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Elizabethan Espionage: Plotters and Spies in the Struggle between Catholicism and the Crown. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016. Pp. x + 358. Pb, \$49.95.

Spying, secrecy, and subterfuge were all part of the English/British scene long before the advent of James Bond. A number of studies in recent years have examined various aspects of the underworld of espionage, although most have focused on the Elizabethan government's extensive spy network and its impact. One such insightful example is Stephen Alford's *The Watchers: A Secret History of the Reign of Elizabeth I* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012), which pulls the curtain back on the full extent and pervasive reach of the Elizabethan secret service and its pursuit of perceived enemies: religious (especially Catholics) or political, foreign or domestic, real or imagined. Patrick Martin takes a rather different approach, focusing instead on the Catholic side of the scales and investigating the response of English Catholics to what they believed to be a life or death struggle for the future existence of the ancient faith and its adherents in early modern England.

Martin's study overlaps with Alford's and others' regarding many of the main players and plots that were afoot in this exciting, transformative, and often dark and dangerous era. What is particularly intriguing and novel in *Elizabethan Espionage* is the way that it shines a light on a figure who, quite intentionally, wanted to remain largely in the shadows—and who managed to do so for many centuries. William Sterrell, an Oxford philosopher, was, at one level, part of the Elizabethan establishment; he worked for Robert Devereaux, Earl of Essex (until his demise) and Edward Somerset, 4th Earl of Worcester. Both Sterrell and Worcester were known to be Catholic or at least to have Catholic sympathies, and the government viewed them as useful agents in reaching out to, and ultimately undermining, Catholics and their efforts, whether to gain toleration for their faith or, in some more extreme cases, to overthrow what they believed to be an implacably hostile Elizabethan regime.

At the center of the government's spy network was Francis Walsingham, who was determined to preserve Protestantism and destroy Catholicism, especially in England and the English Catholic network abroad. Walsingham and his supporters were particularly concerned to protect Queen Elizabeth from the various plots that arose against her, whether to take her life or at least to replace her on the throne with a Catholic monarch—especially Mary, Queen of Scots, or, after her execution in 1587, another suitable Catholic replacement. Among the more vexing questions in this regard is whether religious intriguers instigated these plots as opposed to their being concocted by government officials to ensnare unwitting, if disgruntled, English Catholics. Martin argues that

Walsingham, especially in his obsession to destroy Mary of Scotland, had his hand in virtually all of these plots. While this *may* be true, and while many of his methods were morally dubious, this could be giving him an unfair degree of blame—or credit!

Among the more influential figures on the Catholic side were Hugh Owen, Richard Verstegan, Thomas Fitzherbert, and Robert Persons, all eventually continental exiles who formed major links in the chain of Catholic counter-intelligence. Persons had helped to launch the Jesuit mission to England in 1580, but was forced to flee the next year, after Campion's capture and his notoriety made him a marked man. For almost the next thirty years, however, he worked indefatigably for the English Catholic cause from abroad. For Persons and the others in this exile network, an indispensable ally was William Sterrell, who proved to be a shrewd double agent. While the government was using him to supposedly ferret out Catholic missionaries and plots, he was assisting his coreligionists in various ways, including the wide-ranging efforts and networks of the Jesuits John Gerard and Henry Garnet. In the case of Garnet, Sterrell's feigned efforts to track him down allowed the Jesuit superior to remain at large and achieve much over a surprising twenty-year span. As in all espionage, subterfuge was essential to success and, as Martin relates, "Sterrell and his associates eluded the English government (and historians) by the complexity of their communications" (161).

In the late Elizabethan era, religion and politics, both internally and internationally, intertwined in myriad ways. The Essex Rebellion (1601), which revealed some deep domestic divisions, was reframed, inaccurately, as largely Catholic in nature. In an intriguing connection, Martin argues that in its execution of Anne Line, a Catholic gentlewoman who was condemned for assisting missionary priests, the government tried to link Line and several others to its response to the rebellion. In the internal Catholic dispute known as the Appellant Controversy (relating to governance of the secular clergy and some differences with the Jesuits), the Elizabethan government tried to exacerbate these divisions, whereas Persons and Sterrell tried to drive the regime and the Appellants apart. Facing its own internecine religious divides, the government issued a proclamation in 1602 that officially expelled all Catholic priests (including both Jesuits and Appellants) from the country. This was, however, partly theater designed to appease the Puritans. It was a classic case of targeting an external enemy (the Catholic Church) in order to quell internal dissent.

Although entitled *Elizabethan Espionage*, the last several chapters cover the onset of the Jacobean era. In 1603 James VI of Scotland also became James I of England and, despite Catholic hopes for toleration, it was not forthcoming.

The Somerset House Treaty between England and Spain (1604) largely closed the door to the intervention of the European Catholic powers on behalf of English Catholics. Yet, in part because Queen Anne (of Denmark) was a crypto-Catholic, court entertainments, especially those designed or written by Catholics or Catholic sympathizers, could have subtle or not so subtle political and religious undertones. Martin argues, for example, that Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* was an implicit plea to the king and court for some measure of toleration.

Catholic hopes were largely dashed in the crazed Gunpowder Plot (1605). In this instance, Martin contends that "there is no reason to believe these men [conspirators] were prompted by government provocateurs" (276). While speculation continues to swirl around this plot, others argue that the regime did in fact entice if not entrap at least some of the conspirators. (See, for example, the trilogy on Elizabethan plots by Francis Edwards, S.J.) In any event, Martin emphasizes that the Jacobean government tried to shift the timeframe, contending that this conspiracy was hatched prior to James's accession, thereby denying that his policies played a role in triggering this scheme of desperation on the part of some Catholic gentry.

This account of Elizabethan/Jacobean espionage and Catholic counter-espionage has a number of important insights, especially the fact that the latter existed to a greater extent and with more success than most historians have previously recognized. The author has mined some previously untapped or underutilized sources and has enriched our knowledge of this period, especially relating to areas that the historical players often wished to keep hidden in the dark. Perhaps inevitably there is a fair amount of speculation, so the dividing lines between the possible, the probable, and the near certain are not always clear. Also, at times, the density of the material does not make for easy reading. Still, the spotlight that Martin shines on the extensive Catholic spy network, and on William Sterrell in particular, makes this a valuable study.

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