



# Edmund Spenser's War on Lord Burghley (Early Modern Literature in History)

*Dr Bruce Danner*

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Despite their literary, historical, and biographical significance, Edmund Spenser's attacks on William Cecil, Lord Burghley, have never been the focus of significant critique. These assaults on the Lord Treasurer's character and judgment rank among the era's most politically-charged literary writings, provoking censorship of the 1591 *Complaints*, deflecting the author from his Virgilian-inspired persona as a voice of the state, and intruding a bitter pessimism into his gestures of self-presentation throughout the 1590s. Danner's study examines the poet's attacks on Elizabeth I's powerful first minister, reassesses the timeline of events that led to them, and argues for their centrality in Spenser's increased self-definition as a political and cultural outsider. Interweaving the methods of both literary analysis and critical biography, *Edmund Spenser's War on Lord Burghley* challenges the established dates of canonical texts, the social and personal contexts for scandalous topical allegories, and the new historicist portrait of Spenser's 'worship' of power and state ideology.

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