

Speech at his Death (27[i.e. 29] October 1618)

Sir Walter Raleigh

Introduction

On 29 October 1618, Raleigh was brought to a scaffold in Westminster's Old Palace Yard to be beheaded. In the final hour before his death, he delivered an apologetic speech to the gathered crowd justifying his conduct and insisting on his loyalty to King James and on his Christian belief. Many commentators recorded their favourable impressions of the speech, which helped revive Raleigh's reputation. Several different transcripts were made by onlookers.

Transcript

British Library, Additional MS 11600, ff. 21r–22r

21r

S[i]r Wa^lter Rawleigh his speech at his death who was beheaded in the Pallace of Westm[inster]r the 27th of October 1618./ betweene the howres of 8 and 9 in the morning these lords being present there.

The Earle of Arundell The Earle of Oxford The Earle of Lincolne The Earle of Northampton. Lo[rd] Viscont Doncaster Lo[rd] Percy Lo[rd] Sheffield Lo[rd] Windsor.

And also many k[nigh]ts gent[lemen] of ranke and quality beinge assended

the Scaffold

21v

the Scaffold he saluted the lords & gentleman present w[hi]ch done he spake as followeth./

If there shall appeare any disturbance or trembling passion in me I desire you not to impute it to any imbicillity or weaknes of heart but rather to a strong and uiolent feauor that is now ready to hinder me in what I intend to say for this is now the third fitt & the houre of it is neere at hand for yesterday when I was called out of my bed I was in the full heate & extreimity thereof & I pray god it may now misse me that my voyce may not be hindred in the deliuey of that I would say for I desire that your lo[rdship]ps may be witnesses thereof. I thanke god that I am deliuered out of darkenes to dye in the light. heere the lords most of them being in a window against the scaffold desired him to stay his speech & they would come downe to him which they did & then he proceeded in this manner./

As I sayd I thanke god I am come out of darkenes to dye in the light I meane imprisonment in the towre but concerning the matter for w[hi]ch the king hath taken soe great offence against me (being insensed thereunto by some) I must confesse that there were some probabilitys to moue him thereunto yet farr from truth the mayne & materiall poynts thereof are these first that I did practise w[i]th France & secondly that I had spoken uile naught & scandalous wordes of the kinge./

For the first concerning some practise w[i]th Fraunce I heere call the eternull god to wittnes that I neuer directly nor indirectly had any practise treaty message or businesse with the king or state of France or with any thence nor neuer had any w[i]th the French Agent nor yet neuer

saw him vntill he came to me to my howse o lord I call thy all seeing Ma[jes]tie to wittnes that I am most cleare & innocent herein alas it were a foolish maddnes in mee to lye in the pr[e]sence of god to whom I am am at this uery instant going & before whom I am now to make my accompt for what profitt would it be to me to sett a little florish and glosse on these things & loose my owne soule for when a man shall desire god

to be a

22r

to be a wittnesse of his sayings & he shall then speake falslye o what a most fearefull & terrible thing it is to call god to [bare] wittnes of his falshood, euen in men that haue tyme after it to repent then what is it to me that haue noe tyme after this: I am now out of the power of the world & am not in case to flatter kings, but now am in the power of death, it is true that I did intend to fly to Rochell & to haue liued there vntill I could haue wrought my peace, but that ^I euer intended any enterprise or that there was a french com[m]ission forth as is surmised & hath been strongly enforced against me o lord I renounce thy mercyes if I know of any such thing./

Other manuscript witnesses

- British Library, Additional MS 34727, f. 35v
- British Library, Additional MS 40838, f. 30r
- British Library, Additional MS 4106, ff. 82r–83v
- British Library, Additional MS 44848, ff. 267r–269v
- British Library, Additional MS 69394, ff. 59v–62v
- British Library, Additional MS 72329, ff. 118r–119v
- British Library, Additional MS 72354, ff. 50r–51v
- British Library, Additional MS 73086, ff. 20r–22r
- British Library, Additional MS 73087, ff. 43r–46v
- British Library, Egerton MS 784, p.6
- British Library, Harley MS 1576, ff. 93r–94r
- British Library, Harley MS 1893
- British Library, Harley MS 3787, ff. 182r–182v
- British Library, Harley MS 39, ff. 47x–48x
- British Library, Harley MS 852, ff. 29r–32r
- British Library, Harley MS 6353, ff. 80r–86r
- British Library, Stowe MS 141, f. 74x
- British Library, Stowe MS 141, f. 75x
- British Library, Stowe MS 180, ff. 47x–48x
- Beinecke Library, Osborn b32, pp145–153
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 830, ff. 102r–103
- Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 830, ff. 114r–115v
- Bodleian Library, MS Eng. hist. c. 319, ff. 18r–v
- Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 280, ff. 46r–52v
- Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson D 859, ff. 84r–85v
- Cambridge University Library, MS Dd.3.87, Item 18, 1r–5v
- Cambridge University Library, MS Ee.5.23, pp464–467
- Cambridge University Library, MS Mm.6.33, ff. 181r–185v
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS G.b.7, ff. 135r–138r
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS G.b.9, ff. 161r–170v

- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.a.418, ff. 1r–4v
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS V.b.303, pp271–275
- Folger Shakespeare Library, MS Z.e.1, item 11
- Gonville & Caius College, MS 73/40, ff. 214r–215r
- Inner Temple Library, Petyt MS 538/18, ff. 240r–244r
- Jesus College, MS 83 [on deposit in Bodleian], ff. 68v–70r
- Nottingham University Library, CI LP 5, item 5, 2–5
- Queen's College, MS 121, ff. 512–517
- Queen's College, MS 130, ff. 152–157
- Queen's College, MS 32, ff. 14r–16v
- Somerset Archives, DD\MI/18/82
- Somerset Archives, DD\SF/7/1/11, item 1
- The National Archives, SP 14/103, /52 [ff.74r–76r]
- The National Archives, SP 14/103, /54 [ff.77r–83r]
- Trinity College, MS O.5.21, ff. 178–185

Seventeenth-century print exemplars

- *Arraignment and Conviction of Sr Walter Rawleigh* (London, 1648) [Wing A3744], pp. 26–34
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Sir Walter Raleigh's Sceptick* (London, 1651) [Wing R186/R186A], pp. 139–150
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1657) [Wing R180], pp. 197–202
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1661) [Wing R181], pp. 259–264
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1664) [Wing R182], pp. 259–264
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1669) [Wing R183], pp. 259–264
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1675) [Wing R184], pp. 259–264
- Sir Walter Raleigh, *Remains of Sir Walter Raleigh* (London, 1681) [Wing R185], pp. 260–265

Modern print exemplars

- *Somers Tracts* (2nd ed.), vol. 2, pp. 439–442

Selected Criticism

- Anna R. Beer, *Sir Walter Raleigh and his Readers in the Seventeenth Century* (Basingstoke, 1997)
- Andrew Fleck, "'At the Time of His Death': Manuscript Instability and Walter Raleigh's Performance on the Scaffold", *Journal of British Studies*, 48/1 (2009), 4–28

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<https://mpese.ac.uk/t/RaleighSpeechDeath1618.html>