

# Elizabeth i – speech to the troops at tilbury (1588) assignment

[History](#)



## ELIZABETH I - SPEECH TO THE TROOPS AT TILBURY (1588) HISTORICAL

ANALYSIS The text. This text is a political speech delivered on 9 August Old Style, 19 August New Style 1588 by Queen Elizabeth I of England to the land forces earlier assembled at Tilbury in Essex in preparation of repelling the expected invasion by the Spanish Armada. Queen Elizabeth supported pirates due to the serious economical crisis that England was facing to (at that time, England have been at war against France for several years; this war had entailed huge expenses to the coffers of England). Pirates supported royal finances back.

The main problem of Queen Elizabeth was Mary I, Queen of Scots. She was deposed and came to England in order to take refuge; however, Catholics considered Mary as the rightful Queen of England, so Elizabeth jailed her in the Tower of London. After 18 years in prison, Elizabeth discovered a plot to assassinate her so Mary would become Queen of England; due to this, Elizabeth ordered the beheading of Mary in 1587. The death of Mary was the perfect excuse for Phillip II of Spain (catholic as Mary) to declare the war to England. It is important to notice that Spain had been suffering the attacks of English pirates during several years.

In addition, Elizabeth, who sought to advance the cause of Protestantism where possible, supported the Dutch Revolt against Spain. Thus, Philip planned an expedition to invade and conquer England, thereby suppressing support for the United Provinces??? that part of the Low Countries that had successfully seceded from Spanish rule ??? and cutting off attacks by the English against Spanish possessions in the New World and against the Atlantic treasure fleets. The king was supported by Pope Sixtus V, who <https://assignbuster.com/elizabeth-i-speech-to-the-troops-at-tilbury-1588-assignment/>

treated the invasion as a crusade, with the promise of a further subsidy should the Armada make land.

This great fleet would be known as the Spanish Armada. The purpose of the Spanish Armada was sailing through the English Channel to anchor off the coast of Flanders, where the Duke of Parma's army of tercios would stand ready for an invasion of the South East of England. The Armada achieved its first goal and anchored outside Gravelines, at the coastal border area between France and the Spanish Netherlands. While awaiting communications from Parma's army, it was driven from its anchorage by an English fire ship attack, and in the ensuing battle at Gravelines the Spanish were forced to abandon their rendezvous with Parma's army. The Armada managed to regroup and withdraw north, with the English fleet harrying it for some distance up the east coast of England. A return voyage to Spain was plotted, and the fleet sailed into the Atlantic, past Ireland, but severe storms disrupted the fleet's course. More than 24 vessels were wrecked on the north and western coasts of Ireland, with the survivors having to seek refuge in Scotland. Edinger (2001) states that the Spanish Armada was sunk primarily by shipworms. [11] Of the fleet's initial complement, about 50 vessels failed to make it back to Spain.

The expedition was the largest engagement of the undeclared Anglo-Spanish War (1585-1604). At the time when the Spanish invasion was expected, Queen Elizabeth decided to review in person, this detachment of soldiers assembled at Tilbury. On the day of the speech, the Queen left her bodyguard before the fort at Tilbury and went among her subjects with an

escort of six men. Lord Ormonde walked ahead with the Sword of State; he was followed by a page leading the Queen's charger and another bearing her silver helmet on a cushion; then came the Queen herself, in white with a silver cuirass and mounted on a grey gelding.

She was flanked on horseback by her Lieutenant General the Earl of Leicester on the right, and on the left by the Earl of Essex, her Master of the Horse. Sir John Norreys brought up the rear. The text of this speech was found in a letter from Leonel Sharp (chaplain to Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, present at Tilbury camp that day) sometime after 1624 to the duke of Buckingham. The Author. Queen Elizabeth was born in Greenwich Palace on September 7, 1533. She died on March 24, 1603, of natural causes. Her father was Henry VII.

His second wife, Anne Boleyn was Elizabeth's mother. King Henry wanted a son, but received a daughter, instead, from his second wife. Before Elizabeth's third birthday, Henry had her mother beheaded in charges of adultery and treason. Elizabeth was brought up in a separate household at Hatfield (not known). King Henry's third wife gave birth to a son. This boy was named Edward. Edward was declared first in line for King Henry's throne, while Mary (Daughter of Henry's first wife) was declared second, and Elizabeth was declared third and last in line for the throne.

Elizabeth received a thorough education that was normally reserved for men. She was taught by special tutors of whom, the most known, was a Cambridge humanist by the name of Roger Ascham. Roger Ascham wrote about Elizabeth, " Her mind has no womanly weakness. Her perseverance is

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equal to that of a man and her memory long keeps what it quickly picks up. With the help of these tutors, she was not only fluent in two languages, but in four languages. She was fluent in the languages of Greek, Latin, French, and Italian.

When Henry died in 1547, her brother, Edward, took over the throne at ten years of age. Edward, with a short reign on the throne, died in 1553, and Elizabeth's half, older sister, Mary took the throne. Mary, like Edward, died on November 17, 1558, after a short time on the throne; Elizabeth succeeded her on the same year. Historical Analysis. As mentioned before, England was facing an attempt of invasion by Spanish troops, unleashed by the beheading of Mary I, Queen of Scots. Queen Elizabeth decided to go to Tilbury at the time the invasion was expected, in order to encourage her troops.

It was not usual to see a woman in a battle field, but she wasn't afraid to talk to her soldiers. With this speech, she was probably trying to reinforce her authority. She talks in honesty, recognizing that she is nothing but an old woman, but she also states that her heart and determination are the ones of a king: " 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, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm [... ] " She tries to make the soldiers feel this battle as a personal offense to themselves, and also to the whole nation of England and the Queen herself; Queen Elizabeth doesn't want any prince in Europe to think they can defeat her or England, and so tells to the troops, even stating that she will fight by their side, being their " general, judge and rewarder".

She says she is ready to live and die amongst her troops to Finally, she asks them obedience to her lieutenant and courage in the battle, so they will defeat the enemies " of my God, of my kingdom and of my eople".

Conclusion. Queen Elizabeth I was an eloquent writer and orator and she used these skills to overcome any added opposition faced by her due to her being a woman. She could not change her sex but she could prove herself to be the equal of any man in the category of intelligence witticism. Thus she chooses to emphasize wit and wisdom in her writings and speeches over the body. When Elizabeth I appeared before her troops at Tilbury, she helped to create an image of her relation to England.

That image has been made to serve different points of view in the intervening centuries, during which it has attained the complexity of myth. In 1620s and 1630s, Elizabeth's armor and speech first gained importance as the queen's supposed militant Protestantism become an icon of national unity for English people. As a result of this, this speech became a myth of nationalist feeling. The queen's visit was important to install fortitude among the troops in the event of further conflict.

A rousing, patriotic speech delivered by the Queen of England was precisely what was needed, and Elizabeth's oration did not fail to capture the intensity of the moment. Elizabethan England was a patriarchal society reflecting male dominance in all political and social aspects, reinforced by the belief in the traditional and institutional ' rule of the fathers. ' The Tilbury speech demonstrates Elizabeth's skill at creating contemporary images of monarchy and gender by ambiguous reference to being both king and queen.

In doing so, Elizabeth provides a manipulation of the contradictory notions of a society that is governed by a female monarch by employing her gender to reconstruct a crossover in traditional male and female roles, masculine and feminine attitudes and characteristics. Although she did not marry or have children, Elizabeth may well have been utilising expressions of maternal instinct. The army could have represented a family of "faithful and loving people," her men and 'children' urged onwards by a matriarchal figure determined to keep her family united and safe from potential harm.

The Queen argues that despite lacking the physical prowess of a king, her "weak and feeble body" does not obstruct her willingness to enter the fray in the true spirit of a king. Elizabeth declares that if it were possible she would enter the "midst and heat of battle to live and die" among the assembled army, and displays a readiness to offer her "royal blood" rather than be dishonoured by an invasion of her realm. As a woman, Elizabeth may have believed that she lacked a king's physical strength, but it seems she made a connection between herself and Henry VIII.

Reiterating those characteristics she shared with her father, Elizabeth declares that she has "the heart and stomach of a king and a king of England too." Elizabeth perhaps alleviates some male concerns by offering a political and practical solution to leadership by stating that Leicester "shall be in my stead." This is an example of effective self-propaganda that presents the queen as not necessarily a 'weak' woman, but a man in a man's world, a concept that may have helped minimize the anxieties felt by her being a woman. But did the Queen actually write her speeches?

Maybe she employed an alternative source of inspiration, for example the Queen's Principal Secretary of State, Sir William Cecil. However, it is important to remember the quite brilliant humanist education that Elizabeth received and it hardly seems possible that such an education would not be used in writing all speeches, poems, prayers and letters that characterized Elizabeth's output. Elizabeth often spoke from prepared texts and did provide speeches to be read out by ministers, but she was also prepared to speak without preparation or from memory.

The Spanish invasion was one of the most significant crises of Elizabeth's reign, and for contemporaries, the Tilbury address may have provided a substantial amount of reassurance in the ability of the monarchy not only to lead a successful campaign, but that victory was God-given and assured. However, it could be argued that many of the troops were perhaps more motivated by the promise of "rewards and crowns" than any unrealistic declaration of a queen willing to fight shoulder to shoulder with her soldiers.

The fact that printed versions were made available in the early seventeenth century demonstrates that at later stages in history, people were still interested in the image, role and reputation of Elizabeth I. It is possible that Elizabeth was expressing her message to the nation as a whole, a notion that has been picked up on in later years to counter foreign threats to England. In an effort to project nationalist sentiment, the 'spirit' of the Tilbury speech has been utilised many times, an example being Winston Churchill's 'we will fight on the beaches' speech in 1940.



For modern historians, the Tilbury speech provides an excellent example of Elizabeth's ability to employ language to its fullest expression in a concise, relevant and tactical oration. The speech encapsulates Elizabeth's ability to use stirring rhetoric to project a forceful expression of unity and defiance against potential invaders. In 1588, Elizabeth's Tilbury address was deemed a great example of nationalistic unity, and for modern researchers a fine example of Elizabeth's iconic status.