

A16 Essex did spend, Northumberland did spare

Notes. It seems probable that this epigram was actually written during the reign of James I rather than in Elizabeth's reign. Essex and Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland were brothers-in-law (Northumberland married Essex's sister Dorothy) and both were ultimately condemned for involvement in treasonous affairs. While Essex's Rising in February 1601 cost him his life, Northumberland was convicted of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot of 5 November 1605 and spent many years in the Tower. This verse seems to have been written after Northumberland followed his late brother-in-law into misfortune—i.e. no earlier than November 1605. The claim made here is that, even though they behaved in contrary ways, the two earls shared the same fate of being condemned for supposed "plots" simply because their status as leading members of the ancient nobility made them "suspect" to the sovereign and his/her favoured advisors. The clear implication here is the same which had featured in many Catholic political tracts of the 1570s and later—that the sovereign was encouraged to turn against the great noblemen of England because of the "detraction" of low-born advisors, who feared the power and envied the status of the ancient nobility. The common beneficiary of the fall of Essex and Northumberland was Sir Robert Cecil, who became Earl of Salisbury in 1605.

"Epigram"

Essex did spend, Northumberland did spare,¹

He was free, this close; How shall we live then?

Of Plotts, these courses both suspected are

No: they are not suspected, but great men.

Source. BL Add. MS 10309, fol. 103v

A16

¹ *Essex...spare*: the meaning here seems to be that Essex spent lavishly (demonstrating traditional aristocratic largesse), while Northumberland concentrated on building up his revenues. The former course of life won Essex many admirers but left him critically dependent upon royal grants, while the latter approach made Northumberland rich and deeply unpopular with many of his tenants.
