

## A8 Admir-all weaknes wronges the right

*Notes.* This poem on enemies of the Earl of Essex is dated 20 December 1599 in one source (BL Add MS 5956). At this time, the sickness which Essex had suffered in Ireland brought him to the point of death. Much to the consternation of the Queen and Privy Council, the sympathy which many Londoners felt for the Earl and his plight encouraged many city churches to ring their bells when the rumour circulated that he had died. The bitterness which partisans of Essex felt towards his enemies also blighted the grand celebration of Christmas at court, where “upon the very white walls much villainy hath been written against Master Secretary” (Collins 2.154). The poem below offers a virtual roll-call of Essex’s enemies.

Admir-all weaknes<sup>1</sup> wronges the right  
Honor in generall<sup>2</sup> looseth hir sight  
Secrett are<sup>3</sup> ever their designes  
through whose desert true honor pynes

Award<sup>4</sup> in worth that is esteem’d  
by vertues wracke<sup>5</sup> must be redeem’d.  
pryde spight & pollicie taketh place  
in steade of conscience honor & grace

Noe Cob am I<sup>6</sup> that worketh ill  
or frame my tongue to enemies will.  
Godes ordinance<sup>7</sup> must governe all.  
Lett noe man smile at vertues fall.

Care you<sup>8</sup> that list.<sup>9</sup> For I care not  
by crooked waies<sup>10</sup> true worth to blott  
Nor will I stand upon the ground  
Where such impietie doth abound.

But basely clothed all in Gray<sup>11</sup>  
unto the Court I’le take my waie  
where though I can no Eagle<sup>12</sup> see  
a Cub<sup>13</sup> is good enough for mee.

Whose malice fitting to his mynde

5

10

15

20

will frame his apish witt<sup>14</sup> by kynde  
and make his use of present tyme  
by waies ridiculous to clyme.

There may yow see walk hand in hand

25

the polititians of our land  
that wrong artes glorie with a tongue  
dipt in Water from Limbo<sup>15</sup> spronge

These bussards<sup>16</sup> bold with eageles plumes

to wrong true noblenes presumes.

30

Actions factions now wee fynde<sup>17</sup>

they that see nothing must be blynde.

**Source.** Bodleian MS Rawl. Poet. 26, fol. 20v

**Other known sources.** Bodleian MS Don. c.54, fol. 7r; Bodleian MS Eng. Hist. c.272, p. 41; BL Add. MS 5956, fol. 23r; V&A MS D25.F.39, fol. 81r

A8

<sup>1</sup> *Admir-all weaknes*: Charles Howard, Lord Admiral Nottingham.

<sup>2</sup> *Honor in generall*: one copy has the marginal note here: “Essex lieutenant Generall of England” (Bodleian MS Eng. Hist. c.272).

<sup>3</sup> *Secrett are*: pun on “secretary” (i.e. Sir Robert Cecil).

<sup>4</sup> *Award*: allusion to the mastership of the Court of Wards, which was granted to Cecil in May 1599 during Essex’s absence in Ireland. One copy has the marginal note here: “The Court of Wardes promised to Essex, given to Essex” (Bodleian MS Eng. Hist. c.272).

<sup>5</sup> *wracke*: i.e. “wreck”.

<sup>6</sup> *Noe Cob am I*: allusion to Lord Cobham. A “cob” is big or great man, a leader.

<sup>7</sup> *Godes ordinance*: one copy has the marginal note here: “Lieutenant of the Ordnance”; i.e. Sir George Carew, Lieutenant of the Ordnance (Bodleian MS Eng. Hist. c.272). Although Essex was Master of the Ordnance, Carew served as his deputy and was a close friend of Cecil.

- <sup>8</sup> *Care you*: allusion to Sir George Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain.
- <sup>9</sup> *list*: wishes.
- <sup>10</sup> *crooked waies*: connects Cecil's "crooked" back with his supposed political methods.
- <sup>11</sup> *Gray*: Thomas Grey, Lord Grey of Wilton. A former friend and follower of Essex, he became a bitter enemy of the Earl and pursued a personal feud with Essex's friend, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton.
- <sup>12</sup> *Eagle*: unclear. The eagle was the heraldic device associated with the Stanleys, Earls of Derby. William Stanley, Earl of Derby, had staged an expensive play using the boys of St. Paul's, London, in mid-November 1599, and was tied to Cecil by marriage, but it seems uncertain that a reference to him is intended here. It is possible that "eagle" refers rather to ancient and honourable nobility in a more general sense.
- <sup>13</sup> *a Cub*: allusion to Cecil, emphasizing that his success is based only upon his late father's efforts.
- <sup>14</sup> *apish witt*: seemingly an allusion to Cecil, perhaps drawing upon Spenser's notorious fable of the fox (widely interpreted as referring to Lord Treasurer Burghley) and the ape in *Mother Hubbard's Tale* (1591).
- <sup>15</sup> *Water from Limbo*: water represents Sir Walter Raleigh (from the pronunciation of his first name), while "Limbo" here means hell.
- <sup>16</sup> *bussards*: vultures; i.e. birds that feed on the carrion of more noble animals.
- <sup>17</sup> *Actions factions now wee fynde*: "Factionous Action now I finde" is a better reading.
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