GOOD GRIEF:
Widow Portraiture and Masculine Anxiety
in Early Modern England

A seemingly ordinary picture of a woman hangs in the Dulwich Picture Gal-

lery in London (fig. 1). Depicted in a three-quarter pose and set obliquely

against a plain, dark background, the sitter, simply veiled and dressed in black,
stares calmly and directly toward the viewer. This picture can be situated within a

distinct yet previously unnamed category of female portraiture, what I call widow

portraiture: depictions of the woman during and after her husband’s funeral when

she is recognized as his widow. This genre can be generally characterized as fol-
lows: the woman is dressed in dark colors, her expression is sober, and she some-
times holds or wears a small attribute, such as a medal or ring, that connotes her
status as someone’s widow. (In the Dulwich picture, the sitter wears a strand of
pearls, a reference to her virtue and chastity.) Overall, widow portraiture tends to
be noticeably static, though necessarily so, for this paradigm and its frequent repe-
tition became a standard means of marking the social status of widowhood. Further,

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1 Despite the wealth of information about the socio-economic situation of widowhood in
early modern England, there is a noticeable absence of such information within art-historical
scholarship. Thus we do not find any references to the representation of widowhood in the follow-
ing most recent canonical surveys of portraiture: Lorrie Campbell, Renaissance Portraits: European
Portrait Painting in the 14th, 15th, and 16th Centuries (New Haven, 1990); Andrew Moore with
Charlotte Crawley, Family and Friends: A Regional Survey of British Portraiture (London, 1992); and
Marcia Pointon, Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England
(New Haven, 1993). Two studies deserve special mention. Paul Binski, Medieval Death: Ritual and
Representation (Ithaca, 1996) and, especially, Nigel Llewellyn, The Art of Death: Visual Culture in the
English Death Ritual, c. 1500-c. 1800 (London, 1991) examine visual representations produced in
conjunction with the death ritual in early modern Europe; neither of these, however, offers a crit-
cical examination of the role of gender within ritual and representation. In all of the works cited
here, widow portraiture, as a distinct category of female portraiture, remains undefined.
Figure 1.
“Jane Cartwright,” oil on canvas by John Greenhill.
Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.
By permission of the Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery.
if such a visual marker also perpetuates the ephemeral nature of mourning ceremonial, in so doing it continues the widow’s ritual act of grieving and thereby (ideally) maintains masculine memory. Thus, as we would expect, the majority of these portraits were commissioned 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, were they to predecease their husbands, that role would never be filled.

Such is the case with the Dulwich picture, Mrs Jane Cartwright. The “widow” in question is Jane Hodgson, the third wife of the actor and bookseller, William Cartwright (1606/7–1686), who commissioned John Greenhill (c. 1640/45–1676) to paint his “Last wifes pictur, with a blacke vaile on her head.” She predeceased her husband, yet it is her status as his widow that is commemorated in this portrait. Why did Cartwright impose widowhood upon his wife in this way? Nigel Llewellyn has suggested that this portrait “is a reference not so much to her emotional state but to his.” Indeed, Cartwright’s selfish commission of his wife in a state of mourning, because it is not simply premature but is, in fact, erroneous, can be interpreted as a reflection of his own state of mourning. Yet beyond this, I clearly see a newly separable category of representation — women, at a particular cultural moment, caught in a situation of complex and complicating transformation — which is perhaps contingent upon what might be called early modern masculine anxiety. Does Cartwright commission the portrait of his never to be widowed wife because he fears that, without a widow, he will not be properly mourned and, thus, will be forgotten? Perhaps his anxieties can be justified, for he had already lost two potential widows. His first wife, Elisabeth Cooke, whom he married on 1 May 1633, died only a couple of years into their marriage. Of note, Cartwright, no stranger to the stage, cast his wives in various supporting roles. He asked Greenhill to paint his “first wifes pictur Like a Sheppardess” (Fig. 2), this portrait of Elisabeth Cartwright, which also hangs in the Dulwich Picture Gallery, depicts his wife in the

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3 We do not know the date of the portrait. The only secure date assigned to the sitter is her wedding date, 19 November 1654, which is recorded in the St. James, Clerkenwell, parish registry. That entry, as cited by Boswell, “Young Mr. Cartwright,” 128, reads as follows: “Nov. 19. [1654] William Cartwright, of St. Giles in the Fields, and Jane Hodgson, of our parish.” Therefore the painting must have been executed between Cartwright’s marriage in 1654 and the death of Greenhill in 1676.

4 Llewellyn, Art of Death, 96.

5 Boswell, “Young Mr. Cartwright,” 127.

6 As cited by Murray, Dulwich Picture Gallery, 63.
guise of St. Agnes, virgin martyr. He married his second wife, Andria Robbins, on 28 April 1636; she died, without having had her portrait painted, on 12 May 1652.7 Two years later, he married his third and last wife, Jane Hogdson. She would be cast as his widow — a role that would prove necessary insofar as Cartwright would die a “single man (Having neither wife nor child . . .)”; worse (?), he would die without a grave marker.8 Will his pictorial strategy, at least, be successful? That is to say, will his “widow” ensure his memory?

This essay attempts to explain why and how widows both mourned and were portrayed in early modern Europe, focusing on the traditions and revisions of the mourning ritual in England at that time. 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 countervailing tendencies of discord and dissenion also gnawed at its heart.”9 Along these lines, I understand the widow 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 for both mourner and mourned in early modern England.

Why did Cartwright impose widowhood upon his wife? 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.10 The fear, then, 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 allurean idea Staten refers to as “thanatoerotophobic misogyny.”11 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

7 Boswell, “Young Mr. Cartwright,” 127.
8 As cited by Boswell, “Young Mr. Cartwright,” 128.
10 Henry Staten, Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan (Baltimore, 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.”
11 Staten, Eros in Mourning, 108. Staten cites an early example (p. 38): “Akhilleus 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.”
Figure 2.
only is masculinity inherently anxious, but that this anxiety is paradoxically both a cause and an effect of the patriarchal system:

... 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 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.\textsuperscript{12}

Thus masculine anxiety is both inevitable and necessary, and, when channeled positively, this anxiety can become a strategic tool.\textsuperscript{13}

By such an account, the role of women within the death ritual can be interpreted as a "compensatory or transferential" strategy of continuation, of guaranteeing masculine memory. Because the death ritual was enacted as a means of re-establishing society, the categorization and repetition of gender roles within that ritual were essential for both the restoration and continuation of the constructed order. That is to say, at the especially vulnerable and disruptive time of death, social order could be restored through the repetitive, gender-specific practice of mourning,\textsuperscript{14} and indeed, historically within the western tradition of grieving, women have been designated — and remain — the primary mourners or "memory specialists."\textsuperscript{15} But if, according to Sharon Stroczia, "the fundamental human obligation to bury the dead was inextricably bound up with the social imperative to bury them well,"\textsuperscript{16} then memory required the proper type and amount of mourning. In other words, a good death was determined by good grief.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{13} According to Stephen Greenblatt, \textit{Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare} (Chicago, 1980), 9: "Self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile. This threatening Other — heretic, savage, witch, adulteress, traitor, Antichrist — must be discovered or invented in order to be destroyed." Thus, the widow is, at once, constructed as a container of masculine memory and de-constructed as one of society’s Others.

\textsuperscript{14} Judith Butler established the basis for my discussion of the performance of identity. See especially \textit{Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity} (New York, 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 legitimation ... 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."

\textsuperscript{15} Patrick Geary, \textit{Phantoms of Remembrance: Memory and Oblivion at the End of the First Millennium} (Princeton, 1994), 177.

\textsuperscript{16} Sharon Stroczia, \textit{Death and Ritual in Renaissance Florence} (Baltimore, 1992), 5–6.

A successful performance 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. This delicate operation, if well orchestrated, could, in turn, result in remembrance. But there was much at stake for the actors, actresses, and directors, who took their show on the road. The streets of early modern England held an attentive audience, who, soon enough, would be competing for recognition within the same urban landscape. Control of such an ephemeral performance within an equally ephemeral and penetrable ritual space would become essential. The role of the widow, in particular, would have to be re-written.

In the early modern period, the move to control or the attempt to territorialize public space by suppressing women’s dramatic displays of grief resulted in what has been called “the defeminization of the public sphere.” Writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, Juliana Schiesari 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.

18 In the sixteenth century, Juan Luis Vives called for an end to disorderly grieving by women in A Very Fruithful and Pleasant Book Called the Instruction of a Christian Woman, written in 1523 for Catherine of Aragon. One of the most influential women’s conduct books of the sixteenth century, it was translated into English by Richard Hynde, friend of Thomas More, in 1528–1529. Excerpts from Chapters 1, “Of the Mourning of Widows,” and 3, “Of the Minding of Her Husband,” of Book 3, as quoted by Joan Larsen Klein, ed., Daughters, Wives, & Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500–1640 (Urbana, 1992), 119–20, follow (italics mine):

[Upon her husband’s death] 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. ... 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.

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 legitimized women’s access into the privileged masculine sphere, and their repetitive performance, as newly regulated, continued to contribute to and maintain patriarchal structures.

And yet, this 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.” 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:

The supplement has not only the power of procuring an absent presence through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it. For this presence is at the same time desired and feared. ... Thus, the supplement is dangerous in that it threatens us with death. ...  

If we read the widow as supplement, then we can characterize her as subversive in that her presence — or ‘disorder’ — is considered threatening. Moreover, insofar as the very performance of ritual points toward an unraveling of social order, or insofar as the possibilities of permutation within ritual suggest a potential failure of patriarchal fixity, it can be argued that this particular strategy, to rewrite the role of the widow during ceremonial, is not only dangerous but is, perhaps, even unsuccessful.

Despite women’s role and reputation as memory specialists (now read as questionable), tension remained. That is to say, 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 continued until her own. In fact, the abundance of widows in early modern England did little to quell anxiety. One recent calculation estimates that 14.9 percent of adult women in England were widows, and that 12.9 percent of all households were headed by widows.  


[and] ambivalence" as those cohorts were,\textsuperscript{23} even more disturbing than the number of these single women were their potential transgressions: will they play the role of chaste widow, or will they take lovers or remarry and, if so, forget their duty to mourn?

These were legitimate concerns in the early modern period. We might think of the opinions of Alexander Niccholes, as expressed in \textit{A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving}, first published in London in 1615 and then again in 1620:

At the decease of their first husbands, they learn commonly the tricks to turn over the second or third, and they are in league with death and coadjutors with him, for they can harden their own hearts like iron to break others that are but earth. And I like them the worse that they will marry, dislike them utterly they marry so soon. For she that so soon forgets the flower and Bride-groom of her youth, her first love and prime of affection (which like a color laid on in Oil, or dyed in grain, should cleave fast and wear long), will hardly think of a second in the neglect and decay of her age. . . . \textit{Who can love those living that he knows will so soon forget him being dead. . . . Yet decease, and such a lethe of forgetfulness [oblivion] shall so soon overtake thee as if thou hadst never been.}\textsuperscript{24}

Similarly, we might think of the surprising yet powerful comment upon widowhood by Lodovico Dolce, who wrote that women "rejoice at the death of their husbands as if they had been freed from the heavy yoke of servitude",\textsuperscript{25} or of a witness at the court of Catherine de' Medici, who made the following observation:

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 \textit{grandeur}, possessions, titles and good treatment.\textsuperscript{26}

Writings such as these reflect what Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, writing on the situation in Italy, is prepared to call a marked degree of "anxiety among men."\textsuperscript{27}


\textsuperscript{24} As cited by Lloyd Davis, ed., \textit{Sexuality and Gender in the English Renaissance} (New York, 1998), 222–23; italics mine.


\textsuperscript{27} Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, \textit{Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy}, trans. Lydia Cochrane (Chicago, 1985), 122.
And, if, as William J. Bouwsma pointedly put it, "all anxiety is anxiety about death,"28 or as Clare Gittings specified, "the early modern period was characterized by an increasing anxiety over death" due to "growing individualism,"29 then the collapse of both literal and figurative boundaries at this crucial time could and did cause considerable confusion within an otherwise strictly regulated social world. Indeed, if the consistently uncertain position of the widow during and after ritual magnified masculine anxiety, the widow, once more, would have to be put in her proper place.

The English Gentlewoman, written by Richard Brathwaite, can be read as just one example of a literary attempt to counter the anxiety-inducing deficiencies of ritual. Like other conduct books of the period, this one, published in 1631, provides counsel on how to live as a woman, be it as wife, mother, or widow. This text is set apart from many, however, insofar as it is addressed particularly to female readers. It is noteworthy that the frontispiece of the first edition contains a representation of Brathwaite's ideal English gentlewoman (fig. 3). She is, literally, boxed-in; we might even say framed. Surrounding her image, which is placed centrally and contains her motto, "Glory my goal, grace my guide," are eight scenes, each set within a different social, mainly domestic, setting. These scenes illustrate qualities of character and proper comportment: apparel, behavior, complement, decency, estimation, fancy, gentility, and honor.30 One of those didactic images, in particular, "Fancy," attempts to make clear that choice and opportunity, especially concerning another man, whether he be a second husband or a new lover, are undesirable and are best avoided. The accompanying text reads as follows:

Fancy is featured with a lovely and lively presence; fixing her eye intently on a Tablet, presenting the portrature of her Lover. Drawing aside a Curtaine, she discovers an amorous Picture, and compares it with her Tablet, which enshrines her best feature. In the middle of the Picture is engraven a wounded heart, implying love's intimacy; above it, a burning lampe, importing love's purity; below it, a pair of Turtles mating, inferring love's constancy. All which expressive Emblems of her minde, she seconds with this Moto: My Choice admits no Change.31

Both prescriptive and proscriptive, word and image work together here to discourage desire and transgression; in so doing, this literary and visual dissuasion points to the inherent anxiety of the author, and thus further calls attention to the

29 Gittings, Death, Burial and the Individual, 102.
31 For the explanatory tablet, see Kate Aughterson, ed., Renaissance Woman: A Sourcebook: Constructions of Femininity [sic] in England (London, 1995), fig. 5.
Figure 3.
"The English Gentlewoman."
Bodleian Library, Oxford.
By permission of the Bodleian Library.
complexity and urgency with which such apotropaic strategies, those intended to ward off evil, operated at this time.

Most interesting in this didactic image of "Fancy" is the use of portraiture, as directed both within the scene and toward the reading audience. The portrait of the lover is meant to function here as a marker and protector of masculine memory; and, indeed, this English gentlewoman, heeding the advice of Brathwaite, will contain any curiosity, suppress all temptation, and remain loyal to her lover. But if we take a closer look at the entire image, her obedience also can be read as disturbing and challenging to Brathwaite's ideal, a reading that speaks to the potential failure of male portraiture. Even though she "present[s] the portraiture of her Lover," "Drawing aside a Curtaine," she displays both a voyeuristic gaze and a large, we might say 'erect,' "amorous Picture," which, once decoded, abets her decision to remain loyal to her lover. But "fixing her eye intentively" on his miniature portrait — already flat, 'limp' — her gaze, like the castrating stare of Medusa, is, ultimately, fatal, and this English gentlewoman can be read as subversive, this didactic image as counter-productive.

How, then, can the widow be so sanctioned that she ensures without erasing masculine memory? Building upon Staten's argument that the initial act of auto-mourning is eventually transferred onto the bodies of women, I propose that masculine memory in early modern England could be best maintained by transferring the task of commemoration from male portraiture to female portraiture. An unusual painting, the Triptych Portrait of Lady Anne Clifford, painted circa 1647 (probably by Jan van Belcamp), illustrates the ways in which this strategic transfer could both reshape identity and construct a particular memory (fig. 4).  

The left panel of the triptych depicts Lady Anne Clifford in 1605, the year of her father's death; this image of her commemorates an early period of mourning. Portrayed at the age of fifteen, she is situated appropriately among her schoolbooks, which, it is noteworthy, include Castiglione's Book of the Courtier and Ovid's Metamorphoses: two

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Figure 4.


A saloon scene, vividly painted with a large number of people in the room. The figures are dressed in elaborate historical costumes, indicative of the 17th century. The painting is from 1646 (oil on canvas) by Jan van Hesper (1610–53) (attr.).

Abbott Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria.

By permission of the Bridgeman Art Library.
suggestive texts insofar as one is concerned with conduct, the other with bodily transformation. Addressed primarily to male readers, both texts suggest a future of performance and permutation. In addition, two portraits which depict her govern-ess, Ann Taylor, and her tutor, Samuel Daniel, hang on the back wall. The central panel represents her immediate family in June 1589, one month after her concep-tion: her parents, Margaret Russell, daughter of the Earl of Bedford, and George Clifford, third Earl of Cumberland, and her two brothers, Robert and Francis, both of whom died in infancy. Behind the family are four portraits, each depicting one of Anne's maternal aunts: Lady Warwick, Lady Bath, Lady Wharton, and the Countess of Derby. Presumably at least three of these women, dressed in plain black costume and wearing the characteristic 'widow's peak' head covering, are depicted as widows. In the right panel, Anne is portrayed at the age of fifty-six. As in the opposite wing of the triptych, she is positioned among a collection of portraits and books, and she is portrayed in a period of mourning; here, however, she no longer mourns her father but at least one of her husbands. Excerpts from her diary record the exact dates of each of her periods of widowhood:

I lived Widdow to this Noble Richard Sackville, Earle of Dorsett about six yeares two monethes and fower or five daies over. . . . On the 3rd Daie of June, after I have continewned a Widdow 6 yeares 2 monethes and 5 or 6 daies over, was I married in Chenies Church in Buckinghamshire to my 2nd Husband Philip Herbert, Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, Ld Chamberlain of the King's Howsehold and Knight of the Garter; he being then one of the greatest subjects in the Kingdom. . . . This second husband of myne dyed the three and twentieth of Januarie one thousand sixe hundred and fiftie (as the Yeare begins on Newyeares daie) and was buryed the ninth of Februarie following in the great church at Salisburie. I was lying then at my castle at Aplebie in Westmorland. 33

Her meticulous records, as cited here, demonstrate the seriousness with which she twice performed her social obligation to mark the memory of the dead. The portraits in the right wing depict her husbands, Richard Sackville, the third Earl of Dorset, and Philip Herbert, fourth Earl of Pembroke and Earl of Montgomery. The latter was not yet deceased, though he might well have been. Estranged, he was living in London at the time of the commission. Both portraits, framed and mounted, sit above what appears to be a memorial inscription. Moreover, depicted in black dress with a plain black veil on her head, Anne seems already to be in a state of mourning for him. Once a widow, always a widow? Even her books, which include More's Map of Mortality and Strode's Anatomy of Mortality, suggest that the duty to mourn remained a constant concern throughout her life.

Following Marcia Pointon's keen observation that "the ordering of imagery in particular spaces and settings produces meanings specific to those times and places" and that "[i]t is thus not only what is possessed that is significant but where and

how it is made visible.” I propose that issues of mourning and memory consume the entire triptych, and that the insistence upon commemorating each of Anne’s periods of mourning served a particular memorial purpose. If, as previously suggested, the work of mourning is better achieved by female mourners, and if the pictorial task of commemoration is redirected toward female portraiture, then widow portraiture in particular can be interpreted as a “compensatory or transferential” strategy of continuation, a more efficient means of guaranteeing memory. But whose memory, exactly, is recorded? In the particular case of the Triptych Portrait, I would suggest that the portraits of Anne Clifford mark the memories of her father, brothers, and husbands, as well as her own.

On the one hand, widow portraiture can be read as a successful strategy because it kept women in the home. That is to say, the strict orchestration and almost ‘archaic’ style of the triptych as a whole, in addition to the form and display of the individual portraits contained within it, can be interpreted as a determined attempt to sanction, at least pictorially, the widow. For example, the framed portraits of Anne’s (presumably) widowed aunts seem to forestall the potential transgressions of these single women. Similarly, Anne, who is literally contained within the side wings of the triptych, appears to occupy her proper place while performing her proper role as mourner. But if, by contrast, “the side panels of the painting show Clifford framing and containing her family,” rather than being framed or contained, might we read these two ‘marginalized’ portraits as challenging to family memory? In other words, the ambivalence with which the portraits of Anne function suggest that there is yet another chapter to be written — or rewritten. Positioned at the edges of this memorial triptych, her pendant portraits resemble a pair of inverted bookends. Which story from the annals of her family history does Anne seek to reveal or conceal?

Significantly, Anne commissioned the Triptych Portrait herself; thus, it is she who selectively and strategically writes and rewrites this family history. In so doing, she also repositions herself within that history, seeking, perhaps, what she calls “a new role to play on the stage of this world.” Notably, her “self-immortalizing strategies” revolve around the performances and permutations of gender. Situating herself within a powerful female genealogy, evident in the central panel, she is remembered as “an individual woman holding out against the combined patriarchal


35 It could be argued that she is also mourning the loss of her five sons, all of whom died in infancy.

36 Graham, Her Own Life, 37.

37 As cited by Acheson, Diary, 34.

38 Acheson, Diary, 35.
forces of father, uncles, husbands, lawyers, churchmen, and even the king.” And yet if she thereby seems to reconstitute gender difference, she also subverts that gender dichotomy, simultaneously positioning herself as both male and female. A passage from her autobiography reads as follows:

I was very happy in my first constitution both in mind and body, both for internal and external endowments, for never was there child more equally resembling both father and mother than myself. The color of mine eyes were black like my father, and the form and aspect of them was quick and lively like my mother’s; the hair of my head was brown and very thick, and so long that it reached to the calf of my legs when I stood upright, with a peak of hair on my forehead, and a dimple in my chin, like my father, full cheeks and round face like my mother, and an exquisite shape of body resembling my father. The portraits of Anne within the triptych reflect this gender blending. In the left panel, her portrait echoes that of her mother: head, hairstyle, and dress are similar in each. In the right panel, Anne’s authoritative stance is similar to that of her father; her black veil, in particular, resembling his hairstyle. This gender performance revealed in both text and image continued throughout her life and indeed was commemorated in her funeral sermon: “[t]he Subject here, Woman, we must allow to be so far figurative as ... by a Synechdoche, under one to comprehend both Sexes.”

Appropriately, recent writers have portrayed Anne as a “split” subject or “divided subject,” who self-consciously and successfully repositioned herself within history by unsettling traditional codes of class and gender. Her oscillation between the roles of obedient daughter and wife and self-ruling and self-reliant aristocratic heir has been read as a sign of her modernity. According to these terms, I would suggest that the paradoxical nature of her particular manner of self-fashioning can

39 Graham, Her Own Life, 37.
40 As cited by Acheson, Diary, 32–33.
41 Black dress for women marked them as mourners; indeed, black is, traditionally, the color of death, of grief, and of loss. And yet, it has been adopted by men to represent not what they lack or have lost but what they have; it signifies, according to John Harvey, Men in Black (Chicago, 1995), 51, “the privileges claimed by grief.” Indeed, black dress, for men, was a social uniform. According to Baldesar Castiglione, The Book of the Courtier, trans. George Bull (New York, 1976), 135, “the most agreeable colour is black, and if not black, then at least something fairly dark.” At this time, among princes and courtiers, the color signified grace, seriousness, respect and distinction, not necessarily mourning. It can be argued, however, that Anne re-appropriates black dress, claiming for herself the authoritative and empowering gestures previously reserved for her father.
42 Acheson, Diary, 33.
44 According to Acheson, “Modernity of the Early Modern,” 42–43, “Anne Clifford is distinctively modern because she constructed herself, within a historiographic discourse, as separate from the present in which she lived.”
Figure 5.
"William Cartwright," oil on canvas by John Greenhill.
Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.
By permission of the Trustees of Dulwich Picture Gallery.
be understood as a symptom of her widowhood or, at least, of her ability to mourn. That is to say, the reshaping of her own identity and, subsequently, the revision of her own memory are, in the case of the Triptych Portrait, contingent upon her social obligation to mourn the dead — a duty which, as already described, enabled her to transgress social boundaries (both geographical and, now, bodily) in order to record family memory. For example, if we look again at the right wing of the triptych, she plays both the traditional female role of memory specialist and the previously unscripted, but now permissible, male role of head of family; she is simultaneously portrayed as widow of her first husband and estranged wife of her second, and, having appropriated the body language of her father, as patriarch. If Anne is "capable of both producing and being produced by history," how do her performances and permutations affect masculine memory?

Reading the multivalence of the Triptych Portrait as representative of the ambiguities and complexities of the mourning ritual, we might even read the flexibility of the tripartite structure as a metaphor for the malleability of ritual at this time and, especially, for the tenuousness of memorial strategy insofar as the threefold relationship between the role of the widow, the representation of the widow, and the desired result of that representation seem to be precariously hinged. Indeed, if widow portraiture discloses a continuous project of pre-posthumous auto-mourning, enabling the male subject to mourn in advance his own death and thus perhaps even to ensure his own memory, the manipulations of this new category of representation also complicate the identities and memories of both mourner and mourned. That is to say, if the imposition of widowhood points toward an endless layering of deception and masquerade, and if, moreover, the widow's very performance can be read as suggestive of the fissures and fluidity of identity in early modern society, we might conclude that the widow assumes a very precarious place within the discourse on masculine memory.

Finally, what, then, can be said of the relationship between William Cartwright, himself a performer, and his "widow"? In other words, does the portrait of Mrs. Jane Cartwright ensure his memory? Having unveiled this peculiar widow's portrait, perhaps not. Perhaps, then, for this reason, the always already anxious Cartwright commissioned Greenhill to paint another portrait — this one of himself "in a black dress with a great doge" (fig. 5). If his wives could not mourn him, and if his "widow" might not, Cartwright would have to turn to man's best friend. A boy and his dog — good grief.

Allison Levy
Wheaton College

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46 As cited by Boswell, "Young Mr. Cartwright," 139. We do not know the date of the portrait, but, like the portrait of Mrs. Jane Cartwright, it had to have been painted before the death of Greenhill in 1676.