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## Unfaithful

Brendan M. Raleigh

Gettysburg College, [ralebr01@gettysburg.edu](mailto:ralebr01@gettysburg.edu)

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# Unfaithful

**Author Bio**

Brendan Raleigh is a senior English major. He is a tutor at the Writing Center and the editor of The Gettysburgian, Gettysburg College's student newspaper.

# Unfaithful

Brendan Raleigh

I refused your crown,<sup>1</sup>  
and, in response,  
you lopped the head off  
of my helpless, already-rotten corpse.<sup>2</sup>

Now you call me “usurper,”  
“traitor,” “murderer” –  
condemn me  
like a widow who  
would renounce and deride  
her late and once-loving husband  
to secure herself a spot  
in another’s bed.

At Drogheda and Wexford,<sup>3</sup>  
I slipped my soul into the very corruption  
which, for all my life,  
I had sought to combat –  
oversaw the slaughter of thousands  
for your glory and safety.  
I surrendered my soul and my redemption  
for you.

Now look:  
not two years after my death,  
not two years after you paraded me through  
the streets of London on your shoulders  
and called me a “hero,”  
my head sits alone on a spike  
atop Westminster Hall.

It is placed there like a trophy

1 In March 1657, parliament offered Cromwell the title of king.

2 Cromwell was beheaded two years after his death in order to please the newly-rethroned Charles II. Cromwell’s reign was between Charles II and Charles I, who was beheaded before Cromwell took over.

3 Two sieges which Cromwell led in Ireland, in which around 6,000 were killed, including 1,500 civilians.

as if you fought me,  
bested me,  
and split me open  
for love of the monarchy  
you'd betrayed and beheaded  
just ten years before.

But I know this:  
it is no more than  
a single match, lit  
and thrown into the oil-soaked record rooms  
of the past eight years –  
an erasure of my reign  
and a portrait, open for all to see,  
of England  
groveling, once more, to a king.