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Portrait of an Unknown Lady: Technical Analysis of an Early Tudor Miniature

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Article by **Catherine MacLeod**
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Abstract
This paper argues that the patronage of Isaac Oliver by Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, and his circle in the 1590s was central to both the development of the artist's practice and to Essex's campaign for power at court in the latter years of the reign of Elizabeth I. Oliver's work for Essex marked the artist's shift from middle-class to court patronage, and stimulated the production, for the first time, of multiple replica miniatures of non-royal sitters. New identities for miniatures are proposed, and new physical evidence for Oliver's use of "pattern" miniatures, as opposed to miniatures that are simply unfinished, is discussed. Finally, Oliver's work at the court of James VI and I is considered, in the context of the lingering loyalty to the late, disgraced Earl of Essex.

It has long been recognised that, after a few years working predominantly for the middle classes —his peers and likely friends—at the beginning of his career, the miniaturist Isaac Oliver began to receive aristocratic patronage in the late years of Elizabeth's reign, finally becoming the dominant court portrait painter "in little" during the reign of James VI and I.[1] As far as it goes, this narrative of the trajectory of Oliver's career seems correct, but an important factor in its progression is missing. Analysis of the reasons why Oliver's patronage changed have focused on a presumed shift in artistic taste among the courtier class towards Italianate or continental mannerist styles, and the perception by these patrons that Oliver's miniatures reflected more knowledge of such painting than did those of Nicholas Hilliard, the dominant court miniaturist up until that point.[2] Roy Strong, writing in 1983 in *The English Renaissance Miniature*, comments that "By the middle of the 1590s Hilliard's work must have begun to look increasingly old-fashioned in comparison with that of Oliver".[3] He goes on to say that:

> *Hilliard's miniatures are out of key with the prevalent aesthetic mood of the 1590s. It is significant that Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, by 1596 had switched from a combination of Segar for large-scale and Hilliard for miniature portraits to one of Gheeraerts and Oliver. The atmosphere had changed […].*[4]

Strong's naming of the Earl of Essex here is significant, although he cites Essex's patronage as a sign of the times rather than an agent of change (fig. 1).

Figure 1

Isaac Oliver, *Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex*, circa 1596–1598, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 5 x 4.2 cm. Royal Collection (RCIN 420933). Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection Trust and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020 (All rights reserved).

Essex's patronage of Oliver in this decade was also noted, but any significance dismissed, by Jill Finsten in her PhD thesis on the artist, published 1981. She states, "patronage [of Oliver] prior to Stuart accession to the throne seems to have been concentrated in the bourgeoisie rather than the aristocracy", and then, in a footnote adds: "the Devereux circle, despite their assorted titles, were socially a marginal group; popular heroes, they nevertheless were far from the norm of social respectability".[5] This view of Essex's importance is not the prevalent one today. More recent studies, notably Paul Hammer's influential book, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585–1597*, published in 1999, have ensured that Essex's role in English court politics during this period has been taken much more seriously.[6] His significance as a military strategist, politician, and cultural patron has been explored more fully and with a more nuanced consideration of the historical context. A number of other important studies have further developed understanding of Essex and his influence.[7]
Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex was the son of Walter Devereux, 1st Earl of Essex (1539–1576) and Lettice Knollys (1543–1634). After his father's death, his mother married Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1523–1588), the great favourite of Elizabeth I and Essex's godfather. Leicester became a very significant influence in Essex's life, promoting his stepson's military career and his position at court; Essex took over Leicester's mantle as the queen's favourite, and also inherited the latter's rivalry with Walter Ralegh. In his political ambitions, his great rival was Robert Cecil, later Earl of Salisbury (1563–1612), son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley (1520–1598). In the later 1590s, Essex's political strategy involved distancing himself from his late stepfather's legacy; his shift from the patronage of Hilliard, who had been key to the construction of Leicester's image, to Oliver, as yet not associated with any group of courtiers, seems likely to have been part of this new approach.[8]
In 2004, in an article about portraits of Essex, Roy Strong pointed out that Essex was the subject of "the unprecedented phenomenon of a production line for miniatures".[9] Responding to Paul Hammer's exploration of faction in relation to Essex and late Elizabethan politics, Strong argued that "there must be some connection between the advent of faction and the multiplication of portraits".[10] His argument was primarily based on the evidence of a similar "production line" of oil portraits of Essex, but his contention equally applies to the miniatures. Moreover, when the miniatures by Isaac Oliver of other court sitters produced in the 1590s are considered, it is clear that the phenomenon of multiple miniatures, which seems to start with Essex, goes on to be associated almost exclusively with members of Essex's circle. This article proposes that Essex's patronage of Oliver was crucial not just to the advent of the artist's career as a court portraitist, and to Essex in his campaign of self-promotion, but also to the consolidation of Essex's group of followers more broadly, and to the expansion and the development of the use of portrait miniatures in court politics.[11] Indeed, Oliver's creation of a system for the production of multiple portrait miniatures in this context was an important step in the evolution of miniature painting practice more generally.
Finsten hints at the significance of Essex's followers among the court miniatures by Oliver of the 1590s.[12] However, it has not been pointed out in the literature on the artist that almost all the identifiable miniatures by Oliver of court sitters from the 1590s—of which, it must be noted, there are relatively few—are of members of Essex's circle. In addition to the numerous miniatures of Essex himself, Oliver painted the 3rd Earl of Southampton, his younger political ally and friend, as well as Southampton's first cousins the Browne brothers.[13] There are three surviving miniatures of Sir Richard Leveson, a beneficiary of Essex's patronage who was involved in his military campaigns (see below). Peregrine Bertie, Baron Willoughby D'Eresby,

also painted by Oliver, was a close ally of Essex in the 1590s.[14] In fact, virtually the only identified Oliver miniature from the 1590s not of a significant Essex supporter is that in the National Portrait Gallery identified as Henry Stanley, 4th Earl of Derby.

Figure 2

Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder, *Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex*, 1596, oil on canvas, 211.2 × 127 cm. Collection of Woburn Abbey. Digital image courtesy of His Grace the Duke of Bedford and the Trustees of the Bedford Estates (all rights reserved).

Essex's political ambitions in the 1590s focused on his becoming Elizabeth's chief minister in succession to William Cecil, Lord Burghley. To this end, he proved himself aware both of the power of visual display and of circulating text. He staged a spectacular performance at the Accession Day tournament in November 1595 and in 1596 circulated a much-admired and politically motivated letter of travel advice to the 5th Earl of Rutland, perhaps in fact composed by his secretary, Francis Bacon. But the arena in which he sought most assiduously to prove himself was that of battle, and the most dramatic action in which he took part in support of his personal ambitions, undertaken in the genuine belief that it was also best for England, was the attack on Cadiz in summer 1596. In the wake of this expedition, Essex sought vigorously to present himself as the hero, particularly in opposition to Sir Walter Ralegh.[15] He commissioned a tract about his voyage, and, significantly, kept the long, rectangular beard that he had grown on the expedition. The Venetian ambassador Francesco Gradenigo commented, in November 1596, "The Earl is a great favourite of the Queen; he is about twenty-six years of age, fair skinned, tall, but wiry; on this last voyage he began to grow a beard, which he used not to wear."[16] This beard, which altered his appearance dramatically, became part of his aim to be seen in a different way; the "face of Cadiz" as Paul Hammer has called it, was an important element in Essex's strategy to reinvent himself from the romantic, youthful favourite into a mature and serious political and military leader of significance and power.[17] He had his new appearance immortalised in a full-length portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (fig. 2), and, notably, in the series of miniatures by Isaac Oliver.

Hammer has noted:

> *Far more so than any of his contemporaries, Essex projected a public image of himself which was consciously—and conscientiously—created […] Rather than stone and brick, he sought to present the world with an image of himself as the embodiment of conspicuous virtue.*[18]

The heroic image that Essex created of himself, however, was not just aimed at the queen; in support of his political objectives, Essex seems to have encouraged an idea of personal service and devotion, almost a kind of personality cult.[19] The use of portraits to reinforce political and social bonds was already well established by this period, but seems to have been pursued with particular vigour in Essex's circle. Hammer notes that the number of surviving images of Essex, along with their provenances, suggests that Essex "fairly often used paintings as a means of

recognizing special friendships".[20] Roy Strong takes this observation further, tracing the known and possible provenances of many of the versions of Gheeraerts's oil painting of Essex among his adherents. Given the number of portraits of Essex that exist based on Gheeraerts's bearded image, and the provenances that Strong traces, Strong's assertion of the connection between the multiplication of portraits and the advent of faction, or at least the conscious construction of a group of loyal adherents, is convincing. However, what is not proven is Strong's assertion that "for the first time the impulse [to produce multiple portraits] comes from the person concerned", that is, Essex.[21] In fact, as he notes, there is only one known instance of Essex giving a portrait of himself to someone else.[22]

Miniatures, of course, were even more suitable acquisitions for political adherents than large-scale portraits as they could be used in more complex displays and performances of loyalty: concealed and revealed, kept ostentatiously secret in richly bejewelled cases, opened to the chosen few while remaining closed to the excluded. Here, as Strong notes, Essex is particularly significant, as the multiple replica miniatures of him by Oliver represent a previously unknown phenomenon in miniature painting.[23] The role that a miniature of Essex might play as evidence of the loyalty of a follower is illustrated by the will of Carew Reynell (circa 1563–1624), an adherent of Essex. Reynell left to Essex's son Robert Devereux, 3rd Earl of Essex:

> *a tablet jewel set with four score and odd diamonds with his father's picture and £30 to be bestowed upon the making of the said jewel, in remembrance and full satisfaction of all the favours and benefits which I received from his most noble father.*[24]

There is no evidence about who made the miniature of Essex that Reynell owned, or when it was painted, but clearly he did not consider its setting grand enough in the context of its presentation to Essex's son, and so ordered the making of a very splendid new diamond-studded case. Again, however, while ownership clearly testifies to loyalty towards the sitter, there is no evidence about how Reynell acquired the miniature in the first place; it seems perfectly possible that Reynell himself acquired the miniature originally in order to demonstrate his loyalty to Essex, rather than Essex presenting it to him. This bond of loyalty was then reinforced in the next generation by the bequest of the miniature to Essex's son.

In the context of a demand for miniatures of Essex, either from Essex himself or from those who were, or sought to be, in his circle of support and patronage, the development of a system for the production of such miniatures does not seem surprising. Oliver's miniature of Essex, closely related to the Gheeraerts oil painting and produced at approximately the same time, featuring the proudly worn beard of the Cadiz expedition, exists in more versions than any other miniature by the artist. Examples include those in the National Portrait Gallery,[25] Royal Collection,[26] Burghley House,[27] and the Victoria and Albert Museum,[28] and formerly in the collection of Viscount Harcourt. Although repetitions of oil paintings were common at this time, and systems for such repetition, including tracing and pouncing were well established,[29] repetitions of portrait miniatures were extremely rare at this period, to judge from the surviving miniatures, and there is no previous evidence of a system for the production of such miniatures. Nicholas Hilliard, who had been Isaac Oliver's master, painted repetitions of miniatures of the queen, but each of these had different details of costume and accessories, and Hilliard is reported to have been able to draw the queen from memory.[30] Much earlier in the sixteenth century, Lucas Horenbout had produced repetitions of miniatures of Henry VIII, but again all the surviving miniatures show the king with variations in varying styles of hair, beard, and dress.[31] Essex appears to have been the first non-royal to be the subject of multiple versions of a miniature. It seems that Essex's particular requirements at this time stimulated a new kind of miniature production, from a new

miniaturist: not Hilliard, whom Essex had previously patronised but who was closely associated with the queen and with Essex's stepfather Leicester, but Oliver, a talented young immigrant at the beginning of what was clearly likely to be an exciting career.

Oliver's miniatures of Essex are remarkably consistent. All but one show the same black satin doublet with an unusual double collar arrangement: a small white falling collar, trimmed with lace, is surmounted by a small ruff.[32] A version of the miniature at the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, seems to provide the clue to the way such repetitions were made (fig. 3). This portrait is sometimes described as "unfinished" but at the same time it has been recognised that it was probably used as the basis for the other miniatures of Essex.[33] Close examination suggests that the miniature was intentionally left without a painted background or costume details.[34] Although the face and beard are highly modelled, the costume is just sketched in with very thin, dry black paint. The beard is painted with Oliver's characteristically meticulous technique, but comparison with other versions of the miniature, such as that in the National Portrait Gallery, show that the artist's usual method was, logically, to paint the ruff and collar, and then the details of the long beard over this (fig. 4). The fact that the collar and ruff are present only in outline, and the beard is complete, strongly suggests that there was never an intention to paint any kind of detail on the collar and ruff. Similarly, Oliver's usual practice was to float in the blue background before painting the final details of hair over this; again, the hair has been painted without the background even being started. The miniature seems to have been deliberately fully worked up only in the head, leaving other areas just sketched in, in order to provide a studio pattern for the production of multiple images.

Figure 3

Isaac Oliver, *Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex*, circa 1596, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 5.4 x 4.4 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1974.2.75). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (Public domain).

Figure 4

Isaac Oliver, *Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex*, circa 1596, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 5.1 x 4.1 cm. Collection of National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 4966). Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London (All rights reserved).

Microscopic examination by Polly Saltmarsh of the Yale version of the miniature and that in the National Portrait Gallery supports the theory that the Yale miniature was used as the basis for producing repetitions.[35] The proportions and composition of the two miniatures exactly coincide; the tiny highlights of Essex's eyes in the Yale version are replicated in exactly the same positions in the NPG version (fig. 5).[36] By contrast, the modelling of the features of the face in the Yale version, while executed with Oliver's usual skill, is done almost entirely in monochrome shades of brown and is not fully worked up with stippling and hatching, by comparison with the NPG version. This suggests that the focus of this miniature was form rather than texture and life-like colouring. By contrast, in the NPG version, the modelling is executed in delicate strokes and stipples in a wide variety of colours. How exactly the Yale miniature was used to produce the autograph replicas—whether simply copied carefully or part of a more complex process of mechanical transfer—is not apparent.

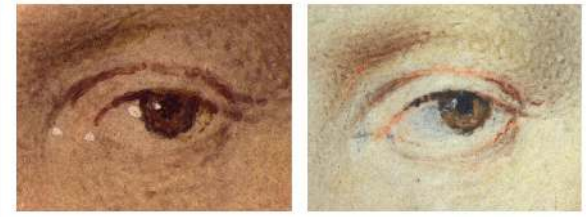

Figure 5

Isaac Oliver, *Microscopic detail of eyes in Figures 3 and 4*, Left: Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection (B1974.2.75); Right: National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 4966). Digital image courtesy of Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection; National Portrait Gallery, London (all rights reserved).

Several other surviving unfinished miniatures from this period seem, by contrast, to confirm the distinct purpose of the Yale miniature; they, unlike the miniature of Essex, appear to have originally been intended for working up into complete, fully finished miniatures. A portrait of Elizabeth I by Oliver, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, has a completed blue background, the face fully modelled, the hair incomplete, and the dress sketched in with unusually bold strokes (fig. 6). The level of finish is closely comparable to that of another miniature, in this case by Nicholas Hilliard, of an unknown woman, also in the V&A (fig. 7). It has been proposed that the miniature of Elizabeth I may not have been intended for completion, as it was used as the basis for engravings and it may not have been possible to trim it into a regular oval shape.[37] However, the painting of the blue background would suggest that this miniature was not only made as a pattern for engravings, but that there was, originally, an intention to complete it; the blue background serves no purpose in making engravings.

Figure 6

Isaac Oliver, *Elizabeth I, 1590–1592*, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 8.2 x 5.2 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (P.8 – 1940). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Figure 7

Nicholas Hilliard, *An Unknown woman, 1575–1580*, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 3.9 x 3.25 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (P.8-1947). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Figure 8

Nicholas Hilliard, *Portrait of an unknown Lady*, circa 1595, watercolour on vellum, laid relaid onto card, 18.2 × 12.2 cm. Collection of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (PD.209 - 1961). Digital image courtesy of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (all rights reserved).

A third unfinished work, again by Hilliard, in the Fitzwilliam Museum, seems to confirm that these two miniatures at the V&A were intended to be completed, by revealing the purpose of the bold, rather crude strokes with which the costumes are delineated in all three of these works (fig. 8). This is a cabinet miniature of an unknown woman with, again, an almost completed background, this time comprising a red curtain, with the face and hair nearly complete, and the dress just sketched in. In this example, the dress is, as with the two unfinished V&A miniatures, delineated with thick, dark strokes. However, these strokes have then been brushed over with a translucent white wash. They have the effect of indicating the shape and structure of the folds of the skirt, the edges of the bodice, and other compositional features in the dress, through the wash. Their crudity is reduced by the white wash but they are still clearly visible, marking out where colour was to be added to create form. The V&A miniatures have clearly been abandoned at one stage before this, leaving the thick black strokes disconcertingly prominent.

The disconcerting roughness—clearly never intended to be seen—of areas of these three unfinished miniatures is nowhere echoed in the highly refined Yale miniature of the Essex; only one other surviving miniature by Oliver from this period appears to be of the same refined but apparently unfinished type. It is, significantly, a portrait of Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, which emerged onto the art market in London in 2011 (fig. 9).[38] Southampton was a close friend and ally, accompanying Essex to Cadiz in 1596, the Azores in 1597, and Ireland in 1599. He was one of the major players in Essex's rebellion of 1601 and was tried and condemned with him, although his death sentence was commuted to imprisonment in the Tower. On loan to the V&A in the first part of the twentieth century, and subsequently included in Jill Finsten's PhD thesis on Oliver, the miniature of Southampton was until recently nevertheless unfamiliar to most scholars of period.[39] The face is worked up in detail, the hair painted fairly broadly, the costume lightly delineated in grey strokes and the background absent entirely. No versions of this miniature are known, but comparison with the Yale miniature of Essex suggests that it was created to serve the same purpose, for the artist to keep in the studio as the basis of replicas. As the hair is less finished in execution than in the Essex miniature, it is less clear a case than that of Essex, but again, the background, usually done early in the process, has not been started, whereas the face appears to be complete. The modelling of the face also appears to be largely in monochrome brown, although the miniature has suffered from fading and so it is possible that some colour has been lost from this area. The costume is lightly and delicately delineated in outline.

The surviving evidence suggests that Oliver produced such replica miniatures of only a very few sitters, all of whom in the 1590s appear to be connected with Essex, although it is of course reasonable to assume that some miniatures have been lost. Aside from Essex himself, the most replicated miniature by Oliver of the late Elizabethan period is that of Sir Richard Leveson, which exists in three high quality versions, in the Wallace Collection (fig. 10), at Welbeck (Portland Collection) and at Charlecote Park (National Trust). Leveson was not a particularly high profile Elizabethan courtier, but he was a close associate of Essex. He captained one of the ships on Essex's Cadiz expedition in 1596, and was knighted as a result, and also went on the Azores expedition of 1597. Like Essex, he wears a long, rectangular beard in the miniatures, although his wide collar may suggest that the image was painted a few years later than that of Essex. There is no known evidence for the commission of Leveson's miniatures; they could have been painted for loved ones before he left for potentially dangerous voyages, or for friends or patrons to celebrate his naval or other successes. But Leveson's association with Essex is significant in the context of him also being the subject of replica miniatures.[40]

Figure 9

Isaac Oliver, *Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton*, circa 1565–1617, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 6.5 x 5.2 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of Christie's (All rights reserved).

Figure 10

Isaac Oliver, *Sir Richard Leveson*, circa 1595–1600, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 5.1 x 4 cm. Wallace Collection, London (M287). Digital image courtesy of Wallace Collection, London (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Two miniatures by Oliver from the late 1590s, now in the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, seem likely to record another of Essex's associates (fig. 11). The sitter is currently identified as George Clifford, 3rd Earl of Cumberland; the face is the same in both portraits, but in each he wears different clothing. A fair-haired man with a blond beard that, unusually, is both wide and long, in one miniature he wears a black doublet and a wide-brimmed black hat with a black plume, and in the other an embroidered jacket with a blue cloak over one shoulder. He does not, however, resemble Clifford in any authentic portraits. Clifford's appearance is well recorded, including in portraits commissioned by his daughter Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, and in

miniatures in which he wears armour documented as belonging to him (fig. 12).[41] Clifford was a dark-haired man who had a narrow, very dark beard. An overlooked portrait at Woburn Abbey suggests what may be the true identity of the man in the Swedish miniatures. It is a full-length oil painting of Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby (1573–1644), in front of a military or tournament-style tent, with his armour beside him (fig. 13). Danby is more familiarly known by his portrait by Van Dyck, painted in the late 1630s, now in the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, which shows him in Garter Robes, wearing a distinctive crescent-shaped patch over the wound he received when he was shot in the face fighting in Ireland in 1599.[42] The Woburn painting shows him as a much younger man, but after 1599, as he has the patch. The facial resemblance between Henry Danvers in the oil painting at Woburn and the man in the two Swedish miniatures is striking; the unusually wide, as well as long, fair beard, wide-set eyes and long, pointed nose are closely comparable.

Figure 11

Isaac Oliver, *Two portraits of George Clifford, 3rd Earl of Cumberland, here identified as Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby*, circa 1590s, watercolour on vellum laid onto card, NMB 974: 5.4 x 4.3; NMB 973: 5 x 4.7 cm. Collection of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (NMB 974 left, NMB 973 right). Digital image courtesy of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

Figure 12

Nicholas Hilliard, *George Clifford, 3rd Earl of Cumberland*, circa 1590, watercolour on vellum, laid onto a fruitwood panel, 25.8 x 17.6 cm. Collection of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (MNT0193). Digital image courtesy of National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (All rights reserved).

Figure 13

Unknown artist, *Henry Danvers, Earl of Danby*, circa 1590s, oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Collection of Woburn Abbey. Digital image courtesy of His Grace the Duke of Bedford and the Trustees of the Bedford Estates (All rights reserved).

While it is perfectly likely that Danby's beard shape and colour were not unique to him, it is notable that there appear to be no other portraits of contemporary courtiers wearing a beard like this. It may be that Danby's beard, like Essex's, was intended to allude to his military adventures, perhaps those undertaken when he and his brother Sir Charles Danvers were in exile in France in the mid-1590s. The brothers had been outlawed after a murder in 1594; they escaped England with the help of their friend the Earl of Southampton, and, once in France, endeavoured to turn around their fortunes. They earned praise from both French and English courtiers for their

military valour while in exile. With the help of various members of Elizabeth's court, notably Essex's wife Frances Walsingham, Danvers and his brother were pardoned in 1598.[43]
Neither of the miniatures in Stockholm includes the crescent-shaped patch, so it could be that, if the sitter is correctly identified as Danby, they were painted before 1599. The miniature with a hat, however, has an area of paint loss approximating to the location of the patch, so it seems possible that what might have been seen as an inexplicably disfiguring mark, once the true identification had been lost, was scraped away in more recent times.[44] Danby, like Essex, clearly valued the power of visual signifiers of military achievements; his patch reminded everyone he met of his valour in battle, and by including it in his portraits, he could also remind those who only saw his image.[45] Danby's patch was also visual evidence of his bond with Essex, as he received this wound fighting in Essex's Irish campaign, specifically when he came to Essex's aid near Mallow, County Cork.
Essex's efforts to achieve power at the Elizabethan court were eventually defeated with absolute finality by his desperate and ill-judged rebellion of 1601, followed quickly by trial and execution. Southampton, tried with his friend, was spared death but was committed to the Tower. Henry Danvers had avoided involvement, but his brother Charles took part and was also executed. The other sitters in Oliver's court miniatures of the 1590s—Peregrine Bertie, Sir Richard Leveson, and the Browne brothers—were not involved with this last, disastrous scheme of Essex's. It might be assumed that Oliver's association with a group of disgraced courtiers would have affected his burgeoning career as a court portraitist. However, the death of the queen two years later and the accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne changed the picture entirely. Essex's active support of James's claim to succeed Elizabeth had been a key part of Essex's political strategy and his loyalty was recognised by the new king. While discouraging the re-formation of Essex's faction, and appointing Essex's rival Robert Cecil as his chief minister, James showed favour to Essex's family and associates. He had Southampton released from the Tower and Essex's son reinstated in the Earldom. James himself chose Nicholas Hilliard as his official miniaturist, picking up his patronage where Elizabeth I had left off, but Hilliard was no longer the miniaturist of choice for the cognoscenti at court. Oliver was appointed "Painter for the art of limning" to Queen Anne in 1605 and his patronage at court subsequently became widespread and well established; Anne's greater interest in and engagement with the visual arts —greater than both Elizabeth I and James—was a key factor in the development of court portraiture at this time.[46] It is possible that some of the Essex replicas date from this later period, when previously suppressed mourning for the popular Essex found expression in various media.[47]
The miniatures Oliver produced in the seventeenth century do not indicate such a clear pattern of patronage as the Elizabethan court miniatures of the 1590s, in the context of Oliver's more widespread popularity at the Stuart court. However, his practice of producing replicas, which had found favour among Essex and his associates, and appears to have been developed specifically for them, also found patronage at James's court. Most notable are the many surviving miniatures of Henry, Prince of Wales, but these, although the face appears to have been painted from a pattern, follow the long tradition of royal replica miniatures in having different costumes—in this case, armour and collars—in each one. Oliver's replica miniatures of Jacobean courtiers, on the other hand, correspond closely with his practice at the Elizabethan court. Particularly notable are those of Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford (fig. 14). At least four replica miniatures of her survive; in addition to a number of more independent miniatures of her, these give Harington a parallel position of prominence to that of Essex in the artist's earlier oeuvre.[48] Harington's

husband, Edward Russell, 3rd Earl of Bedford, was a close associate of Essex and had been involved in the rebellion.

Figure 14

Isaac Oliver, *Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford*, circa 1612–1616, watercolour on vellum, laid onto card, 5.1 x 4.4 cm. Royal Collection (RCIN 420892). Digital image courtesy of Royal Collection Trust and Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2020 (All rights reserved).

The other significant Oliver replica miniatures of this period are two of Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox, later Duke of Richmond, painted in about 1603, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum and the National Portrait Gallery respectively (fig. 15). Lennox was a second cousin of James VI, which made him one of James's closest relatives, and he was the only non-royal Duke in either England or Scotland when James ascended to the English throne in 1603 as James I. Although he was not a significant political player in James's court in England, Lennox clearly commanded very high social prestige. Lennox displays the most luxurious beard of all, perhaps by this time and in this case more of a fashion statement, as he was not a notable military man. The Fitzwilliam Museum version is in much better condition and of higher quality overall that the one in the National Portrait Gallery collection, but recent examination by Christine Slottved Kimbriel and Paola Ricciardi has shown that the former was altered at an early stage by the artist; specifically, the collar shape has been changed and was originally the same shape as that in the National Portrait Gallery miniature (fig. 16).[49] This suggests that the NPG miniature may be slightly earlier. Close examination of the NPG miniature has revealed that the face and beard, while damaged and retouched, are of a quality to be attributable to Oliver himself, whereas the costume is painted with much less skill. The face is also rendered in monochrome shades of brown, contrasting with the Fitzwilliam Museum miniature's face, modelled in a wider range of colours. The combination of the skilful but monochrome rendering of the face and beard, by comparison with the more crudely painted costume suggests that this may have been the original pattern miniature—of the Essex and Southampton type—made as the basis for replicas of

Lennox's portrait, but finished off relatively crudely by another hand at a later date.[50] The hypothesis that this miniature was not originally intended to be mounted and framed is supported by the fact that it is not laid onto a playing card, which usually happened before the painting process even started, but onto table-book leaf, a type of gesso-backed card which became the usual support for miniatures after Isaac Oliver's death. The incentive for finishing this miniature may well have come from Lennox's third wife, Frances Howard, who married the duke in 1621, four years after Oliver's death, and wore this distinctively shaped miniature prominently in portraits of herself painted during her widowhood.[51]

Figure 15

Left portrait: Isaac Oliver, *Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox, later Duke of Richmond*, circa 1605, watercolour on vellum, laid onto table-book leaf, 5.7 x 4.4 cm. Collection of National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 3063); Right portrait: Isaac Oliver, *Ludovick Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox, later Duke of Richmond*, circa 1603, watercolour on vellum, laid on card, 4.9 x 4 cm. Collection of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (FM 3869). Digital image courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, London (All rights reserved); Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (All rights reserved).

Figure 16

Isaac Oliver, Ludovic Stuart, 2nd Duke of Lennox and Duke of Richmond (near-infrared image), circa 1603, watercolour on vellum, laid on card, 4.9 x 4 cm. Collection of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (FM 3869). Digital image courtesy of Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (All rights reserved).

To conclude, consideration of the political context of the sitters in Isaac Oliver's court miniatures of the 1590s has revealed what appears to be a pattern in the artist's patronage at this time, both in terms of who he was painting and the kinds of miniatures that he was producing. Oliver's court patronage focused around Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, who in the later 1590s was consciously promoting his own image in the pursuit of political goals, and also assembling around himself a group of loyal adherents, both dependent on his patronage and supportive of his aims. The advent of replica miniature portraits in Oliver's oeuvre—and therefore in miniature painting as a whole—seems to have been a direct response to the requirements of Essex and his circle, used to support and reinforce their socio-political networks, echoing the use of oil portraiture in this way. Technical examination of some of the miniatures concerned has revealed how Oliver painted pattern miniatures, never intended to be "completed", in order to satisfy a new demand for replicas. In addition to his notably innovative style, with its connections to continental Mannerism, Oliver's demonstrable ability to create very high quality repetitions of

portraits, as well as his close association with Essex and his circle, put him in pole position to dominate miniature painting at the court of James I, which is exactly what he went on to do.

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Catharine MacLeod is Senior Curator of Seventeenth-Century Portraits at the National Portrait Gallery. She studied English Literature at the University of Cambridge and History of Art at the Courtauld Institute, London. She has curated a number of major exhibitions including Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II (2001); The Lost Prince: The Life and Death of Henry Stuart (2012); and most recently, Elizabethan Treasures: Miniatures by Hilliard and Oliver (2019). She has written extensively on British portraiture of the early modern period, most recently publishing on the portraiture of Anne of Denmark, and she is working with Diana Dethloff of UCL on a catalogue raisonné of the works of Sir Peter Lely.

Footnotes

1. For example, see Roy Strong, *Artists of the Tudor Court: The Portrait Miniature Rediscovered 1520–1620* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1983), 97; and Roy Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1983), 162 and 166.
2. Crudely, Hilliard's style depended on a more linear aesthetic and an economical, graphic approach, with relatively little modelling of facial features or attempt to create a sense of space behind the picture plane; Oliver's miniatures are much more highly modelled, using subtle tonal transitions to create areas of light and shade, and with a greater emphasis on individuality in his portraits. See Victoria Button, Katherine Coombs, and Alan Derbyshire, "Limning, the Perfection of Painting: The Art of Painting Portrait Miniatures", in Catharine MacLeod (ed.), *Elizabethan Treasures: Miniatures by Hilliard and Oliver* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019), 26–28.
3. Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature*, 111.
4. Strong, *The English Renaissance Miniature*, 112.
5. Jill Finsten, *Isaac Oliver at the Courts of Elizabeth I and James I* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981), Vol. 1, 37, n. 23.
6. Paul Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585–1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
7. For example, Janet Dickinson, *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589–1601* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012); and Alexandra Gajda, *The Earl of Essex and Late Elizabethan Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
8. See Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, 211; and Elizabeth Goldring, *Nicholas Hilliard: Life of an Artist* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre

for Studies in British Art, 2019), 236–237.

9. Roy Strong, "Faces of a Favourite: Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, and the Uses of Portraiture", *British Art Journal* 5 (2004), 80.
10. Strong, "Faces of a Favourite", 80.
11. The significance of factional politics at court in the 1590s has not been accepted by all historians. Janet Dickinson proposes a different model in *Court Politics and the Earl of Essex, 1589–1601* (2012), arguing that the Cecil faction was largely a retrospective, invented creation. However, most historians accept that Essex sought to strengthen his own position by assembling loyal followers around him.
12. Finsten, *Isaac Oliver at the Courts of Elizabeth I and James I*, Vol. 1, 37, n. 23.
13. The Burghley House Collections.
14. V&A P.5-1947.
15. See Paul E.J. Hammer, "Myth-Making: Politics, Propaganda and the Capture of Cadiz in 1596", *The Historical Journal* 40 (1997): 621–642.
16. "Venice: November 1596", in Horatio F. Brown (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 9, 1592–1603* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1897), 236–245. *British History Online*, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/venice/vol9/pp236-245, accessed 22 April 2020.
17. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, 211. For more on the relationship between beards and the creation of masculine identity in the Renaissance period, and particularly martial identity, see Will Fisher, "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England", *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 155–187, especially 172–173.
18. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, 199.
19. For example, see Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, 216–224 on Essex's following among military men.
20. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics*, 206.
21. Roy Strong, "Faces of a Favourite", 89.
22. Strong, "Faces of a Favourite", 87. This was a portrait presented to the Venetian factor in London.
23. Strong, "Faces of a Favourite", 80.
24. *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1558–1603*, edited by P.W. Hasler (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1981) and TNA: PRO, PROB 11/144, fols 201*v*–202*r*; see also Mary Edmond, *Hilliard and Oliver: the Lives and Works of Two Great Miniaturists* (London: Robert Hale, 1983), 109.
25. NPG 4966.
26. RCIN 420933.
27. MIN0004.
28. E.1177-1988.
29. For example, see Rachel Billinge, "Artists' Underdrawing and the Workshop Transfer Process", in Tarnya Cooper, Aviva Burnstock, Maurice Howard, and Edward Town (eds), *Painting in Britain 1500–1630* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2015), 138–145.
30. Sir John Harington recorded that he had heard from others that Hilliard could paint the queen "by the Idea he hath, without any patterne". Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso in English Heroical Verse, by Sir John Harington of Bathe Knight*, translated by John Harington, 2nd edn (London: printed by Richard Field, 1607), 278. The ambivalent relationship between the

use of patterns by artists and the value of invention and ingenuity is discussed by Alexander Marr in "Pregnant Wit: *ingegno* in Renaissance England", *British Art Studies* 1 (November 2015), DOI:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/amarr.

31. See Graham Reynolds, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Miniatures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (London: The Royal Collection, 1999), 45–48.
32. The exception to this repetition of costume is a full-length version using the same head type, formerly in the collection of Valerie Eliot, which shows Essex dressed in white, with a gorget worn under the lower collar; see Christie's sale 20 November 2013, lot 171.
33. See Lindsay Stainton and Christopher White, *Drawing in England from Hilliard to Hogarth* (London: British Museum Press, 1987), 48; and Graham Reynolds, *The Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Miniatures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen*, 85.
34. I am very grateful to Jessica David and Polly Saltmarsh for sharing with me the technical report they wrote on the miniature at Yale in 2015, which informs the rest of the discussion of this miniature.
35. I am very grateful to Polly Saltmarsh for sharing with me her observations on these two miniatures.
36. The highlights on the NPG miniature have oxidised and now appear greyish.
37. Charlotte Bolland in Catharine MacLeod (ed.), *Elizabethan Treasures: Miniatures by Hilliard and Oliver* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2019), 111.
38. Christie's sale, London, 29 November 2011, lot 101.
39. Finsten, *Isaac Oliver at the Courts of Elizabeth I and James I*, Vol. 2, 62–63, no. 37.
40. As is the case with Essex, there is also a relationship between Leveson's miniatures by Oliver and a full-length oil portrait painted at about the same time—in this case, a painting formerly at Arbury Hall, Warwickshire.
41. For example, the portrait attributed to Jan van Belcamp and now at Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal; the miniature by Nicholas Hilliard in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City; and the miniature by Hilliard in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.
42. Susan J. Barnes, Nora de Poorter, Oliver Millar, and Horst Vey, *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (New Haven, CT: Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art for Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 494 – 495.
43. J.J.N. McGurk, "Danvers, Henry, Earl of Danby, (1573–1644)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, DOI:10.1093/ref:odnb/7133.
44. I am grateful to Cecilia Ronnerstam, specialist in portrait miniatures in the Research Department of the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm for confirming that this area of paint appears to have been scraped away.
45. See Karen Hearn, "Revising the Visage: Patches and Beauty Spots in Seventeenth-Century British and Dutch Painted Portraits", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (2015), 816.
46. See MacLeod, *Elizabethan Treasures*, 182.
47. Strong suggests that some of the miniatures might be later works by Oliver, see Strong, *Artists of the Tudor Court*, 106.
48. See MacLeod, *Elizabethan Treasures*, 159; and Cory Korkow, *British Portrait Miniatures: The Cleveland Museum of Art* (London: Cleveland Museum of Art in association with D. Giles Ltd, 2013), 62–65.
49. See Christine Slottved Kimbriel and Paola Ricciardi, "Secrets of a Silent Miniaturist: Findings from a Technical Study of Miniatures Attributed to Isaac Oliver", *British Art Studies*

17, DOI:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-17/kimbrielricciardi.

50. See Kimbriel and Ricciardi, "Secrets of a Silent Miniaturist", DOI:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-17/kimbrielricciardi.
51. See MacLeod, *Elizabethan Treasures*, 156–157.

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