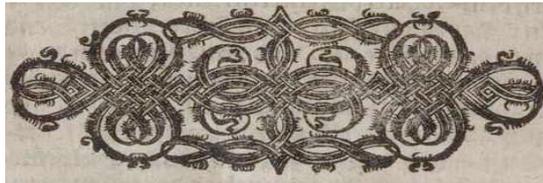


The Rhetoric of Mortality: Elizabeth I's Use of Death

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This paper examines Elizabeth I's use of death in her rhetoric. Built as a reaction to Henry VIII's apparent view of lives as expendable, Elizabeth attempted to forge her own indelible identity within the hearts of her subjects while warding off the dangerous advances of her male courtiers. The major issues and themes of her reign can be broken down into three broad and overlapping categories, each equally influential on her rhetoric of death. As assuredly as she ruled by God's will Elizabeth would have to give account before Him in the next life, and she professed this to be the standard she lived by. In Elizabeth's rhetoric, death becomes the most potent argumentative device in her arsenal and demonstrates her ability to change her greatest weakness into her greatest strength.



Confrontation with any aspect of the life of Elizabeth I necessarily incorporated her position as a female monarch and doubly so the area of her rhetoric. To some extent her capability as monarch is easily explained by her education and oratory skills; Elizabeth can be said to have assumed male courtly language when she became queen. As critic Allison Heisch points out, Elizabeth was more an “honorary man” than a beacon for women’s liberation.¹ She did not or, more generously, could not pursue the issue of women’s rights from her tenuous position. However her lack of policy dealing with women’s issues did not minimize the fact that she was a woman operating, with some historic success, in a court of hostile men. The relatively recent field of gender studies concerning this time period, especially the work of Maire Axton, Susan Frye, and Carol Levin, has explored the nuance and intrigue of being a lone powerful female in a male society.² Taking the investigation a step further than gender relations, this essay examines Elizabeth’s use of death in her speeches and in so doing seeks to illuminate the most effective tool she used to wield power in such an antagonistic, male environment. Lacking the gendered

authority of her late father, Elizabeth could not simply force obedience or ignore male counsel: her gender did not immediately allow for political dominance even if her desires were expressed in the appropriate modes. While she invoked her femininity at times to demonstrate her motherly love for her people and other related applications, it was not directly her most powerful or fundamental rhetorical trope. What took this position in her rhetoric was her own death: her manipulation of that potential and future event provides the foundation for her other rhetoric, even and especially that of her femininity.

Before looking at specific examples, I will establish what “rhetoric of mortality” means to separate it from other rhetorics of a similar nature and to demonstrate how this particular rhetoric is unique to Elizabeth and her position as queen. As a point of reference, if we were to examine the mortality rhetoric of her father Henry VIII or most other male monarchs we would find that it is outwardly directed. Henry’s assertion of his power over the lives of those around him was extraordinary and has a particular relevance to Elizabeth that we will examine more closely later.³ For now it is sufficient to realize that kings publicly thought about death when they made their wills, when they decided whom to execute, when they decided to go to war, and when they named their heirs. Kings wanted to appear as strong as possible; professions of the tenuousness of their own lives and the miraculous nature of their survival did not fit with the traditional interpretations of divine right that greatly valued prowess and virtue over the sort of divine protection that Elizabeth invoked. Kings did not want to bring attention to the fact that they were mortal men just like their subjects. Other people died in a random way: God had directly appointed the king and controlled his fate.⁴ If the general mode of kings and by logical extension all males who were considered the rulers of their households was to direct death towards others, it was the fate of women, at least in the eyes of their male contemporaries, to occupy the opposite position. A representative sample of the thoughts of women at this time is difficult, if not impossible, to compile given the limited amount of education that average women would have received; however, in Charlotte Otten’s collection, we can see that women dealt with death self-reflexively much as the Queen did: the fear of death during childbirth is a common theme in the surviving accounts.⁵ As Lawrence Stone has documented, men assumed near-total control over women: husbands could beat their wives for disobedience and, in some places, kill them if they suspected adultery or infanticide.⁶ Henry VIII’s actions toward women provide a significant precedent for Elizabeth to establish a feminine fear-of-death rhetoric: in Henry’s court women lived and died at his design. However, Elizabeth’s position allowed her to create a previously unused and unavailable space between the two positions of male dominance and female helplessness. Her rhetoric of mortality was an

empowered reflexive use of the concept. She called attention to her own vulnerability as a way of proving her legitimacy and deflating the arguments of her opponents. Her rhetoric was as death-centered as the rhetorics of her female contemporaries often were, but given her position as ruler her language becomes as much a tool for endorsement as vulnerability.⁷ Although death was latent in most of her self-affirming gestures, the emphasis that the Queen placed on death in the limited words she used in public demonstrated much more than a vague concept of mortality. Elizabeth's rhetoric of death evolved through time, but its core remained both an admission of her tenuous female position and the proof of divine providence. Just as the monarchs before and after her, "Elizabeth sought to shape her public image through her oratory," as Teague notes, and due in part to her traumatic childhood, death became ever-present in her rhetoric and self-image.⁸

The perilous condition of women in positions of power in Elizabeth's life cannot be overstated; indeed, in early modern society women occupied a very low rung on the social ladder. Elizabeth's position as the lone political female in a male dominated society, despite her obvious intelligence, did little to change the value that men placed on the competency of women. This tenuous situation would not have come as a surprise to the Queen as she had been dealing with the reality of near-absolute male domination over women throughout her life. Larissa Taylor-Smith asserts that "[b]y analyzing the convergence of psychological traumata at critical stages in Elizabeth's life, we can arrive at an understanding of Elizabeth personally, the reasons for her success, and contemporary reactions to her rule."⁹ Though muted by courtly language, the Queen's singular awareness of death as imposed on women by men is evident in her speeches. An account of her early experiences with death, most associated with the women in her life, serves to establish why death was so much on her mind. When Elizabeth was just two years and eight months old, her mother was executed for high treason in May of 1536. What sort of direct effect her violent death had on Elizabeth would be impossible to measure, for not only had her mother disappeared physically, she was also blotted out publicly as "Anne Boleyn's name could not even be mentioned without provoking a fearsome reaction from Henry VIII."¹⁰ Elizabeth did not long lack a maternal, female presence, however, because her father married Jane Seymour almost immediately after Anne's execution. Elizabeth's new mother figure did not last, though, for she died of complications only twelve days after having given birth to Edward in 1537. Though Elizabeth was only four when this incident happened, it was one of her first experiences with death in childbirth. Even as the lasting impact of such an event on a child of this age might be difficult to gauge, she undoubtedly encountered it throughout her life, as the possibility of dying during or soon after giving birth became one of

her more powerful rhetorical examples. Two years later Henry married Anne of Cleves, who proved to be less attractive than advertised, and her six-month stay as Henry's wife provided another, if less deadly, precedent for the value of the queen-figure. At this point in her life Elizabeth gained another step-mother, her mother's cousin, Katherine Howard; however, less than two years later in 1542 Katherine was beheaded for her supposed amorous indiscretions before and after her marriage to the King. Elizabeth was almost ten when Henry married Katherine Parr and thirteen when he died leaving his actions and attitudes imprinted on Elizabeth's mind. While historian Sandra Sider argues that in the early modern period "[b]ecause most people did not live beyond the age of 40, death and the dying were a constant presence, simply a fact of life," this dispassionate view of mortality should not be extended to the realm of Henry VIII's court.¹¹ Elizabeth was most likely aware of the high mortality rates in the general population but could not be expected to view the deaths of the women around her as a matter of course, especially as most of these deaths were due to the direct will of her father. For everyone at that time, it was gravely serious that "the Renaissance had nothing with which to battle the major diseases that attacked thousands, including dysentery, diphtheria, ergotism, tuberculosis, smallpox, syphilis, a sickness that may have been typhus fever, and, of course, plague," as Sider observes, but for Elizabeth it would have been equally important that there seemed to be no guard against Henry VIII or, by extension, the will of any monarch.¹² Thus it is easy to see how Mary's accession to the throne marked a period of great personal struggle for Elizabeth. The two women were rallying points for opposing religious views and with plots on both sides her very survival was at stake. Even more serious than the position of being both female and in close proximity to Henry VIII, Elizabeth's life as a potential rival to Mary found her confined in the Tower of London in 1554 but released to house arrest after Mary supposed herself pregnant, a circumstance that effectively nullified the threat of Elizabeth's forcible succession. Mary was regularly advised that Elizabeth needed to die to ensure both her safety and the protection of Catholic interests in England, just as Elizabeth's advisors would ask for the death of Mary Queen of Scots. Elizabeth's survival in the face of such danger under both Henry and, perhaps more miraculously, Mary became one of the foundations of her rhetoric of death, and it did not seem too presumptuous to assert that only divine will could have preserved her through all of these trials.

While Elizabeth's young life may have been uniquely endangered because of her proximity to her father, it was also at great risk from the general danger to all young children at this time. As Sider explains, "At least 20 and as many as 40 percent of all babies, regardless of class, died within the first 12 months of life[, and]...half of those who survived infancy died before they reached the age of 10."¹³ Clearly to have made it

through adolescence at this time seems nothing short of a miracle, and while the comforts of nobility might have helped, in Elizabeth's case survival amounted to the outright protection of God. Supporting this assertion is Lena Cowen Orlin's argument that despite the parade of wives that Henry had "Elizabeth inherited the crown of England as the only remaining member of her immediate family. She would not have succeeded to the throne otherwise, given that family's particular history, her birth order, and her gender."¹⁴ Upon receiving news of her sister's death and her accession to the throne, Elizabeth is reported to have said, "This is the Lord's work and it is wondrous in our eyes," and she continued this theme into her public speeches.¹⁵ In her first speech to Parliament in 1558 Elizabeth said that upon their deaths, "I with my ruling and you with your service may make a good account to almighty God and leave some comfort to our posterity in earth."¹⁶ She was reinforcing the idea that God placed her on the throne and that neither she nor anyone else could ignore this command for her to rule. Though divine right as an argument for monarchy was not new, Elizabeth's preservation from death against all odds made it all the more relevant to her rhetoric. When she survived smallpox in 1562, she did not allow Parliament to use it as an argument for her swift production of an heir, explaining that it was not for her own benefit that she survived but for her people:

Although God of late seemed to touch me rather like one that He chastised than one that He punished, and though death possessed almost every joint of me, so as I wished then that the feeble thread of life, which lasted (methought) all too long, might by Clotho's hand have quietly been cut off, yet desired I not then life (as I have some witnesses here) so much for mine own safety, as for yours...I know now as well as I did before that I am mortal. I know also that I must seek to discharge myself of that great burden that God hath laid upon me; for of them to whom much is committed, much is required.¹⁷

The plots against her life definitely provided a deadly backdrop to her reign, but here Elizabeth was speaking of a direct confrontation with the reality of her own death. Whereas a King might have argued that he survived because of his strength, Elizabeth specifically said that her only motivation to survive was her concern for her people. Indeed she locates the control over her life in the hands of another entity: the Fate Clotho. However, it is important to note that Clotho was the spinner, Lachesis the one who decided the length of the thread of life, and their sister Atropos the Fate who cut the thread. Elizabeth would have known the roles of the Fates, so the suggestion is that Clotho was poised to act without her sisters and prematurely cut the thread. What stayed Clotho's hand, something that the Greek gods were powerless to do, was God's intervention on behalf of the people of England. God once again acknowledged that she

should rule by sparing her life and, despite her continual proximity to death, reinforced the claim she already asserted previously: that he has given her this “burden.” Her other rhetoric about her position as ruler was born out of this assertion; when she proclaimed herself “your anointed queen” there was no doubt as to where the substantiation of that claim derived.¹⁸ Though this theme followed Elizabeth throughout her reign, it was chiefly important in the first few years of her reign when her rule was most vulnerable; as Heisch explains, “Divine Right, to which she frequently alluded in the first handful of years, became in easier days a gracious explanation for her success, and in her last years almost irrelevant—something accepted rather than insisted upon.”¹⁹ Not all issues were so easily resolved as many lacked the historical precedents that arguments of divine right enjoyed; the well-documented arguments over succession are a prime example of an issue that was still hotly contested even when her right to rule despite her femininity became less widely contested.

Initially Parliament sought to require a speedy marriage of Elizabeth: “The House of Commons sent a delegation to the Queen, urging her to marry early. Their arguments were straightforward: a husband and children would provide her immortality, which she deserved,” as Teague notes.²⁰ Other delegations, letters, and proposals spelled out additional benefits of marriage: a husband would relieve her of the burdens of ruling alone; children would ensure the succession of her line, and both would end the plots against her life. However, in the estimation of Elizabeth herself, this constant pressure to marry amounted to a threat against her life. As she said in her October 1561 response to the Scottish ambassador when he brought up succession, “[T]his desire is without an example—to require me in my own life to set my winding-sheet before my eye! The like was never required of no prince.”²¹ While modern critics might find her accusations to be an exaggeration, consideration of the precedents in her own life shows them to be quite reasonable. After all, as Larissa Taylor observes, in her father’s house “wives were clearly expendable, their chief purpose being to produce male children. Catherine of Aragon had been discarded for her inability to give birth to a living male child; Elizabeth’s own mother had been executed for essentially the same reason; and Jane Seymour was dead even though she had given the king what he desired above all things.”²² Although Taylor asserts that it is primarily through these influences that Elizabeth developed “a lively dread of pregnancy and childbirth,” women at large had to deal with the very real possibility of death in childbirth.²³ Furthermore, her experiences with pregnancy and childbirth were by no means positive; as Taylor explains, “while death in childbirth (or as an indirect result of its issue, e.g., Anne Boleyn, Catherine of Aragon) was not rare in early modern England, Elizabeth was personally exposed to its

worst consequences on several important occasions."²⁴ Indeed, society at large during and after this time period seemed to focus on death in childbirth as the number of its artistic depictions, most notably on the tombs of women, significantly increased.²⁵ In this light Elizabeth's refusal to a hasty marriage was more than understandable: she avoided the possibility of dying by the new king's hand or the delivery of his progeny. Even when she claimed to be considering what was best for England, marriage was not preferable. Though not always so dramatic as to accuse Parliament of plotting her death, she meant virtually the same when she said, "At this present, it is not convenient, nor ever shall be without some peril unto you and certain danger unto me. But were it not for your peril, at this time I would give place notwithstanding my danger."²⁶ Her acquiescence to marry and produce an heir represented a softening of her earlier position. She acknowledged the danger to herself and said she was willing to marry when the time was right, but behind the more pleasant veneer lay the same message: pregnancy is life-threatening and marriage is one step away; she would risk neither unless absolutely imperative. Whether or not she actually intended to marry under any circumstances or was simply attempting to get Parliament to leave her alone is not recorded in history, but either way she placed the emphasis on her willingness to risk death for her people if necessary. Elizabeth mirrored a mother's protection of her children to her people; just as the death of the mother while protecting her children might temporarily save them it would leave them vulnerable afterward. Elizabeth's present death must outweigh the future negative outcomes; the conditions for sacrificing her own life having been the future safety and stability of England, she controlled the situation from both ends by refusing to name an heir and leaving succession in question. At the beginning of this two-sided debate, her replies were much less poetic than they became after her power began to solidify.

Her apparent selfless acceptance of death in childbirth when it was best for England was definitely a more diplomatic reply than she made in a speech the first year of her reign concerning her willingness to die a virgin. The transcript of this speech has two official versions; in the first her assertion, "And in the end this shall be for me sufficient: that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin," is slightly less poetic than the second but nonetheless powerful in its confirmation of Parliament's worst fears.²⁷ Elizabeth's willingness to remain unwed and without an heir was, in the first version, specifically related to her position as queen. Elizabeth's lack of an heir cannot be construed as her lack of care over the succession, as "[m]arriage by Catherine Grey or Mary Stuart would affect the English succession and Elizabeth exercised considerable power and ingenuity to thwart their respective courtships."²⁸ Thus, the first version specifically focuses on the

lack of her own heir but does not discount later actions to control what she saw as threats to herself and her people based on succession. Politicizing a simple statement about contentment with remaining unwed might seem like a convenient hindsight reading, but as the two versions are preserved as equally valid, it is important that we recognize the reasons multiple versions exist. The versions that have been preserved were, quite often, conscious attempts by the crown to control Elizabeth's public image, and the two versions of this speech did so for different ends. The preservation of the first version can be seen as having a political message, while the second has a more personal one. The second version of the speech makes no mention of her station but reads, "Lastly, this may be sufficient, both for my memory and honor of my name, if when I have expired my last breath, this may be inscribed upon my tomb: Here lies interred Elizabeth, A virgin pure until her death."²⁹ This version treats her more as woman than queen and therefore shifts the focus away from the succession and toward her human vulnerability. The lasting image of a pure virgin is what Elizabeth courted instead of suitors: this version explains that for Elizabeth marriage meant a sully of her honor, and, despite the wishes of her councilors, she wanted to die with it intact. On their side Parliament was struggling against the idea that in an "age of early menopause and a high rate of death in childbed...the House of Tudor would die with the queen," as King argues, but the Queen managed to outlast their persistence.³⁰ Although many members focused their arguments on the uncertainty of their lives after her death, there were those who saw, as the Queen did, the risks to her life. King observes:

Unlike Sidney, who remains discreetly silent about the queen's age and vulnerability to fatal complications in a pregnancy, Stubbs explicitly raises the danger of death in childbirth. His acknowledgement of the queen's real age and mortality lack's Sidney's courtly delicacy... "How exceedingly dangerous they find it by their learning for Her Majesty at these years to have her first child, yea, how fearful the expectation of death is to mother and child; I fear to say what will be their answer."³¹

For her own part Elizabeth must never have thought the danger to her subjects sufficiently relieved as to ignore the danger to herself and wed, and though she never named a successor, she attempted to conclude the matter by saying, "Howsoever it be, as long as I live, I shall be queen of England; when I am dead, they shall succeed that has most right."³² By bluntly saying, "when I am dead," Elizabeth was more than implying that the conversation was over. Both the Parliament and the Queen were dwelling on her death when discussing succession, which was one of the foundations of the Queen's displeasure with the whole business. Elizabeth argued against the serious consideration of her own death by others while at the same time seriously considering it herself: she was being forced to

acknowledge her own death, even anticipate it, while denying those around her the ability to plan publicly for that very eventuality. It is important to note that she was not denying the fact of her death, nor was she hiding her vulnerability; she was publicly arguing for the same higher power that preserved her life through her accession to handle the issue of succession. Elizabeth made it clear that she was the one to wield the rhetoric of her death; her subordinates were not allowed to anticipate its occurrence publically. Her refusal to name an heir meant both that plots to hasten the accession of the next ruler were not put into action and that she remained the primary locus of power.

The issue of succession was a cornerstone of Elizabeth's rhetoric of death, as well as that of her opponents, and in the contemporary theory of the king's two bodies succession is relevant to both her femininity and her sovereignty. Though the divisions between the king's two bodies have been well established and investigated elsewhere, it is important to explain the traditional distinction before looking at how Elizabeth addresses it.³³ In his study in mediaeval political theology, Kantorowicz explains that in the eyes of Elizabeth's courtiers, "The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural ... [A]nd in this he is subject to Passions and Death as other Men are; the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects ... [T]his Body is not subject to Passions as the other it, nor to Death, for as to this Body the King never dies."³⁴ Traditionally the division between the king's bodies is as mortal individual and head of the body politic. However, this distinction was a two-edged sword for Elizabeth as "immortality, perfection, [and] ubiquity all seem to enhance the power of the monarch, but the decision really stresses the continuity of the monarch and reminds Elizabeth Tudor that as Queen she is bound to observe the grants made by the monarchs whose office she holds," as Axton argues.³⁵ Therefore the unity of the body politic, past and present, could serve as a limitation on the power of the queen. Whether or not Elizabeth intended it, her oratory at Tilbury reorganized this duality in a way that focused on her weakness but strengthened her position. When she purportedly said, "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too," she was individualizing the body politic to the person of the monarch and delineating between her masculine and feminine halves.³⁶ The singular legal distinction of the person of the king allowed her to take on masculine traits without losing any of her feminine ones. The body politic was not represented as the people with her as the head, though she makes this traditional distinction elsewhere, but as the half of her that makes up for the susceptibility of the feminine to death.³⁷ The dangers against women at this time have been well established, and Elizabeth took on this stronger male half in this instance so that she might stand and fight for her subjects.

For Elizabeth, this insistence on her protection of her subjects did not only emerge as late as her speech at Tilbury; in 1559 Elizabeth was already assuring her subjects that “for the safety and quietness of you all I will not spare, if need be, to spend my blood.”³⁸ However, this trope was at its most poignant on the battle field, and her rhetoric underscores the situation: “Wherefore I am come among you at this time not for my recreation and pleasure, being resolved in the midst and heat of the battle to live and die amongst you all, to lay down for my God and for my kingdom and for my people mine honor and my blood even in the dust.”³⁹ This sentiment was no doubt appreciated, but without the masculine half that she professed to have it was less substantive. The duality of the Queen in the traditional sense allowed for all the past and future Kings of England to stand with their soldiers in defense of the realm; in Elizabeth’s sense it provided the masculine virtues in herself that she wanted her soldiers to have. Her willingness to sacrifice herself in battle, much like her willingness to marry if the time was right, was dramatic, if unproven, and echoed what she repeatedly professed in Parliament when she said, “I assure you all that though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet shall you never have any more mother than I mean to be unto you all,” and in a later speech along the same lines, “For although perhaps you may have after me one better learned or wiser, yet I assure you, none more careful over you.”⁴⁰ This image of caring mother, although intertwined with that of the protective father, provided only for the death of the mother figure. The protection came from the body politic, the love and devotion from Elizabeth herself: the former would continue when she dies, the latter would not. Elizabeth attempted to create her own golden age by tying her love of her people in with her own death, a rhetorical tactic that makes the love of future monarchs appear less sincere. All her arguments along these lines stem from her realization that she was going to die and her sense of the necessity of controlling her image even after death. Her physical reign would end, but she wanted her ideological reign to continue after her death in the hearts and minds of her subjects.

She reinforced this concept and the others that she used throughout her reign in her final major speech to Parliament, popularly called her Golden Speech. Here Elizabeth explained just how much death has influenced her:

Yet what dangers, what practices, what perils I have passed...But it is God that hath delivered. And in my governing, this I have ever had the grace to use—to set the Last Judgment Day before mine eyes and so to rule as I shall be judged, and to answer before a higher Judge, to whose judgment seat I do appeal that never thought was cherished in my heart that tended not to my people’s good.⁴¹

She began by going over the proof-positive of God's will for her to rule; the "perils" were no longer quite as imminent, but they had been a part of her rhetoric for so long that her audience would immediately recognize all the things she had overcome. In the same way Parliament would not be surprised by her concentration on rule based on post-mortem judgment, but her explanation of it here was more pronounced than it had been previously. Elizabeth clearly said that Judgment Day was "ever" on her mind: accountability after death was her standard for decision-making. Furthermore, she used the concentration on judgment, something with which both sides of the religious conflicts of her time would have agreed, as a final justification for her actions as monarch. Her death rhetoric here encapsulated the majority of those tropes that she used throughout her reign; even the argument about an heir was implicit in her assurance that all her decisions were for the good of her people. This invocation of death was, in relation to the changing politics around her, different from many of those mentioned, as there was no specific threat to the Queen to prompt it. The Tilbury speech, her response to the demands that she marry and bear a child, and her early arguments about her fitness to rule were all reacting to outside threats against her. She was accusatory: Parliament wanted her to risk her life in childbirth; foreign invaders were coming; people were trying to kill her. In the Golden Speech she introduced her mortality in a different way: death was still something upon which she always dwelled, but it had finished its evolution into more of a directional force in her reign than something with which outside influences were threatening her. She finalized the long process of taking back the political control of her death, but at the same time she was losing the physical battle.

Given Elizabeth's familiarity with death and her utilization of it in her speeches, it seems natural that she should despise her own aging; it was enough to confront death in Parliament, and she did not need it following her back to her private chambers. When Elizabeth was young, her control of physical images of herself was relatively straightforward; artists simply had to portray her in the most flattering and regal way possible, but as she got older realistic portraits were less flattering, and "after Isaac Oliver's disastrous experiment with naturalistic portraiture of the queen as an aging woman, authorized images shifted to the anachronistic 'Mask of Youth' that appears in paintings of the queen until her death," as King argues.⁴² After spending so much time fighting against the presentation of her death in public, it seems that its physical approach was not something she wanted reinforced. Not only did she prefer idealized versions of portraits that did not show her age, the Queen was so unable to face the approach of death that, according to some sources, she had all of the mirrors removed from the castle.⁴³ Although the credibility of these sources is somewhat in doubt, this action would

physically signify that Elizabeth continued in private what she wanted presented in public. Furthermore, because it was a popular notion at the time, this story shows a cultural awareness of the Queen's control of her own image. A cult of royal youth, despite everyone's knowledge to the contrary, exemplified a rhetorical position on her own death. Her motto "semper eadem" might have been true of her political and religious policy, but she seems to have wanted it to be true of her physical body as well. Her appearance in public under heavy make-up to maintain the semblance of the pure virginity of her early years aided her public control of the specter of her death. While it was acceptable for to talk about her death abstractly and to use it in courtly discourse as inevitability, she did not want to acknowledge its physical approach. No one would claim that the Queen or her subjects was unaware of her aging; even without mirrors in the castle, the evidence would make itself known, but she would rather use it as a tool than actually embrace it. Though political uses of her death were now well-established, her attempt to extend her control to the physical body can be interpreted both as the last grasping of an aging woman and the continuation of a practical policy into a less practical realm. Views of the queen as insecure in her aging body are plausible, but it would perhaps be more accurate to say that vanity played no greater or lesser part than her continuation of her death rhetoric: Elizabeth had made it very clear that she did not wish to discuss what was going to happen to those left behind when she died. God would take care of England the same way he preserved her; Elizabeth simply needed to control the images of herself that would remain after her death.

Given the precedents in Elizabeth's life, we can understand her need to be irreplaceable. She did not want her people to trade her for a new monarch like her father traded so many women in his life. In order to maintain an aura of necessity, Elizabeth built and maintained a position of control over her death. As a master rhetorician, Elizabeth emphasized her death as a way of strengthening and defending her position against a room full of hostile men. During her early years Elizabeth credited a higher power for her preservation, and she emphasized that when speaking to her people. Once in power she fought throughout the early years of her reign to control the conversation about her own death, and repeatedly feuded with Parliament over issues dealing with her mortality. Most indicative of her need to feel needed, she worked the hardest at getting people to focus on her instead of making plans for after her death: attempting to disguise her age, working to avoid naming an heir, and defining herself by how she would be remembered by her people and judged by her God. While Elizabeth did spend much of her life controlling and avoiding her death, her assurance that the love of future monarchs could not compare to hers allowed for the admission of a time when she would be dead. As she approached the end of her life, in a slight

relinquishing of the control she once demanded, she allowed people to acknowledge her death as long as she had not been replaced in their hearts.

Elizabeth's rhetoric of death developed as her reign progressed, responding both to the changing threats of the political landscape and her perception of the people's needs. Her accession to the throne was providential to say the least, but maintaining power was something that Elizabeth had to accomplish. Her deft political maneuvering was overwhelmingly influenced by her ability to use a rhetoric of death to accuse, justify, and persuade. She did not care to dwell on her death as much as brandish it and put it away again, but in many of her historically important or impassioned speeches she put it to effective use. Elizabeth's own death was the most important rhetorical weapon in her arsenal, and for a woman who was so intellectually adept this was no small matter.



¹Allison Heisch, "Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power," *Signs*, 1.1 (Autumn 1975): 31-55. Also see Mary Thomas Crane, "'Video et Taceo': Elizabeth I and the Rhetoric of Counsel," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 28, no.1 (Winter 1988): 1-15.

²For an in depth look at Elizabeth's positioning herself within a male society in terms of a gender studies analysis, see Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society's Humanities Press, 1977); and Carol Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). These works are the cornerstones for study of Elizabeth's gender dynamics.

³Mortimer Levine, "Henry VIII's Use of His Spiritual and Temporal Jurisdictions in His Great Causes of Matrimony, Legitimacy, and Succession," *The Historical Journal* 10, no. 1 (1967): 3-10. Levine makes a good case that not only was there little successful historical precedent for the extent of Henry VIII's actions, but

that Kings in other times period may have faced civil war if they took cumulatively similar actions. Antonia Frasier, *Wives of Henry VIII*. (New York: Knopf Pub, 1994) gives an account of the fear that Henry VIII generates not only around his wives but also the other members of his court.

⁴For an investigation of Henry VIII's invocation of divine right, as well as that of Elizabeth I and James I, see John Guy, *The "Imperial Crown" and the Liberty of the Subject* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 1992), 65-87.

⁵ Charlotte F. Otten, ed. "Women Describing Childbirth, Sickness, and Death," in *English Women's Voices, 1540-1700* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1992), 219-73.

⁶Lawrence Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977).

⁷ Otten, 219-73. Lacking the authoritative office Elizabeth enjoyed, other English women were unable to create similar positive results from their feminine subjective-death positions.

⁸Frances Teague, "Queen Elizabeth in her Speeches," in *Gloriana's Face*, ed. S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1992), 63-78.

⁹Larissa J. Taylor-Smith, "Elizabeth I: A Psychological Profile," *Sixteenth Century Journal*. 15 no. 1 (Spring, 1984): 47-72.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 51.

¹¹Sandra Sider, *Handbook to Life in Renaissance Europe* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005), 307.

¹²*Ibid.*, 307.

¹³*Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁴Lena Cowen Orlin, "The Fictional Families of Elizabeth I," *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), 85.

¹⁵Elizabeth was actually quoting Psalm 118:23. Whether she actually said this when informed of her ascension is not known, but she did have the verse imprinted on the gold coins during her reign, which probably lead to the popularization of idea. *A History of the Reigns of the House of Tudor* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1799), 235.

¹⁶Elizabeth I, *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, et al, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 52.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁹Heisch, 33.

²⁰Teague, 72.

²¹Elizabeth I, 64.

²²Taylor-Smith, 52.

²³*Ibid.*, 53.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 57.

²⁵Judith W. Hurtig, "Death in Childbirth: Seventeenth-Century English Tombs and Their Place in Contemporary Thought," *The Art Bulletin*, 65, no. 4 (Dec, 1983): 603-615.

²⁶Elizabeth I, 97.

²⁷Ibid., 58.

²⁸Marie Axton *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession* (London: Royal Historical Society's Humanities Press: 1977), 39.

²⁹Elizabeth I, 60.

³⁰John N. King, "Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 43, no.1 (Spring, 1990): 40.

³¹Ibid., 50.

³²Elizabeth I, 65.

³³Ernest H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).

³⁴Ibid., 13.

³⁵Marie Axton, 17.

³⁶Elizabeth I, 326.

³⁷Ibid., 96. Elizabeth notes that it is "a strange thing that the foot should direct the head in so weighty a cause" when the Parliament was urging her to marry.

³⁸Ibid., 54.

³⁹Ibid., 326.

⁴⁰Ibid., 72, 108.

⁴¹Ibid., 341-2.

⁴²King, 59.

⁴³For more on the historical and apocryphal stories about Elizabeth I and mirrors see Louis Montrose, "Though the Looking Glass," in *The Subject of Elizabeth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 241-248.