ops from his examination of religious and political documents, letters, diaries, autobiographies, plays, and sermons, as well as his engagement with current scholarship, is based on his interpretation of how seventeenth-century puritans saw each other and how they were perceived in their day. Spurr acknowledges that the term "puritan" was dynamic and applied to several denominations; it denoted a cluster of ideas, attitudes, and habits, all derived from a belief in justification by faith alone, predestination of the elect, and regeneration. He also distinguishes puritans from other dissenters and unsettles some of traditional assumptions about the early movement through his observations about the social and political conservatism of many puritans. Influenced by revisionist interpretations of seventeenth-century history, largely the product of British historians, Spurr concludes that "perhaps we are too hasty to point out innovations and too slow to recognize how little else had really changed" (p. 202). The book's twelve chapters are divided into three sections, which follow a general introduction: Puritans and Puritanism; The Rise and Fall of the Puritans; The Puritan Experience.

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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. Pp. xviii, 446.

A well-written reassessment of the successful years of Elizabeth's last favorite, based on extensive and careful use of a wide variety of unpublished archival sources, this book aims to rehabilitate the earl's reputation. Often slighted as an impetuous, indulged and philandering aristocrat whose flaws far exceeded his goals, Essex is here presented as a valorous young man who pictured himself as the military leader of a threatened international Protestant movement, but was forced by circumstances to concern himself with the political process on which his goals rested. The case for the earl's consistent and coherent political aims is clearly presented in the introduction and conclusion of the book and partially sustained in the intervening chapters. Unfortunately, many of his actions, particularly after 1590, require a very sympathetic reading in order to make them fit this interpretation.

Essex too often acted in ways that undercut his presumed program. Hammer shows the degree to which his honor impelled him to support the suits or goals of his followers beyond the point where success was even remotely possible. Said to have disdained the sycophancy and indirectness of the court, he could not refrain from compromising liaisons with the queen's ladies-in-waiting, angering their families and the queen. He failed to create a domestic power base, circulated self-justifying tracts that alienated even those inclined to support him, and abandoned his puritan supporters to support Whitgift's efforts to install their enemy, Bancroft, as bishop of London. His desire permanently to occupy Cadiz, presented

as a central element of his anti-Spanish policy, seems foolhardy and doomed to failure, given Philip II's greater wealth and power. In his conclusion, Hammer suggests that in 1597 there was no Cecil faction, but rather an anti-Essex coalition; he does not deny the existence of an Essex faction.

At times, Hammer's central argument disappears in the presentation of the details of the earl's actions as patron, courtier-favorite, warrior and royal advisor. It is the recounting of these details that many readers will find the most valuable element of the book, which is generally well edited, although Elizabeth is twice charged with "prevarication" when "procrastination" was clearly intended.

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