

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



‘How many would the peaceful city quit, / To welcome him’?: The Earl of Essex on Parade

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Shakespeare rarely referred to a contemporary historical figure in a play; one of his best-known references is to the Earl of Essex in the Chorus of Act V in *Henry V*. That reference imagines a triumphal march upon Essex’s return from Ireland and service as Lord Lieutenant. To date, there has been no in-depth investigation of the significance of Shakespeare’s picturing Essex specifically in the context of a march or a procession, nor has there been a study of the many contemporary depictions of him as on parade.

This is an unfortunate omission because parades were an important part of Essex’s identity, especially his public self-presentation. Some examples of Essex’s processions include the turnout of his men, dressed in Devereux colors, for the 1588 response to the Spanish Armada; the 1596 advance upon and return from Cadiz; and his 1597 departure for Ireland. A ballad in Thomas Deloney’s *The Garland of Good Will* (1628) entitled ‘The Winning of Cales’ depicts Essex on the march in Cadiz, accompanied by ‘horsemen and footmen’ (l.72) and displaying the ‘English coulors’ (l.94).¹ In 1599, while in Ireland, he was criticized for marching west from Munster ‘in a manner resembling a royal

¹ Thomas Deloney, *The Garland of Good Will. Diuided into three parts: Containing many pleasant Songs, and pretty Poems to sundry new Notes* (London: E.B. and Robert Bird, 1628), <https://www.proquest.com/books/garland-good-will-divided-into-three-parts/docview/2240961748/se-2> [accessed January 20, 2022]. Similarly, ‘A mournfull dittie made on the death of the late Earle of Essex’ pictures him marching magnificently into Cadiz (stanza 8, line 1). See W.L. Braekman, ‘A “Mournfull Dittie” on the Death of the Earl of Essex, Queen Elizabeth’s Favourite’, in *Elizabethan and Modern Studies, Presented to Professor Willem Schrickx on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. by J.P. Vander Motten, (Geneva: Seminarie voor Engelse en Amerikaanse Literatuur, R.U.G., 1985), pp. 21-36 (p. 27). This ballad also notes that his brother Walter was killed when he was marching to Rouen in 1591, ‘leading brauely his farre traine’ (stanza 6, line 2).

progress'.² Domestically, Essex also participated in processions for the Accession Day celebrations in the 1590s,³ and led a cavalcade of gentleman to Cambridge in February, 1595.

Essex is presented on parade in several texts during his lifetime, including George Peele's *Eglogue Gratulatorie* (1589), Thomas Churchyard's 1599 *Fortunate Farewell to the most Noble Earl of Essex*, written to celebrate his departure to Ireland, and a 1599 Thomas Cockson engraving of a mounted and martial Essex.⁴ Beyond his lifetime, Robert Pricket's 1604 poem *Honors Fame in Triumph Riding*, as well as some of the ballads mourning his death, described him as on parade.⁵ Jacobean histories such as Stow and Howe's *Annales* (1605) also portrayed him on parade. Gervase Markham used Essex and others as exemplars for aristocrats in the 1624 *Honor in His Perfection*, alluding to Essex's marches as he did so. Other texts not explicitly about Essex are also worthy of consideration, particularly 1590s histories of Henry IV and his overthrow of Richard II. Sir John Hayward was questioned in 1599 by the Privy Council regarding the connection to Essex of his 1599 *Life and Raigne of Henrie IIII*, and Shakespeare's *Richard II* (1597) may have been viewed by some of Essex's followers on the night before the uprising. These two texts emphasize Henry Bolingbroke's march out of London upon his banishment and his march back into London just before his overthrow of Richard II.

Examining Essex on parade is important for understanding his public identity, both self-created but also created by others. The elements and implications of his parades provide insight as to how he presented himself and was understood by others, which in turn provides a more complete understanding of his impact on the collective Elizabethan imagination. The fascination with him felt by Elizabethan society of the 1580s and 1590s marked him out but also created pitfalls for him, including his inability to control his public image or its implications in new and dangerous contexts.

² Chris Butler and Willy Maley, "'Bringing rebellion broached on his sword": Essex and Ireland', in *Essex: The Cultural Impact of an Elizabethan Courtier*, ed. by Annaliese Connolly and Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 133-52 (p. 139).

³ See Roy Strong regarding the 'triumphal entries into the tiltyard' of Essex and other jousting, in *The Cult of Elizabeth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 139.

⁴ Richard McCoy discusses this engraving in *The Rites of Knighthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), pp. 96-8. A 'ballad of the noble departing of the right honorable the Earle of Essex, lieutenant generall of her maiesties forces in Fraunce and all his gallant companie' was entered in the Stationers' Register in July of 1591, but that ballad is lost. See Braekman, p. 22.

⁵ See note 1.

To understand these contexts, some general principles about Essex's parades must be established. His processions often involved leaving or entering London at the beginning or end of an international military campaign, with him mounted and dressed as a soldier and a general. As well as being a means to an international destination, however, his parades clearly existed to convey an impressive spectacle in and of themselves. The parades portrayed him as imminently or already victorious in military endeavors, often in a manner invoking Roman triumphal processions. Thus, the parade conveyed the victory that the time abroad may not have actually achieved. Essex's parades always elicited large numbers of spectators who watched and shouted congratulations. Typically, he did not engage with them substantively beyond acknowledging their good wishes. The visual markers of his aristocratic status, especially his horse, kept him separate from and above his spectators.⁶

Taken together, these elements of his parades can easily be seen as presenting the public with the spectacle of an alternate version of magnificence to the queen – a version that is militaristic and male. Significantly, in a letter of June 28, 1599, John Chamberlain reported to Dudley Carleton the queen's dissatisfaction with Essex's efforts in Ireland in this manner: 'The Quene is nothing satisfied with the earle of Essex manner of proceeding, nor likes anything that is done, but sayes she allowes him 1000li a day to go in progresse'.⁷ The potential problems with the public presentation of this alternative were obvious to many; hence, the Privy Council's suppression of the Thomas Cockson engraving or Francis Bacon's 1595 advice to Essex to play down the military aspects of his public image.⁸

⁶ Essex's parades thus contrasted significantly with the most famous Elizabethan parades, the queen's progresses, which were non-military and domestic, and thus circular in nature, emphasizing every point in the journey. The queen was also more willing to stop and talk with her audience. See Mary Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Ceremony* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), p. 5. For information regarding Elizabeth's progresses, see Cole and Zillah Dovey, *An Elizabethan Progress: The Queen's Journey into East Anglia, 1578* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1996).

⁷ *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, two vols., ed. by Norman McClure (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939), I, p. 74.

⁸ Walter Devereux, *Lives and Letters of the Earls of Essex: In the Reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I*, two vols., (London: John Murray, 1853), pp. 395-6, Letter of October 4, 1596 from Francis Bacon to Essex. As Garry Wills puts it, 'A man even appearing to rival a queen will himself open to a barrage of charges that his very appearance will tend to substantiate in the ruler's mind, no matter how well disposed to him; see Garry Wills, *Making Make-Believe Real: Politics as Theater in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 310.

Ultimately, the dangerous implications of Essex's parades came to a head in the 1601 uprising. During his trial, Essex was accused of seeking the attributes featured prominently in his previous parades: military power, popularity, and a uniquely splendid status. His response denied the parade-like aspects of his movement through London: he claimed that his march was motivated by the desire to gain access to the queen quickly. However, the truth lies somewhere in between, as the uprising is instructively analyzed as a failed Essex parade.

To re-interpret the uprising, it is helpful to examine in-depth the elements of Essex's parades. The most readily apparent characteristic of the parades is their military flavor. Essex always appeared at the head of a large company of soldiers, dressed as a general and soldier.⁹ Descriptions of his marches often focused on the visual splendor associated with showy militarism. One particularly florid example comes from Markham's description of Essex's march to meet Henri of France in 1591 in the 1624 *Honour in His Perfection*. Markham calls Essex's army 'the goodliest, the richest, and the most glorious Army that euer the Sunne shined on' and exclaims:

O! yet me thinks I see the enter-view, or first meeting betweene the King and this Earle, where the Flowers of England and the Flowers of France mixing together, so reflected vpon Gold, that the Ayre and the Earth seemed all to be one flame, and the Sunne blushing shrunke to see his glory eclipsed (29).¹⁰

Richard McCoy indicates that this procession included 'six pages mounted on chargers and dressed in orange velvet all embroidered with gold', 'twelve tall body squires', and 'six trumpets sounding before him'. Essex's own clothing and equipment for his horse 'alone were worth sixty thousand crowns' and included a 'military cloak... of orange velvet covered all in jewels'.¹¹ Similarly, for the 1585 expedition to Portugal, Essex spent a thousand pounds 'to outfit and equip his own force of seven hundred gentlemen and fifteen hundred common soldiers' in the 1585 expedition to the Netherlands and was

⁹ Even Essex's beard may have contributed to the parade, given the association between Essex's 'distinctive square-cut beard' and his victory at Cadiz in 1596. Elke Mettinger, 'Topicality and Conceptual Blending in Shakespeare's *Henriad* – The Case of the Earl of Essex', *Acta Neophilologica* 49.1-2 (2016), 29-51, (p. 41).

¹⁰ Gervase Markham, *Honour in His Perfection* (London: Benjamin Fisher, 1624), <https://www.proquest.com/books/honour-his-perfection-treatisecommendations/docview/2240949423/se-2> [accessed 20 January 2022].

¹¹ McCoy, p. 81.

reproved by his maternal grandfather for ‘wasteful prodigality’.¹² In Peele’s *Eglogue Gratulatorie*, welcoming Essex back from Portugal in 1589, a shepherd offers a pastorally-inflected description of the splendid military spectacle he witnesses: ‘His [Essex’s] Raine Deere racking with proud & stately pace, / Giueth to his flock a right beautifull grace’ (stanza 12, ll. 3-4).¹³ While the military splendor of these early expeditions may have been motivated by Essex’s desire to prove himself as a military leader, the later parades demonstrate that ostentation was a ubiquitous feature of his parades. Paul Hammer quotes a contemporary description of Essex’s army for the 1596 Cadiz expedition: ‘300 grene heddred youths covered with fethers, golde and sylver lace’ were among those soldiers. Hammer identifies a goal ‘to make conspicuous display of... martial ardour’ among Essex’s followers.¹⁴ Richard Williams’s ballad, ‘The Life and Death of Essex’, describes his departure for Ireland in 1599 in similarly magnificent terms: ‘gallantlie hym selfe prepared / With a moste brave and warlike trayne, / (no cost to furnish hym was sparde)’ (stanza xxvii, ll. 157-9).¹⁵ After Essex’s execution, Pricket uses the language of glory and brilliance to put him permanently on parade in the first lines of his poem:

My lines desire to rayse
Bright honors fame, in triumphs state to ride
Whose liuing worth did so adorne his prayse,
As that his glory shall to the world abide (stanza 1, ll. 1-4)¹⁶

A few lines later, Pricket describes Essex’s patriotic militarism in the terms of glorious spectacle: ‘[H]e did vphould the pompe of Englands state’ (stanza 2, l.2). Essex’s attachment to military pomp sometimes appeared in less laudatory texts. In the 1601 *Declaration of the Practises and Treasons Attempted and Committed by Robert Late*

¹² Ibid, p. 79.

¹³ George Peele, *An Eglogue Gratulatorie: To the right honorable, and renowned Shepheard of Albions Arcadia: Robert Earle of Essex* (London: Richard Jones, 1589), A3v, <https://www.proquest.com/books/eglogue-gratulatorie-entitled-right-honorable/docview/2248528290/se-2> [accessed 20 January 2022].

¹⁴ Paul E. J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1586-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 220.

¹⁵ *Ballads from Manuscripts, Part II, Ballads Relating Chief to the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. by F.J. Furnivall and W.R. Morfill (Hertford: Stephen Austin and Sons for the Ballad Society, 1873), p. 29.

¹⁶ Robert Pricket, *Honors Fame in Triumph Riding* (London: Printed by R.B. for Roger Jackson, 1604), A4r, <https://www.proquest.com/books/honors-fame-triumph-riding-life-death-late/docview/2240865957/se-2>, [accessed 20 January 2022].

Earle of Essex, Francis Bacon describes Essex's surrender after the 1601 uprising as performed '[w]ith the ceremony amongst marshall men accustomed' (G1v).¹⁷

This emphasis on military ostentation creates an interesting wobble between the destination and the journey for Essex's marches. The ostensible reason for a military march is to arrive somewhere to fight or to return home. This can be seen in Peele's *Eglogue Gratulatorie*, dedicated to Essex 'for his welcome into England from Portugall'. The *Eglogue* emphasizes the international destination and the return to London:

... comen he is fro far,
Fro wrath of deepest Seas and storme of War;
Safe is he come, O swell my Pipe with ioy,
To the olde buildings of Nue reared Troy (stanza 18, ll. 1-4, A4v)

(These lines also function as reminders of Essex's access to international and military affairs, a perhaps uncomfortable reminder for the queen, who did not have the same access. She had forbidden him to leave for Portugal, but he defied her orders.) However, the level of effort expended on the march's spectacle suggests that the march is as important as the fight, or, more precisely, that the march can project ideas that the fight cannot guarantee, such as victory or glory won, and bravery and honor displayed.¹⁸ For example, Pricket's *Honors Fame in Triumph Riding* was written in 1604, with Essex's disgrace and death in recent memory. The poem's act of putting Essex back on parade re-bestows upon him qualities that the events of 1601 stripped away: honor, fame, and triumph. Conversely, in *Henry V*, Shakespeare in 1599 pre-bestows victory in Ireland upon Essex, imagining his triumphant return even though he has just departed.

With regard to parades returning from abroad, such as the one pictured in the *Eglogue Gratulatorie*, one way of projecting victory was to portray the parade as a triumphal

¹⁷ Francis Bacon, *A Declaration of the Practises & Treasons attempted and committed by Robert Late Earle of Essex* (London: Robert Barker, 1601), <https://www.proquest.com/books/declaration-practises-treasons-attempted/docview/2240937699/se-2> [accessed 20 January 2022].

¹⁸ Interestingly, Essex was willing to forgo this appearance of victory in other contexts. An impresa on the shield he used for Accession Day festivities showed a pen and a cannon, or cannon ball, weighing unnaturally equally in a scale, with the Latin inscription '*Et tamen Vincor*' ('and yet I am subdued'). The impresa indicates that his military efforts are vanquished by the Cecils' bureaucratic aggregation of power. For a discussion of this impresa, see Cathy J. Reed, 'Not Northumberland but Essex: Identifying the Sitter in Two Miniatures by Nicholas Hilliard', *British Art Journal* 16.1 (2015), 88-94.

march, especially a Roman triumph, such as those associated with Julius Caesar.¹⁹ In the *Eglogue Gratulatorie*, Palinode criticizes Piers for overstepping his shepherdly bounds to offer ‘Triumphals’ on Essex’s return (stanza five, l. 3, A2r). One of the ballads circulated after his death, the ‘Elegy on the Earl of Essex’, converts his sea voyage home from Cadiz into a marine triumph:

Which Cesars actes, when he had done,
Into the deepe he forwith lancste;
Hoystinge vp sayles to Cutte the streames
That shine against the sun bright beames.
The fishes plaid in signe of Joy,
And mermaids carrol songs of glee;
With wind the silken fluds did toye;
And Neptune charged his tritons three:
For his returne the trumps to sound,
With ekkoing noyse they did abound. (ll. 63-72)²⁰

(That this triumph happens at sea, rather than in England, might be an oblique recognition of the lack of enthusiasm with which the queen and the Privy Council greeted Essex upon his return.) Book VI of *The Faerie Queene* also has a triumphal march in it, when Calidore (sometimes associated with the Earl of Essex)²¹ parades to celebrate his victory over the Blatant Beast. ‘So led this Knight his captiue with like conquest wonne’ (6.12.35.9); the display of the beast echoes the triumphs’ presentation of the spectacle of captive enemies in the march:

And all such persons, as he earst did wrong,
Reioyced much to see his captiue plight,
And much admyr’d the Beast, but more admyr’d the Knight (6.12.37.7-9).²²

¹⁹ For more information on the Roman triumph, see Mary Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007). For the emphasis on Roman triumphs in Elizabethan processions, see Laurence Manley, *Literature and Culture in Early Modern London* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 276-7.

²⁰ ‘An Elegy on the Earl of Essex’, in *Ballads From Manuscripts*, p. 247.

²¹ See *The Works of Spenser: A Variorium Edition, Volume VI: The Faerie Queene, Books 6 and 7*, ed. by Edwin Greenlaw, Charles Grosvenor Osgood, Frederick Morgan Padelford, and Ray Heffner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), Appendix II, ‘The Prototype for Sir Calidore’, pp. 349-64.

²² Edmund Spenser, *The Collected Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by E. de Selincourt (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

As with military ostentation, portraying a march as a triumph creates the appearance of victory, no matter how equivocal the outcome – as was the case for all of Essex’s military expeditions. Interestingly, William Camden reports Essex as resisting advice to submit himself to the queen by using similar language: ‘Let [my Adversaries] triumph, I will never follow their triumphal Chariot’ (605).²³

One aspect of the analogy to Caesar mentioned by Francis Davison in a 1602 sonnet regarding Essex is Caesar’s sword. In *A Poetical Rhapsody*, Davison addresses Essex as ‘worthily famous lord’ and claims that ‘your sword with envy imitates / Great Caesar’s sword in all his deeds victorious’.²⁴ Essex’s sword was a focus for others thinking about his parades, as well. In his 1599 ‘Fortunate Farewell to the Most Noble Earl of Essex’, Churchyard envisions Essex’s campaign in Ireland in this manner:

The sword is drawn TYROENS dispatch draws nye.
A traitor must, be taught to know his king,
When Mars shal march, with shining sword in hand[.] (73)²⁵

Pricket’s reference to Essex’s sword makes it into a symbol of his victoriousness:

Let Cales tell forth the honor of his deeds,
His valiant prowes, and his iustice such:
As who so but their owne description reed,
Will say of truth, that he deseru’d as much
As euer any noble Conquerer did,
His Conquering sword was with such mercie led:
As datelesse time shall speake his fame,
And blaze the honor of his name. (stanza 8, lines 1-8, B1r)

²³ William Camden, Book IV, *The historie of the life and reigne of the most renowned and victorious Princesse Elizabeth, late Queen of England*, Book IV (London: Printed for Benjamin Fisher, 1630), <https://www.proquest.com/books/historie-life-reigne-most-renowned-sic-victorious/docview/2240925808/se-2> [accessed 20 January 2022] .

²⁴ Quoted in Connolly and Hopkins, Introduction in *Essex: The Cultural Impact of an Elizabethan Courtier*, p. 2.

²⁵ Thomas Churchyard, *The Fortunate Farewell to the most forward and noble Earle of Essex* (London: William Wood, 1599), <https://www.proquest.com/books/fortunate-farevvel-most-forward-noble-earle-essex/docview/2240900442/se-2> [accessed 20 January 2022].

The prominence of a sword during a victory parade could be seen as emphasizing the lauded individual's ability to do violence, one of the potentially more subversive aspects of Essex's parades.

Essex's sword was also, of course, a symbol of his status as an aristocrat. Parades expressed his aristocratic status in several ways. For example, Essex's being mounted reminded viewers that he was a nobleman, especially when he was surrounded by foot soldiers. The horse he rode literally embodied his status as a practitioner of chivalry; it is no accident that Cockson's engraving showed Essex mounted. Essex was associated with horses from the beginning of his time at court; his first major office was bestowed in 1587, when he became Master of the Horse. While the symbolism of his succeeding the Earl of Leicester in this office has frequently been noted, some admirers of Essex simply saw his association with horses as a fitting symbol of his status as an aristocrat and a soldier, especially given the ceremonial obligations of the position.²⁶ In *Honors Fame in Triumph Riding*, Pricket insists that he is restoring Essex to his former glory by raising him from the dead 'in triumphs state *to ride*' (stanza 1, line 2, A4r, emphasis added). And Pricket offers this description of Essex's becoming Master of the Horse: 'Braue troupes of horse he brauely led, / And thus at first his fame was spred' (stanza 4, lines 7-8, A4v).

Two riderless horses can offer an informative comparison to Essex's mounted status in his parades. One of the most famous Elizabethan parades was Philip Sidney's funeral march, captured for subsequent generations in a set of engravings that could be made to unspool from a machine, thus causing the procession to, essentially, happen again.²⁷ The engravings demonstrate the height difference between those walking in the procession and the mounted aristocrats. However, the most noticeable horse is Sidney's own: understood to be 'riderless' to represent his absence, actually ridden by a page and led by a footman 'trayling a broken lance' or carrying a battle ax 'the head downwards',²⁸ all meant to symbolize Sidney's absence. Similarly, in the 1586 Accession Day tilt, a riderless horse 'draped in deep mourning' was led into the tiltyard.²⁹ Immediately after his death, Sidney was mourned primarily as a soldier and aristocrat, and the riderless horse imagery reinforced these qualities. Essex frequently emphasized the similarities between Sidney and himself or portrayed himself as Sidney's successor; his mounted status during his parades offered a reminder that some heroic noble soldiers remained.

²⁶ Hammer, *Polarisation*, p. 60.

²⁷ John Nichols's *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, III, pp.283-340.

²⁸ *Ibid*, III, p. 329.

²⁹ Strong, p. 140.

Another piece of Essex's martial and aristocratic presentation was the presence in the parade of his retainers, soldiers, and followers. Parades offered aristocrats an opportunity to display the number of their loyal followers, perhaps even offering a reminder of the private armies that powerful medieval noblemen had amassed in the past century. Essex was frequently attended by large groups of people at all occasions, including numerous soldiers in his parades. He provided the largest contingent of soldiers at Tilbury in 1588,³⁰ and produced 320 mounted and on-foot soldiers in the Devereux colors of tangerine and white for the victory parades after the defeat of the Armada, a show intended to be larger and more impressive than those of other noblemen. Hammer characterizes Essex's processions, such as his participation in the annual procession of the Knights of the Garter, by noting the 'size and magnificence of Essex's company, the traditional symbols of a great nobleman'.³¹ Elsewhere, Hammer observes that 'on military expeditions or great ceremonial occasions, his followers routinely numbered in the hundreds'.³² John Stow described Essex's departure for Ireland in 1599 as similarly populous: 'he had a great traine of Noble men & gentlemen, on horseback before him, to accompany him on his iourney' (71).³³ Camden's account of Essex's departure confirms Stow, describing Essex as 'accompanied out of *London* with a gallant Train of the Flower of Nobility, and followed by the People with joyfull Acclamations' (569). Chamberlain's letters to Carleton repeatedly emphasize the large numbers of gentlemen and soldiers set to accompany Essex in his departures for the Islands voyage and for Ireland.³⁴

That Essex was publicly seen at the head of a potential army loyal to him could certainly be considered worrisome. It was tricky enough that the parades presented Essex as a leader, possessing the usual qualities of a monarch (male, militaristic, aristocratic); however, the overwhelmingly military nature of the marches could also suggest Essex as a supplanter of the queen, the head of an armed insurrection. Filling a military parade with hundreds of soldiers contributed to the glory of the spectacle, but also physically presented the potential power and challenge that an individual might offer to the queen's authority. In the 1615 *Annales*, Stow and Howe provide this account of Essex's 1599 return from Ireland:

...the Earl meant to returne into England with three thousand choice Souldiers and competent Leaders: making no doubt to have friends ynow at his Aryuall for

³⁰ Hammer, *Polarisation*, p. 73.

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 200.

³² *Ibid*, p. 291.

³³ John Nichols's *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I, IV*, p. 71.

³⁴ *The Letters of John Chamberlain*, I, pp. 31, 51, 55, and 62.

Coroboration against all common encounters, but when hee well perceiued it would proue a daungerous disturbance of the estate, hee enclined to the aduice of Sir Christopher Blunt [to return alone to England.]³⁵

Paired with the last element of Essex's parades to be discussed – the public acclaim garnered from large and appreciative crowds – the number of soldiers on parade had the potential to become truly problematic for the queen and her government.

The presence of enthusiastic spectators is a ubiquitous feature of texts describing Essex's parades. Peele's *Eglogue Gratulatory* assembles a pair of shepherds to greet Essex upon his return from Portugal; one notes to the other that his piping is unnecessary:

Lowder pipes then thine, are going on this plaine:
Fair Elizaes Lasses and her great Groomes,
Receiue this Shepherd with vnfaigned welcomes. (stanza 33, ll. 2-4, B1v).

(That the enthusiasm comes from the courtly figures is an interesting rejoinder to the queen's displeasure with his departure for Portugal.) Markham emphasizes this aspect of Essex's return from the royally-sanctioned 1591 French expedition: 'After he had finished his greate workes in France, [he] was returned home with the admiration and applause of both Kingdomes' (30). Stow and Howe offer this description of Essex's 1599 departure for Ireland:

The twentie seuen of March 1599. about two a clocke in the afternoon, Robert Earle of Essex Vicegerent of Irelande &c. tooke horse in Seeding Lane, and from thence being accompanied by diuers Noble men and many others, himself very plainely attired, roade through Grace-streete, Cornehill, Cheapside, and other high streets, in all which places and in the fields, the people pressed exceedingly to beholde him, especially in the high ways for more then four myles space crying and saying, God blesse your Lordship, God preserue your Honour &c. and some followed him vntill the Euening, onely to behold him[.] (71)

Similarly, Shakespeare's reference to Essex in *Henry V* predicts that the city will turn out in large numbers to greet him upon his victorious return from Ireland.

³⁵ John Nichols's *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I*, IV, p. 86. Both Southampton and Sir Christopher Blunt claimed to have dissuaded Essex from the plan to return to England from Ireland at the head of an army during the 1601 trial. See Janet Dickinson, *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589-1601* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2012), pp. 53-4.

Perhaps not accidentally, both Shakespeare's *Richard II* and Hayward's *Life and Reigne of Henrie IIII* present Henry Bolingbroke as highly popular, even actively seeking popular acclaim. Regarding the procession that marks Henry's banishment from England, Hayward writes:

The people as he departed; by heaps flocked about him, some to see, and some to salute him: lamenting his departure in such sort, as though their onely light and delighte did then forsake them[.] This affection was the more excessive; for that the duke was driuen into exile by occasion of his liberall speeches against the most hateful persons in all the Realme: & being the onely noble man then aliue, of the popular faction, the loue was wholly accumulated vpon him, which was before deuded among the reste. (50)³⁶

Henry's reception upon his (unauthorized) return to England depicts more directly the subversive possibilities of popular acclaim:

[T]he common people which... take no care of publique affaires, and are in the least daunger by reason of their baseness, with shoutes and acclamations gaue their applause; extolling the Duke, as the onely man of courage, and saluting him King. (70-1)

Shakespeare's Henry Bolingbroke is perceived by others in the play as deliberately courting popularity. Richard says of Henry's departure from England:

Oursel and Bushy, Bagot here and Green,
Observ'd his courtship to the common people,
How he did seem to dive into their hearts
With humble and familiar courtesy
Off goes his bonnet to an oyster-wench,
A brace of draymen bid God speed him well,
And the tribute of his supple knee,
With 'Thanks, my countrymen, my loving friends'[.] (1.4.23-6 and 31-4)

³⁶ Sir John Hayward, *The First Part of the Life and Raigne of King Henrie IIII* (London: John Wolfe, 1599), <https://www.proquest.com/books/first-part-life-raigne-king-henrie-iiii-extending/docview/2240863039/se-2> [accessed 20 January 2022].

The Duke of York offers a similar description of Henry's entrance into London upon his return:

Then, as I said, the Duke, great Bullingbrook...
With slow but stately pace kept on his course,
Whilst all tongues cried, 'God save [thee], Bullingbrook!'....
Whilst he, from the one side to the other turning,
Base-headed, lower than his proud steed's neck,
Bespake them thus: 'I thank you, countrymen'. (5.2.7, 10-11 and 18-20)

If Shakespeare's play implies that Henry intentionally courts his public through his displays of affability, an identical characterization of Essex is proffered in another text, Everard Guilpin's satirical poem, *Skialetheia* (1598). Guilpin's description of Essex as 'great Foelix' directly echoes Shakespeare's play:

For when great Foelix, passing through the street
Vaileth his cap to each one he doth meet,
And when no broom-man that will pray for him
Shall have less truage then his bonnet's brim,
Who would not think him perfect curtesy[?]
... Signior Machiavel
Taught him this mumming trick, with curtesy
T' entrench himself in popularity
And for a writhen face and body's move
Be barricado'd in the people's love. (57-61 and 65-70)³⁷

Guilpin's presentation of Essex as deliberately courting popularity for suspect reasons is similar to Francis Bacon's reference to the Earl of Tyrone in *The Declaration of the Practises and Treasons*. Bacon describes Tyrone as undertaking a progress to celebrate and promote his conspiracy with Essex: 'Tyrone grewe into a strange and vnwoonted pride, and appointed his progresses and visitations to receiue congratulations and homages from his confederates' (C3r).

³⁷ Everard Guilpin, 'Skialetheia', in *The Renaissance in England: Non-dramatic Prose and Verse of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by Hyder Rollins and Herschel Baker (Boston: D.C. Heath and Co., 1954).

All of these elements inform the abortive march around London that constituted the Essex uprising of 1601. Essex's parades had, to some extent, already touched off concern about his public image. Cockson's engraving was called in by the Privy Council, and Hayward was questioned for his portrayal of the publicly acclaimed Henry, as well as the history's extravagant dedication to Essex. Essex's parades could convincingly be seen as a deliberate plan to court popularity and present a public vision of power and magnificence. The event subsequently called Essex's rebellion is usefully understood primarily as a parade: Essex and his followers marched around London for several hours, shouting to spectators their fears about the murderous intention of their enemies. This march was a complicated mixture of adherence to and departure from previous parades. Essex did not institute some aspects of his previous parades that might have increased the chance of success for a rebellion, if that had been, in fact, his goal. But he clearly sought interaction and support from spectators,³⁸ perhaps making assumptions based on previous parades, assumptions that turned out to be false. Most importantly, it can be argued that the lure of the parade triumphed over more rational considerations for the success of the 'rebellion'.

Essex's circuit around London was, in many ways, quite different from his previous parades. He walked with fellow aristocrats and friends,³⁹ rather than being mounted among a company of soldiers. There were no reports of a drawn sword, a general's baton, or cavalry. Camden notes that Essex 'forgot both Horses and his main Design' (609) when he was visited at his house by the Lord Keeper, the Earl of Worcester, Sir William Knollys, and the Lord Chief Justice. The eschewing of a full military spectacle made the 'rebellion' look not very rebellious. This may have been intentional; as with the return from Ireland, Essex and his followers may have wished to avoid the appearance of a military *coup d'etat*. Recent historical studies have made the case that he believed he had not behaved treasonously (at least through the duration of his trial).⁴⁰ As he marched,

³⁸ The government made this argument in Essex's trial for treason. For example, Camden reports Francis Bacon's response to Essex's defense of himself during the trial that he could not have intended a rebellion with so small a company attending him:

This was cunningly done of you, who placed all your Hope in the Citizens Aid, supposing that they would arm both you and yours, and take up Arms for you; imitating herein the Duke of *Guise*, who, not long since, entering into *Paris* with a small Company, excited the Citizens to Arms in such short, that he drove the King out of the City (Camden, p. 619).

³⁹ Between 100 and 200 men accompanied him, according to Dickinson. Interestingly, a largely pro-Essex ballad printed in 1603, "A Lamentable Ditty on the Death of Robert Devereux," describes the situation this way: "[H]e to the city came, / With all his troops" (ll.51-52). Thomas Evans, *Old Ballads, Historical and Narrative*, 4 vols. (London: Printed for R.H. Evans by W. Balmer & Co., 1810), III, p. 160.

⁴⁰ See Dickinson, pp. 54-6.

Essex shouted out to observers that his enemies were plotting his murder. The language of victimhood contrasted strikingly with his previous marches and their efforts to project victory or mimic a Roman triumph. The presence of his friends demonstrated that he had supporters, but these relatively few peers offered a different visual image than a sea of retainers positioned below him. Paired with the sentiment that his enemies were trying to murder him, this picture suggested primarily aristocratic infighting, rather than the previous parades' inspiring spectacle of the queen's victorious general.⁴¹

In one striking way, however, Essex's march during the uprising echoed his previous parades (as well as Elizabeth's progresses); it did not move quickly towards a destination. Essex and his followers literally walked in circles around London rather than moving speedily to the palace, a tactic that might have increased the chance of accomplishing a military objective, such as seizing the queen. This choice is particularly perplexing given the reason that Essex and others gave at their trial for their actions: they claimed that their goal was to gain access to the queen, so that Essex could plead for her protection.⁴² As Camden quotes him, 'the Earl of Essex answered with a chearfull Voice and Countenance, and a courageous Heart, "...That he had no other Design, but to prostrate himself at the Queen's Feet, to make known his just Complaints and Grievances"' (614-15).⁴³ If ever there were a moment to move swiftly to a destination, this would have been it, with lives hanging in the balance.

Beyond avoiding creating an intimidating picture, Essex's more modest parade, with its lack of ceremony and ostentation, was possibly meant to make a point. Upon his unauthorized return from Ireland, he entered the queen's private chambers covered with the dirt from his travels, without prior warning or permission. This could be suggesting that, in his great eagerness to be with her, he forewent the niceties in order to rush to her. A contemporary description has Essex making 'all hast up to the presence, and soe to the

⁴¹ It should be noted, however, that Hammer quotes an account of the company that describes it as 'many other of our noble ffreindes & kinsemen, lords, knights & gentleman' (103). This language echoes the emphasis on loyal retainers and followers discussed above. Elsewhere, he notes that the plan to have twelve noblemen accompany him into the queen's presence may have been significant from a historical perspective (106). Paul Hammer, 'The Earl of Essex and Elizabethan Parliaments', *Parliamentary History* 34.1, 90-110.

⁴² See Hammer, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59.1 (Spring, 2008), 1-35 (pp. 11-13).

⁴³ John Chamberlain reported the same motive to Dudley Carleton in a letter of February 24, 1601. See *Letters of John Chamberlain*, I, pp. 119-120.

Privy Chamber, and staid not till he came to the Queen's bed chamber'.⁴⁴ If this were the intended appearance, it is quite the opposite of a parade: abandoning spectacle in order to speed to the desired destination. However, a letter that Essex wrote to the queen (but apparently never sent) in November, 1600, imagines another entry into the queen's presence in much more parade-like terms: 'I sometimes think of running, and then remember what it will be to come in armour triumphing into that presence, out of which both by your voice I was commanded, and by your hands thrust out'.⁴⁵ Here, he seems once again to prioritize the ostentatious manner of his entry.

Rather than hastening to the queen in February 1601, however, Essex marched around the city in a prolonged and circuitous way. A possible reason for this choice could have been that most uncertain element of previous parades: the spectators. As noted above, the official version of the 'rebellion' claimed that Essex sought to persuade Londoners to join him. Camden offers this interpretation in his account of the uprising:

Herewith the Earl being somewhat animated, he began to discourse how much he was favoured throughout the City; and persuaded himself, by the former Acclamations of the People, and their Mutterings and Murmurings against his Adversaries, that many of them were devoted to him, to maintain his Credit and Fortune. (607)

It has often been asserted that Essex intended to raise support in the city, but there is no clear evidence for this. Hammer asserts that Essex went into the city to ask the Lord Mayor and Aldermen to petition the queen to give him access to her presence.⁴⁶ Alexandra Gajda believes that Essex had devoted significant effort to planning for a rising of the citizens of London to support him.⁴⁷ However, Janet Dickinson does not see evidence of this forethought, and argues that it would be have been an odd miscalculation by a seasoned military commander to assume that Sheriff Smyth could muster significant numbers of armed citizens without warning.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Quoted in Dickinson, p. 41. Of course, his entrance into her presence by himself was also less intimidating and potentially treasonous than his arrival at the head of a large company, as he and his colleagues had already concluded.

⁴⁵ Devereux, *Lives and Letters of the Earls of Essex*, vol. 2, pp. 129-30.

⁴⁶ Hammer, 'Shakespeare's Richard II, the Play of 7 February 1601, and the Essex Rising', p. 14.

⁴⁷ See Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 28-30, and p. 32.

⁴⁸ Dickinson, pp. 49-50.

None of these theories, however, explain the march's parade-like focus on its audience: the marchers' slow pace, Essex's repeated addressing of the spectators, and the apparent effort to be seen by as many Londoners as possible. Had Essex's plan been based in expectations of support from Sheriff Smyth, moving speedily to his house would have been in order. Had his plan been to maximize the chances that the citizens of London would join him, it would have been more strategic to shout out warnings about the fate of the commonwealth or threats to London's citizens, rather than focusing on plots to murder him.⁴⁹ The parade format, however, gave Essex something that he may have sought after a year of house arrest and condemnation by his peers: the chance to be admired by the general public for his magnificence as an individual – to be the single focal point of public acclamation. Possibly, Essex was drawn to reproduce former parades, parades from a time when he was an esteemed hero rather than a suspicious character with a Star Chamber trial in his past and a deputation from the government currently in his house. The lure of eliciting spectators' expressions of love and support for him and only him may have been an effort to put back the clock or revive his former status. Janet Dickinson speculates, 'It is possible to suggest that Essex may have seen himself as undertaking some sort of almost ceremonial approach to the Queen'.⁵⁰ Thus, strategic goals, be they moving speedily to the queen or raising a citizen army, perhaps took second place to the attempt to reproduce the relationship between himself and spectators of parades past. However inexplicable tactically, perhaps the journey once again became more important than the destination, as with Essex's previous parades.

There are many reasons why the marchers were not joined by London's citizens. Most importantly, their actions were perceived as treasonous. His spectators saw a difference between Essex, the affirmed general of the queen, and Essex, the unauthorized marcher. Spectators reacted positively at first to the march, on the assumption that it was permitted by the queen:

The general multitude being entirely affected to the Earle, sayd, that the Queene, and the earle were made friendes, and that her maiestie hadde appointed him to ryde in that triumphant manner through London, vnto his house in Seeding lane, & all the way he went, the people cryed, god saue your honor, God blesse your honor, &c. (Stow and Howe, 153-4).

⁴⁹ Gajda's work, however, suggests that distinguishing between an imperiled commonwealth and an imperiled Essex may be a false distinction in his mind, as his sentiments often equated the two. See p. 164.

⁵⁰ Dickinson, p. 54.

Once it became clear that this was not the case, spectators continued to watch but did not join him. Stow and Howe describe how those who arrested Essex perceived ‘the peoples great vnwillingnes, eyther to apprehend the Earle, or ayde him.... Notwithstanding the great loue the Londoners bare vnto the Earle, yet they would not ayde him’ (154). Essex, on the other hand, may have assumed that his popularity transcended his current status with the queen, and that he would always receive the support of his spectators. Certainly, he was repeatedly presented with characterizations of himself as wildly popular, as noted above.⁵¹ And, if he failed to understand at this moment that his status derived crucially from the legitimacy the queen bestowed upon him, this would be just another example of his persistent error regarding the source of his authority. The most famous example of this error occurred when he was questioned by the Dean of Norwich in the Tower about the uprising; he said he needed only the authority of the Earl Marshal of England to demand that the queen rid herself of evil counsellors.⁵² As Gajda has shown, Essex persistently attributed his status to his individual moral worthiness rather than his adherence to the expectations of others.⁵³

While considerations of treason were probably paramount, spectators’ reaction to this march may have been shaped by how it differed from Essex’s previous parades. Ironically, this march may have failed because Essex did not reproduce the previous paradigm in its entirety. This march lacked the exciting expressions of militarism or triumph, with a victorious, admirable Essex at its head. Even more unusually, the self-announced weak and vulnerable pedestrian Essex addressed his spectators directly at their level, rather than remaining magnificently above them on his horse. If Essex did, in fact, hope that his different behavior would provoke equally different behavior in his audience – rebelling instead of spectating – he must have been disappointed. His spectators did what they had done in all of his previous parades; they watched and commented, including shouting positive comments for a while, but they did not join him. Essex’s spectators had never before been invited to ‘join’ the parade, having only ever been passive observers. His former parade behavior had encouraged hierarchy and distance between him and his audience. Never having engaged in a dialogue with them, as Elizabeth did on so many occasions, his attempt to address the crowd could have seemed unusual and perhaps startling, while the unfamiliar and unimpressive visual elements may have failed to inspire them to consider, even fleetingly, the possibility of joining him.

⁵¹ Gajda notes that the government also shared this perception of him. See Gajda, p. 63.

⁵² Apparently, Essex invoked the authority of Earl Marshall at one point during the rebellion as well. See Gajda, p. 54 and p. 180.

⁵³ See Gajda, p. 176, and p. 190.

An account of the uprising hostile to Essex determinedly emphasizes the differences from his previous parades. In the *Declaration of the Practises and Treasons*, Francis Bacon describes Essex as weak, fearful, and inglorious:

...[S]o as being extremely appalled, as diuers that happened to see him then, might visibly perceiue in his face and countenance, and almost moulted with sweate, though without any cause of bodily labour but only by the perplexitie and horror of his minde, hee came to Smiths house the Sherife (F4v).

Slightly earlier, Bacon introduces the idea of Essex's inability to be compelling to his spectators:

But from the time he went forth, it seems God did strike him with the spirit of Amazement, and brought round again to the place whence he first moued. For after he had once by Ludgate entred the Citie, he neuer had as much as the heart or assurance to speak any set or confident speech (but repeated onely ouer and ouer his take as he passed by, *That he should haue bene murthered*) nor to do any act of foresight or courage: but he that had vowed hee would neuer bee cooped vp more... cooped himself first within the wals of the Citie, and after within the wals of an house, as arrested by Gods Iustice as an example of disloyaltie. (F3r-F4v)

With his usual effectiveness, Bacon dismantles every piece of Essex's spectacle on parade. Rather than being glorious, Essex is mute, horrorstruck, and sweaty. Rather than marching on horseback in triumph in a linear progress from abroad, he walks in circles in a failed attempt at a coup. Indeed, he 'coops' himself up within the city; at the end, he ceases to march at all, barricading himself inside a house. If Pricket's version of Essex is *Honor's fame in triumph riding*, Bacon's is 'dishonor's infamy in defeat walking'.

While Bacon's description of Essex's march is rhetorically effective (and probably deliberately deployed, given the government's fear that people would rise to support Essex after the rebellion),⁵⁴ it also appears to be simply accurate. Stow and Howe also emphasized the lack of direction of Essex's march, noting 'from thence the Earle went *to and fro*, & then came backe to Gracechurch streete' (154 – emphasis added). They conclude the description of the march similarly: 'the earle hauing passed *to and fro* through diuers streetes, and being forsaken of diuers of his gallant followers, he resolved to make his nearest way home' (155 – emphasis added). And Camden also remarks on Essex's inglorious sweatiness: 'Having passed nigh the whole Length of the City, to

⁵⁴ See Gajda, pp. 32-3.

Sheriff's House he came, much perplexed in mind, and in such a Sweat, that he was fain to shift his Shirt' (609).

If Essex did hope that people would join him, it is possible that this hope was shaped by the 1590s histories of Henry IV. In Hayward's *Life and Reigne of Henrie IIII*, Henry also marches with a few companions, confident that people will join his cause:

The residue of his attendants were very few, not exceeding the number of fifteen lances: so that it is hard to esteeme whether it was greater maruaile, either that he durst attempt, or that he did preuaile with so smal a company: but his chiefest confidence was in the fauour & assistance of the people within the realme (68-9).

His hopes come true; as Henry returns to London, he receives reinforcements:

Therefore cutting of vnnecessary delaies, with al possible celerity hee hastned towards London: to the end that possessing himself thereof as the chiefe place within the realme, both for strength and store, he might there make the feat of the warre. In this iourney no signe nor shew of hostility appeared, but all the way as he passed, the men of chiefest quality and power adioyned themselues vnto him... In euerie place also where he made stay, rich gifts and pleasant deuices were presented vnto him, with large supply both of force and prouision: far aboue his neede (70-1).

What happened for Henry, however, did not happen for Essex. What could have been the ultimate parade became the most dismal failure.

Once Essex was arrested, tried, and imprisoned, his marching days were over, with two notable exceptions. His movement from his trial back to the Tower was his last public appearance. Stow and Howe's account of this event provides a striking contrast to previous parades:

The newes of all this days businesse was sodainly diuulged throughout London, whereat many forsook their Supper, and ranne hastily into the streets to see the Earle of Essex as he returned to the Tower, who went a swift pace bending his face towards the earth, and would not looke vpon any of them (157).

Although he once again generated a city audience, Essex here refused to engage with his spectators, whether by his own choice or because it was imposed upon him. In either case, this departs significantly from the uprising's focus on spectators. Essex's very last

progress was to the scaffold, within the precincts of the Tower (and therefore not a public spectacle, although much described in subsequent accounts of his execution). A manuscript account of Essex's death describes a procession quite different from his military parades: 'all the waie as he came from the chamber to the scaffold he praied, sainge, "O lord give me true Repentance & true patience, & true humilitie."' Hee entreated those that went with him to praie for him'.⁵⁵ Honor, glory, and militarism gone, Essex is portrayed only in a religious and penitential light. Interestingly, however, unlike the march to the Tower, he once again seeks acknowledgement from his spectators, albeit in a different context.

This final procession was itself reworked after his death, and essentially transformed back into the standard version of an Essex parade. In *Honors Fame in Triumph Riding*, Pricket offers an account of Essex's progress to the scaffold that re-establishes many of the elements of his previous parades:

He like himself in roabes of honor clad,
With countenance cleare and looks heroicall,
Went on as if in heart he had been glad,
To meet his friends at some great festiuall.
His noble mind the path of death did tread,
As if it did vnto some triumph lead (stanza 50, lines 1-6, D1r)

Essex's last march to the scaffold becomes, in Pricket's words, a final 'triumph'. Similarly, the 'Verses upon the report of the right Honorable the Lord of Essex' imagines Essex in a triumphal parade into the afterlife. He is described as:

Some Princes spirit, some mightie monarchs ghost,
At sight of whome ech ghost in hell doth quake;
Such glory shinneth in his manly face,
That Phoebus rides not with so great a grace.
My self did see him, soone as ere he came;
Come step by step, with such a maiestie,
That sure he was a man of muckle fame,
Of great renowme, and greater dignitye;
His gesture, gate, and carriage doth declare
He was not as the basser commons are. (315-24)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Ballads from Manuscripts*, p. 211.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 226.

The power of Essex's parades in the public imagination was such that, even after his execution for treason, some of his erstwhile spectators put him on parade one last time.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Essex's death may have been occasion for other public processions, of a sort. Hammer notes: "By the summer of 1601, die-hard Essexians were parading around with nettles in their hats and wearing tawny orange ribbons." Paul Hammer, 'Lord Henry Howard, William Temple, and the Earl of Essex', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79.1 (2016), 41-62 (p. 43).