THE DEATH OF ELIZABETH I

REMEMBERING AND RECONSTRUCTING THE VIRGIN QUEEN

CATHERINE LOOMIS
THE DEATH OF ELIZABETH I
QUEENSHIP AND POWER

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THE DEATH OF ELIZABETH I
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Catherine Loomis
For my mother, Pat Loomis
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INTRODUCTION

When Queen Elizabeth I died on March 24, 1603, few of her subjects could remember life under another monarch “except,” John Stow noted, “they were aged persons.” The Queen’s forty-four-year reign, longer than that of any of her predecessors, was, for many of her English subjects, peaceful, prosperous, and Protestant: “England was rychor, in bettor repute and esteem amonge forenors, and everie waye ye subjectes moore happie in her reygne then evor itt wase before,” Sir John Oglander wrote in his memoirs, “or to be doubted evor will be agayne.” While some English subjects doubted that their country’s stability could continue under the rule of Elizabeth’s foreign successor, James VI of Scotland, and others feared that the Queen’s death would be followed by civil war, Elizabeth’s Privy Councilors took measures to suppress all other contenders to the throne and successfully welcomed James—and his two sons—to England. The Privy Council’s careful planning ensured that no political rebellions marred James’s arrival in England, but preparing the hearts and minds of English subjects to accept their new King was the work of poems, sermons, pamphlets, and plays. The literary response to Elizabeth’s death taught the country how to mourn and remember the Queen, and how to welcome and accept the new King.

Although James himself displayed few outward signs of sorrow at the news of the Queen’s death, some of Elizabeth’s contemporaries seemed genuinely to mourn her passing: writing on March 16, 1603, as news of the Queen’s final illness reached him in Berwick, Sir John Carey complains to Robert Cecil that reports of Elizabeth’s condition “hathe sett suche a grefe so neer my hart as I fear will not eseley be removed, styll dountinge the worst”; hearing that there was no hope of Elizabeth’s recovery Sir Francis Vere laments, “I never thought to live to see so dismal a day”; during the Queen’s final days historian William Camden wrote to antiquarian Robert Cotton, “I knowe you are, (as we all here have been) in a melancholy and pensive cogitation”; and the
Earl of Oxford, shortly before the Queen’s funeral, writes, “I cannot but finde a greate gryefe in my selfe, to remember the mistres whiche we have loste.” These letters record private expressions of grief; the publication in 1603 of collections of memorial poems and pamphlets along with the London sermon announcing the Queen’s death are a more formal and public response to England’s loss, although most end with joyful anticipation of James’s reign.

King James’s arrival in England had been greeted with relief, in part because the succession of a new monarch promised other kinds of changes. Out-of-favor courtiers such as Shakespeare’s patron the Earl of Southampton, confined in the Tower of London for his part in the Essex rebellion, had reason to believe that their fortunes would improve under King James. Religious malcontents were also happy to hear the news: Puritans and Catholics alike hoped for greater tolerance of the practice of their faith. Some English subjects were relieved that they were no longer under a woman’s control: the Earl of Northumberland expresses this diplomatically when he assures the incoming king that

> When we looke into your competitors at home we finde the eies of the world, nether of the great ons nor small ons, ones cast towards them, for ether in there worthe are thay contemptible, or not liked for thare sexes, wyshing noe more queens, fearing we shall never enjoy an uther lyke to this.⁵ (Bruce, 55)

As the new King became more familiar, however, nostalgia for the late Queen of famous memory began to grow. Godfrey Goodman’s account of Elizabeth’s death ends with a brutal explanation of this: “when we had experience of the Scottish government, then in disparagement of the Scots, and in hate and detestation of them, the Queen did seem to revive.”⁶ Bishop Goodman goes on to describe the particulars of that revival, including the nearly idolatrous restoration of Elizabeth’s image: “then was her memory much magnified,—such ringing of bells, such public joy and sermons in commemoration of her, the picture of her tomb painted in many churches, and in effect more solemnity and joy in memory of her coronation than was for the coming in of King James” (98).

Unable to raise Elizabeth from her grave, her subjects had to settle for seeing the Queen live in pictures and histories.
Historians continue to dispute whether the revival of interest in Elizabeth indicates dissatisfaction with James, but coinciding with the nostalgia for Elizabeth was the growth of new and unusually powerful roles for women on the Jacobean stage. The poetry written immediately after her death transformed Elizabeth from an elderly female ruler into a virginal, eternally youthful saint. The powerful female dramatic characters created to replace her expand the imaginative possibilities for women while at the same time emphasizing virtues—chastity, self-sacrifice, passivity—that the early modern English establishment encouraged women to cultivate. Among the many cultural transitions of the early modern period the shift from female to male rule is especially well documented, and an analysis of the imagery by which Elizabeth's death was broadcast and interpreted by her subjects clarifies and complicates the role of early modern women and female literary characters, and demonstrates the ways in which Elizabeth's successors attempted to dress themselves in her royal power.

Scholarly interest in Queen Elizabeth has often focused on efforts by the Queen, her court, and her poets to construct memorable images of a quasi-divine monarch. Frances Yates, Roy Strong, and many of Elizabeth's biographers have described successful attempts to fashion Elizabeth as a classical yet thoroughly English goddess who also manages to incorporate elements of religious figures such as the Old Testament's Deborah and Solomon, the New Testament's Virgin Mary, and Revelation's woman clothed with the sun. Historians new and old have studied the intricate relationship between sixteenth-century authors and the Elizabethan court, paying special attention to playwrights' roles in creating and sustaining Elizabeth's public image. These studies of Elizabeth's self-fashioning, however valuable as a means of assessing her royal power, rarely look at the uses to which the Queen's reputation was put after her death.

This book examines the poetry, drama, and prose written in response to the death of Queen Elizabeth. The loss of the Queen is reflected not only in formal elegies, sermons, and memorial pamphlets, but also, I argue, in the dead queens, imperiled virgins, and female corpses populating Jacobean drama. In addition, Elizabeth is remembered in less formal genres including ballads, memoirs, diaries, and even embroidery written or stitched by her subjects. These neglected texts provide new details about
Elizabeth's final days, a more complete picture of the sources of Jacobean nostalgia for the Queen, and a new way to approach the tangled relationship between early modern authors and their female protagonists. Because many of these texts are unknown or infrequently studied, I have tried to make readers aware of their existence and range rather than offering a detailed reading of a small number of sources. A survey of the poetry, prose, and drama written to mourn and memorialize Elizabeth permits us to study the historical response to the death of a woman of enormous power, to examine the ways in which control over Elizabeth's image shifted from the court to the poets, and to notice the ways in which Elizabeth's presence continued to haunt English literature long after her death.

Aside from the last chapters of Elizabeth's biographies, there has been little work done on the Queen's final days. To evaluate the far-reaching effects of Elizabeth's death, I borrow the methodology of scholars who have studied the way Elizabeth represented herself, the way early modern women wrote about themselves, and the way Elizabethan culture represented women. I begin with an examination of contemporary accounts of the Queen's final illness and death. Detailed descriptions of the Queen's last days and funeral are scattered among state papers, diaries, letters, pamphlets, memoirs, and early modern histories of England. Most biographers rely on two or three of these sources; using a wider range of materials reveals a more complicated response to Elizabeth's death than a brief outburst of public mourning, and shows the considerable efforts exerted by the English aristocracy to use their remembered and reconstructed Queen to help ensure the peaceful accession of King James.

The immediate literary response to Elizabeth's death was a profitable one: dozens of books containing hundreds of poems eulogizing the Queen appeared for sale within a few days or weeks of her death. Surprisingly, this body of work has received little critical attention. Many of the elegies contain images of the Queen—a now-penetrable virgin, a decaying corpse, an abandoning mother—that are more fully exploited in later dramas. Other poems offer images of blooming and dying flowers, the rising and setting sun, and spring succeeding winter to naturalize James's succession. Still others make obsessive and detailed references to the War of the Roses to warn against potentially devastating political disruption as James succeeds his cousin. Chapter 2 surveys and analyzes these images as
attempts to control and generate interpretations of Elizabeth’s reign and her personality.

The poetry and prose published in 1603 to memorialize Elizabeth is generally favorable to the Queen, but some accounts are less complimentary. One eyewitness account, written in 1607 by Elizabeth Southwell, a maid of honor in the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts, has usually been treated as a work of fiction because of Southwell’s Catholicism and because the narrative ends with a gruesome account of the explosion of the Queen’s corpse during her wake. In chapter 3 I assess the value and accuracy of Southwell’s long-neglected narrative, and examine the ways in which Elizabeth’s detractors and supporters have used it.

Like Southwell’s narrative, plays written shortly after Elizabeth’s death began offering new and sometimes unflattering portraits of the Queen. To satisfy the theatrical tastes of Jacobean audiences—and perhaps to create them—early seventeenth-century playwrights peopled their dramas with an astounding variety of female characters. Among these are protagonists who glamorize, reassess, or parody Elizabeth’s carefully cultivated roles. Chapter 4 examines a number of Jacobean plays to discover the ways in which Elizabeth reemerges as a literary character. The Queen appears as herself in both parts of Thomas Heywood’s *If You Know not Me You Know Nobody* (1604 and 1605) and as her infant self in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *Henry VIII*, but other playwrights revive her in the form of doughty but endangered virgins, imperious older women, or female corpses that, like Southwell’s Elizabeth, refuse to remain in their containers.

Feminist scholars and others have studied the ways in which the roles of women were affected by or reflected in drama and poetry as well as in legislation, doctrine, and conduct books. The prose and poetry written about Elizabeth’s death is a rich source of information about the perceptions of women’s duties and authority as well as their limitations. It is also an unusually thorough record of the contemporary response to the death of a powerful woman. At the conclusion of “The Heart and Stomach of a King”: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power, her seminal analysis of Elizabeth’s negotiation of her public role, Carole Levin notes, “Perhaps the best queen of all is a dead one; one who can be made to stand for whatever one wishes, one who can look down from heaven and advise on how things on earth
ought to be different.” The literary response to the death of Queen Elizabeth reveals not only a terrible sense of loss, but also a concerted effort, made mostly by male authors, to reconstruct a new and improved version of the Queen, one that refuses to grow old, make demands, or die.
CHAPTER 1

AT THE LAST GASP: THE FINAL DAYS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH I

Early in 1603, as Queen Elizabeth I’s “human infirmite”1 gave way to a serious illness “her Majesty’s bodily troubles”2 became a matter of intense interest to her subjects. Reports of Elizabeth’s appearance, actions, and speeches during her final days fill the letters, diaries, sermons, and memoirs of those with access to the court. A wide range of narratives survive: the official letters of Robert Cecil, Elizabeth’s secretary of state, and the gossipy ones of John Chamberlain, a minor courtier and great observer; the memoir of the Queen’s cousin, Robert Carey, later Earl of Monmouth, and the diaries of Lady Anne Clifford, Master of Requests Roger Wilbraham, and law student John Manningham; a manuscript history of 1603 by treasury clerk John Clapham, and the formal histories compiled by William Camden; the reports of foreign ambassadors, and eyewitness accounts by a maid of honor, an imprisoned priest, and anonymous sources all provide dramatic descriptions of the Queen’s final days.3 While some of these sources were private, and remained so, often for centuries, many of the events they describe were quickly known by the public, and the reactions they convey are unlikely to be unique to the writers. These sources provide an unusually complete account of the chronology of, and the public reaction to, Elizabeth’s death, and establish a context for attempts to reconstruct Elizabeth in poetry and drama. The surviving accounts of the Queen’s final illness, her death, and her funeral reveal a contentious and complicated situation in which the ability to control images of the Queen and reproduce those images in fiction helped the monarch and the aristocracy sustain their power, and avoid a costly civil war.
Queen Elizabeth outlived eight popes and four kings of France; her forty-four-year reign is among the longest of any English monarch. Elizabeth was healthy and fortunate: she survived smallpox as well as what the title of a 1594 pamphlet describes as *sundry horrible Conspiracies…detected to have (by Barbarous murders) taken away the life of the Queens most excellent Majestie*. Until shortly before her death, the Queen’s physical well-being impressed her courtiers and visitors to her court. After meeting with Elizabeth in February 1603, the Venetian ambassador Giovanni Scaramelli described her as being “in perfect possession of all her senses; as she neither eats nor sleeps except at the call of nature, everyone hopes and believes that her life is much further from its close than is reported elsewhere.”

John Manningham’s diary entries describing the Queen’s last days include the report that “[h]is physicians said shee had a body of a firme and perfect constitucion, likely to have lived many yeares” (208). At the onset of the Queen’s illness Robert Cecil wrote, “till within these ten or twelve dayes I never beheld other shew of sickenes in the Queen, then merely those things that are proper to age.” Christophe de Harlay, Comte de Beaumont, the French ambassador to England, in a report written after the Queen’s death, claimed that “her pulse and her eyesight were good to the last” (*CSPV*, X, 16), and in dispatches from the previous fall was impressed with her good health. Until a few weeks before her death, the Queen continued to dance, ride, and attend plays, and took daily walks in her garden. William Camden attributes this vigor to Elizabeth’s “abstinence from wine, and most temperate dyet, (which she often said was the noblest part of Physicke)”; Richard Mulcaster credits “a diet low and spare” as well as Elizabeth’s virginity. De Beaumont slyly notes that the Queen’s “confidence respecting her age” is an illusion “promoted by the whole court, with so much art, that I cannot sufficiently wonder at it” (Raumer, 454). While the death of a sixty-nine-year-old monarch could hardly come as a surprise, the Queen’s final illness arrived suddenly.

Although Robert Cecil had begun his cautious correspondence with James VI of Scotland in May 1601, most subjects did not prepare for the Queen’s death until there were more obvious signs that Elizabeth was ill. Some mild symptoms appeared during the winter of 1602–03, a season marked by weather so unusually cold and wet that John Chamberlain assured Dudley Carleton that it was “the sharpest season that I have lightily knowne” (182).
Chamberlain, having heard the Queen was unwell in December, complained that he was expecting “no shew of any great doings at court this Christmas” (179) but was later pleased to find the court “flourisht more then ordinarie” (180); the entertainment included dancing, bear-baiting, plays, and gambling. Elizabeth’s godson, John Harington, wrote to his wife on December 27, 1602 that, in a recent audience with the Queen, he found her “in moste piti-able state,” troubled not only by illness but by “choler and greife” prompted by thoughts of Ireland’s rebellious Earl of Tyrone and the executed Earl of Essex; later that evening Harington attempted to distract Elizabeth with poetry,

whereat she smilede once, and was pleasede to saie; when thou doste feele creepinge tyme at thy gate, these fooleries will please thee lesse; I am paste my relishe for suche matters; thou seeste my bodilie meate dothe not suite me well, I have eaten but one ill tast-ede cake since yesternighte.\textsuperscript{11}

Harington was dismayed by the court’s response to signs of Elizabeth’s mortality: “I finde some lesse mindfull of whate they are soone to lose, than of what they may perchance hereafter get” (77).\textsuperscript{12} Despite Harington’s misgivings, by January 21 the Queen had recovered from her cold and, “in very fowle and wet weather” (Chamberlain, 182), moved the court to Richmond, the palace Elizabeth considered her warmest.

The Queen had been suffering from what Chamberlain called “a setled and unremovable melancholie” (188) for some time: one of her chaplains, Dr. Henry Parry, told John Manningham in March 1603 that “hir Majestie hath bin by fittes troubled with melancholy some 3 or 4 monethes” (207); in March this melancholy intensified and on March 9 de Beaumont reports that “a deep melancholy is visible in [the Queen’s] countenance and her actions” (Raumer, 456). On the same date, an anonymous correspondent described Elizabeth as “infinitely discontented.”\textsuperscript{13} An unsigned letter sent to Scotland near the time of the Queen’s death describes other troubling signs of her sadness: Elizabeth “sleepeth not somuch by day as shee used, nether taketh rest by night: her delight is to sit in the darke, & sometimes with sheddinge of tears to bewayle Essex.”\textsuperscript{14} When Elizabeth’s cousin Robert Carey visited her on or about March 19 the Queen complained “that her heart had been sad and heavy for ten or twelve days” (58), a description confirmed
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by Henry Parry’s report on March 23 that “for this fourtnight” Elizabeth had been “extreame oppressed” (Manningham, 207) by her melancholy. De Beaumont, the French ambassador, blames the melancholy for the onset of the Queen’s final illness: “the common opinion of the Queen’s doctors and of those who were most closely in attendance upon her and waited on her, is that her illness was entirely due to a profound sorrow which had fallen on her secretly a few days before she succumbed to it” (CSPV, X, 15).

There was much speculation about the source of Elizabeth’s “torment of mind” (Wilbraham, 53) as there continues to be among historiographers of her reign. The Earl of Northumberland in a March 17 letter to King James claims “those that were neer-est her” attributed the Queen’s sorrow to “the displeasoure she tooke at Arbella, the motions of taking in Tyron, and the deathe of her old acquaintance the Lady Notinghame.” The Countess of Nottingham, Elizabeth’s friend and cousin Catherine Howard, died on February 20; courtier Philip Gawdy wrote to his brother that Elizabeth took the death “muche more heavily” than had Catherine’s husband the Lord Admiral Charles Howard (126), and de Beaumont reported that the Queen was so overwhelmed by her grief for the Countess, “for whom she has shed many tears, and manifested great affliction,” that she had refused his request for an audience (Raumer, 455). The Queen’s councilors were urging her to accept the surrender of Ireland’s Earl of Tyrone, a further reminder of the Essex rebellion: Elizabeth was reported to think it “most dishonourable to pardon a rebel that had made seven years’ war with her whereas she would not be permitted to spare Essex for one day’s derelict,” a thought that caused her to “[fall] into great passion.”

Lady Arbella Stuart appeared to be negotiating a marriage with Edward Seymour, the son of Catherine Grey and, under the terms of the will of Henry VIII, heir to the throne should Elizabeth not exercise her prerogative and name a successor. A 1603 marriage between Stuart and Seymour would have strengthened the claim each had to the throne, threatening an orderly succession. Robert Carey, writing in part to emphasize the smooth transition to James’s rule, cleverly links the Queen’s melancholy sighs with those he heard her “fetch … when the Queen of Scots was beheaded” (58). The first day of Lent, which in 1603 was March 9, was the anniversary of the execution of the Earl of Essex; Elizabeth believed that since Essex’s death, “the people’s affection toward her waxed more cold
than had been accustomed” (J. Clapham, 96). William Camden reports that Elizabeth “had heard by some whisperers, and from the French King, that many of the Nobility did by secret letters and messengers seek to winne favour” with James VI, the likeliest successor (222). Godfrey Goodman, later Bishop of Gloucester, also blames inattentive courtiers for adding to the Queen’s sorrow, claiming that in Elizabeth’s final weeks “the court was very much neglected, which was an occasion of her melancholy.” Early in February Elizabeth had to have her coronation ring, worn on her wedding ring finger, sawn off because “it was so growne into the flesh, that it could not be drawne off,” an event her courtiers read as “a sad presage, as if it portended that the marriage with her kingdom, contracted by the Ring, would be dissolved” (Camden, Historie, 222). When Elizabeth’s lord treasurer reported in March that the Queen’s “coffers are empty,” his words were “thought to augment her infirmities” (CSPD, 299). After considering her displeasure at Arbella Stuart, her dismay over the Earl of Tyrone, and her being still “possessed with grief” over the Earl of Essex, de Beaumont concludes that it is

much more probable that the sufferings incident to her age, and the fear of death, are the chief causes of all; for if we set aside that...by a regular life and restraining the passion of her mind, she endeavours most carefully to preserve her health, I am persuaded that the causes above alleged could not suffice so powerfully to affect both mind and body, and cause her to suffer so severely. (Raumer, 456)

The courtiers found the Queen’s sorrow contagious: Antony Rivers, secretary to Father Henry Garnet, reported in March that “[a]ll are in a dump at Court” (CSPD, 298). Yet when members of her Privy Council begged her to “impart such griefs as they doubted might trouble her, Elizabeth answered that she knew nothing in the world worthy to trouble her” (J. Clapham, 98).

Shortly after moving the court to Richmond in late January, Anne Clifford reports, Elizabeth began to “grow sickly” (3) but the Queen continued her official duties through February, entertaining the Venetian ambassador and, John Manningham reports, hearing a sermon preached by Dr. Rudd on the text “I sayd yee are Gods, but you shall all dy like men,” to which she replied, “you have made me a good funerall sermon; I may dye when I will” (194). By March, however, Elizabeth’s symptoms had
become more alarming. On March 7, a letter writer reported that the Queen “was troubled with a cold, but is well again”; on March 9 Robert Cecil wrote to George Nicholson, the Queen’s agent in Edinburgh, that Elizabeth “hath good appetite, and neither cough nor fever, yet she is troubled with a heat in her breasts and dryness in her mouth and tongue, which keeps her from sleep, greatly to her disquiet” although he then assures Nicholson that despite this Elizabeth “never kept her bed, but was within these three days, in the garden” (Salis, XII, 667). On the same date Cecil wrote a fuller report for Sir John Herbert, the second secretary of state:

It is very true that her Majesty hath of late for eight or nine days been much deprived of sleep, which you know was ever wont to moisten her body, and whenever she lacked it, she was ever apt to be impatient. This continuance for nine or ten days decays her appetite somewhat, and drieth her body much, wherein, though she be free from sickness in stomach or head, and in the day catcheth sleep, yet I cannot but affirm unto you that if this should continue many months, it promiseth no other than a falling into some great weakness or consumption which would hardly be recovered in old age. (Salis, XII, 668)

Three other letters dated March 9 provide more details: Father Henry Garnet’s secretary, Father Antony Rivers, wrote to a Venetian correspondent claiming that Elizabeth “rests ill at nights, forbears to use the air in the day, and abstains more than usual from her meat, resisting physic, and is suspicious of some about her as ill-affected” (CSPD, 301). Rivers also wrote to Giacomo Creleto in Venice, noting that the Queen

complaineth much of many infirmities wherewith she seemeth suddenly to be overtaken: as imposthumation in her head, aches in her bones, and continual cold in her legs, besides a notable decay of judgment and memory, insomuch as she cannot abide discourses of government and state, but delighteth to hear old Canterbury tales, to which she is very attentive; at other times impatient and testy, so none of the Council, but Secretary [Cecil], dare come in her presence. (CSPD, 298)

At the same time the French ambassador reported that the Queen

has not had any sleep during this time, and eats much less than usual. Though she has no actual fears, she suffers much from
incessant restlessness, and from so great a heat of the mouth and stomach that she is obliged to cool herself every instant, in order that the burning phlegm, with which she is often oppressed, may not stifle her. (Raumer, 456)

Elizabeth then appeared to recover: on March 12, Roger Manners, the Earl of Rutland, reported to his brother John, “It has been a troublesome and heavy time here owing to the Queen’s dangerous sickness; but now we rest in better hope, because yesterday she found herself somewhat better” (Rutland, 387). On March 15, William Camden wrote to tell Robert Cotton that the “excessive sleepless indisposition of her Majestie is now ceased, which being joined with an inflammation from the breast upward, and her mind altogether averted from physic in this her climactericall year, did more than terrify us all.” The Venetian ambassador to France, Marin Cavalli, perhaps less fearful that his letters to the Doge would be intercepted than was his English counterpart, provides a more alarming account:

The Queen of England’s illness is inflammation and a swelling in the throat, contracted by sitting late at council. On retiring she felt the beginnings of the mischief, which at once caused the entire loss of appetite the first day, and the second deprived her of sleep; and for two days she went without nourishment, nor would she ever submit to take medicine. She saw some rose water on her table and some currants, and she took a fancy for some. After her forehead was bathed she fell asleep. When she woke the gathering in her throat burst, and the attendants were alarmed lest the blood should suffocate her, or cause her to break a blood vessel. (CSPV, IX, 563)

De Beaumont’s dispatch, written on March 14, is even more dramatic:

The queen was given up three days ago; she had lain long in a cold sweat, and had not spoken. A short time previously she said, “I wish not to live any longer, but desire to die.” Yesterday and the day before she began to rest and found herself better, after having been greatly relieved by the bursting of a small swelling in the throat. She takes no medicine whatever, and has only kept her bed two days; before this she would on no account suffer it, for fear (as some suppose) of a prophecy that she should die in her bed. She is moreover said to be no longer in her right senses: this, however, is a mistake; she has only had some slight wanderings at intervals. (Raumer, 456–457)
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On March 15 Sir Noel de Caron, the ambassador from the States of Holland, wrote to the deputy of the States in Paris with details of this same “defluxion in the throat,” which occurred on March 11 and left the Queen “like a dead person” (CSPD, 302). De Caron assures the deputy that although the Queen had been ill for a fortnight and had not slept for “10 or 12 days” she was beginning to recover: “for the last three or four nights she has slept four or five hours, and also she begins to eat and drink something” (CSPD, 302). The Queen had confidence in her recovery: when Cecil and John Whitgift, the archbishop of Canterbury, got down on their knees to beg her to eat and take her medicine, de Beaumont reports, “she was angry with them for it, and said, that she knew her own strength and constitution better than they; and that she was not in so much danger as they imagin’d.” Thomas, Lord Burghley, Cecil’s brother, greeted news of the Queen’s recovery with the wish for a happy ending: “I trust in God this that might have proved a tragedy will prove a comedy for so long time as God shall appoint” (Salis., XII, 671). An anonymous manuscript, usually attributed to Robert Cecil’s secretary, reports that the Queen developed a cold on February 28, that the Lords of the Council were notified of her illness on March 7, and that the Queen began “somewhat to amend” after March 15. The Earl of Northumberland, living in hope of James’s accession, was less optimistic. Writing to the King on March 17, he reports that

Her Majestie hathe bene evell now almoast one monthe. In the twelve first dayes it was kept secrett….Moer dais told us it was ane indisposition of bodie; siknes was not in any maner discerned, her sleep and stomak only bereft her, so as for a 20 dayes she slept very little. Since she is growne very weak, yet sometymes gives us comfort of recoverie, a few hours after threatens us with dispaire of her well doing. Phisick she will not take any, and the phisitions conclut that if this contineu she must needes fall into a distemper, not a frensie, but rather into a dulnesse and a lethargie. (Bruce, Correspondence, 72)

As Northumberland predicted, the Queen’s recovery was brief: the manuscript attributed to Cecil’s secretary reports that by March 18 “she began to bee very ill: Wherupon the [Lords] of the counsell weare sent for to Richmond” (fol. 1r). De Beaumont, in a March 18 dispatch, claims the Queen’s musicians were also
sent for because, he speculated, “she means to die as cheerfully as she has lived.” He describes her condition in detail:

The queen is already quite exhausted, and sometimes, for two or three hours together, does not speak a word. For the last two days she has her finger almost always in her mouth, and sits upon cushions, without rising or lying down, her eyes open and fixed on the ground. Her long wakefulness and want of food have exhausted her already weak and emaciated frame, and have produced heat at the stomach, and also the drying up of all the juices, for the last ten or twelve days. (Raumer, 457)

As the Queen’s symptoms worsened, the councilors began to make preparations for her death and for the even grimmer possibility of a civil war over the succession. John Stow reports that, as Elizabeth grew “daungerously sicke” in March, “straight watches were kept in the Citie of London, with warding at the gates, lanthornes with lights hanged out to burne all the night.” On March 12, Chief Justice Popham cautioned Robert Cecil to fortify London because “the most dissolute and dangerous people of England are there, and upon the least occasion will repair thither” (Salis., XII, 671). On March 15, warrants were issued to local government officials to assist the Countess of Shrewsbury “in suppressing some disorderly attempts and riots intended by certain ill-affected persons” (Rutland, 388) who wanted Arbella Stuart, who was in the Countess’s custody, to be placed on the throne. On March 16, the Earl of Shrewsbury was ordered by the Council to “suppress all uncertain and evil rumours concerning the state of the Queen’s health […] and also to prevent all unlawful assemblies and disorderly attempts which such rumours may breed in the country about [him]” (Rutland, 388); a similar letter to the sheriff of Stafford survives, asking that “extraordinarie care” be taken to suppress rumors of the Queen’s “indisposition of health,” asserting that the council was “assured that the better and wiser sorte of men will governe themselves with such discretion and judgment as is meete,” and promising the sheriff that “her majestie (by whose auctoritie wee do this) liveth with good sense and memo- rie and thankes be to God with good hope of presente recoverie & amendment.” On March 17, the Earl of Northumberland reported to his cousin Sir Henry Slingsby that “good order is taken…by the Lords of the counsell for depressing all suche
discontented persons as may make insurrections” and instructed Slingsby to offer Lord Burghley “all [Northumberland's] tenants reddy to be disposed of in any sutche matter if it should happen in those parts any kind of moving” (Slingsby, 257–258). On the same date, Northumberland wrote to King James with details of the steps being taken to secure the peace:

order is gevin for pressing of all such rogues as might be apt to stirre, and are sent unto the Loe Cuntries; the citye of Lundonn is commandit to keip strong watch least discontented persones might mak any head theare; the two presidentes in there governementes have the lyke charge, and withall to have ane eye to the papists. Some recusantes of greatestt notte are committed, and commandit, but not with any maner of rigour. Every countye hathe the lyke waarning. Care is willed to be had by the command-ers of the strong places for feare of surpryses; so as they having combined them selves, and meaning to combyne them selves with moe, of whom they cannot be ignorant of the affections of many of us to your caus, I must needes conclu that they all intend to doe lyke honest and just men. (Bruce, Correspondence, 73)

As Northumberland notes, in addition to ordering watches and mustering tenants, officials also began to incarcerate persons considered dangerous. John Chamberlain reported that “some principall papists were made sure, and some daungerous compan-ions clapt up” (190); John Clapham adds that “all wandering and suspected persons…in most parts of the realm” (104) were jailed. William Camden commends the Privy Council who “providently caused all the vagrants hereabout to be taken up and shipped for the Low Countries,” and who took steps to “draw some munition to the Court, and the great horses from Reading…to take order for the navy to lye in the narrow seas, and to commit some gentle-men hunger-starved for innovations.”27 On March 17, the Venetian ambassador reported that “five hundred vagrants were seized in the taverns and elsewhere, under pretext of sending them to serve the Dutch, and are still kept as a precaution under lock and key on that pretence” (CSPV, IX, 558); three weeks later, he reported that “[f]oreigners to the number of five hundred were shipped over to Holland, and a like number of Catholics were imprisoned and only liberated after the proclamation of the new King” (CSPV, X, 7). On March 19, the Privy Council closed the theaters in London, Middlesex, and Surrey to prevent public gatherings, and wrote
to each nobleman then in London ordering him to “come to the Court the next day, attended with a smale retinewe for the avoiding of rumor.” After conferring with these lords, the Council wrote on March 20 to “sondrie Earles and Barons” to describe the plans for “the preventing of disorders and for the continuance and preservation of tranquilitie and peace in all parts of the realme”; the councilors promised they would “speedily advertise” the lords should the Queen die (APC, 493–494).

News of the seriousness of the Queen’s illness made great observers out of her subjects: “This accident hathe made all the wholle nation looke about them,” the Earl of Northumberland wrote to King James (Bruce Correspondence, 72). Lady Margaret Hoby’s diary entries for this period capture some of the tension and fear of those who were receiving news about the Queen several days after it left London, and Hoby notes that Elizabeth’s illness “wrought great sorowe and dread in all good subjectes hartes.” John Clapham was among those watching every move of the Privy Councilors who “were seen to pass to and fro, sometimes with heavy countenances, as betraying their fears, and sometimes again more cheerful, as either dissembling it for the present, or conceiving hope of the Prince’s amendment” (99–100), and the Dutch ambassador Noel de Caron became a close reader of the behavior of those with access to the Queen: “being between the coffer chamber and [Elizabeth’s] bed chamber, he saw great weeping and lamentation among the lords and ladies, as they passed to and fro, and perceived there was no hope that Her Majesty should escape.” Efforts were made to suppress news of the Queen’s illness: on March 15, George Chaworth—who attempted to inform his employer, Arbella Stuart, of the Queen’s condition—wrote that Elizabeth “ys sicke though courtiers saye contrarye.” Father William Weston, confined in the Tower of London, was “completely... cut off from converse with men and from news,” but noticed during the Queen’s last days that “a strange silence descended on the whole city, as if it were under interdict and divine worship suspended. Not a bell rang out. Not a bugle sounded—though ordinarily they were often heard.”

“Every man’s mouth is full of the Queen’s danger,” Henry Brouncker wrote to Robert Cecil on March 19 (Salis., XII, 693), and as “variable rumors” (J. Clapham, 99) of the Queen’s death swept London those who lived outside the city walls brought their plate and jewels to the city where “continual strong watches”