Chapter 13

Framing Widows: Mourning, Gender and Portraiture in Early Modern Florence

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What is the relationship between mourning and portraiture, and what is the role of gender within that sometimes-tenuous intersection? This chapter examines 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.¹ Further, insofar as identity, memory and history might be manipulated through ritual performance and representation, this chapter suggests a particular set of strategies facing both mourner and mourned in early modern Florence.

Sex and the City

I begin with a provocative text, *La vedova* (*The Widow*), written by Giovan Battista Cini in 1569 in Florence and performed in the Palazzo Vecchio that same year under the reign of Grand Duke Cosimo on the occasion of the visit of the Archduke Carl of Austria.² The plot unfolds as follows: Federico feigns his death only to

¹ Many of the ideas presented here stem from my dissertation, 'Early Modern Mourning: Widow Portraiture in Sixteenth-Century Florence' (Bryn Mawr College, 2000), and I wish to express my gratitude to David Cast and Steven Z. Levine for their guidance and support; work on the dissertation was funded by the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation and the Graduate School of Bryn Mawr College. An early version of this chapter was delivered as the Tomasso Lecture at Tufts University; I wish to thank Cristelle Baskins for the invitation and for her thoughtful comments.

² Of interest, in 1569, at the time of the publication and performance of *La vedova*, Cosimo was a widower. His first wife, Eleonora of Toledo, had died in 1562; he would not remarry until 1570, at that time to Camilla Martelli – she would mourn him upon his death four years later. Cini's play was published in Florence in 1569; a modern edition is published in

return to Florence in disguise with one eye patched in order to gaze upon his newly 'widowed' wife, Cornelia. What he quickly discovers is a multitude of suitors, each with a strategic – and comic – manner of possessing the then again available Cornelia. Devastated, he tries desperately, and with great difficulty, to deter each of his potential replacements. Ultimately, the disguised, monocular Federigo reveals himself to the relief of Cornelia, and he and his ever-chaste widow live happily ever after. In sum, Cini's comedy revolves around an endless layering of shifting identities, deception and masquerade. Afraid of being forgotten and not sure that his wife will mourn him, Federigo prematurely imposes widowhood upon his wife, which, in turn, opens up a world of possibilities for his widow, her suitors and, necessarily, himself, creating chaos and mischief in the streets of Florence.

Of particular note, the accompanying stage set, known from a design by Baldesare Lanci, an architect in Cosimo's court, depicts an identifiable civic site (Fig. 13.1).³ Clearly visible, from Vasari's Uffizi, still being constructed, are an edge of the Loggia dei Lanzi, the Palazzo Vecchio (inside which Cini's comedy was being performed), the expanse of the Piazza della Signoria and, in the background, Brunelleschi's dome and Giotto's campanile. Previous studies of Lanci's drawing have been from a technical point of view, concerned with the problems of stage perspective and scenery rotation.⁴ I would like to suggest,

Benedetto Croce, ed., *Scrittori del pieno e del tardo Rinascimento* (Naples: Philobiblon, 1953). For a summary of the plot, see Marvin T. Herrick, *Italian Comedy in the Renaissance* (Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1960), 166-168; the prologue is reproduced in Aldo Borlenghi, ed., *Commedie del Cinquecento*, vol. 1 (Milan: Rizzoli, 1959), 1037-1040. For references to the play, see, especially, Alessandro Striggio, who wrote the music for the *intermedii*, in Warren Kirkendale, *The Court Musicians in Florence during the Principate of the Medici* (Florence: Olschki, 1993); and Angelo Solerti, *Musica, Ballo e Drammatica alle Corte Medicea dal 1600 al 1637* (New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1968).

³ See Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà and Anna Maria Petrioli Tofani, *Feste e Apparati Medicei da Cosimo I a Cosimo II: Mostra di Disegni e Incisioni* (Florence: Olschki, 1969), 25-29, cat. no. 9, pl. 1; L. Berti, *Il Principe dello Studiolo. Francesco I dei Medici e la fine del Rinascimento fiorentino* (Florence, 1967), 48-49; Mario Fabbri, E. G. Zorzi and A. P. Tofani, eds., *Il Luogo Teatrale a Firenze: Brunelleschi, Vasari, Buontalenti*, Parigi (Florence: Electa, 1975), 100-101; P. N. Ferri, *Indice geografico-analitico dei disegni di architettura civile e militare esistenti nella R. Galleria degli Uffizi in Firenze* (Rome, 1885), 66; A. M. Nagler, *Theatre Festivals of the Medici* (New Haven, 1963), 41; K. Neidam, 'Le théâtre de la Renaissance à Rome,' in *Analecta Romana Instituti Danici* 5 (1969): 75; N. Pirrotta and E. Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, trans. K. Eales (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially 188-193, 354-356 and 361-365, pl. 30; E. Povoledo, 'Lanci, Baldessare,' in *Enciclopedia dello Spettacolo*, vol. 6 (Rome, 1959): 1192-1194; M. Stein, *Det italienske renaissance-teater og perspektiv-scenens opprindelse. Fra Brunelleschi til Buontalenti* (Copenhagen, 1969), 48-49; and E. G. Zorzi and M. Sperenzi, *Teatro e spettacolo nella Firenze dei Medici; modelli dei luoghi teatrali* (Florence: Olschki, 2001), especially 154. Also useful for this discussion is the work on Medici theatre by James M. Saslow, *The Medici Wedding of 1589: Florentine Festival as Theatrum Mundi* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁴ See, especially, Nagler, 44-46, who cites Ignazio Danti's 1583 edition of Vignola's *Le*

however, that, in the context of this study, this rationally planned public space deserves further critical attention. How and why does this particular civic site function as the setting for a play about widowhood in sixteenth-century Florence? Sixteenth-century Italian comedy is typically set within a markedly less specific, or even unidentifiable, neighborhood than that of *La vedova*.⁵ Does urban planning, in this example, serve to manage, in some way, the anxiety caused not by Federigo's 'death' but by the subsequent uncertainties of Cornelia's 'widowhood?': will she play the role of chaste widow and mourn her husband? Or, independent again, will she take a lover and, if so, forget her duty to mourn?

These were legitimate concerns in the sixteenth century – not just the stuff of comedy, although here we might even think of the fictive Florentine widow, who, as recounted by Leon Battista Alberti in his *Dinner Pieces*, becomes pregnant while mourning in the city. Fearing that her pregnancy might be noticed, she flees neighbors and neighborhoods until an older widow offers this counsel:

Such are our arts, and such our talent: we dupe and deceive ... a woman who wishes to deceive always finds a way ... We'll say that you're tired of the city and are leaving for the country to relax ... Just take my advice. Let us drink, laugh, and love.⁶

Alberti's dialogue is provocative on several counts. It points to the centrality of the city in defining early modern widowhood, the social and geographical transgressions of the widow and, subsequently, her ambiguous position within the urban landscape. The city is the place of ritual, the social space that first marked her widowhood and continues to signify her new status. Indeed, her new social position allows her to move through neighborhoods in ways previously unavailable to her, bringing recognition of her widowhood and, thus, ideally, her husband's memory. And yet, her transgressions, meant to mark her as one man's widow, also mark her as available. In other words, without a husband, Alberti's widow gains mobility and a pregnancy.

Joking aside, the following surprising yet powerful historical accounts reflect similar attitudes. Ludovico Dolce remarked upon widowhood that women 'rejoice at the death of their husbands as if they had been freed from the heavy yoke of servitude,'⁷ and a witness at the court of Catherine de' Medici made the following observation:

due regoli della prospettiva pratica, which includes a discussion of Cini's comedy focused on the technical advances of Lanci's scenery.

⁵ For example, *Il granchio*, a comedy written by Leonardo Salviati and performed in Florence just three years earlier than Cini's *La vedova*, employs an idealized urban landscape, which is based on Serlio's composite model of 1545. See, especially, Louise George Clubb, 'Italian Renaissance Comedy,' in idem, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 29-48.

⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *Dinner Pieces*, trans. David Marsh (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1987), 190-197.

⁷ *Dialogo di M. Ludovico Dolce delle istituzione delle donne*, 4th ed. (Venice, 1560), 68. As cited by David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Les Toscans et leurs familles: une*

They want friends and lovers, but no husband, out of love for the freedom that is so sweet. To be out from under the domination of a husband seems to them paradise, and no wonder, they have the use of their own money ... everything passes through their hands ... they can pursue their pleasures and enjoy companions who will do as they wish. They remain widows in order to keep their *grandeur*, possessions, titles and good treatment.⁸

Now, might we read Lanci's carefully constructed Florentine landscape as a metaphor for an ordering of the uncertainties of widowhood in sixteenth-century Florence? I am prepared here to interpret the strict orchestration of Lanci and Cini's Florence as a determined attempt to control the presumed dangers of female sexuality⁹ – unsuccessful, however, because the compulsive realism of the scene renders it ambiguous: does the application of a hyper-real perspective close off space, containing the widow, or does it open up space, allowing for her potential transgression? Despite the seemingly set boundaries of *this* early modern Florence, socially dictated rules are ultimately compromised and seams are ruptured. If Renaissance comedy reflects an unraveling of social order,¹⁰ not only does the very performance of widowhood in Cini's play point toward an insistence upon instability, but, moreover, the compulsive realism of Lanci's stage set suggests a potential failure of patriarchal fixity.

I wish to call attention to the importance of the urban landscape within the public death ritual, the role of the widow within that ritual and the ambiguities of her newly acquired mobility within urban space. In my analyses of the rites of death, I work also with the idea, convincingly put forth by David Cressy, that 'early modern society was governed by principles of order and consensus, but

étude du 'catasto' florentin de 1427 (Paris, 1978), 610: 'Non m'è ascoso, che alcune donne ... non che elle s'attristino, ma s'allegnano della morte de' loro mariti non altramente, che se fosse loro scosso dal collo un grave giogo di servitù.' For English translation, see Giulia Calvi, 'Reconstructing the Family: Widowhood and Remarriage in Tuscany in the Early Modern Period,' in Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe, eds, *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 276.

⁸ Brantôme, 7: 392. As cited by Nancy Lyman Roelker, 'Widowhood and Rational Domesticity: Modes of Independence for Women in Early Modern Europe,' *Journal of Family History* 7 (1982): 377.

⁹ Within the present volume, for cultural stereotypes of the Italian widow as sexually insatiable, see the Introduction, 'Widow's Peek: Looking at Ritual and Representation;' and Catherine Lawless, '"Widowhood was the time of her greatest perfection": Ideals of Widowhood and Sanctity in Florentine Art;' Joyce de Vries, 'Casting Her Widowhood: The Contemporary and Posthumous Portraits of Caterina Sforza;' and Cristelle L. Baskins, 'Trecento Rome: The Poetics and Politics of Widowhood.'

¹⁰ See, especially, Thomas M. Greene, 'Ceremonial Play and Parody in the Renaissance,' in Susan Zimmerman and Ronald F. E. Weissman, eds, *Urban Life in the Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 281-293. On the performance of identity in Renaissance Florence, see, in the same volume, Weissman, 'The Importance of Being Ambiguous: Social Relations, Individualism, and Identity in Renaissance Florence,' 269-280.

[that] countervailing tendencies of discord and dissension also gnawed at its heart.¹¹ Along these lines, I understand the widow – a woman, at a particular cultural moment, caught in a situation of complex and complicating transformation – as someone whose place was ambiguous yet necessary in the account of masculine memory of which she was always so signal a part; further, I bring to this account notions of the subversive and the destabilizing of the masculine, suggesting that the ambiguities of ritual performance and representation could result in a very precarious memory – and identity – for both mourner and mourned in early modern Florence.

Historically, strategies of deferral or transcendence have been consciously devised as a response to what Henry Staten calls thanato-erotic anxiety – the fear within the dialectic of mourning not of loss of object but of loss of self.¹² The fear of one's own death and the concomitant fear of being forgotten could and did result in auto-mourning – a premature and self-inflicted process of grieving. This initial act is eventually (and vengefully) transferred onto the bodies of women, for it is the woman's sexuality that undermines the man's authority. Her erotic allure is also a deathly allure, an idea Staten refers to as 'thanatoerophobic misogyny'.¹³ This fear of being forgotten and the subsequent strategies of remembrance, which may become deeply misogynistic, can be understood further when considered in conjunction with the reading of early modern English society offered by Mark Breitenberg. He suggests that not only is masculinity inherently anxious, but that this anxiety is paradoxically both a cause and an effect of the patriarchal system.¹⁴

By such an account, the role of women within the death ritual can be interpreted as a strategy of continuation, of guaranteeing masculine memory.¹⁵

¹¹ David Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England: Tales of Discord and Dissension* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

¹² Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xi-xii: '[The dialectic of mourning] begins with the process of attachment to, or cathexis of, an object, without which mourning would never arise ... As soon as desire is something felt by a mortal being for a mortal being, eros (as desire-in-general) will always be to some degree agitated by the anticipation of loss ... the loss of the beloved is a loss of self.'

¹³ *Ibid.*, 108. Staten cites an early example, 38: 'Achilles weeps, and makes women weep, for himself and for his loss. To wreak vengeance in the *Iliad* means finally: to be the cause of mourning, to transform the passive affect of grief into the active, compensatory pleasure of inflicting grief upon others and most conclusively upon women.'

¹⁴ Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 10 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2: '... anxiety is so endemic to patriarchy that the issue becomes not so much its identification but rather an analysis of the discourses that respond to it – the compensatory or transferential strategies operating behind its representations and projections. Thus anxiety is both a negative effect that leads us to patriarchy's own internal discord, but it is also an instrument (once properly contained, appropriated or returned) of its perpetuation.'

¹⁵ Within the present collection, for comparative studies of the role of gender within the death ritual, see, especially, J. S. W. Helt, 'Memento Mori: Death, Widowhood and Remembering in Early Modern England,' and Marina Arnold, 'Mourning Widows: Portraits

Insofar as the death ritual stands as a cultural mechanism designed and performed in order to reaffirm social order, the categorization and repetition of gender roles within that ritual were essential. In other words, at the especially vulnerable and disruptive time of death, social order could be restored through the repetitive, gender-specific practice of mourning,¹⁶ and, indeed, historically within the Western tradition of grieving, women have been designated – and remain – the primary mourners or ‘memory specialists.’¹⁷ But if, according to Sharon Strocchia, ‘the fundamental human obligation to bury the dead was inextricably bound up with the social imperative to bury them well,’¹⁸ then memory required the proper type and amount of mourning. In other words, a good death was determined by good grief.

To that end, a system of pre-established rules dictated ritual behavior. As Richard Trexler has pointed out in his work on Florentine public ritual, ‘men’s and women’s behavioral forms were of course carefully distinguished, but so were the behaviors of young, nubile, married, and widowed females ... There was a right behavior for each social actor in every conceivable social situation.’¹⁹ Leonardo Bruni’s ‘Panegyric to the City of Florence,’ composed between 1403 and 1404, boldly proclaims the magnificence of the city on these terms; especially praiseworthy, according to Bruni, are the ‘internal order’ of Florence and the ‘harmonious cooperation’ of its citizens, who move and act properly within its ‘clearly defined’ spaces:

So we see that in the beginning Florence observed a principle of great wisdom: Do nothing for ostentation nor allow hazardous or useless display, but instead use great moderation and follow solid proportion ... Nowhere else do you find such internal order, such neatness, and such harmonious cooperation ... There is nothing here that is ill-proportioned, nothing improper, nothing incongruous, nothing vague; everything occupies its proper place, which is not only clearly defined but also in right relation to all the other elements.²⁰

of Widows and Widowhood in Funeral Sermons from Brunswick-Wolfenbuettel;’ and, on the situation in early modern Italy, see Baskins.

¹⁶ Judith Butler established the basis for my discussion of the performance of identity. See, especially, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), 140: ‘The action of gender requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization ... this “action” is a public action ... gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.’

¹⁷ Patrick Geary, *Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 177.

¹⁸ Sharon Strocchia, *Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 5–6.

¹⁹ Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), 108.

²⁰ Leonardo Bruni, ‘Panegyric to the City of Florence,’ reproduced in Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, eds, with Elizabeth B. Welles, *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists*

A successful performance, therefore, revolved around the strategic staging of gesture and behavior, as well as of access, movement and visibility, within an urban space temporarily transformed into a ritual space. In an attempt to get things right, or to perform well, the structures and rules of ceremonial underwent constant permutation.²¹ This delicate operation, if well orchestrated, could, in turn, result in remembrance. Control of such an ephemeral performance within an equally ephemeral and penetrable ritual space would become essential; the role of the primary mourner – the widow – would have to be carefully directed.

Already in 1373, Petrarch had advocated the banishment of women's vocal mourning practices, what he called 'loud and indecent wailing,' from the public streets.²² Following such thirteenth-century legislation, which can be characterized generally as restricting female lamentation within public space, the humanist critique of public grief and mourning offered from Petrarch onward attempted to orchestrate new social codes within a recently re-defined and particularly ordered urban space.²³ The humanist critique of female lamentation advocated by the early Renaissance patriarchy reveals a gender politics at work.²⁴ This particular re-writing of ritual called for an end to dramatic ostentation and display, especially in women's outward show of grief; instead, women's behavior was increasingly expected to resemble that of men – stoic, calm and ordered. This move to control or the attempt to territorialize public space resulted in what has been called 'the

on *Government and Society* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 135-175, citations at 136-137 and 168-169.

²¹ Death rites have been interpreted by some, not as fixed, static models but as social and cultural moments, which, constantly in a state of flux, enabled Florentines to identify and re-identify themselves, to communicate within and across social groupings and to impart honor to both themselves and the deceased, pointing to a marked fluidity and multiplicity within Florentine ritual and society. See, especially, the following publications by Sharon Strocchia: 'Gender and the Rites of Honour in Italian Renaissance Cities,' in Judith C. Brown and Robert Davis, eds, *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 39-60; *Death and Ritual*, 1992; 'Funerals and the Politics of Gender in Early Renaissance Florence,' in Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari, eds, *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 155-168; 'Remembering the Family: Women, Kin, and Commemorative Masses in Renaissance Florence,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 42 (1989): 635-654; and 'Death Rites and the Ritual Family in Renaissance Florence,' in Marcel Tetel, Ronald G. Witt and Rona Goffen, eds, *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1989), 120-145.

²² As cited by Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 163. For the extended citation, see, in this collection, Baskins.

²³ For a closer reading of the humanist critique of women's grieving, see Allison Levy, 'Augustine's *Concessions* and Other Failures: Mourning and Masculinity in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany,' forthcoming in Lynne Dickson Bruckner and Jennifer Vaught, eds, *Grief and Gender: 700-1700* (St Martin's/Palgrave, 2003).

²⁴ See, especially, Strocchia, 1991.

defeminization of the public sphere.²⁵ Indeed, the desired result of this revision of female lamentation was a masculinization of the death ritual and of the spaces of that ritual. The goal of restoring order legitimated women's access into the privileged masculine sphere, and their repetitive performance, as newly regulated, continued to contribute to and maintain patriarchal structures. After all, female lamentation was still deemed 'the business of women.'²⁶

But if, in Florence, a system of pre-established rules dictated ritual behavior, a second system was always already in place to counter the prescribed conduct. That is to say, circumvention of code was as much a part of public ritual as inscription of code. One could even argue, given the large number of exemptions granted from sumptuary legislation, that the practice of breaking the rules of ritual became, itself, a sort of ritual act.²⁷ Thus, insofar as there is an inherent ephemerality, inconsistency and fluidity within ritual performance, how can we now re-read the Florentine death ritual?

We might suggest that the humanist attempt to control women's mourning eventually backfires insofar as the presence of the female mourner 'reveals the very anxiety it is meant to suppress: it at once resists and represents the catastrophe of death.'²⁸ If wives, mothers and sisters, designated as the primary mourners, stabilize the public masculine realm, they also contaminate it. That is to say, their very performance within the masculinist symbolic, no matter how contained and restricted, disturbs and challenges the stability of this new ideology, even if it simultaneously contributes to and maintains it. Moreover, insofar as the very performance of ritual, as well as the possibilities of permutation within that ritual, suggest a potential failure of fixity, it can be argued that this particular strategy – to rewrite the role of women during ceremonial – is not only dangerous but is, perhaps, even unsuccessful.

²⁵ Writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Schiesari, 163-164, asks of this politicized re-staging, '... were these women's ritualized expressions of grief really disorder? How could they be disorder when mourning was part precisely of a symbolic order? I think what we need to see is that in the transition from a feminized symbolic (or one at least in which women had a more central role) to a masculinist symbolic, the "disorder of women" becomes part of an ideological apparatus that would empower men to hegemonize the public sphere, hence to phallicize the symbolic.'

²⁶ Diane Owen Hughes, 'Mourning Rites, Memory, and Civilization in Premodern Italy,' in Jacques Chiffolleau, Lauro Martines and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, eds, *Riti e Rituali nelle Società Medievali* (Spoleto, 1994), 23-38, citation at 25-26.

²⁷ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 5, has pointed to the inherent ambiguity in the function and meaning of ritual: 'In practice it is often tricky to determine whether a specific performance is modeling or mirroring. Rituals tend to blur these two processes, which is perhaps the very source of the creative tension in rituals, the tension between a conservative mirroring of what is and the utopian modeling of what might be.'

²⁸ Elizabeth Bronfen and Sarah Webster Goodwin, *Death and Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 14.

Despite women's role and reputation as memory specialists (now read as questionable), tension remained. For example, even beyond the space of ritual, the widow was guaranteed a place, albeit a limited one, within the public realm, where she was often able to reformulate her imposed containment, finding herself at the threshold of unlimited opportunity; this pregnant moment arose precisely upon her husband's death and could continue until her own. In fact, the abundance of widows in early modern Florence did little to quell anxiety. A few quantitative figures based on the Florentine *catasto* (census) of 1427, as interpreted by David Herlihy and Christiane Klapish-Zuber, help to situate our subject: 25 percent of the general population of adult women in Florence were widows. (Comparatively, only four percent of adult men were widowers.)²⁹ Widowhood could last anywhere from one year to the remainder of a lifetime and could mean significant changes in socioeconomic status, for better or for worse.³⁰ Whether staying within the

²⁹ David Herlihy and Christiane Klapish-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families: A Study of the Florentine Catasto of 1427* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). The marriage pattern was characterized by a very young age for women at first marriage and a significantly later age for men at first marriage, resulting in a considerable age difference between husband and wife. Thus, Florentine women were widowed early: 18 percent of women over age 40 were widowed and 45 percent of women over age 50 were widowed. For a close reading of these statistics in relation to women's lives, see Klapish-Zuber, 'The "Cruel Mother": Maternity, Widowhood, and Dowry in Florence in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,' in idem, *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 117-131, especially 120.

³⁰ Isabelle Chabot and Thomas Kuehn have examined the economic and legal situations of widows, both of which could change dramatically depending upon the length of widowhood. For example, after her husband's death, it was extremely difficult for a widow, competing with male heirs, guardians and future husbands, to regain her dowry; the tensions and biases surrounding the Florentine dowry system usually resulted in extreme economic situations for the widow – either poverty or independence. See Isabelle Chabot, 'Sola, donna, non gir mai: Le solitudini femminili nel Tre-Quattrocento,' *Memoria* 18 (1986): 7-24; idem, 'Widowhood and Poverty in Late Medieval Florence,' *Continuity and Change* 3/2 (1988): 291-311; and idem, '"La sposa in nero." La ritualizzazione del lutto delle vedove fiorentine (secoli xiv-xv),' *Quaderni Storici* 86/2 (1994): 421-462. On legal issues, see Thomas Kuehn, *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and idem, 'Law, Death, and Heirs in the Renaissance Repudiation of Inheritance in Florence,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 45/3 (1992): 484-516.

On the dowry system, see David Herlihy, 'The Medieval Marriage Market,' *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1976): 1-27; Diane Owen Hughes, 'From Bridepiece to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe,' *Journal of Family History* 3 (1978): 262-296; J. Kirschner and Anthony Mohlo, 'The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence,' *Journal of Modern History* 50 (1978): 403-438; and Klapish-Zuber, 'The Griselda Complex: Dowry and Marriage Gifts in the Quattrocento,' in idem, 1985, 213-246.

Elaine Rosenthal, 'The Position of Women in Renaissance Florence: neither Autonomy nor Subjection,' in Peter Denley and Caroline Elam, eds, *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein* (London: Westfield College, University of London

marriage household, whether returning to the agnatic household or whether rejecting the traditional household altogether and living independently,³¹ the consistently uncertain social, economic and interfamilial mobility of approximately 25 percent of the female population caused a marked degree of what Klapisch-Zuber has referred to as 'anxiety among men.'³²

Thus, the penetration of both geographical and social boundaries could and did cause considerable confusion within an otherwise strictly regulated urban landscape. Indeed, if the consistently uncertain position of the widow during and after the mourning ritual magnified masculine anxiety, the widow would have to be put in her proper place. The potentially destabilizing autonomy of the widow within the public realm was threatening enough to prompt the Dominican friar, Girolamo Savonarola, to compose specific rules governing the comportment of widows in his 1491 *Book on the Widow's Life*: she is scolded for wandering through the streets, she is discouraged from standing at windows, she is told to lower her gaze:

Especially in churches and other public places you can attract scandal to yourself and to your kin, for I assure you that a great deal can be known from her eyes about the virtue of a lady and the sobriety of her lifestyle. Whence speaks the Prophet in Ecclesiasticus [26.9]: 'fornication in a woman can be known from the way she raises and lifts up her eyes', and therefore the widow ought always to look down and lower

Committee for Medieval Studies, 1988), 369-381, has noted the variety of experiences – both negative and positive – affecting a widow's economic situation and calls for a fuller re-reading of women's lives than that most frequently offered.

Others have examined the opportunities, consequences and strategies of remarriage. See Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); and idem, 'Deception and Marriage Strategy in Renaissance Florence: The Case of Women's Ages,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988): 193-217. See also Giulia Calvi, 'Maddalena Nerli and Cosimo Tornabuoni: A Couple's Narrative of Family History in Early Modern Florence,' *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (1992): 312-339; idem, 1998, 275-296; and Heather Gregory, 'Daughters, Dowries, and the Family in Fifteenth-Century Florence,' *Rinascimento* 2d ser., 27 (1987): 215-237.

On the widow's decision *not* to remarry, when, according to Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, 1985, 112-113, 'movements achieve visibility,' see Rudolph Bell, *How to Do It: Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), who suggests, based on the frequent discrepancies between didactic, male-authored texts and women's writings (letters and poetry, for example), that a great number of women preferred to remain unmarried as a means of gaining relative emancipation.

³¹ On alternative living spaces for widows, see P. Renee Baernstein, 'In Widow's Habit: Women between Convent and Family in Sixteenth-Century Milan,' *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 25/4 (1994): 787-808; and Richard Trexler, 'A Widow's Asylum of the Renaissance: The Orbatello of Florence,' in idem, ed., *The Women of Renaissance Florence*, vol. 2 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), 66-98.

³² Klapisch-Zuber, 1985, 122.

her eyes to the ground, wherever she is, and especially when she is in the view of men.³³

I suggest that this literary dissuasion points to the inherent anxiety of the author, himself, and, thus, further calls attention to the complexity and urgency with which such memorial strategies operated at this time. Despite attempts to sanction or cloister the widow, other literary accounts, from Leon Battista Alberti to Lodovico Dolce, as we have seen, suggest that widows continued to evade containment, even if marginally.

Framing Widows

Reading Cini's Federigo as representative of Florentine masculinity, if anxiety was caused as much by the threat of social disorder as by the threat of oblivion,³⁴ how, then, could the early modern Florentine both contain the widow and ensure his memory? By way of suggestion, I re-introduce Alberti, who in 1435 made the following observation: 'Painting possesses a truly divine power in that not only does it make the absent present ... but it also represents the dead to the living many centuries later.'³⁵ And indeed, Alberti's bronze self-portrait (Fig. 13.2),³⁶ dated to approximately the same year, could be read as an image of 'Renaissance Man,' the individual who seeks – and achieves – fame and immortality through commemoration, as memorably defined by Jacob Burckhardt in 1860 and reiterated by Erwin Panofsky and John Pope-Hennessy a century later.³⁷

³³ Girolamo Savonarola, *Libro della vita viduale* (Florence, 1491), fols. c 3, verso – c 4, recto; as cited by Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c. 1300-1550* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 33. For additional analyses of Savonarola on widowhood, see, in the present collection, Lawless and de Vries.

³⁴ As observed by William Bouwsma, 'Anxiety and the Formation of Early Modern Culture,' in *A Usable Past: Essays in European Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 157-189, especially 162, 'all anxiety is anxiety about death.'

³⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture: the Latin Texts of De Pictura and De Statua*, trans. and ed. Cecil Grayson (London and New York: Phaidon, 1972), 60-61. For a second frequently cited English translation, see Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John Spenser (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1956), 63: 'Painting contains a divine force which not only makes absent men present, but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive.' For the original Latin, see Leon Battista Alberti, *Opere volgari* (Bari: 1960-1973), vol. 3, 45. For an Italian translation, see Grayson, 44.

³⁶ See, most recently, Robert Tavernor, 'Self-Portraiture and Alberti's Eye for the Future,' in idem, *On Alberti and the Art of Building* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 31-36.

³⁷ See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (London and New York: Penguin, 1990; orig. 1860), 104: 'To this development of the individual corresponds a new sort of outward distinction – the modern form of glory.' See also Erwin Panofsky, *Tomb Sculpture: Its Changing Aspects from Ancient Egypt to*

At the beginning of this new century, however, turning my millennial gaze toward Alberti, I read his self-portrait as a failed strategy of remembrance, interpreting 'Renaissance Man,' in this example, as an always already unstable – and anxious – socio-cultural construct. That is to say, if Alberti gains immortality through the classicizing, commemorative profile, why does he also insist upon staring out – in the form of the winged eye (Fig. 13.3)?³⁸ Alberti's signature *impresa* – the magnified, winged eye – can be seen either as omnipotent or impotent. Patricia Simons has suggested that male profile portraiture was short-lived because it posed the threat of castration; that is to say, with the sole eye averted, disengaged – we might say, 'blind' – the inactive male cannot defend himself against the stony, deadly stare of Medusa.³⁹ Read in conjunction with Simons's account of male profile portraiture, can Alberti's winged eye be seen as an emblem meant to counter masculine anxiety? Or, staring out and insightfully asking, '*QUID TUM*' ('What next'), can Alberti's large eye be interpreted as overcompensating in advance for art history's potential oversight? What I clearly see as a newly separable category of female portraiture that is contingent upon what might be called early modern masculine anxiety has gone largely unnoticed. I am suggesting that, by eventually transferring the task of commemoration from male portraiture to female portraiture, this is how the early modern Florentine attempted to ensure his memory, and *this*, as Alberti asks, is what's next.

Bernini (New York: Abrams, 1964); and John Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (New York: Pantheon, 1966) and idem, *Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, 3rd ed., (Oxford: Phaidon, 1985), especially 'The Humanist Tomb,' 34-44. Even a recent catalogue entry by S. Scher, ed., *The Currency of Fame: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance* (New York: Abrams in association with The Frick Collection, 1994), 41, describes Alberti's bronze portrait medal on these terms: 'No one better personifies the ideal of the Renaissance man ... Alberti's relief self-portrait ... transforms a classical prototype into the proudly confident image of an individual Renaissance man as master of the perceptible universe.'

³⁸ Alberti's personal device – the winged eye – appears with his motto ('*QUID TUM*') and an encircling laurel wreath on this manuscript version of *Della famiglia*, dated around 1438; it also appears three times on the self-portrait plaque (Fig. 13.2): once in the lower left corner and twice more along the right edge, framing his signature, 'L. BAP.' The winged eye also appears on the reverse of another portrait medal of Alberti created by Matteo de' Pasti around 1450.

³⁹ See Patricia Simons, 'Women in Frames: the Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture,' in Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds, *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 38-57, especially 50. To nuance Simons's interpretation of profile portraiture, see Adrian Randolph, 'Performing the Bridal Body in Fifteenth-Century Florence,' *Art History* 21/2 (1998): 182-200; and the most recent study of Renaissance portraiture, David Alan Brown ... [et al.]; with contributions by Elizabeth Cropper and Eleonora Luciano, *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art in association with Princeton University Press, 2001).

Portrait of a Woman, painted by Bernardino Licinio between 1525 and 1535, depicts a widow holding a portrait of her husband (Fig. 13.4).⁴⁰ Set against what seems to be a domestic space, she stares out blankly with a somber expression; by contrast, his portrait, which was probably painted posthumously as indicated by its black frame, is situated before a view of the outside world. Dressed in mourning black, the neckline of her gown is embroidered with two small dogs, a traditional symbol of fidelity. Thus, she is forever connected to her husband; indeed, her extended arm supports his portrait. If male portraiture memorializes the sitter, representing 'the dead to the living many centuries later,' as Alberti suggests, then widow portraiture not only memorializes the husband, but it also provides him with a perpetual mourner. In other words, not only is the husband remembered, but he is also remembered in what was considered to be an ideal manner – by a virtuous and chaste widow.⁴¹ This double portrait, then, does double duty. And yet, the presence of the husband in this portrait can also be interpreted as redundant. That is to say, the depiction of the wife as widow suggests that the husband is already dead; perhaps there was a more efficient memorial strategy.

In the following revision of Italian Renaissance portraiture, I attempt both to describe and account for the complex nature of the representation of the widow – perhaps no more complex than that of the woman, or even the man, but differently complex, nonetheless – by distinguishing and defining, within the genre of portraiture, a new category. Moreover, I examine how those representations, in turn, might perpetuate or even complicate the culturally coded performance of mourning: how does the uncertain or ambiguous position of the widow within

⁴⁰ Though not a Florentine painter, Licinio can still be used productively in this context insofar as this double portrait underscores the present argument. See David Chambers and Jane Martineau, eds, *Splendours of the Gonzaga* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1982), 164; Jodi Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82; Simons, 'Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women,' in Alison Brown, ed., *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 274-276; and Luisa Vertova, 'Bernardino Licinio,' in *I Pittori Bergamaschi dal XIII al XIX Secolo. Il Cinquacento*, vol. 1 (Bergamo: Poligrafiche Bolis, 1980), 389 and 425, n. 70.

⁴¹ As Diane Owen Hughes, 'Representing the Family: Portraits and Purposes in Early Renaissance Italy,' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17/1 (1986): 7-38, has pointed out in her study of female portraiture in relation to the Renaissance family, women were painted on the walls of funerary chapels in order to act as witnesses. Despite their removal from the agnatic family, women were represented in a state of perpetual mourning for their fathers and brothers during baptisms, weddings and funerals. In addition to serving a didactic purpose by instructing future generations, Hughes, 25, suggests that this type of portrait served not only as a *memento mori* but also as an *absit omen* – 'a representation that is meant to avert a dreaded or feared condition or to transform a state of affairs perceived as painful, unacceptable or dangerous into its desired opposite.' On didacticism, see also Simons, 1992, 48-49; and Cristelle L. Baskins, 'Cassone' Painting, Humanism, and Gender in Early Modern Italy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), especially, 'Object Lessons,' 1-25.

ritual inform her representation? Conversely, how might representation be used strategically to fix the fluidity of the widow?

The category of widow portraiture can be generally characterized as follows: the widow is depicted in a three-quarter or bust-length pose; she is set in profile or frontally against a plain, dark background; she is depicted with a sober or severe expression; and, most importantly, she is simply veiled and dressed in dark colors. For the purposes of this introduction, we might suggest that Giorgio Vasari's portraits of Caterina Sforza (Fig. 5.5) and Maria Salviati (Fig. 13.5) serve as representatives of sixteenth-century widow portraiture within the Medici family.⁴² Painted between 1556 and 1559, these two frescoes of the grandmother and mother, respectively, of Duke Cosimo decorate the Sala di Giovanni delle Bande Nere, named after Cosimo's father, in the Palazzo Vecchio (these family matters will soon come to matter). Overall, widow portraiture tends to be noticeably static, though necessarily so; for this paradigm and its frequent repetition became a standard means of marking the social status of widowhood. For example, Caterina Sforza was married – and widowed – three times; different portrait medals were cast to commemorate her various states of widowhood.⁴³ Similarly, Maria Salviati's frequent and repetitive portrayal originated only with her husband's death.⁴⁴

Portraits on panel, after religious pictures, accounted for the most numerous type of painting found in domestic interiors. By the fifteenth century, there was a significant increase in the number of secular images used to decorate the home, and, at that time, independent panels were framed and hung in the most private rooms of the home, where such luxurious possessions could be displayed. By the sixteenth century, however, portraits had become a commonplace in the home and were hung in the most public reception spaces, such as halls and galleries. If we use a Medici inventory of 1492, we can make the following general assumptions about the placement of portraits, as determined by the sex of the sitter: women's portraits were surrounded by paintings with religious or devotional subject matter,

⁴² See Karla Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici: 15th-18th Centuries*. 3 vols. (Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1981-1989), 360-361 and 1264-1265. I wish to express my gratitude to Dott. Riccardo Checcacci, who obtained for me the photograph reproduced here.

⁴³ For a description of the portrait medals and their copies, see Langedijk, 358-360. For an investigation of the sociopolitical function of these medals, see Joyce de Vries, 'Power, Gender, and Representation in the Italian Renaissance Court: Caterina Sforza's Portrait Medals,' *Women's Art Journal* (forthcoming); and her essay in the present collection. On portrait medals, in general, see Scher, 1994.

⁴⁴ These include a painting on panel in Baltimore by Pontormo, dated 1537 (Fig. 13.7); a painting on panel in the Uffizi attributed to the workshop of Pontormo (Fig. 13.9); a drawing in the Uffizi by Pontormo; and an engraving by Francesco Allegrini of 1761. The most exhaustive survey of the portraiture of Maria Salviati can be found in Langedijk, 1262-1267. See also Gabrielle Langdon, 'Pontormo and Medici Lineages: Maria Salviati, Alessandro, Giulia and Giulio de' Medici,' *Revue d'art canadienne* 19/1-2 (1992): 20-40.

whereas men's portraits were surrounded by paintings with both religious or devotional and secular subject matter.⁴⁵

Yet, it is difficult to determine how many of the portraits of women there in the house were of widows because the inventories usually do not describe details, such as costume or attributes, and because the inventories tend to describe female portraits simply, as in 'head of a woman.' For example, a large Tornabuoni inventory of 1497 records, among others, a portrait of a woman, '1° quadretto c'una testa e busto di Mona Lucrezia de' Medici,' located in the 'Camera terrena in sul androne,' or ground-floor entrance hall.⁴⁶ If we understand this entry to be a reference to the portrait painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio around 1475 (Fig. 13.6), whether or not the sitter is Lucrezia Tornabuoni, widow of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (the inscription is later), we still can make a compelling argument that this is a widow's portrait insofar as it depicts the sitter with the identifying thin, black ribbon running through her sheer head covering. We then can imagine, in some way, the social context of similar representations.⁴⁷

Of those female portraits mentioned in inventories securely identifiable as widows, other documents, like contracts, show that the majority were commissioned, as we would expect, by male patrons: fathers, sons and grandsons; some portraits of wives as widows were even commissioned prematurely, disclosing a project of pre-posthumous mourning, by which the husband positions his wife as the one who will be his widow and will have mourned for him. In other cases, wives were portrayed as widows even though, predeceasing their husbands, that role would never be filled.⁴⁸ On the one hand, then, widow portraiture can be

⁴⁵ See the following: Richard A. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy, 1300-1600* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 145; Rab Hatfield, ed., 'Some Unknown Descriptions of the Medici Palace in 1459,' *Art Bulletin* 52 (1970): 232-249; John Kent Lydecker, 'The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence,' (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1987); idem, 'Il patriziato fiorentino e la committenza artistica per la casa,' in *I ceti dirigenti nella Toscana del Quattrocento* (Atti del V Convegno, 1982; Florence, 1987), 209-221; John Pope-Hennessy and Keith Christiansen, 'Secular Painting in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels, and Portraits,' *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 38 (Summer 1980): 2-64; Howard Saalman and Philip Mattox, 'The First Medici Palace,' *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 44 (1985): 329-345; Marco Spallanzani, *Inventari Medicei, 1417-1465: Giovanni di Bicci, Cosimo e Lorenzo di Giovanni, Piero di Cosimo* (Florence, 1996); Marco Spallanzani and Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà, *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (Florence, 1992); Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400-1600* (New York: Abrams, 1991); and Frank Zollner, 'Leonardo's Portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo,' *Gazette des Beaux Arts* 121 (March 1993): 115-138, especially 125.

⁴⁶ Part of this inventory of the estate of Giovanni di Francesco Tornabuoni, taken on 25 September 1497, is reproduced in Lydecker, 1988, 63-64, n. 84.

⁴⁷ See Simons, 1992, 52; Fern Rusk Shapley, *Catalogue of the Italian Paintings* (Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art: 1979), 203-204, pl. 140; and Lydecker, 1988, 61-67, for the location of this portrait within the Medici household.

⁴⁸ See Allison Levy, 'Good Grief: Widow Portraiture and Masculine Anxiety in Early Modern England,' in Dorothea Kehler and Laurel Amtower, eds, *The Single Woman in*

read as a successful strategy because, as commissioned and as displayed, it kept women in the home. In so doing, widow portraiture seems to forestall the potential transgressions of these single women; literally contained, they seem to occupy their proper place while performing their prescribed role as primary mourner. A closer look, however, at the widow portraiture of Maria Salviati suggests that the early modern widow, though framed in this way, also was able to manipulate her ritual and representational containment.

A portrait painted by Jacopo Pontormo, dated between 1526 and 1538, depicts Maria dressed plainly in black with a widow's veil (Fig. 13.7).⁴⁹ In her left hand, she holds a medal, perhaps commemorating the death of her husband;⁵⁰ with her right, she holds the hand of a small child, previously identified as her young son, Cosimo, but now understood to be Giulia de' Medici, daughter of Duke Alessandro de' Medici.⁵¹ Curiously, Cosimo commissioned this painting, the first official portrait to commemorate Maria Salviati's widowhood. Did Cosimo commission this portrait of his mother as widow in order to maintain his father's memory? Or did Cosimo, if, like the fictive, though contemporary, Federigo, fearing not only his death but also the potential lapse into oblivion, appropriate his father's widow as his own? That is to say, seeing his mother mourning her husband, his father, does this widow's portrait serve to reassure Cosimo that he, too, will be mourned? Further, did this image function for Cosimo as a reminder that his father was dead and, by so doing, did it reinforce his authority, power and masculinity? If widow portraiture confirms the death of the father, Cosimo is here victorious, especially so if this painting was commissioned in the very year he rose to power – 1537; thus, his new control of the state may also reflect his victory at home. And yet, if this portrait of Maria Salviati can be read as asserting the masculinity of Cosimo

Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation (Arizona: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, forthcoming 2003).

⁴⁹ The portrait is problematic on several counts, most notably revolving around questions of date and identity of the sitters, some of which will be discussed in the following notes. For the most recent summary, see *Virtue and Beauty*, 222–224.

⁵⁰ Federico Zeri, *Italian Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery*, vol. 2 (Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1976), 325, has suggested that this is the medal struck by Francesco da Sangallo in 1522 in honor of Giovanni delle Bande Nere.

⁵¹ The young child, whose identity is disputed, had been painted out at an unknown date. When the painting was restored in 1937, the over-paint was removed, leading to the following hypotheses: Janet Cox-Rearick, *The Drawings of Pontormo* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 241, 300ff, and 310ff; Herbert Keutner, 'Zu einigen Bilnissen des frühen Florentiner Manierismus,' *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz* 7/2 (1955): 139–154, see, especially, 146–150 and 152; Edward King, 'An Addition to Medici Iconography,' *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 3 (1940): 74–84, especially 75ff; Langedijk, 1263; and Zeri, 324–328, especially 325, have identified the child as Cosimo. Bernard Berenson, in private correspondence with King, stated that the young child was not Cosimo but a girl; for this reference, see Elizabeth Cropper, *Pontormo: Portrait of a Halberdier* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum of Art, 1997), 4. More specifically, Langdon, 1992, 27–30, has proposed that the young child is Giulia de' Medici in the care of Maria Salviati.

and situating the role and representation of the widow, it can also be interpreted as challenging such gender codes altogether insofar as it is a very androgynous child who clutches the doubled, phallic fingers of a woman whose erect body and prophylactic-like veil necessarily masculinize *her*.

Some portraits of Medici widows disclose a curious project, whereby the woman is represented mourning her husband prematurely. Such is the case with the double portrait painted by Giovanni Battista Naldini of Maria Salviati and her husband, Giovanni delle Bande Nere, commissioned by Cosimo's sons, Dukes Francesco and Ferdinando, in 1585 to record the Medici lineage (Fig. 13.8).⁵² In this portrait, a ghost-like Maria, distanced and truncated, is set back behind the more dominating and lively centrally placed figure of Giovanni. She outlived him by seventeen years. And yet, in this portrait, it is her status as his widow that is posthumously commemorated – this in contrast to her husband, who is portrayed as though alive during her mourning of him. I would argue, however, that ultimately this double portrait could be characterized as subversive. For example, her downward glance, following the advice of Savonarola, is perhaps read initially as one of submission and passivity, but this widow's peek can also be interpreted as threatening to the phallic masquerade of masculinity. If the double portrait depicts the virtuous performance of Maria Salviati's widowhood, there is, nonetheless, a precarious and ambiguous fissure discernible in this painting. A very virile Giovanni, dressed in armor and standing 'alert and erect,'⁵³ is made more than just vulnerable by Maria's glance. Her gaze, directed toward his prominent, exaggerated codpiece, is, like the castrating gaze of Medusa, ultimately fatal.

The Widow's Cleavage

Thus far, the relationship between ritual and representation, between performance and portraiture, seems to be precariously hinged. That is to say, within these provocative portraits, social and bodily boundaries seem to be, at once, strategically fixed and yet ever shifting. Even the most obvious and socially sanctioned marker of widowhood – black mourning dress – could be contested. The remainder of this paper will attempt to undress the early modern widow but only insofar as she is always already undressing herself.

⁵² Of course, none of these sitters were alive when the portraits were painted in 1585; this is very significant. Giovanni had been dead for 59 years, Maria for 42 years and Cosimo for 11 years. Maria's grandsons, Francesco and Ferdinando, were approximately 41 and 36 years old, respectively, when they commissioned the double portrait. See Langedijk, 357 and 1043–1044; 1028 and 1262. For a similar double portrait of Caterina Sforza and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco, see de Vries, 'Casting Her Widowhood.'

⁵³ This passage is borrowed from Patricia Simons, 'Alert and Erect: Masculinity in Some Italian Renaissance Portraits of Fathers and Sons,' in Richard Trexler, ed., *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994).

In 1450, the Florentine bookseller, Vespasiano da Bisticci, praised Alessandra Bardi, an ideal widow, for her black costume, which 'was quite plain, her dress high up to her neck, as becomes a widow, with a veil over her eyes.'⁵⁴ Apparently following such social prescriptions, Maria Salviati, 15 years into her widowhood, was still dressing in black mourning costume: 'The Signora Maria ... is wont to wear bombazine of course black silk, and oft it seems as it were of plain camlet, without a pattern, and 'tis heavy, as if of wool, and by no means contents me ...'⁵⁵ By this etiquette, black dress preferably 'effaced and desexualized' the widow;⁵⁶ and yet, this epistolary account of Maria Salviati's mourning costume, though criticized as understated, should not be underestimated. For example, in a portrait attributed to the workshop of Pontormo, her decidedly compromising costume, with its revealing bodice, exposes more than just her décolleté (Fig. 13.9);⁵⁷ it sheds a metaphorical light on the widow's homographic *might*: her strength and power lie, precisely, in her capability and her probability. To be sure, then, Vespasiano's admonition would prove necessary; just 10 years later, strict statutes had to be passed banning women's growing taste for wearing mourning dresses with slits and necklines so low that 'they exposed half their chest' beneath more modest mantles.⁵⁸ Two disparate though striking examples illustrate this point: *Portrait of a Lady*, attributed to Jacometto Veneziano (Fig. 13.10), and *Portrait of a Lady, called La Monaca*, painted by Giuliano Bugiardini (Fig. 13.11).⁵⁹ Simultaneously obeying and disobeying by cleverly and successfully manipulating mourning dress and, thus, rejecting, to a certain degree, an imposed moral prescription, early modern widows gained a sense of personal expression and social recognition.

⁵⁴ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates; The Vespasiano Memoirs: Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, trans. William George and Emily Waters (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 460. For the Italian, see Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di Uomini Illustri del Secolo XV* (Florence, 1938), 579.

⁵⁵ As cited by Cecily Booth, *Cosimo I. Duke of Florence* (Cambridge, 1921), 117. The letter, from Caterina Cibò, Duchess of Camerino, to her sister, Eleonora Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, is dated 8 July 1541 and describes Maria Salviati's appearance during her widowhood.

⁵⁶ This phrase is borrowed from Strocchia, 1992, 174.

⁵⁷ On this Uffizi portrait of Maria Salviati, see Langedijk, 1262-1264, who lists the identification of both artist and sitter as uncertain, though probable.

⁵⁸ As cited by Strocchia, 1992, 174-175. A series of sumptuary laws, which regulated expense and conspicuous consumption, had already been passed; but, as we might expect, as early as 1384 in Florence, exemptions from such restrictions could be bought. On the purchase of licenses, see Strocchia, 1989, especially 130. See also, Diane Owen Hughes, 'Sumptuary Law and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy,' in John Bossy, ed., *Disputes and Settlements: Law and Human Relations in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 69-99.

⁵⁹ *Virtue and Beauty*, 160-161 and 208-213. There is no consensus that these two sitters, each dressed in black with a revealing bodice, are widows; however, it is precisely that ambiguity of identity and, more specifically, the literal and metaphorical slippage of costume that underscore my argument.

These blatant violations of sumptuary legislation have been interpreted as 'part of a larger set of social strategies.'⁶⁰ For example, Catherine de' Medici cleverly dressed in black not only as a sign of eternal mourning but also in order to serve as a stand-in for her husband, whose colors, as well as those of most male monarchs at this time, were the same as those of her mourning costume;⁶¹ in this way, she gained power formerly unavailable to her; her strategy enabled her to possess the virtues of a male ruler without losing the female virtues of an ideal widow. Might Maria Salviati, who, like Catherine, was left with the responsibility of overseeing the education and administrative duties of the future ruler, have done the same following the death of her husband? Seen even another way, what else could the widow gain through such clever maneuvering? Moreover, if this is what it comes down to – widows who multi-task – then the work of mourning would have to be re-assigned. I want to examine still further the politics of black costume and the ways in which, if men, too, wore black, identity – and memory – could be problematized.

According to Baldesare Castiglione, as dictated in *The Book of the Courtier*, 'the most agreeable color [for men] is black, and if not black, then at least something fairly dark.'⁶² Among princes and courtiers, the color is understood as having signified grace, seriousness, respect and distinction – not necessarily mourning; by contrast, black dress for women, as prescribed by male writers at this time, marked them, at least on the surface, as we have seen, solely as mourners. And yet, despite these social significations of black dress, gender distinctions and memorial duties were often blurred. If black costume, once the marker merely of female mourning, could be appropriated by men – adopted to represent not what they lack or have lost but what they have, signifying 'the privileges claimed by grief,'⁶³ – might not women, in turn, re-appropriate that same black costume, claiming for themselves the authoritative and empowering gestures initially reserved for men in black? Might we even read men's black costume as premature self-memorial fashion? In sum, what happens when costume fails to signify, as demonstrated by a portrait pair of Contarini husband and wife by Jacometto

⁶⁰ Strocchia, 1992, 176.

⁶¹ Sheila ffolliott has written extensively on the strategic fashion choices made by Catherine de' Medici following Henry II's death in 1559 and the subsequent authority granted to her. See, especially, 'Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow,' in Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan and Nancy J. Vickers, eds, *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 227-241.

⁶² Baldesare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. G. Bull (New York: Penguin, 1976), 135. For the Italian, see Castiglione, *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (Milan: Garzanti, 1981), 159.

⁶³ John Harvey, *Men in Black* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 51. For more on the changing significance of black dress as worn by men and women through the centuries, see Ann Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Veneziano (Figs. 13.12 and 13.13)?⁶⁴ Each in black – he, now, in costume ‘quite plain, [his] dress high up to [his] neck, as becomes a widow ...’⁶⁵ – who mourns whom? If mourning is part performance, is not costume always already masquerade? Returning to *La Monaca* (Fig. 13.11), long misunderstood as a portrait of a nun despite the presence of a thin, black band woven through her veil, it is noteworthy that the accompanying portrait cover is decorated with a theatrical mask and the inscription, ‘*Sua cuique persona*’ (‘To each his own persona’) (Fig. 13.14), suggesting that this widow ‘is not what she appears to be.’⁶⁶ Indeed, it is, precisely, this uncertainty that is the widow’s cleavage. Re-read in this light, even more evocative, perhaps, is the *Portrait of a Lady* (Fig. 13.10), with its bizarre, phallic head covering – the Lacanian logo of power, once ‘alert and erect,’ now gone limp – suggestively tucked away into her laced-up bosom; masculinity is finally mourned.⁶⁷

Conclusion

If the widow, transgressing social and bodily boundaries, could shed her ‘widow’s weeds,’ or mourning clothes, which site does she come to occupy within the early modern discourse on mourning and masculine memory? We might conclude that, like Federigo’s ambiguous ‘widow,’ Cornelia, the early modern widow is an uncanny marker of masculine memory, a precarious player upon a strategically constructed, though always already unstable urban stage. Turning again to Lanci’s stage set, we might even read the flexibility of the creased and limp paper as a metaphor for the malleability of the ritual city at this time and, especially, for the tenuousness of memorial strategy. Moreover, fixing our gaze on Brunelleschi’s oculus, the vanishing point of Lanci’s compulsive perspective drawing, who stares back? The cycloptic Federigo? An omni(m)potent Alberti? Or is this the omnipresent widow’s peek? If the visual and verbal texts of *La vedova* suggest the impossibility of situating the widow, so, too, does widow portraiture. That is to say, ultimately, both strategies can be read as ambiguous attempts to fix the

⁶⁴ *Virtue and Beauty*, 154–157.

⁶⁵ See note 57; here, italics mine.

⁶⁶ *Virtue and Beauty*, 209.

⁶⁷ According to Jacques Lacan, ‘The Signification of the Phallus,’ in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 289–290, the function of the phallus dictates the relations between the sexes: ‘Let us say that these relations will turn around a “to be” and a “to have”, which, by referring to a signifier, the phallus, have the opposed effect, on the one hand, of giving reality to the subject in this signifier, and, on the other, of derealizing the relations to be signified. This is brought about by the intervention of a “to seem” that replaces the “to have”, in order to protect it on the one side, and to mask its lack in the other, and which has the effect of projecting in their entirety the ideal or typical manifestations of the behaviour of each sex ... I am saying that it is in order to be the phallus, that is to say, the signifier of the desire of the Other, that a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade.’

potential transgressions of the Florentine widow. Taking a final look at Alberti, in response to his insightful motto, '*QUID TUM*' ('what next'), this revision of Italian Renaissance portraiture calls for a continuation of this task of addressing and undressing widows, and, in so doing, of ripping the seams of the early modern discourse on mourning and masculine memory.

Figure 13.1 Baldesare Lanci, *View of Florence* (sketch of the stage set for *La Vedova*, written by Giambattista Cini). Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe, Uffizi, Florence. Scala/Art Resource, New York

Figure 13.2 Leon Battista Alberti, *Self-Portrait*. Samuel H. Kress Collection. Photograph © 2001 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Figure 13.3 ?Leon Battista Alberti, the flying eye enclosed by a wreath with the inscription QUID TUM, ink sketch on a manuscript of *Della Famiglia* (c. 1438), MS. II.IV.38, c.II9v. Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence

Figure 13.4 Bernardino Licinio, *Portrait of a Woman*. Pinacoteca del Castello Sforzesco, Milan. Alinari/Art Resource, New York

Figure 13.5 Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Maria Salviati*, fresco, 1556-1559. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Alinari/Art Resource, New York

Figure 13.6 Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Lucrezia Tornabuoni*. Samuel H. Kress Collection. Photograph © 2001 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Figure 13.7 Jacopo Pontormo, *Maria Salviati with Giulia de' Medici*, c. 1539. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

Figure 13.8 Giovanni Battista Naldini, *Portrait of Giovanni delle Bande Nere with His Wife, Maria Salviati*, oil on canvas, c. 1585. Uffizi, Florence

Figure 13.9 Jacopo Pontormo, *Portrait of Maria Salviati*. Uffizi, Florence.
Scala/Art Resource, New York

Figure 13.10 Attributed to Jacometto Veneziano, *Portrait of a Lady* (recto). John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

Figure 13.11 Giuliano Bugiardini, *Portrait of a Lady, called La Monaca*. Uffizi, Florence. Alinari/Art Resource, New York

Figure 13.12 Jacometto Veneziano, *Portrait of Alvise Contarini*, c. 1485-1495. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 13.13 Jacometto Veneziano, *Portrait of a Woman*, c. 1485-1495. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Figure 13.14 Attributed to Giuliano Bugiardini, *Portrait Cover with Mask and Grotesques*, c. 1516. Uffizi, Florence. Scala/Art Resource, New York