

The Shocking Death of Mary II: Gender & Political Crisis in Late Stuart England

Melinda S. Zook

Dying of smallpox in the seventeenth century was hardly unusual, never mind shocking. But the unexpected death of the vibrant and popular Mary II, Queen of England, in December 1694 was shocking to contemporaries, and the tremendous outpouring of grief that followed the news of her death was truly unprecedented. The profound grief that shook the English in the late seventeenth century by the death of the Queen was not unlike that which rocked the British in 1997 when Diana, Princess of Wales, was killed in a road accident. Not only did both cases prove the British to be much less stoic and far more emotive than their reputation belies, but both deaths also initiated a royal crisis. The trials and tribulations of the House of Windsor in the wake of Diana's death are well known.¹ A more serious royal crisis for which far less is known occurred in 1694.

Mary was the elder daughter of the Catholic King James II; she was the Princess of Orange, wife of William of Orange of the Netherlands; and following the Glorious Revolution of 1688/89, the regnant queen of the British Isles from 1689 to 1694; one of only six regnant queens in English history. But Mary II was both a regnant and a consort queen, the only monarch in British history to

Melinda S. Zook is Associate Professor of History at Purdue University. She is the author of *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (1999) and the co-editor of *Revolutionary Currents: Nation Building in the Transatlantic World* (2004). She has published articles on Aphra Behn, Mary Astell, Protestant nonconformity, and seventeenth-century political thought. She is currently completing a book-manuscript on women, politics, and religion during the Restoration.

1 This was portrayed recently in the feature film, *The Queen* (Miramax, 2006). On the aftermath of Diana's death, the royal family, and popular reaction, Anthony Holden, *The Tarnished Crown: Princess Diana and the House of Windsor* (London, 1993); Rob Turnock, *Interpreting Diana: Television Audiences and the death of a Princess* (London, 2008).

hold both titles. The dual monarchy of William III and Mary II was a unique constitutional solution to the dilemma of James II's departure from his kingdoms in the winter of 1688.² Although considered a regnant queen, all true sovereignty rested in King William alone when he was in England. But when William was abroad, making war against Louis XIV or managing his Dutch affairs, Mary was invested with executive authority.³ This happened six times between 1689 and 1694, for a total of thirty-two months (a period of almost three years).⁴ When William returned, Mary resumed her role as consort queen. As both regnant and consort queen, Mary II was able to exercise considerable influence, particularly over the Church of England.

Yet strangely enough, with the exception of popular biographers, Mary II has received little attention.⁵ To this date, there is no true scholarly biography of her. Why so? In part, it seems that what makes Mary so attractive to popular historians is exactly what repels both feminist and court historians. Mary II has been consistently portrayed as either a monstrous King Lear-like daughter who betrayed her loving father (James II); or as a submissive and self-effacing wife who worshipped her hero husband (William III). The titles of two fairly recent popular histories of the Queen reflect this bipolar reading of Mary's life: one is *William's Wife* and the other, a study of both Mary and her sister, Queen Anne, is *Ungrateful Daughters*.⁶

2 According to the Declaration of Rights, 1689, James II's hasty retreat to France in December 1688 amounted to an abdication. Finding the throne "vacant," the convention parliament the met to resolve the crisis offered the crown to William and Mary. On the Revolution, see Lois G. Schworer, *The Declaration of Rights, 1689* (Baltimore, 1986); Steven C.A. Pinkus, *England's Glorious Revolution: A Brief History with Documents* (Palgrave, 2006).

3 A Regency Act was passed in 1690 at the beginning of Mary's first regency, empowering her with executive authority while stating that William's written directives overrode hers. During her subsequent regencies, however, no such act was deemed necessary. See *Statutes of the Realm*, 11 vols. (1810-20), 6:170.

4 Mary's regencies are 11 June to 10 September 1690; 6 January to 10 April and 1 May to 19 October 1691; 5 March to 18 October 1692; 24 March to 29 October 1693; and 6 May to 9 November 1694.

5 There are six popular biographies of Mary II in English (not including books that cover both Mary and William or Mary and Anne). They are: Mary Sanders, *Princess and Queen of England: Life of Mary II* (London, 1913); Marjorie Bowen, *The Third Mary Stuart* (London, 1929); Nellie Waterson, *Mary II, Queen of England* (Durham, NC., 1928); Hester Chapman, *Mary II: Queen of England* (London, 1953); Elizabeth Hamilton, *William's Mary: A Biography of Mary II* (New York, 1972); Jean Plaidy, *William's Wife* (New York, 1993). Also see Agnes Strickland's biography of Mary in her *Lives of the Queens of Scotland and England and English princesses connected with the regal succession of Great Britain* (New York, 1851-59), 12 vols. vols. 5 & 6. While Strickland was exceedingly hostile to William, Mary, and the Revolution, her biography of Mary remains a valuable source.

6 Plaidy, *William's Wife*; Maureen Waller, *Ungrateful Daughters: The Stuart Princesses Who Stole Their Father's Crown* (New York, 2002). Mary's dual image as betraying daughter and obedient

Mary's image as a passive wife to William was also a product of her own making. She crafted her "memoirs" (descriptions of the years between 1689 and 1693, written at the end of year in one or two sittings) within the conventional ideas of womanhood in the late seventeenth century -- passive, obedient, pious -- and, unlike most of her other personal papers, she did not burn them when she became ill. The "memoirs" represent Mary as she *wished* to be remembered and need to be balanced against other sources that often describe the Queen as firm, assertive, and once convinced, unwavering.⁷

Twenty years ago, as a product of the tercentennial celebrations of the Glorious Revolution in 1988 and 1989, historians produced some groundbreaking work on Mary, which led to a reevaluation of her image and her role in the dual monarchy.⁸ Both Lois Schwoerer and William Speck asserted that Mary played a crucial role in convincing the English of the legitimacy of the Revolutionary Settlement of 1689; and that during her six regencies she was a successful executive of state, neither dominated by her council nor timidly relying on William's written advice. Their work clearly affirmed the image of a woman of integrity and intelligence, whose partnership in the dual monarchy was in no way simply ceremonial or perfunctory. The perception at that time was that the traditional derogatory textbook descriptions of Mary II, such as that in Lacey Baldwin Smith's *This Realm of England, 1399-1688*, (first edition, 1966) would no longer stand.⁹ They would have to be altered in light of this new research.

Yet little has changed. In Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed Britain, 1603-1714*, (1996) Mary is described as "a figurehead regnant, controlled by a Council of Nine and managed by William's detailed directives. She disliked

wife was also perpetuated by Jacobite and Whig propaganda following the Revolution. I discuss this in "History's Mary: The Propagation of Mary II, 1689-1694," in *Women and Sovereignty*, ed. L. Fradenburg (Edinburgh, 1992), 168-92.

⁷ R. Doebner, *Memoirs of Mary, Queen of England (1689-1693) Together with Her Letters* (London and Leipzig, 1886).

⁸ Lois G. Schwoerer, "The Queen as Regent and Patron," in *The Age of William III & Mary II: Power, Politics, and Patronage, 1688-1702*, eds. Robert P. Maccubbin and Martha Hamilton-Phillips (Williamsburg, VA., 1990); "Images of Queen Mary II, 1689-95," *Renaissance Quarterly* 42 (1989): 717-784; W.A. Speck, "William --and Mary?" in *The Revolution of the 1688-89: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Lois G. Schwoerer (Cambridge, 1992). William Speck also wrote the article on Mary in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Although generally a solid overview of Mary's life, it nonetheless relies on Mary's problematic "memoirs" and several hostile sources. W.A. Speck, "Mary II (1662-1694)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

⁹ Smith never revised his description of Mary; he writes, "Mary was ignorant of history, politics, science, and mathematics. Her spelling was quaint, her grammar faulty. Her mind, her critics maintained, was 'as sluggish as an inland river,' and she always deferred to her husband's judgment." *This Realm of England, 1399-1688* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000), 8th ed., 339.

political responsibility and the details of government: “[it] does but break my brains the more and not ease my heart,” an aptly selected quote from Mary’s memoirs, to be sure. Kishlansky continues, “Mary’s passions were domestic, a psychological shelter from the traumas of having rejected her father and fallen out with her sister, Anne.” It was but the “comforts of home” and her “intense religious devotion” that gave her solace. Kishlansky’s Mary is a fragile invalid, unworthy of further discussion. The only less flattering description of a Stuart monarch in Kishlansky’s text is reserved for Mary’s sister, Queen Anne.¹⁰

This essay seeks to reestablish the political significance of Mary II’s reign in order to understand the tremendous outpouring of printed and iconographic materials eulogizing her in 1694 and 1695. Contemporaries were quite literally shocked and deeply unsettled by her sudden demise. Although the friends of the Revolution were shaken by this turn of events, through their sermons and elegies, they strove to reconcile a grieving nation to the new political reality of William alone. Their efforts were a kind of damage control. This was made necessary after the King’s extremely public display of less than manly behavior over his wife’s death. Mary’s death not only initiated a political crisis but something of a royal gender crisis as well.

Previous work on Mary has shown that her role in the making of the Glorious Revolution and the success of the Revolutionary Settlement was absolutely fundamental. Mary was not only willing to see her husband usurp the throne of her father, and disinherit her stepbrother, but also bypass her own far stronger claim to the English throne. Within the Convention of February 1689, charged with settling the government, there was some sentiment in favor of Mary ruling alone. A small group of Tories, led by Thomas Osborne, the Earl of Danby, hoped to elevate Mary as a regnant Queen.¹¹ William would become her consort. They saw in Mary, as a woman, the potential for a milder and more manageable sovereign, certainly more so than William, who was already the source of some uneasiness among the nation’s divisive elite.¹² But William made it clear that he would have nothing to do with any arrangement that placed his wife over him and threatened to take his person and his army home, leaving the English naked to French aggression and the

10 Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603–1714* (London, 1996), 301–02. On Queen Anne, Kishlansky writes, “Anne was dull, taciturn, stubborn and unattractive. Her conversation was mind-numbing, her taste insipid, her pleasures limited to gambling and dining, losing pounds at one set of tables and gaining them at the other.” Anne’s biographers, or anyone who has studied her, would no doubt disagree. *A Monarchy Transformed*, 316.

11 Schwoerer, “Images of Mary II,” 726–27.

12 Andrew Browning, *Thomas Osborne, the Earl of Danby and duke of Leeds (1632–1712)* (Glasgow, 1944–51), 1:421–33; H.C. Foxcroft, *The Life and Letters of Sir George Savile* (London, 1898), 2 vols. 2:222.

wrath of a vengeful James II. Mary herself resolved the impasse by asserting that she had no intention of being elevated above her husband, writing Danby a sharply worded rebuke for daring to make such a proposal.¹³

But Mary could hardly be left out of any political solution adopted in 1688/89. If one accepted the fiction that James II had abdicated himself and that his infant son, James Edward, was an imposter, as so many English were more than willing to do, Mary was the next legitimate heir. Her legitimacy, as the next Stuart claimant, could not be ignored. At their coronation ceremony on April 11, 1689, the crown was offered to both William and Mary and all official documents, prayers, proclamations, and litanies of the Church ran in both names. William grudgingly accepted this solution since all real authority was invested in him alone.

William may have only accepted this deal reluctantly but he soon had reason to rejoice in it. The English were not fond of foreigners. They were not fond of the Dutch with whom they had fought two wars within recent memory. They were especially not keen on foreign kings, who surrounded themselves with their fellow countrymen, squeezing the English away from the fountain of all bounty, power, and prestige.¹⁴ But Mary was English and clearly a devoted daughter of the Church of England. She was, in fact, everything he was not. William was short, sickly, homely, arrogant, cold, reserved, and taciturn; while Mary was tall, beautiful, healthy, unassuming, cheerful, talkative, and genial.¹⁵ In Whig poetry, she was compared to Venus, Juno, and Eve (before the Fall), Urania, Pallas, Deborah, Astraea, Elizabeth I, and the Virgin Mary. William himself admitted that although he knew not how to win English hearts, she surely would. It was her presence that made the Revolutionary Settlement palatable for High Churchmen and Tories. She had supporters in both parties and far fewer enemies. Many among the English governing elite hoped – and it was not unrealistic – that Mary would outlive her asthmatic husband and rule alone. In short, she was the Settlement’s saving grace. A fact that William was made increasingly aware, and he candidly admitting in

13 Bishop Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time* (Oxford, 1833), 3: 395-396. Hereafter, cited as *HOHOT*; Strickland, *Lives of the Queens*, 5: 521; Sir John Dalrymple, *Memoirs of Great Britain and Ireland* (London & Edinburgh, 1772-73), 2: app., pt. 1, 342.

14 The traditional perception that the Dutch dominated the court of William and Mary was mostly born of English jealousy and ill-will. As Andrew Barclay points out, “Dutchmen never dominated William’s bedchamber in the way that the Scots had done under James [I].” “William’s Court as King,” in *Redefining William III: The Impact of the King-Stadholder in International Context*, eds. Esther Mijers & David Onnekink (Ashgate, 2007), 23.

15 Mary was able to transmit her affable and generous nature to a broad audience, as attested to time and again in various contemporary accounts. Typical are the words of Richard Allestree when he writes that, “Her temper was naturally sweet, her disposition free and generous.” *The Whole Duty of Mourning. Now Published on the Sad Occasion of the Death of our Most Gracious Lady Mary the II* (1694), preface, pages unnumbered.

June 1689 that, “if he [William] left us, the Queen would govern better.”¹⁶

When William did leave England, as he did six times between 1689 and 1695, he placed the government safely in the hands of his Queen. Or as Nahum Tate put it more poetically, “While He abroad did Foreign Force oppose; / She rul’d at home, and charm’d Domestick Foes.”¹⁷ Mary was given a Council of Nine (originally, five Tories and four Whigs) to advise and assist her. But they did not rule her and they themselves were often divided along partisan lines. During her first regency, Mary often sat in the council meetings in silence, but she wrote shrewd character sketches of each of the members in her letters to William. She disliked the marquis of Carmarthen (formerly the earl of Danby); she found William Cavendish, Earl of Devonshire, “weak and obstinate, made a mere tool of his party.” Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset, was “lazy.” Thomas Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, was “mad.”¹⁸ Eventually, as W.A. Speck asserts, Mary was “quite able to divide and rule the nine.”¹⁹

The Queen’s most profound and lasting influence concerned the Church of England.²⁰ Mary II was personally known to a great many clergy of all ranks. At court, she surrounded herself with churchmen, often choosing their company over female friends.²¹ She appreciated the garrulous Bishop Gilbert Burnet, who William often found annoying.²² Burnet had settled at The Hague in 1686, quickly establishing close ties with the Prince and Princess, and he remained Mary’s confidante following the Revolution. Burnet adored the Queen, a sentiment widely shared among the many churchmen who knew her. Above all, though, both William and Mary found in John Tillotson the kind of clergyman on whom they could place an absolute trust.²³ In contrast to Burnet, Tillotson was calm,

16 Foxcroft, *Savile*, 2:222.

17 Nahum Tate, *A Poem upon the Death of Her Majesty, Queen Mary* (London, 1695), 6.

18 Doebner, *Memoirs*, 29-30.

19 Speck, “Mary II,” *ODNB*.

20 I am preparing a more detailed study of Mary’s role in the formation of the Latitudinarian Church of the long eighteenth century. Currently, the best scholarship on the subject is Mark Goldie, “John Locke, Jonas Proast and religious toleration,” in *The Church of England, c. 1689-c.1833, From Toleration to Tractarianism*, eds. J. Walsh, C. Haydon, and S. Taylor (Cambridge, 2002), 143-71.

21 This was a situation with which Mary was familiar. She was “greatly beloved” by clergy of various Protestant denominations in Holland. She was particularly close to her Anglican chaplains at The Hague, especially George Hooper and Thomas Ken. Strickland, *Lives of the Queens*, 5:2.

22 Burnet was elevated to the see of Salisbury in May 1689 by William and Mary. On William’s relationship with Burnet, see Foxcroft, *Savile*, 2:216, 232.

23 Tillotson was made one of the King’s chaplains soon after the coronation and clerk of the King’s closet in April 1689. In October 1690, he replaced the nonjuror William Sancroft as Archbishop of Canterbury. Of Mary and Tillotson, one contemporary wrote that they shared the same “principles and temper, their designs and endeavours were for peace.” William Bates, *A Sermon*

discreet, urbane. His liberal theology with its emphasis on practical spirituality and ethical behavior appealed to Mary's desire for moral reformation. Moreover, as a former Presbyterian minister himself, Tillotson had no interest in persecuting Protestant dissent: a position completely in line with the Queen.²⁴ Mary, Burnet, and Tillotson sought to redirect the Church, setting it on an entirely new course: from the Church of Archbishop William Sancroft -- sacerdotal, coercive, and bound tightly to the Stuart monarchy -- to the Church of Archbishops Tillotson and Tenison -- conciliatory, pragmatic, and latitudinarian.

Mary was extremely eager to prevent a schism within the Church between the abjuring and nonjuring (those willing and unwilling to swear new oaths to William and Mary) clergy. William and Mary left the nonjuring clergy unmolested and in possession of their dioceses and livings until the summer of 1691, when at last their patience had worn out. With the King abroad and the care of the Church left to the Queen, she saw to the removal of the nonjuring clergy and began "filling the Bishopricks."²⁵ Naturally, the vacancies left by the nonjurors were a great opportunity to refashion the Church, and the Queen strove to "produce a great change in the church and the temper of the clergy," through promotion and translation.²⁶ For the most part, Mary's bishops were Low Church: men friendly to the Revolution and willing to comprehend or tolerate Protestant nonconformity. Many of them were exceptionally gifted, such as Edward Fowler, nominated by Mary to the see of Gloucester in July 1690. All were interested in enlightened, practical solutions to the Church's problems rather than theological dogmatism. But Mary's appointments could also be keenly political, guided by the desire to reconcile the Church to the Revolution. According to Burnet, she tried to "overcome the peevishness of the leaders of the [High Church] party by preferring them."²⁷ In Bath and Wells, she nominated William Beveridge to replace her former chaplain, the nonjuring Thomas Ken.²⁸ Beveridge and Ken were both known for their monastic life-styles and anglo-Catholic piety. Mary hoped that Beveridge's replacement of Ken would make for a smooth transition and not

Preached upon the Much Lamented Death of our Late Gracious Queen Mary (London, 1695), 20.

24 T. Birch, *The Life of the most reverend Dr. John Tillotson, lord archbishop of Canterbury*, 2nd ed. (London, 1753); Gareth Bennett, "John Tillotson (1603-94), Dean and Archbishop of Canterbury: Portrait of a Liberal," in *To the Church of England: Essays and Papers... by Gareth Bennett*. Ed. Geoffrey Rowell, (Worthing, UK., 1988), 75-85.

25 Doebner, *Memoirs*, 37.

26 Burnet, *HOHOT*, 4:212.

27 Burnet, *A Supplement to Burnet's History of My Own Time*, ed. H.C. Foxcroft (Oxford, 1902), 504.

28 "Queen Mary said she knew he [Ken] had a great desire to be a martyr, but he should not be gratified in her time." Quoted in Burnet, *HOHOT*, 4:11.

disrupt the diocese.²⁹ But when Beveridge refused, she turned to Richard Kidder, another moderate and member of Tillotson's circle, who was flatly told that refusal was not an option.

Mary not only oversaw the replacement of the nonjuring bishops, she continued to distribute minor preferments throughout the duration of her reign.³⁰ She took advantage of the King's absences. In 1691, she hastily appointed her friend and High Churchman, George Hooper, a man who William could not abide, to deanship of Canterbury.³¹ On the other hand, William, when home, could overrule her. When Tillotson died in November 1694, Mary strongly favored the intellectual Edward Stillingfleet to replace him as Archbishop of Canterbury. But the Whigs in William's government considered Stillingfleet's "notions and his temper too high," and William chose the more moderate Thomas Tenison.³² Mary seems to have approved of Tenison, and in her last months (Mary died shortly after Tillotson) she defended the Archbishop Tenison against his detractors. Indeed, Tenison was a good choice; he continued the work of Tillotson and Mary: patronizing her charities, advancing the cause of moral reformation, and fully supporting the propagation of the faith abroad.

Mary's years in Holland had attuned her to a far more stark approach to worship than she found in the Church of England upon her return. At the Hague, she went to "publick prayers four times a day," but once in England, she complained shortly after her return, "now I hardly have the "leisure to go twice and that in such a crowd with so much formality and little devotion."³³ Even before her coronation in February 1689, Mary resolved to alter what she could. She dismissed the violinists at St. James's Chapel and had the singing of the prayers halted. Mary saw to it that the services at the royal chapels were far more frequent and public. A great believer in sermons, she had those given before her published, as well as many others. More sermons were published by the Queen's command during Mary's five year reign than during all of twenty-five years of Charles II's regime.³⁴ The Queen could also be critical of what her clergy said and did. She flatly told Burnet to shorten one

29 Beveridge was in "all the great questions of Church doctrine and ritual" similar to Ken. E. H. Plumptre, *The Life of Thomas Ken, D.D* (London, 1890), 2 vols. 2:51.

30 It was through her influence that the former Dissenter turned Churchman, Samuel Wesley, the father of the famous Wesleys, was transferred to the rectory of Epworth. John Henry Overton, *Life in the English Church* (London, 1885), 94.

31 Hooper was one of Mary's chaplains in Holland. William, as Prince of Orange, found Hooper's stance against the Dissenters in England annoying and stated that if ever he had anything to do with it, "Dr. Hooper will never be a Bishop." Arthur Trevor, *Life and Times of William the Third*, (London, 1836), 2 vols. Appendix, "Manuscript Account of Dr. Hooper," 2: 468.

32 Burnet, *HOHOT*, 4:238.

33 Doebner, *Memiors*, 11-12.

34 Tony Clayton, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004), 96-7.

of his long-winded sermons and reprimanded George Hooper for traveling on Sundays.³⁵ More importantly, she pressured clergymen guilty of pluralism or non-residence to abandon those livings where they did not reside.

The Sabbath-breaking that Mary witnessed in and around London annoyed her. In 1691 she informed her council that she was framing regulations for better observance of the Sabbath, going so far as to forbid all hackney-carriages and horses from working Sundays. That summer she issued a proclamation to the JPs of Middlesex for the suppressing of drunkenness, blasphemy, and debauchery. In 1692, during the King's absence, the Queen sent directives to the magistrates throughout England "to execute the laws against drunkenness, swearing, and profanation of the Lord's Day."³⁶ Burnet suggests that Mary's puritanical regulations were the subject of some ridicule, but she was supported by the King and the leading Low Church clergy.³⁷ What is certainly true is that her attempts at moral reformation, her numerous charities, and, above all, her own example as a model of piety and devotion at Court won her accolades of praise at the time of her death.

While the Church was Mary's special care, she also directed policy and made numerous difficult decisions in the King's absence. In 1690, she imprisoned her own uncle, Henry Hyde, the second Earl of Clarendon, in the Tower on suspicion of corresponding with her father.³⁸ In June 1692, she ordered John Churchill's name "struck out of the council, as being under the displeasure of their majesties."³⁹ She could be uncompromising, as was particularly true when she felt her husband or the Revolutionary Settlement were being undermined. In 1693, a Jacobite printer, William Anderton, was seized along with several of his pamphlets. One tract accused the King of various atrocities, including ordering fifty of his wounded English soldiers to be buried alive.⁴⁰ Anderton was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. Many pleaded to the Queen for his life. He was, after all, a "mere mechanic," printing what others had written.⁴¹ But Mary was unmerciful to those who libeled her husband, and Anderton was executed. The Queen was hardly unassuming. She hardly "lacked bowels," as a vindictive Sarah Churchill famously

35 Trevor, *Life and Times*, Appendix, 2: 473.

36 *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic*, 1690-91, 437-38.

37 Burnet, *HOHOT*, 4:181-182.

38 Dalrymple, *Memoirs*, 2:app., pt. 2, 128; cf. 134, 138.

39 The Earl of Marlborough was suspected of corresponding with James II and was dismissed as William's commander-in-chief of the English army. Foxcroft, *Savile*, 2: 153.

40 *Remarks upon the Present Confederacy and the Late Revolution* (London, 1693). Another incendiary tract printed by Anderton was [Charles Lawton] *A French Conquest Neither Desirable nor Practicable* (London, 1693).

41 *An Account of the Conversation Behaviour and Execution of William Anderton, Printer* (London, 1693); Macaulay, *History of England*, 5: 2368-69.

put it.⁴² When Mary's sister, Princess Anne, refused to follow her instructions and dismiss the Churchills from her presence, Mary replied sharply, "I am the Queen and I will be obeyed."⁴³ Mary II proved herself as a capable and able regnant during William's absences. His dependence on her, along with the whole framework of the Revolutionary Settlement, was made crystal clear by her unexpected death in the winter of 1694/95. Her death was one of the more serious political crises of the 1690s. But as with Mary's many contributions to the dual monarchy, historians have paid it little attention. On the other hand, contemporaries were shaken to the core, none more so than William III.

She was taken ill on December 19, 1694. The King returned to Kensington Palace on the second day of her illness and "was struck with this beyond expression," according to Bishop Burnet. "The day after he [the king] called me into his closet, and gave a free vent to a most tender passion; he burst out into tears and cried out that there was no hope of the Queen, and that, from being the most happy, he was now going to be the most miserable creature upon earth. He said during the whole course of their marriage he had never known one single fault in her; there was a worth in her that nobody knew besides himself."⁴⁴ At first there was some confusion as to her predicament: was it measles or the dreaded smallpox? But by the sixth day, her body exhibited all the telltale signs of hemorrhagic smallpox.⁴⁵

Mary's condition continued to deteriorate. She had difficulty breathing and was spitting blood. The service at Whitehall Chapel that Christmas Day was gloomy; when prayers were said for the queen, the King broke into sobs. "The court is all in tears and the King is drowned in sorrow," wrote one observer.⁴⁶ On December 26, Thomas Tenison, the newly installed Archbishop of Canterbury, informed the Queen of the true nature of her condition, which she took gracefully. But her serenity was continually broken by the distress of the King, who lost all control and broke into a passionate weeping, amazing all those who had always marveled at his former reserve. Mary entreated him, "not to make her suffer the pangs of death twice." William replied, "that if God caused this blow to fall... everything would be over for him." The doctors and churchmen around Mary's bed found William's overwrought behavior bizarre and frightening. With William out of control, Mary stepped into the breach, persuading the King to leave her bedside. A camp cot, one that William used during his numerous campaigns, was placed in her anteroom where he was supposed to sleep but could not, and instead, "fell into

42 John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, (Oxford, 1955), ed. E.S. De Beer, 6 vols. 2:69.

43 Dalrymple, *Memoirs*, 2: app., pt. 2, 45.

44 Bishop Gilbert Burnet, *History of His Own Time* (London, 1991), abridged, 246-47.

45 Donald R. Hopkins, *Princes and Peasants: Smallpox in History* (Chicago, 1983), 40.

46 *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, William III, July 1-December 31, 1695*, 301

a swoon of exhaustion.”⁴⁷

Mary continued to control her death and legacy. She had already arranged her papers and burnt others; now she gave orders that a small desk be delivered to the King. She declared that she was not afraid of death and passed her final hours with seven bishops by her side. She avoided any scene of final parting with the King.⁴⁸ When it was announced that the Queen’s pulse was failing, William fainted. She died shortly after midnight on the 28 December 1694. Londoners awaiting the news learned of her death by the tolling of the bells.⁴⁹

Her death was truly shocking. All accounts speak to a mourning that was near universal, not only in England and Holland, but throughout Protestant Europe.⁵⁰ Foreign envoys in London were amazed at the extent of the people’s grief. There was a sense of sheer wonder that it was *her* that should be taken, she that was only thirty-two, known for her rather abundant physique, blooming health, and gaiety; and that it was not *him*, twelve years her senior, thin and peaked. No less astonishing than the sudden death of the Queen, was the uncontrollable grief of the King who panicked everyone and jeopardized the stability of the Revolution, acting as if he would soon follow his wife to the grave. “The sight of his misery,” the Dutch envoy wrote, “was enough to melt the hardest heart.”⁵¹ The Whig writer and actor, Colley Cibber, queried, “Is’t not enough to see a nation groan?/ But must the loss be doubled on the throne?”⁵² George Stepney’s famous Latin epigram on the subject tells it all, translated as, “The Queen so bravely dies, the King so grieves, / You’d think the Hero’s dead, the woman lives.”⁵³

“The King,” wrote his close confidant, William Bentinck, Earl of Portland, in January, “is inconsolable, and indeed we have had great reason to be alarmed for his health.”⁵⁴ His fainting fits continued. He shut himself into his bedchamber,

47 Bowen, *The Third Mary Stuart*, 272-73; Allstree, *The Whole Duty of Mourning* (1694), preface; Macaulay, *History of England*, 5: 2468-2470.

48 Edward Fowler, *A Discourse of the Great Disingenuity and Unreasonableness of Repining at Afflicting Providence... publish’d upon the Occasion of the DEATH of Our Gracious Sovereign, QUEEN MARY* (London, 1695), 37; Burnet, *HOHOT*, 4: 248; Macaulay, *History of England*, 5: 2470.

49 William’s reaction to the announcement of Mary’s death is discussed in Robert Fleming, *A Practical Discourse Occasioned by the Death of King William* (London, 1703), 140.

50 Burnet writes, “She was the most universally lamented princess and deserved to be so of any in our age or our history.” *HOHOT*, 4: 248-49. As Princess of Orange, Mary was beloved in Holland; ordinary people would kiss the wheels of her carriage. At the news of her death, church bells tolled for several days. National Archives, SP 84/216, f. 134.

51 Quoted in Macaulay, *History of England*, 2:468.

52 Colley Cibber, *A Poem on the Death of Our Late Sovereign Lady, Queen Mary* (1695), 9.

53 George Stepney quoted in *Poems of the Affairs of State: Augustan Satirical Verse, 1660-1714*, ed. William Cameron (New Haven, 1971), 6 vols. 5:444.

54 Quoted in Bowen, *The Third Mary Stuart*, 284.

his secretary reported that “the King will see nobody and do nothing.” William’s letters from that month continually harkened back to one theme, “As for the world it is no longer anything to me.”⁵⁵ In late January, he left Kensington while it was being prepared for the funeral, declaring that he could not bear the sound of the hammering when the black velvet draperies were hung in every state room. The Queen’s funeral on March 5 was a grand baroque spectacle, elaborate and lavish, a national affair complete with a grand procession, official accounts, and engravings. All the buildings along the path of the procession to Westminster Abbey were draped in black crepe. Christopher Wren designed Mary’s mausoleum; Henry Purcell wrote the music to her funeral service.⁵⁶

The Queen’s death and the King’s grief was a public relations disaster for the Whigs and all supporters of the Revolution. It was difficult enough to lose the half of the dual monarchy that was truly popular and generally seen as more legitimate. But for William to act as though he would whither away, forget his lifelong crusade against Louis XIV, and abandon Protestant Europe and Revolutionary Britain to the vengeance of their enemies, this, in short, was a nightmare. Nor was the King’s behavior very manly, particularly from the most martial of Kings who, in Whig polemic was compared to Caesar, Mars, Alexander, Achilles, Augustus, Atlas, Hercules and, for saving the Church, Constantine.⁵⁷

At least sixty poems were printed on the death of Mary, as compared to the more normal amount of approximately twenty-five each at the deaths of Charles II, William III, and Queen Anne. In addition, forty-four sermons on her death were published and thirty-six medals were cast to memorialize the Queen, also a very high number.⁵⁸ Sermons were the first flood of printed materials on the death of

55 Ibid, 283.

56 Paul S. Fritz, “The Trade in Death: the Royal Funerals in England, 1685-1830,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 15 (1982): 291-316; Tony Clayton, *William III and the Godly Revolution* (Cambridge, 2004), 78; John Blow and Henry Purcell, *Three Elegies upon the Lamented Loss of our Late Most Gracious Queen Mary... sett to the Musick by Dr. Blow and Henry Purcell* (London, 1695).

57 See, for example, John Whittle, *Constantine Redivivus: Or, a Full Account of the Wonderful Providences and Unparall’d Successes... of the Heroical Prince, William the Third* (London, 1693); on William as Hercules, see Stephen B. Baxter, “William III as Hercules: the political implications of court culture,” in Schwoerer, *The Revolution of 1688-89*, 95-106.

58 I have compiled a ‘working list’ of all poems on Mary’s death. Professor Warren Johnston, who is constructing a database of sermons, 1660-1700, helped me locate all the sermons on Mary’s death. On the medals, see N. Tindall, *The Metallic History of the Last Three Reigns... from the Revolution to the death of King George I* (London, 1745-46). A large number of essays commemorating Mary were also published. See, Daniel Defoe, *The Life of that Incomparable Princess, MARY, our Late Sovereign Lady* (London, 1695); James Abbadie, *A Panegyric on our Late Sovereign Lady, MARY, Queen of England* (London, 1695); Peter Jurieu, *A Pastoral Letter written on the Occasion of the DEATH of the Late Queen of England... with Reflections on the Greatness of that Loss to Europe* (London, 1695); J.S., *A Brief History of the Pious and Glorious Life and Actions... MARY, Queen of England*

Mary, often given shortly following the news of her death. They signify the horror that so many contemporaries felt upon learning the grim news. "I have undertaken of this mournful duty," Dutch minister, John Ortwinus, told his congregation in Delph, "afraid however... [that] my sobs should interrupt my words."⁵⁹ Many of the clergy who had their sermons printed knew the Queen and could relate personal stories, often poignant, about her habits and demeanor.⁶⁰ Several were by Protestant Dissenters, asserting that they too were dealt a deadly blow by the demise of this most pious Queen.⁶¹ Some were by Huguenot and Dutch Reformatist ministers on the Continent, translated and reprinted in England.⁶² Almost all of them speak to a powerful sense of loss to both England and Protestant Europe. They were also angry and blamed the nation's sins for her death; particularly, the sin of ingratitude toward a God who had only just recently delivered the nation from popery and slavery through his instruments, William and Mary. "Malcontents," Jacobites, or anyone unenthusiastic about the Revolution were the cause of God's displeasure. These churchmen were certainly aware of William's great grief and his overwrought, highly-public behavior. Several warned him against immoderate grief. But the sermons truly register the first wave of public reaction, as measured by the clergy, who were themselves grief-stricken and often more concerned with their own loss, the loss to the Church, and Protestantism throughout Europe, than with William.

The second wave of materials, the elegies, odes, broadside ballads, and pindarics, which flowed from the presses throughout 1695, record a growing uneasiness with William's conduct in the wake of Mary's death. Prepared by the friends of the Revolution, this material not only sought to extol Mary's virtues, but also resign the nation to the new monarchy: William *sans* Mary. "Stay then thy floods of Tears," as one poet pleaded with the nation, "Maria has left behind, /A King that's Great, Good, Merciful, and Kind /A Prince that's famed abroad, below'd at home."⁶³ These

(London, 1695); Gilbert Burnet, *An Essay on the Memory of the Late Queen* (London, 1695).

59 John Ortwinus, *A Funeral Oration pronounced at the DEATH of the Most Serene and Potent PRINCESS, MARY STUART* (London, 1694/5), 3.

60 In particular, see those by Edward Fowler, Andrew Barnett, White Kennett, William Payne, Edward Pelling, Thomas Tenison.

61 See, for example, John Howe, *A Discourse Relating to the Much-lamented Death, and Solomon Funeral... QUEEN MARY* (Cornhill, 1695); Thomas Goodwin, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death... QUEEN MARY* (London, 1695); Joseph Boyse and Nathaniel Weld, *Two Sermons Preach't on a Day of Fasting and Humiliation ... On the Sad Occasion of the Death of Our Late GRACIOUS QUEEN* (Dublin, 1695).

62 For example, Isaac Claude, *Sermon upon the Death of the QUEEN of ENGLAND* (London, 1695), translated from French; Peter Francius, *An Oration of Peter Francius, Upon the FUNERAL of the Most August Princess, MARY II* (London, 1695), translated from the Latin.

63 *A Poem on the Death of the Queen*. By a Gentlewoman of Quality. (London, 1694/5).

writers continually exhorted the King to rouse himself and not “too long indulge thy grief.”⁶⁴ Time and again their poems devoted nearly as much space to describing the virtuous Queen as they did praising William as a warrior king. *Maria. A Poem Occasioned by the Death of Her Majesty* is typical. Using martial imagery, it reminds the King of “Battles, Conquests, Triumphs, Fame: / So shall with tears of blood, insulting foes/ Weep in their turn, and doubly feel our woes.”⁶⁵ Another ode goes on to wonder at “William’s self, whom danger ne’er could fright” and ends calling the King to arms, “Rouse therefore mighty Prince.”⁶⁶ True, William’s tear-streaked face was witnessed by many, but his were “manly tears.”⁶⁷ The Whig polemicist John Tutchin’s poem on Mary’s death, commands William to “Weep, weep no more / Maria’s softer Charms! /When War and Honour call you to your Arms.” William is the new Hercules and must now learn to “bear the world alone.”⁶⁸ Samuel Wesley’s elegy seeks to console the nation, reassuring all that the King’s “Grief will soon to Marital Fury turn,” and than France will have cause to mourn.⁶⁹

The national anxiety over William’s reaction to Mary’s death, and the very real fear that he would die or desert England was a common theme in the poetry of 1695. Many speak of William’s grief as a kind of death, but quickly assure readers that heaven “conducts him to his life again.”⁷⁰ “Command your Grief, and like a Hero mourn,” as one poet addressed the King, “If you forsake us, we are lost indeed.”⁷¹ Matthew Prior’s ode to William on his arrival in Holland later that year, reminds the King that: “Embattl’d Princes wait their Chief,/ Whose Voice should rule, whose Arm should lead,/And, in kind Murmurs, chide that Grief/ Which hinders EUROPE’S being freed.” Prior pleads with William to regain his manly courage for the sake of the security of the nation: “Cold in the Grave with Mary lies, / Unless in Thee her strength is safe,/ The frightened Nation wholly dies.”⁷² Over half of John Tutchin’s poem is also devoted to reminding William of the

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64 *An Elegy upon the Most Pious and Incomparable PRINCESS, MARY, Queen of England* (London, 1695), broadside.

65 Peter Anthony Motteux, *Maria. A Poem Occasioned by the Death of Her Majesty* (London, 1695), 12.

66 Simon Segar, *Threno-Maria. A Rapsodicall Essay on the Death of our late Gracious Sovereign Queen Mary* (London, 1695), pages unnumbered.

67 *On the DEATH of the QUEEN, A POEM* (London, 1695), 8.

68 John Tutchin, *An Epistle to Mr. Benjamin Bridgewater, Occasion’d by the Death of the late Queen Mary* (London, 1694), 3, 4.

69 Samuel Wesley, *Elegies on the Queen and Archbishop* (London, 1695), 13.

70 *To the Memory of the Queen: A Pindaric Ode* (London, 1695), 3.

71 John Cutts, *On the Death of the Queen by a Person of Honour* (London, 1695), 3.

72 Matthew Prior, *To the King, an Ode on His Majesty’s Arrival in Holland* (London, 1695),

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armies awaiting him abroad: "Your single presence half a Conquest gains; / Then to your Armies and your Honours go."⁷³ These poems reassured readers that while William's "Manly Soul" was pressed down by "weighty Grief" now, soon enough he will no longer "woman in his griefs appear" and resume the war.⁷⁴ Many of the poets speak of William turning his sorrow into rage and redoubling his fight against Louis XIV. Now from heaven above, "May Blest Maria's Soul inspire/ His active Breast with double Fire." "May his conquering Arms advance/ Into the Bowels of Insulting France."⁷⁵

Immediately following the Glorious Revolution, when William's legitimacy as England's King was often questioned, Whig propaganda continually hailed him our *real, rightful, and lawful* King. But following the Queen's death, Whig polemic became particularly obsessed with conjuring up the image of William as a manly military hero. Poets and pundits were keen to remind the public of William's masculine prowess, especially as it was displayed on the battlefield. In short, he may have wailed, wept, and fainted for his dear wife, but he was still Hercules, still Mars, still Achilles and would draw his sword once again. He also became divine, repeatedly referred to as "Godlike William."⁷⁶ As Matthew Prior put it to the King, "Mary reigns a Saint in Heaven/ And Thou art a Demi-God below."⁷⁷

The friends of the monarchy strove hard to resign the nation to the loss of the Queen and to the reign of William alone. This was no easy task. These writers themselves found the new reality a severe blow. Lines like, "Heaven could not spare them both, but leaves us one," written by a gentlewoman, feel heavy and remorseful.⁷⁸ They solemnly remind their readers that they still have the King, "for whom Alone we live."⁷⁹ There is a sense of resignation in a line like John Phillips' "Tho' Mary's gone, yet William still remains."⁸⁰ In William Wake's sermon on Mary's death, he asserts that while God has taken Mary, "William continues his Sacred Majesty." And if that did not brighten one's spirits, and apparently he was not sure it would, Wake reminds his listeners of the promise of a "farther succession" of another Stuart princess, Anne.⁸¹ The last word, however, belongs to

73 Tutchin, *An Epistle to Mr. Benjamin Bridgewater*, 4.

74 Cibber, *A Poem on the Death*, 14

75 *Albion's Tears on the Death of Her Sacred Majesty Queen Mary* (London, 1695), 8, 11.

76 Motteux, 10; John Dennis, *The Court of Death, A Pindarique Poem, dedicated to the Memory of Her Most Sacred Majesty, Queen Mary* (London, 1695), passim; Thomas Yalden, *On the Conquest of Namur. A Pindaric Ode* (London, 1695), 11.

77 Matthew Prior, *To the King*, last couplet.

78 *A Poem on the Death of the Queen by a Gentlewoman of Quality* (London, 1695), 4.

79 *Urania, A Funeral Elegy on the Death of Our Gracious QUEEN* (London, 1695), 7.

80 John Phillips, *In Memory of our Late Most Gracious Lady Mary* (London, 1695). 10.

81 William Wake, *Of our Obligation to put Trust in God, rather than in Men* (London, 1695),

Bishop Burnet, who seems to have taken Mary's death as hard as the King himself. In his 200-page essay lauding the virtues of the Queen, Burnet ends sadly, "We are not quite abandoned: God does still preserve Him to us."⁸²

Although William himself wondered if he could resume the business of war, telling a confidant that, "I feel myself no longer fit for military command," he did slowly, eventually, command his grief and continue his campaign against the French.⁸³ He was, however, more dependent on the Whigs, to direct the state during his absences and, most importantly, to support and fund the war-effort. Dissatisfied Tories, many of whom were closer to Mary, were released from any uneasiness they might have felt about attacking the government during her lifetime. More importantly, the King could no longer depend on Mary's popularity with the nation as a whole either, and he felt compelled to show himself to his English subjects, spending three weeks in northern and western England in late 1695.⁸⁴

The King and Archbishop Tenison continued to support Mary's charities and realized her vision of a college in Virginia for the propagation of the faith.⁸⁵ When William died in March 1702 and his body was undressed, it was discovered that he had worn a locket of Mary's brown hair. The nation, of course, recovered as well, but not unlike the general feeling of malaise following Diana's death in 1997, there was an intangible sense of loss: that something so bright had been whisked away, and that the world was made just a little less intriguing, just a little less sweet.⁸⁶

82 Burnet, *An Essay*, 190.

83 William to Heinsius, January 1695; quoted in Macaulay, *History of England*, 5:2479.

84 Stefan van Raaji & Paul Spies, *The Royal Progress of William and Mary* (Amsterdam, 1988), trans. A. P. K. Graafland, 133-46.

85 On the establishment of the College of William and Mary, see Parke Rouse, "Their Majesties' Royal College in Virginia, in *The Age of William and Mary*, 209-13.

86 And just as Diana was hailed, "England's rose," in the maudlin lyrics of Elton John, so Mary upon her death figured as England's "royal rose." See, for example, Daniel Defoe, *The Life of that Incomparable Princess, MARY*, 69.