the Secretary of State because he suspected that Cecil's agents might well be seeking to infiltrate his correspondence with Sidney. Whatever the circumstances, Whyte remained at pains to emphasise Cecil's supposedly benign agency in Essex's affairs, as he wrote on 16 February:

> Now that the Earl of Essex by Mr. Secretary's means was stayed from Star Chamber, her Majesty's anger by the Earl's submission and acknowledgment of his errors towards her appeased, it is verily believed that within 3 or 4 days he shall go to his own house, and so by degrees have more liberty. The world thinks that there is a reconcilement between the Earl and Mr. Secretary, who was held more his enemy than was cause, for when it came to the very point, none did deal more truly or honorably than he did with the Earl, which hath gained him great honor. (424)

Whyte continued his reports during the rest of February and most of March on rumours that Essex would soon be allowed to retire to his own residence, Essex House; and in his letter of 21 February he noted how Essex and Cecil were now "good friends" and that the latter had warmly commended "the Earl's discretion showed in his submissive letter to the Queen" (427). But by 25 February Whyte was reporting yet another potential crisis since pleading letters written to the queen by Essex's sister, Lady Rich, had reputedly been "published abroad" (431), although she vigorously denied any involvement in their dissemination. Indeed, his resolute female supporters and few still loyal relatives, friends and servants sometimes did more harm than good in their understandably solicitous concern for his welfare and on 8 March Whyte reported that Essex's removal to his own house had been unexpectedly delayed because:

> [T]he great Ladies Leicester, Southampton, Northumberland, and Rich[40] assembled themselves at Essex House to receive him, which hindered it at that time. He hath his health well again, and is much troubled at the indiscretion of his friends and servants, which makes him, by their tattle to suffer the more. (440)

On 22 March Whyte described to Sidney how the earl had finally been allowed to return to Essex House under the guardianship of Sir Richard Berkeley. His wife was permitted to stay with him during the day (449) and on 5 April Whyte noted that she was "said to be with child" (459). These happy domestic arrangements continued and on 12 April he described how Essex "often walks upon his open leads and in his garden with his wife, now he, now she, reading one to the other" (461). Frances Walsingham remained close to Robert's wife, Barbara Gamage Sidney, and on 3 May Whyte described their warm meeting at Baynard's Castle, noting: "Me thought to see her clad as she was, was a pitiful spectacle" (474).

By 10 May Whyte reported that Essex was continuing to enjoy being back at his own house and that he "plays now and then at tennis, and walks upon his leads and garden" since his wife had gone to stay with her mother so as not to irritate the queen by her continual presence at Essex House (476). But, just as Essex's situation seemed to be improving, yet another unexpected crisis hit his rehabilitation, as Whyte ominously reported:

> An apology written by my Lord of Essex about the peace is as I hear printed, but his Lordship is very much troubled withal and hath sent to my Lord of Canterbury and others and to the stationers to suppress them, for it is done without his knowledge or procurement, and fears it may be ill taken. 2 are committed to close prison; what they will disclose is not yet known. (476)

Predictably, as Whyte reported on 13 May, Elizabeth was deeply offended "that this apology of peace is printed, for of 200 copies, only 8 is heard of. It is said that my Lady Rich's letter to her

[40] Lettice Knollys Devereux Dudley, Countess of Essex and Leicester; Elizabeth Vernon Wriothesley, Countess of Southampton; Dorothy Devereux Percy, Countess of Northumberland; and Lady Penelope Rich.

Majesty is also printed, which is an exceeding wrong done to the Earl of Essex" (480). Plans, therefore, were initiated for Essex to appear "before certain commissioners appointed to judge of his faults" (486) and he duly appeared before them on 5 June at the Lord Keeper's residence where he had been previously incarcerated (491). In an interrogation which lasted from nine in the morning until eight at night, Whyte reported on 11 June how Sir Edward Coke, the Attorney General, had made a strident speech against Essex, adapted from Cicero's first oration against the conspirator Catiline, resulting in the sequestration of all of Essex's official posts (495). To make matters worse, on 14 June Whyte described how some libels criticizing the queen's treatment of Essex had been circulating and that "a proclamation is published against such seditious persons, to be severely punished according to the laws of the realm" (498).

The remainder of Whyte's surviving correspondence with Robert Sidney from late June until late October 1600 documents Essex's inexorable slide into disgrace and personal ruin. On 25 June he reported how the queen had sent to him "for her own letter which she writ unto him to command him" not to knight any of his supporters in Ireland but Essex could only reply in a "very submissive letter" that he "had lost it, or mislaid it, for he could not find it, which somewhat displeases her Majesty" (593). Essex's case now seemed absolutely hopeless, and of far more importance to Whyte was the need for Sidney to continue cultivating good relations with Sir Robert Cecil. He duly described how:

> Mr. Secretary continues to do a world of good offices [for Essex], and in time will prevail no doubt, Yet is there no reconcilement between them, nor sought of any side. Me thinks this honourable proceeding of Mr. Secretary's must needs tie the Earl to respect him everlastingly. (503)

By early July, Whyte reported, Essex was seeking permission to withdraw into the country (509); and on 26 July Whyte reiterated how he was sensibly "desirous to go to the country, and seems to be willing to lead a retired life, from all affairs of state" (514). But on the following day, Whyte explained to Sidney how yet another pro-Essex publication had caused him considerable harm with the queen and Cecil. The Queen angrily summoned Essex and showed him a copy of John Hayward's *The First Part of the Life and Reign of King Henry the IV* (1599), which was fulsomely dedicated in Latin to the earl and pointedly compared him to Bolingbroke who

had usurped the English throne from King Richard II in 1399. This work had already been censored in March and the second edition recalled and burned in May 1599.[41] Whyte had no doubt that the volume's dangerous praises of Essex had greatly harmed him at court and that the revival of this scandal in July 1600 would do him even more harm (515). On 4/5 August Sidney, no doubt at Whyte's instigation, wrote from Flushing two impassioned letters to Robert Cecil, entirely disassociating himself from Essex and pleading that his name should not be implicated with the Earl's "ill fortunes, since he did never make me take part with his good fortune."[42]

Although Whyte had wisely sought to distance himself from Essex for most of 1600, in late August he was summoned to meet with both the earl and his wife at the "banqueting house near the waterside." They warmly enquired after Robert Sidney and, after discussing his aborted involvement in the routing of Spanish forces at Nieuport in July, promised to write personally to him (524).[43] On 23 August Whyte reported how Essex had written to both the queen and Cecil (526), pleading to be allowed to withdraw quietly into the country at Grey's Court, Oxfordshire, the home of his uncle, Sir William Knollys, the comptroller of the royal household (529). But by 6 September Whyte had heard that Essex instead had gone to Ewelme Lodge, a royal manor house in Oxfordshire and that he planned to stay there until Michaelmas (29 September) so that he might then come back to "London again, to be an humble suitor he may return to her Majesty's sight." Whyte commented laconically on this plan: "As yet there is little hope of it, but I see time brings forth wonderful things" (532). On 12 September he

[41] This historical book was repeatedly cited during Essex's Star Chamber hearings in June 1600 and Hayward was himself interrogated by crown officials, leading to his remand in the Tower of London until after the queen's death. See Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 44, 47-8, 251.

[42] TNA SP 84/60, ff.264-6. This dismissive statement by Sidney contrasts sharply with earlier protestations to Essex of his strong personal loyalty, such as when he wrote in autumn 1595: "[T]hough I were no way tied unto you for your own particular favours, as long as you have these ends you now have, you cannot separate me from following their course." Lambeth Palace Library, MS 652, f.167v; quoted in Hammer, *Robert Devereux*, 247.

[43] Sidney had accompanied Prince Maurice into Flanders but pressing administrative duties in Flushing had necessitated his return there prior to military engagement with the Spanish. His absence from the battlefield had been unfavourably commented upon back at the English court and also had earned him Elizabeth's disapproval.

forwarded to Sidney a personal letter from Essex (which has not survived) but in early October it became apparent that a crucial decision was about to be made over Essex's continuing rights to his license "of the sweet wines" (541). When this license was withdrawn, at the personal behest of the queen but probably also at the instigation of Sir Robert Cecil, Essex was effectively ruined financially, and on 30 October Whyte concluded: "He sues now only for grace and that he may come to her Majesty's presence, of which there is small hope as yet appearing" (551). These dismissive words provide Whyte's final comment in his surviving correspondence on the Earl of Essex.

The ignominious demise and execution of Essex is well known and may be briefly summarized here. On 7 February 1601 he was summoned by the council. On that afternoon a group of his supporters paid Shakespeare's old company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, to stage *Richard II*, supposedly to foster a spirit of rebellion among the populace with Bolingbroke to provide a provocative model for the Earl of Essex's relationship with the aged queen, as in Hayward's text. On 8 February the Earl of Worcester led a four-man delegation to establish why Essex had not responded to the Council's summons on the previous day. But they were ignominiously seized and imprisoned before Essex led an ever-dwindling band of some three hundred followers through the streets of London. His hopes were severely dented when the sheriff of the City of London, Sir Thomas Smythe (whose widow was to marry Robert Sidney in 1626), refused to support the earl and his motley followers. Essex, Southampton and their few remaining supporters were forced into a rapid retreat and took refuge in Essex House.

Essex's one-time co-leader of the Cadiz Expedition in 1596, the Lord Admiral, Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, put the mansion under siege. Standing resolutely alongside him on the riverside of the house was Robert Sidney, who attempted to negotiate a peaceful surrender for Essex and his men. The Countess of Essex, Lady Rich and their female servants were allowed to leave but when Essex and the Earl of Southampton appeared on the roof of Essex House, Sidney shouted up to enquire what he intended to do since the house was about to be blown up with gunpowder if he did not immediately surrender. Although Essex replied that he would soon "fly up to heaven" in the blast he eventually negotiated terms and surrendered late that evening.[44] He

[44] G. B Harrison, *Earl of Essex*, 291-2. *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, V.550. Hay, *Life of Robert Sidney*, 165-7.

was imprisoned overnight at Lambeth Palace and on the following morning was moved to the Tower of London and rapidly tried on a charge of treason with the Earl of Southampton and other followers. Robert Devereux was executed in the courtyard of the Tower on 25 February 1601 before a small group of onlookers.

It is not known if Robert Sidney attended the trial and execution of his former friend and close political ally.[45] But, following Whyte's advice, Sidney had been consciously distancing himself from Essex since at least September 1599, even though he had not succeeded in finding any other supporter at court so well placed with the monarch to seek favour and appointments on his behalf. As is well known, the last years of Elizabeth's reign proved unwaveringly disappointing for Robert Sidney in terms of his personal advancement—in sharp contrast to the almost immediate favour shown to him after March 1603 by King James I and Queen Anne, ultimately leading to his creation as Earl of Leicester in August 1618.

[45] Vincent Hussey's account of Essex's capture at Essex House, TNA SP12/278, fols. 48-9, 53. See also Sir Robert Cecil's personal account, "A memorial about the insurrection of the Earl of Essex," SP12/278, ff.127-8. Michael G. Brennan, *The Sidneys of Penshurst and the Monarchy, 1500-1700* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT, 2006), 111-12.