Chapter 1

Widow's Peek: Looking at Ritual and Representation

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Whereas recent studies of early modern widowhood by social, economic and cultural historians have called attention to the often ambiguous, yet also often empowering, experience and position of widows within society, *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe* is the first book to consider the distinct and important relationship between ritual as it pertains to widowhood (namely, the culturally dictated and managed set of social roles and responsibilities of widows during and after mourning ceremonial) and representation. The essays assembled here read widowhood as a catalyst for the production of a significant body of visual material – representations of, for and by widows, whether through traditional media, such as painting, sculpture and architecture, or through the so-called ‘minor arts,’ including popular print culture, medals, religious and secular furnishings and ornament, costume and gift objects. As this introduction and the essays that follow will suggest, a careful and critical look at this unique and understudied correlation can offer valuable insight into the fashioning and re-fashioning of individual, family and civic identity, memory and history in early modern Europe.

A Way of Looking at Widows

Much important work on women has been published in the 25 years since Lauro Martines issued a plea ‘to rearrange our grasp of the whole social life’ of late medieval and Renaissance Europe.¹ The present study is indebted, in immeasurable ways, to those scholars who first peeked – and more often than not *stared* – into the lives of all women, not just of widows. It was Joan Gadol Kelly who, in 1977, directly confronted the infamous out-of-step assertion by Jacob Burckhardt that ‘women stood on a footing of perfect equality with men,’ asking decisively, ‘Did Women Have a Renaissance?’ and sparking a provocative debate both on the status of women within early modern culture and on feminist interpretations of that

¹ Lauro Martines, ‘A Way of Looking at Women in Renaissance Florence,’ *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1974): 15-28, citation at 16.

history.² David Herlihy's reconsideration of that question and, specifically, the subsequent trend within feminist scholarship to judge the Renaissance 'meaningless when applied to women and their history' countered the assumption that women were restricted and repressed and, in so doing, expanded the scope of inquiry.³ As he and other scholars have proposed, looking toward social determinants in order to understand the more complex notion that the whole idea of gender raises allows us, according to Judith C. Brown, 'to historicize the conditions of both women and men as actors on the historical stage.'⁴ Inspired by this rhetoric of performance and challenged by the previous promise of destabilizing restrictive categories and assumptions, the essays in this collection, which focus the gaze on widows' lives, seek to newly re-view the circumstances and experiences of early modern women through the lens of visual culture.

An overview of early modern widowhood, while recognizing the various period, geographical and class differences that exist, can help us to see more clearly our subject. Popular images of the widow as old and ravaged, barely more than a personification of death, or as a lustful, licentious temptress, or as a penniless and hopeless caregiver – imposing pictures, indeed – portray a substantial segment of the early modern European population as marginalized; yet very often neither decrepit, dangerous nor destitute, widows were anything but displaced members of society. The realities of widowhood paint a very different portrait and, perhaps, explain why and how such stereotypes became institutionalized in the first place.

We might begin by defining the widow as a woman, at a particular cultural and historical moment, caught in a situation of complex and complicating transformation. With her new social designation, which, itself, was non-negotiable, came a multitude of dramatic changes. Indeed, women's lives were suddenly in flux, and the events and experiences that followed affected everything from emotional states to economic ones. In most parts of Europe, following burial ceremonial, women returned to live with their birth, or agnatic, families. If they received an inheritance or gained control of their dowries, some widows found themselves in economically advantageous positions, resulting in financial security and even leading to relative independence. Other widows might be forced to

² Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London and New York: Penguin, 1990; orig. 1860), 250; Joan Gadol Kelly, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?,' originally published in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977) and reprinted in Kelly, *Women, History and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19-50.

³ David Herlihy, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?: A Reconsideration,' *Medievalia et Humanistica* (1985): 1-22. Reprinted in his *Women, Family, and Society in Medieval Europe: Historical Essays, 1978-1991*, ed. with an introduction by A. Molho (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 33-56, citation at 34.

⁴ Judith C. Brown, 'Introduction,' in *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, eds Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 1-15, especially 5.

support themselves and their children; such circumstances could determine whether or not a widow was to remarry, a delicate negotiation that was usually decided by a male relative. As 'passing guests' between households, such arrangements could be problematic, especially if the widow had children, who then would be placed in a vulnerable and compromising position.⁵ Upon widowhood, there were many expectations but just as many opportunities – conflicting and consensual, desirable and devastating, ephemeral and eternal.

The uncertainties of widowhood in early modern Europe led to a substantial production of literature, from conduct books to sermons, 'governing' (there was a thin line between recommendation and law) the comportment of widows. For such an example, we might look toward the most influential women's conduct book of the sixteenth century, *A Very Fruitful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman*, written by Juan Luis Vives in 1523, published in Latin in Antwerp that same year and, underscoring the popularity of the book, soon thereafter translated into English, Castilian, French, German and Italian. As a means of presenting the general tone and tack of this and similar literary persuasions and dissuasions, substantial excerpts follow from the Third Book, which takes as its topic the roles and responsibilities of widows. In Chapter I, 'Of the Mourning of Widows,' Vives dictates the proper type and amount of mourning for women; with the devastating loss of a husband comes a loss of identity, which not only justifies but also requires even uncontrollable grief:

Good woman, when her husband is dead, ought to know that she hath the greatest loss and damage that can bechance her in the world, and that there is taken from her the heart of mutual and tender love toward her, and that she hath lost not only the one half of her own life (as learned men were wont to say when they had lost them whom they loved dearly) but herself also to be taken from herself altogether and perished. Of this cause may come honest weeping, sorrow, and mourning with good occasion, and wailing not to blame. It is the greatest token that can be of an hard heart and an unchaste mind, a woman not to weep for the death of her husband. Howbeit there be two kinds of women which in mourning for their husbands in contrary ways do both amiss: that is, both they that mourn too much and those that mourn too little. I have seen some women no more moved with the death of their husbands than it had been but one of light acquaintance that had died, which was an evident sign of but cold love unto their husbands. Which thing is so foul that none can be more abominable nor more cursed.⁶

In Chapter III, 'Of the Minding of Her Husband,' the author recommends how a widow should act during her widowhood; she should understand that with the

⁵ See the important article by Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "'The Cruel Mother': Maternity, Widowhood and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,' in her *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 117-131, citation at 118.

⁶ As cited by Joan Larsen Klein, ed., *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500-1640* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 119.

death of her husband, who is now considered a 'divine ... spy,' she must behave accordingly, for she has a duty to both his memory and his children:

Let a widow remember and have still before her eyes in her mind that our souls do not perish together with the body, but be loosed of the bonds of our corporal grossness, and be lightened from the burden of the body ... Wherefore a good widow ought to suppose that her husband is not utterly dead, but liveth both with life of his soul and beside with her remembrance ... Then what should a Christian woman do? Let her keep the remembrance of her husband with reverence and not with weeping, and let her take for a solemn and a great oath to swear by her husband's soul and let her live and do so as she shall think to please her husband, being now no man but a spirit purified and a divine thing ... Also let her take him for her keeper and spy, not only of her deeds, but also of her conscience. Let her handle so her house and household and so bring up her children that her husband may be glad, and think that he is happy to leave such a wife behind him. And let her not behave herself so that his soul have cause to be angry with her and take vengeance on her ungraciousness.⁷

Vives prefers that widows not remarry, but if they must, in Chapter VII, 'Of Second Marriages,' he offers advice on choosing a second husband; the best kind is old and stern, able to control and discipline the widow, who is in need of order and rule:

I would counsel a good woman to continue in holy widowhead, namely if she have children, which thing is the intent and fruit of matrimony. But and she doubt lest she can not avoid the pricks of nature with that life, let her give an ear unto St. Paul the apostle writing unto the Corinthians in this wise: 'I say to unmarried women and widows, it were good for them if they kept themselves as I am: but yet if they cannot suffer, let them marry. For it is bett[er] to marry than burn' ... Yet let them beware that they do it not by and by after their husband's death, for that is a token that they loved not them, for whose departing they have so soon left sorrowing, mourning, and all desire of them. And if they must provide ought for their house or children, let them see to it before the business of marriage and dominion of a new husband. And let them get such husbands as be according for widows to be married unto, nor young men, wanton, hot, and full of play, ignorant, and riotous, that can neither rule their house nor their wife nor themselves neither; but take an husband something past middle age, sober, sad, and of good wit, expert with great use of the world, which with his wisdom may keep all the house in good order, which by his discretion may so temper and govern all thing that there be always[s] at home sober mirth and obedience, without forwardness, and the household keep in their labor and duty, without pain, and all things clear and holy.⁸

As these excerpts demonstrate, stereotypes of widows (as decrepit, dangerous or destitute) coexisted with social demands and expectations of widows (as passive, submissive, weak and silent). If Vives's document, equally prescriptive and proscriptive, reinforces this shallow though deeply troubling

⁷ Ibid., 119-120.

⁸ Ibid., 120-122, citation at 121-122.

picture, other sources, both literary, as touched upon below, and visual, as the essays in this volume will explore at great length, suggest that widows in early modern Europe did not always follow the advice of those (male) dictates of ritual etiquette, instead, often going against the grain and blurring such socio-behavioral boundaries. For example, counter to Vives's counsel that women remain widows, shunning remarriage in honor of their husbands' memories, Alexander Niccholes, in *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving*, first published in London in 1615 and then again in 1620, reports that 'at the decease of their first husbands, [widows] learn commonly the tricks to turn over the second or third, and they are in league with death and coadjutors with him ...'.⁹ The anxious tone of this account perhaps reveals why such 'dialogues' were first recorded – not as impartial cultural documents but as preconceived directives – but it also reveals, albeit in a hostile manner, a glimpse into the reality of widows' lives.

If widows could, and apparently did, remarry, sometimes even with frequency and, thereby, challenging social and emotional limitations, they also could circumvent economic restraints. A French widow, for instance, stepped in as head of the family business upon the death of her husband; a notarial contract of 1612 discloses that '[she] has shown to the best of her ability up to the present and promises to continue to show and teach to the best of her ability the merchandise of bookseller and all in which she is involved in this trade.'¹⁰ An extreme illustration of a widow taking matters into her own hands can be found in fifteenth-century Russia, where the very ambitious widowed mayor, Marfa Boretskaia, 'wanted to marry a noble of the Lithuanian king ... and to rule with him in the king's name the entire Novgorodian land.'¹¹ These are two cases of women who, through various means of micro- and macro-management, respectively, negotiated and manipulated the circumstances of their widowhoods to their own end, seeking and gaining control – if not power. To be sure, such opportunities were not available to all women, but what we can recognize from these two examples is that the range of possibilities and ambiguities of widowhood in early modern Europe points to a complex and complicating relationship between reality and representation.

Review of Books on Widowhood

There is a wealth of published material on topics closely related to the present study, such as the socioeconomic variables of widowhood, the role of gender

⁹ As cited by Lloyd Davis, ed., *Sexuality and Gender in the English Renaissance: an Annotated Edition of Contemporary Documents* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1998), 222-223.

¹⁰ As cited by Monica Chojnacka and Merry E. Weisner-Hanks, eds, *Ages of Woman, Ages of Man: Sources in European Social History, 1400-1750* (London: Longman, 2002), 254-255, citation at 255.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 262-266, citation at 264.

within death and mourning rituals, the form and function of the arts produced in conjunction with those rituals and women's patronage. The following compilation is not meant to be exhaustive but suggestive of the variety of approaches to the study of widowhood, offering a broader context in which this collection can be read.¹²

General studies on widowhood in medieval and early modern Europe include the following single-author studies and edited collections (arranged in alphabetical order): Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, eds, *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Jan Bremmer and Lourens van den Bosch, eds, *Between Poverty and the Pyre: Moments in the History of Widowhood* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), which offers a comparative worldview of widowhood, written from an anthropological perspective, and focuses on power relations between men and women; Cindy L. Carlson and Angela Jane Weisl, eds, *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), which interrogates the social constructions of widowhood; Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner, eds, *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Longman, 1999), which presents new approaches to the study of widowhood from both the male and female perspectives and includes a useful suggested reading list; Olwen H. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe 1500-1800* (London: HarperCollins, 1995), which includes a chapter on pan-European widowhood; Louise Mirrer, ed., *Upon My Husband's Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992); which addresses cultural, legal and socioeconomic concerns within literary and historical accounts; and Michel Parisse, ed., *Veuves et Veuve dans le Haut Moyen Age: Table Ronde* (Paris: Picard, 1993).

On visual representations produced in conjunction with and/or as a result of funeral and burial ceremonial in medieval and early modern Europe, see the single-author books by Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), and Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual, c. 1500-c. 1800* (London: Published in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum by Reaktion Books, 1991), both of which connect European (mainly English and French) ritual and representation through a study of commemorative objects and monuments. The edited volume by Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000) is concerned with the relationship between object and memory and with the significance of family within that relationship.

Readers interested in the correlation between representation and European women, in general, should consult the following works: Annette Dixon, ed.,

¹² Please note that this literature overview is limited to general studies of European widowhood and contains only edited collections and single-author books. More specialized scholarship is referenced throughout the volume by individual contributors.

Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art (London: Merrell, 2002, in association with The University of Michigan Museum of Art), which considers images of mythical, historical and biblical widows; Wayne Franits, *Paragons of Virtue: Women and Domesticity in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), which includes a chapter on literary and visual images of widows and widowers; and Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco, eds, *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), which contains an essay by Caroline P. Murphy on representations of specific stages in the female life cycle, including widowhood, by the late-sixteenth-century Bolognese artist, Lavinia Fontana. See also Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c. 1300-1550* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), Cynthia Lawrence, ed., *Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), and Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, eds, *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy*. Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, vol. 54 (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001), all of which treat patronage projects by widows.

Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe

The present study fills a significant gap in the literature on early modern widowhood, making an original contribution to the fields of women's/gender studies and visual culture. The contributors to this volume explore the role and representation of the widow in early modern Austria, England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain; they represent a variety of disciplines, including art history, social history and literature, and they offer a diversity of critical approaches to the topic. This collection of thirteen new interdisciplinary essays, grouped under four distinct thematic sections, describes the visual context and, thereby, nuances the socio-cultural, historic, economic and psychological framework in which widowhood was constructed, celebrated, censored and commemorated.

Representing Widowhood: Mourning Models

The volume opens with three reflections on didactic ideas and images of ideal widowhood. By way of introduction, a mid-sixteenth-century painting by Cornelius de Visscher, *Portrait of a Woman, Aged 40, and a Child* (Fig. 1.1),¹³ provides insight into the ways in which imagery could both present and perpetuate mourning models. A widow, dressed in black and depicted with a somber

¹³ The painting, in the Louvre, is illustrated in Lorne Campbell, *Renaissance Portraiture. European Portrait-Painting in the 14th, 15th and 16th Centuries* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 65.

expression, comforts, or rather guides, her young daughter, whose appearance, complete with matching black costume and pensive gaze, echoes that of her exemplary mother – all of which notably takes place in a domestic setting; lest we forget the object of this widow's mourning, a framed portrait of her husband hangs on the back wall. On the power of such portraiture, Francisco de Hollanda, in *Four Dialogues on Painting* of 1548, observed the following:

It prolongs for many years the life of one who dies, since his painted likeness remains; it consoles the widow, who sees the portrait of her dead husband daily before her; and the orphan children, when they grow up, are glad to have the presence and likeness of their father and are afraid to shame him.¹⁴

In de Visscher's family portrait, the husband gains immortality through both his own commemorative picture and that of his dutiful wife, who, via his representation, is continually reminded of her role and responsibility as his widow.

In her essay, "'Widowhood was the time of her greatest perfection': Ideals of Widowhood and Sanctity in Florentine Art," Catherine Lawless explores how and why the widow saint was depicted in Florentine art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Focusing on particular types of widow saints, including apocryphal, early Christian and biblical saints, and popular late medieval saints, Lawless suggests that widow saints were appropriated by religious orders in order to encourage female piety within the community. As Lawless explains, the tension between social expectations of widowhood and representations of an ideal widowhood was particularly acute in Florence, where, due to the complex dotal system, a widow was caught between the conflicting ambitions of her natal and marital families. Thus, the third orders rapidly appropriated the cults of saints who saw widowhood as an opportunity to embrace a religious yet active life in order to promote an ideal of lay piety. And yet, as Lawless reveals, represented in public and in semi-private areas, there were widows whose images, though serving a didactic purpose, would inevitably remind their viewers of the contradictions within constructions of ideal widowhood.

As J. S. W. Helt points out in his essay, '*Memento Mori*: Death, Widowhood and Remembering in Early Modern England,' widows served as sites of memory in two important ways: as custodians of property and wealth, and as active participants in the ritual performance of remembering, through which they constructed, preserved and transmitted their own social identities, as well as those of their husbands and families. According to Helt, these different roles – women who are 'remembered' and women who 'remember' – are, in the discourse of memory, interconnected yet distinctive. The widow's role in actively shaping remembrance can be most clearly seen in her participation in the rites of death and

¹⁴ Francisco de Hollanda, 'First Dialogue,' in *Four Dialogues on Painting*, trans. Aubrey F. G. Bell (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), 25-26. For a similar and equally suggestive remark by Leon Battista Alberti, see my essay, 'Framing Widows: Mourning, Gender and Portraiture in Early Modern Florence,' in the present volume.

burial for her spouse that served to create a memory of his 'good death' within the *memento mori* tradition. The art and literature of this tradition taught the important craft of 'dying well' and emphasized that a 'good death' began during life and was preserved afterward in the 'good memory' of friends, neighbors and family members, especially widows.

Marina Arnold's essay, 'Mourning Widows: Portraits of Widows and Widowhood in Funeral Sermons from Brunswick-Wolfenbuettel,' considers illustrated funeral sermons preached and printed for widows. The most common literary genre in early modern Germany, Lutheran funeral sermons for widows served the primary purpose of presenting role models for the female members of the community. Limiting her investigation to the principality of Brunswick-Wolfenbuettel, Arnold examines both portraits of widows and representations of their funeral rites as recorded in the funeral sermons and concludes that widows and widowhood were inevitably seen and portrayed from a male perspective. Nevertheless, as she suggests, the illustrated funeral sermons allow insight into the lives and circumstances of widowed women of various social and political background, education, age and mentality, and they show the significant role that was played by widows within the mourning ritual and within the family, the household and the community in early modern Germany.

Re-presenting Widowhood: Fashionable Choices

If the first set of essays identifies widows, or at least their representations, as conforming to social demands, the next three shift the focus, revolving around the question of agency and examining the various ways in which the widow could manipulate her newly acquired social status by rejecting or circumventing the models described above. In so doing, via public and private, contemporary and, even, posthumous imagery, she subtly, though successfully, could re-present herself. We might briefly examine the experience of Catherine de' Medici who, upon her widowhood, cleverly modified her mourning dress by appropriating the costume of her deceased husband in order to gain power and authority previously unavailable to her.¹⁵ The observations of Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass are especially fitting in this context: 'In the Renaissance, clothes were material mnemonics, the bearers of names. Yet as bearers of names, clothes inscribed conflict. Whose name is materialized in cloth? ... One function of clothes was to name, unname, rename.'¹⁶ Through costume, Catherine de' Medici was able to take on both the male attributes of her husband and the female attributes of a historical ruler; for instance, she also presented herself in the guise of Artemisia,

¹⁵ Sheila Ffolliott, 'Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow,' in *Rewriting the Renaissance: the Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 227-241.

¹⁶ Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 32.

a model widow. A drawing by Antoine Caron, *Artemisia and Lygdamis View the Completed Mausoleum* (Fig. 1.2), purposefully tailors a connection between the two identities, presenting Catherine as an exemplary widow who directs the construction of her husband's tomb – exemplary, indeed, but now on her own terms.

In her essay, 'Casting Her Widowhood: The Contemporary and Posthumous Portraits of Caterina Sforza,' Joyce de Vries examines the portraits, both contemporary and posthumous, of the most famous – and infamous – widow regent in late-fifteenth-century Italy, Caterina Sforza, and provides insight into how portraits functioned in the social and political construction of widowhood in early modern Italy. Caterina's widowhood, de Vries explains, was the key to her social and political power: she was legally acceptable as regent only as long as she remained chaste and loyal to her dead husband, Girolamo Riario, and properly educated his heirs, her children; thus, Caterina constructed her official image as Riario widow through portraiture and conduct even though she married (and was widowed) twice more during her regency. De Vries studies Caterina's contemporary portrait medals, which offer evidence of her self-fashioning as widow and regent, and her posthumous images, many of which were produced in the Medici court in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and reflect the shaping of her legend by her descendants. As de Vries reveals, if the manipulation of the concept of widowhood and its iconography served a patriarchal agenda – to establish and monitor ideal codes of behavior for widows – it also served a self-empowering agenda insofar as Caterina was all the while transgressing significant aspects of those codes.

Elizabeth McCartney's essay, 'A Widow's Tears, a Queen's Ambition: The Variable History of Marie de Médicis's Bereavement,' explores how the political use of mourning recorded in both the texts and print culture of early Bourbon France offers new testimony of the legitimacy of Marie de Médicis's public authority as regent of France. The focus of McCartney's argument is divided between three topics. First, her essay offers an assessment of contemporary images of Marie's bereavement. Official records and published accounts drew attention to her mourning; through prose and image, readers were able to envisage the emotion of a widowed queen. Second, she examines the politics of the minority regency government (1610-1614), which revived interest in Marie's status as widow of Henry IV. Finally, she treats the political use of the queen's mourning during the later years of Louis XIII's reign and how that reconfiguration continued to protect her influence over the royal council and those beholden to her patronage. Combined, McCartney suggests, these topics reveal a historical relationship between contemporary perceptions of gender and the evolution of public law that promoted female presence in early modern political culture.

In his essay, 'Conceptualizing the *Kaiserinwitwe*: Maria Theresia and Her Portraits,' Michael E. Yonan addresses several portraits that the eighteenth-century Habsburg Empress, Maria Theresia, commissioned of herself during the last decade of her life. In these years, Maria Theresia ruled the Habsburg territories as a sovereign empress while she simultaneously adopted the dress, behavior and

attitude of an imperial widow. This was an entirely unprecedented situation in the Austrian Habsburg tradition. She fashioned the term *Kaiserinwitwe* (Empress-Widow) to describe her new and, to many observers, confusing imperial identity. As Yonan explains, Maria Theresia faced particular challenges regarding representation since the available portrait tradition did not allow for imperial authority to be represented as emanating from a widowed body. In 1772, Maria Theresia commissioned the Roman painter, Anton von Maron, to produce a large-scale portrait of her. Yonan argues that this portrait combines the mythical and the everyday into an uncomfortable mixture that, nonetheless, visualizes successfully the contradictions inherent in the title Empress-Widow.

Widowhood and Representation: Building Memories

Half way through the volume, the organizing principle shifts gears, flipping and, again, tweaking the two, by now familiar, unifying terms – ‘widowhood’ and ‘representation’ – and, in so doing, pushes still further the boundaries of investigation to set up even more provocative comparisons. The collection continues with four studies of patronage projects undertaken upon widowhood; these essays are concerned with large-scale sculptural and architectural commissions that were intended to record family history, masculine memory and, in some cases, the widow’s own identity. Necessarily, these investigations also examine the particular and often peculiar considerations and strategies facing the widow as patron.

Upon widowhood, some women occupied a new and potentially very powerful socioeconomic position, allowing for an often-monumental manner of marking memory. For others, the circumstance was hardly one of power but of promise; in other words, the uncertainty of a widow’s future economic situation frequently cast her in a prominent, even if temporary, role. In his conduct book, *The Most Praiseworthy Instruction of the Honourable and Virtuous Life of the Widow*, published in Venice in 1547, Ludovico Dolce offered this advice:

And because to run the household one enters into many transactions which are not appropriate for a lady, like buying, selling, receiving payments, dealing with judgements and soliciting advocates, and doing business that takes up the whole day and is a skill, the widow should choose an efficient and trustworthy man to whom she should commit the burden of this management.¹⁷

Yet until, and/or if, such a decision was made – either by her or for her – financial and administrative duties generally fell under the control of the widow. A fresco by the school of Domenico Ghirlandaio in the Florentine oratory of San Martino dei Buonomini depicts a widow assisting the notary who takes an estate inventory following her husband’s death (Fig. 1.3). While her particular economic status, present or future, cannot be securely determined, clearly her role is central at this

¹⁷ As cited by King, *Renaissance Women Patrons*, 37.

pivotal moment. Of course, for some widows that moment was not at all short-lived, allowing for unique expressions of memory – and power.

As Holly S. Hurlburt explains in her essay, 'Individual Fame and Family Honor: The Tomb of Dogaressa Agnese da Mosto Venier,' the dogaressa of Venice, the consorts of the elected doges, had public exposure and influence unavailable to any other women of their or any other class in early modern Venice. One of these rare women was Agnese da Mosto Venier, widow of Doge Antonio Venier; her patronage project was the first monumental wall tomb in Venice known to have been commissioned by a woman, and it presents a radical departure in terms of previous dogaressal memorial insofar as she chose burial separate from her husband. According to Hurlburt, her choice of burial highlights her unique status, and it suggests that this dogaressa constructed her identity as related to but separate from her husband's authority and sought, through her commission, to preserve her own identity as his widow – an identity infrequently recognized by Venetian society before the sixteenth century and infrequently embraced by her dogaressal colleagues.

Laura D. Gelfand's essay, 'Margaret of Austria and the Encoding of Power in Patronage: The Funerary Foundation at Brou,' examines Margaret of Austria's skillful transition from wife to widow to regent and her politically savvy commission of the funerary foundation at Brou in Bourg-en-Bresse. Gelfand examines the changes that occurred from the originally modest conception of the church as a monument for her husband, Philibert le Beau, Duke of Savoy, to the grand program that was eventually constructed, as Margaret became a key player in the world of international politics. A member of the house of Valois and a Habsburg, the Duchess of Savoy, who served as regent of the Netherlands, required the use of a multitude of strategies. Many of the changes that occurred during the construction were intended to evoke memories for specific audiences of the dynastically charged imagery that had been created by her Valois ancestors in the preceding centuries. As Gelfand argues, propagandistic manipulation of elements of style to evoke past generations of Valois rulers acted as a significant tool in Margaret's efforts to garner support from the territories over which she governed as both widow and regent.

Bess of Hardwick began construction of Hardwick Hall in 1590, shortly before the death of her fourth husband, George Talbot, the sixth Earl of Shrewsbury. Sara French's study, 'A Widow Building in Elizabethan England: Bess of Hardwick at Hardwick Hall,' examines how Bess's status as widow during Hardwick's construction, and during three other periods of her life, gave her a unique position as an architectural patron. Although Bess never became a notorious widow, she did engage in certain activities not normally within a woman's purview: she was a builder – a patron of three major country houses and a number of minor building projects. French discusses how Bess's status as widow influenced Hardwick's plan, the decoration of its rooms and the way in which the rooms within the house relate to each other; she also explains how some elements of the decoration at Hardwick can serve as possible explanations for Bess's awareness of contemporary ideological formulae about widowhood. French suggests that the decoration of

Bess's houses and the final structure of Hardwick Hall may in fact support the idea that Bess of Hardwick was aware of the ways in which she could manipulate architectural space to reinforce her position as a wealthy and powerful widow in Elizabethan England.

As Stephanie Fink De Backer explains in her essay, 'Constructing Convents in Sixteenth-Century Castile: Toledan Widows and Patterns of Patronage,' widows in early modern Castile, unlike other European widows, who did not necessarily enjoy the same potential legal and financial autonomy, were not marginalized figures but rather visible, active and central members of their communities. Looking to the Toledan case, De Backer traces the lives of two sixteenth-century widows of differing backgrounds, Catalina de la Fuente and Blanca de la Cerda, both of whom shared the common pursuit of conserving personal and familial memory via differing forms of patronage. As De Backer makes clear, as legal free agents able to play the boundaries of moral and juridical opinion to their advantage, widows in early modern Castile were in an excellent position to extend their patronage widely and did so quite readily.

Widowhood and Re-presentation: Constructing Histories

Closing the collection are three essays not on representations of, for or by widows but rather on what widowhood represents – allegorically, culturally, politically, psychologically and socially – broadening our understanding of the interplay of widowhood and representation. A very suggestive double portrait by the seventeenth-century painter, Gerard (Willem) van Honthorst, *Amalia von Solms in Widow's Dress*, literally points toward the ways in which representation can construct while complicating history and memory (Fig. 1.4). Dressed in mourning black, her extended arm supports his portrait; thus, this widow is forever connected to her *presumably* deceased husband – *presumably* because there are examples of portraits of wives as widows commissioned prematurely by husbands. In some of those cases, in which the husband positions his wife as the one who will be his widow and will have mourned for him, wives, predeceasing their husbands, would never fulfill that role.¹⁸ Whether or not this widow mourns at the right time, she at least seems to do so in the right fashion. Or does she? Handling not much more than a miniature of her husband, who's manipulating whom? Moreover, who precisely is being framed? For example, is her gaze one of devastating sadness or humiliating boredom? Is her gesture one of loyal remembrance or nonchalant dismissal? Her synchronized obedience and ambivalence, or our not knowing how to read her expression, suggests that the spin on history and memory can work both ways – for both mourner and mourned – in early modern Europe.

In an attempt to put Iconography and Social History into productive conversation, Cristelle L. Baskins's essay, 'Trecento Rome: The Poetics and Politics of Widowhood,' takes as its focus the evolution of the personification of the city of Rome in Italian art from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century. Images

¹⁸ For an English example, see 'Framing Widows.'

of *Roma* as widow have generally been understood as referring to the absence of Christ and his vicar on Earth, the Pope. But as this essay makes clear, widowhood is not a constant over time; an examination of the shifting roles of widows allows Baskins to critique the 'passive' reading of widowhood. Widows' mourning practice, increasingly curtailed by civic authorities, recalls quite another personification: *Ira* (anger). By the sixteenth century, *Roma* is no longer represented as a mourning, angry widow but rather as an abused, raped woman. As Baskins explains, turning personified Rome inside out, iconographic analysis alone cannot do justice to the nuances of such representations of the personified city, *Roma*.

In my essay, 'Framing Widows: Mourning, Gender and Portraiture in Early Modern Florence,' I examine why and how widows both mourned and were portrayed in early-sixteenth-century Florence, reading what we have come to call the early modern death ritual not only as a historical and cultural construct but also as a gender-specific performance that served as a catalyst for the production of a significant body of visual material, what I refer to as widow portraiture – depictions of the woman during and after her husband's funeral when she is recognized as his widow. Insofar as identity, memory and history might be manipulated through ritual performance and representation, I suggest that the early modern widow was an uncanny marker of masculine memory, a precarious player upon a strategically constructed, though always already unstable, urban stage. In other words, I read visual and verbal strategies as ambiguous attempts to fix the potential transgressions of the Florentine widow, further complicating the early modern discourse on mourning and masculine memory.

In 1585, Elisabeth of Austria, the widow of Charles IX of France, received as a gift from her brother, Archduke Ernst, a relic of St Leopold encased in a magnificent gold reliquary. As Amelia Carr argues in her essay, 'Contested Narratives: Elisabeth of Austria and a Relic of St Leopold,' the reliquary places Elisabeth into a narrative of genealogy and reproduction. The reliquary emphasizes fertility because the bone it so splendidly houses is a pelvic bone; and yet, the 1585 document of authentication prominent in the shrine loudly proclaimed the relic to be a shoulder blade. The false label, Carr contends, is most likely a legitimate strategy to affect a pious outcome based on a perceived relationship between the appropriate body part and its primary recipient; however, Elisabeth seems to have resisted the most overt of the reliquary's messages, refusing further participation in the Habsburg marriage diplomacy and retiring to the convent of Clares, which she had founded in Vienna, living widowhood in piety and independence.

Afterword

In 'Last Rites: Mourning Identities (?),' I address the universal significance of this project on widowhood and visual culture, calling for a continuation and expansion of the objective of this collection: a critical re-assessment of the particular, often ambiguous, status of widowhood and the ways in which it has been and continues to be represented and re-presented. Yet I also bring to this account notions of the

subversive and the destabilizing that can be enunciated in representations not so historical, not so particular, not so local in their purpose. For example, in a shift away from early modern Europe, I investigate the iconicity of widowhood, from Jackie Kennedy to the merry widow to the war widow, suggesting that the very performativity of the widow within and beyond ritual, either early modern or postmodern, and, as the essays in this collection reveal, the multivalence of subsequent representation cannot but result in a precarious identity and memory for both mourner and mourned.

A Way of Responding to Widows

Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe brings together two universal constants and a variety of novel inquiries. Because these essays cover such a wide range of geographical areas and chronological periods, it is hoped that the division into different thematic categories will set up some provocative comparisons, allowing the reader to recognize and appreciate the complexity and contradiction, the iconicity and mutability, and the timelessness and timeliness of widowhood and representation.