Imposing Pictures
Widow Portraiture as memorial strategy in early modern Florence*

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.¹ The plot unfolds as follows: Federigo feigns his death only to 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 Duke Cosimo’s court, depicts an identifiable civic site: Clearly visible, from Vasari’s Uffizi, still being constructed, are an edge of the

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*I am extremely grateful to Dr. Martina Schattkowsky, who invited me to speak on this topic. This paper, a longer version of the one delivered at Schloss Rochlitz, is an excerpt from my dissertation, „Early Modern Mourning: Widow Portraiture in Sixteenth-Century Florence“ (Bryn Mawr College, 2000). That project was funded by the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation and by the Graduate School of Arts and Humanities at Bryn Mawr College; I would like to thank Professors David Cast and Steven Levine for their guidance and support.

¹ Cini’s play was published in Florence in 1569. A modern edition is published in 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, 166-68; the prologue is reproduced in ALDO BORLENGHI, ed., Commedia del Cinquecento, vol. 1, Milan: Rizzoli, 1959, 1037-40; see also, references, esp. to Alessandro Striggio, who wrote the music for the intermedi, 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/London: Benjamin Blom, 1968. – Interestingly, 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 in 1574.
Loggia dei Lanzi, the Palazzo Vecchio (inside which Cini’s comedy was being performed) with Bandinelli’s Hercules and Cactus (c. 1525–34), Michelangelo’s David (1501–04), and Ammanati’s Neptune fountain (c. 1563–66), the expanse of the Piazza della Signoria, and finally Brunelleschi's dome and Giotto’s campanile (Fig. 1). Previous studies of Lanci’s drawing have been from a technical point of view, concerned with the problems of stage perspective and scenery rotation. I would like to suggest, 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?

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. For example, we might think of the surprising yet powerful comment of Ludovico Dolce upon widowhood that women rejoice at the death of their husbands as if they had been freed from the heavy yoke of servitude 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.

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3 See especially, Nagler, Theatre Festivals (s. note 2), 44-6, who cites Ignazio Danti’s 1583 edition of Vignola’s Le Due regoli della prospettiva pratica, which includes a discussion of Cini’s comedy focused on the technical advances of Lanci’s scenery.

4 Indeed, Lanci’s drawing is problematic on several counts. Sixteenth-century Italian comedy is typically set within a markedly less specific, or even unidentifiable, neighborhood than that of La Vedova. 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, esp. Louise George Clubb, Italian Renaissance Comedy, in: idem, Italian Drama in Shakespeare’s Time, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989, 29-48.

5 Dialogo di M. Ludovico Dolce delle istituzione delle donne, 4th ed., Venice 1560, 68. – As cited by
 [...] 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. 

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Thus, might we read Lanci’s carefully constructed Florentine landscape as a metaphor for an ordering of the uncertainties of widowhood in sixteenth-century Florence, as a container for the widow’s potential mobility? 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 sexuality—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. Thus, if Renaissance comedy reflects an unraveling of social order, not only does the very performance of widowhood in Cini’s comedy point to an insistence upon instability, but, moreover, the compulsive realism of Lanci’s stage set suggests a potential failure of patriarchal fixity.

This paper asks, how, in this moral and social situation, one might position the widow within the tradition of Italian Renaissance portraiture? Moreover, how does the uncertain or ambiguous position of the widow within ritual inform her representation? Or, put another way, how might representation be used strategically to fix the fluidity of the widow? How might those representations, in turn, perpetuate or even complicate the culturally coded performance of mourning?

A few quantitative figures based on the Florentine catasto, or census, of 1427, as interpreted by David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-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.) Widowhood could

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8 David Herlihy/Christiane Klapisch-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 forty were widowed and 45 percent of women over age fifty were widowed; for a close reading of these statistics in relation to women’s lives, see Christiane Klapisch-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/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985, 117-31, esp. 120. – In addition to the invaluable studies on Florentine widowhood cited above, there are numerous comparable studies on European widowhood that address legal, economic, and marital concerns: Ida Blom, The History of Widowhood: A Bibliographic Overview, in: Journal of Family History 16/2 (1991), 191-210; Louise Mirrer, ed., Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992; Roelker, Widowhood (s. note 6), 376-78; Sue
last anywhere from one year to the remainder of a lifetime and could mean significant changes in socio-economic status, for better or for worse. Whether staying within the marriage household, whether returning to the agnatic household, or whether rejecting the traditional household altogether and living independently, the consi-


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, in: Memoria 18 (1986), 7-24; IDEM, Widowhood and Poverty in Late Medieval Florence, in: Continuity and Change 3/2 (1988), 291-311; IDEM, 'La sposa in nero.' La ritualizzazione del lutto delle vedove fiorentine (secoli XIV-XV), in: Quaderni Storici 86/2 (1994), 421-62; on legal issues, see THOMAS KUEHN, Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; IDEM, Law, Death, and Heirs in the Renaissance Repudiation of Inheritance in Florence, in: Renaissance Quarterly 45/3 (1992), 484-516. – On the dowry system, see DAVID HERLHY, The Medieval Marriage Market, in: Medieval and Renaissance Studies 6 (1976), 1-27; DIANE OWEN HUGHES, From Bridepiece to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe, in: Journal of Family History 3 (1978), 262-96; J. KIRSCHNER/ANTHONY MOHLO, The Dowry Fund and the Marriage Market in Early Quattrocento Florence, in: Journal of Modern History 50 (1978), 403-38; CHRISTIANE KLAPISCH-ZUBER, The Griselda Complex: Dowry and Marriage Gifts in the Quattrocento, in: idem, Woman, Family (s. note 8), 213-46. – Elaine Rosenthal has noted the variety of experiences – both negative and positive – affecting a woman’s economic situation, and calls for a fuller re-reading of women's lives than that most frequently offered, see ELAINE ROSENTHAL, The Position of Women in Renaissance Florence: neither Autonomy nor Subjection, in: Peter Denley/Caroline Elam, eds., Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein, London: Westfield College, University of London Committee for Medieval Studies, 1988, 369-81. – Others have examined the opportunities, consequences, and strategies of remarriage, see ANTHONY MOHLO, Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994; IDEM, Deception and Marriage Strategy in Renaissance Florence: The Case of Women’s Ages, in: 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, in: Renaissance Quarterly 45 (1992), 312-39; IDEM, Reconstructing (s. note 5), 275-96; HEATHER GREGORY, Daughters, Dowries, and the Family in Fifteenth-Century Florence, in: Rinascimento, 2d ser., 27 (1987), 215-37. – On the widow’s decision not to remarry, when „movements achieve visibility“ [HERLHY/KLAPISCH-ZUBER, Tuscans (s. note 8), 112-13], as a means of gaining relative emancipation, see, for example, RUDOLPH BELL, How to Do It; Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians, Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1999. He 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.

On alternative living spaces for widows, see P. RENEE BAERNSTEIN, In Widow’s Habit: Women between
stently uncertain social, economic, and inter-familial mobility of approximately 25 percent of the female population caused a marked degree of what Klapisch-Zuber has referred to as „anxiety among men.“\textsuperscript{11} Thus, the penetration of both geographical and social boundaries — both during and after ritual — could and did cause considerable confusion within an otherwise strictly regulated urban landscape.\textsuperscript{12} Reading Cini’s Federigo as representative of Florentine masculinity, if anxiety was caused less by the threat of social disorder than by the threat of oblivion,\textsuperscript{13} how, then, did the early modern Florentine both contain the widow and ensure his memory?

By way of suggestion, I introduce Leon Battista Alberti, who in 1435 made the following observation: \textit{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.}\textsuperscript{14} And indeed, Alberti’s bronze self-portrait (Fig. 2),\textsuperscript{15} dated to approxi-
mately 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 Jakob Burckhardt in 1860 and reiterated by Erwin Panofsky and John Pope-Hennessy a century later.¹⁶

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? Alberti’s personal device, or impresa, the winged eye, appears three times on the self-portrait plaque: once in the lower left corner and twice more along the right edge, framing his signature, „L. Bap.“ It appears with his motto (Quid Tum) and an encircling laurel wreath, on a manuscript version of Della famiglia, dated around 1438 (Fig. 3).¹⁷

Alberti’s 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,

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¹⁷ It also appears in this expanded form on the reverse of another portrait medal of Alberti created by Matteo de’ Pasti around 1450.
disengaged – we might say, „blind“ – the inactive male cannot defend himself against the stony, deadly stare of Medusa.¹⁸ Read in conjunction with Simons’s account of male profile portraiture, can Alberti’s winged eye be read 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 distinct category of female portraiture that is perhaps contingent upon early modern masculine anxiety has gone largely unnoticed.¹⁹ I am suggesting that, by transferring the task of commemoration from male portraiture to female portraiture, this is how the early modern Florentine ensured his memory and


¹⁹ Despite the wealth of information on closely related topics such as the role of gender within ritual, the form and function of the arts produced in conjunction with ritual, the socio-economic variables of widowhood, the representation of women and women’s patronage, there is a noticeable absence of scholarship concerned specifically with the unique relationship between widowhood and representation in early modern Europe. The relevant single-author studies and edited collections on visual representations produced in conjunction with and/or as a result of the funeral and burial ceremonial in medieval and early modern Europe include: NIGEL LLEWELLYN, The Art of Death. Visual Culture in the English Death Ritual c. 1500-c. 1800, London: Published in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum by Reaktion Books, 1991; and PAUL BINSKI, Medieval Death, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996. – Both studies connect European (mainly English and French) ritual and representation through a study of small commemorative objects, such as jewelry; neither of these, however, examines the role of gender within ritual or the ways in which gender codes, as socially dictated, might affect the subsequent production of objects; a recent collection of essays, GIOVANNI CIAPPELLi/PATRICIA LEE RUBIN, eds., Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, though concerned with the relationship between object and memory and with the significance of family within that relationship, fails to interpret widowhood as a catalyst for the production of a significant body of visual material. – The relevant single-author studies and edited collections on women and representation include: GERALDINE A. JOHNSON/SARA F. MATTHEWS GREICO, eds., Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, which contains an essay by Caroline P. Murphy on Lavinia Fontana’s representations of specific stages in the female life cycle, including widowhood in late sixteenth-century Bologna; CYNTHIA LAWRENCE, ed., Women and Art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs, University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 1997; and CATHERINE KING, Renaissance Women Patrons. Wives and Widows in Italy c. 1300–1550, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, both of which refer to patronage projects by widows. Although these recent studies, critical of previous art historical accounts, draw upon social history and gender issues in an attempt to present the reader with a more comprehensive view of early modern women and representation, again, except for isolated passages, none focus on the connection between widowhood and visual culture. – By contrast, this paper introduces a new genre of female portraiture and pushes feminist methodologies further, suggesting the various ways in which such visual imagery could be manipulated by artist, patron, and even subject, calling up new possibilities in representation, see also, by THIS AUTHOR, the edited collection, Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe, esp. the chapter „Framing Widows: Mourning, Gender and Portraiture in Early Modern Florence“., forthcoming from Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003.
this, as Alberti asks, is what's next. A Woman Holding a Portrait of a Man, painted by Bernardino Licinio between 1525 and 1535, illustrates this point (Fig. 4). This double portrait depicts a widow holding a portrait of her husband, which was probably painted posthumously as indicated by its plain black frame. Set against a plain, dark background — probably a domestic space — she stares out blankly with a somber expression; by contrast, his portrait 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 right arm supports his portrait.

If male portraiture memorializes the sitter, representing „the dead to the living many centuries later,“ as Alberti suggested, then widow portraiture not only memorializes the husband but it also provides him with a perpetual mourner. As Diane Owen Hughes 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 suggests that this type of portrait served not only as a memento mori but also as an abbit 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.“ In other words, not only is the husband remembered, but he is remembered in what was considered to be an ideal manner – by a virtuous and chaste widow. The double-portrait, then, does double duty. And yet, his presence can also be interpreted as redundant. That is to say, the depiction of the wife as widow suggests that the husband is already dead. Thus, I propose that widow portraiture 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 – the widow’s portrait within the Medici family during the sixteenth century. For the purposes of this introduction, we might suggest that Giorgio Vasari’s portraits of Caterina Sforza (Fig. 5) and Maria Salviati (Fig. 6) serve as representatives of sixteenth-century widow portraiture within the Medici family. Painted between 1556 and 1559, these two frescoes of the grandmother and mother, respectively, of Duke Cosimo, who commissioned the portraits, decorate the Sala di Giovanni delle Bande Nere, named after Cosimo’s father, in the Palazzo Vecchio.  

21 ALBERTI, On Painting (s. note 14).
22 On the didactic function of female portraiture, see also SIMONS, Women in Frames (s. note 18), 48-9; more generally, on the didactic function of visual imagery, see ELENA CILETTI, Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith, in: Migiel/Schiesari, Refiguring woman (s. note 12), 35-70; and, most recently, CRISTELLE L. BASKINS, „Cassone“ Painting, Humanism, and Gender in Early Modern Italy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, esp. Introduction, „Object Lessons,“ 1-25.
23 DIANE OWEN HUGHES, Representing the Family: Portraits and Purposes in Early Renaissance Italy, in: Journal of Interdisciplinary History 17/1 (1986), 25.
Abb. 5  Giorgio Vasari, Caterina Sforza; c. 1556–1559 [Florence: Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Giovanni delle Bande Nere].
Abb. 6 Giorgio Vasari, Maria Salviati; c. 1556–1559 [Florence: Palazzo Vecchio, Sala di Giovanni delle Bande Nere].
Based on the forms of these representations, the category of widow portraiture—depictions of the woman during and after her husband’s funeral when she is recognized as his widow—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. 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.25 Similarly, Maria Salviati’s frequent and repetitive portrayal originated only with her husband’s death.26

If such a visual marker perpetuates the ephemeral nature of mourning ceremonial, it also continues the widow’s ritual act of grieving and, thereby, (ideally) maintains masculine memory. Thus, as we would expect, male patrons—fathers, sons and grandsons—commissioned the majority of these portraits. 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.27

On the one hand, then, widow portraiture can be read as a successful strategy because, as commissioned and as displayed, it kept women in the home. That is to say, 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,

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25 At the age of fifteen, in April 1477, she married Girolamo Riario and was widowed eleven years later at the age of twenty-six; at the age of twenty-eight in 1490, she married Giacomo Feo and was widowed in August 1495 at the age of thirty-three; and three years later, in April 1498, she married Giovanni di Pierfrancesco de’ Medici and was widowed that September; for a description of the portrait medals and their copies, see Langedijk, The Portraits (s. note 24), 358-60; for an investigation of the socio-political function of these medals, see Joyce De Vries, Power, Gender, and Representation in the Italian Renaissance Court: Caterina Sforza’s Portrait Medals, in: Women’s Art Journal (forthcoming); and idem, Casting Her Widowhood: Contemporary and Posthumous Portraits of Caterina Sforza, in: Levy, Widowhood and Visual Culture (s. note 19).

26 The most exhaustive survey of the portraiture of Maria Salviati can be found in Langedijk, The Portraits (s. note 24), 1262–67; see also Gabrielle Langdon, Pontormo and Medici Lineages: Maria Salviati, Alessandro, Giulia and Giulio de’ Medici, in: Revue d’art canadienne 19/1-2 (1992), 20-40.

resulting in a very precarious identity and memory for both mourner and mourned in early modern Florence.

In a portrait painted by Pontormo between 1526 and 1537, Maria, dressed plainly in black with a widow’s veil, holds in her left hand a medal commemorating the death of her husband, Giovanni delle Bande Nere (Fig. 7). With her right, she holds the hand of a small child, possibly their young son Cosimo, the future Grand Duke of Tuscany, and, thus, the widow’s body serves as a bridge, connecting deceased father with young son. This portrait was commissioned by Cosimo, perhaps in 1537—eleven years after his father’s death. That Cosimo chose to have his mother and possibly himself portrayed at an earlier age is very interesting, especially since this was the first official portrait to commemorate her widowhood. Did Cosimo commission this portrait of his widowed mother in order to maintain his father’s memory? Or did Cosimo need to see his mother mourning her husband, his father, because he feared his own inevitable death, and a potential lapse into oblivion? That is to say, does widow portraiture serve to reassure the living that they, too, will be mourned? Or 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?

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28 This is perhaps the medal struck by Francesco da Sangallo in 1522 in honor of Giovanni delle Bande Nere, for this suggestion, see Federico Zeri, Italian Paintings in the Walters Art Gallery, vol. 2, Baltimore: Walters Art Gallery, 1976, 325; Langedijk, The Portraits (s. note 24), 1264, continues this argument, suggesting that the medal shows the symbolic joining of the two branches of the Medici family.

29 Following peace at the Battle of Montemurlo, the seventeen-year-old Duke commissioned Pontormo to paint his mother’s villa at Castello, as well as portraits of both mother and son. The portrait under consideration is believed to be the work described by Giorgio Vasari, Le vite de piu eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architetti, ed. Gaetano Milanese, vol. 6, Florence: Sansoni, 1878, 245-95, esp. 281-82.
Abb. 7  Jacopo Pontormo, Maria Salviati with a Young Child; c. 1538
[oil/panel; Baltimore: The Walters Art Museum].
If widow portraiture confirms the death of the father, Cosimo is here victorious, especially so if the 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 and situating the role and representation of the widow, it can also be interpreted as challenging 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 posthumous double-portrait of Maria Salviati and Giovanni delle Bande Nere, which was painted by Battista Naldini in 1585 as one of a series of twenty-seven family portraits (Fig. 8). This official double portrait of husband and wife was commissioned by Cosimo’s sons, Dukes Francesco and Ferdinando, in 1585 to record the Medici lineage. In this portrait, a ghost-like Maria, distanced and truncated, is set back behind the more dominating, lively, and centrally placed figure of her husband. Of course, none of these sitters was alive when the portraits were painted in 1585; this is very significant. Maria Salviati outlived her husband by seventeen years. And yet, in both of these portraits, it is the woman’s status as her husband’s widow that is posthumously commemorated—this in contrast to her husband, who is portrayed as though alive during her mourning of him.

Abb. 8 Giovanni Battista Naldini, Portrait of Giovanni delle Bande Nere with His Wife, Maria Salviati [oil/panel; c. 1585; Florence: Uffizi].

30 See Langedijk, The Portraits (s. note 24), 1028 and 1262.
31 Giovanni had been dead for fifty-nine years, Maria for forty-two years, and Cosimo for eleven years. Maria’s grandsons, Francesco and Ferdinando, were approximately forty-one and thirty-six years old, respectively.
32 Curiously, both figures spent the last years of their lives in mourning. Giovanni, a famous condottiere, received his nickname, delle Bande Nere, because of the black armor worn by his army in honor of the Medici pope, Leo X, who died in 1519. Giovanni mourned him for the next seven years, until his own death in 1526.
However, I would argue that ultimately this double-portrait of Maria Salviati and Giovanni delle Bande Nere could be characterized as subversive. For example, her downward glance is perhaps read initially as one of submission and passivity, but it can also be interpreted as threatening to the phallic masquerade of masculinity. If it 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“ 33 is made vulnerable by Maria's glance. That is to say, her gaze, directed toward his prominent, exaggerated codpiece, is, like the castrating gaze of Medusa, ultimately fatal.

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 seems 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.

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' [...] 34 Thus, from a letter dated 1541, we know that Maria Salviati, fifteen years into her widowhood, was still dressing in black mourning clothing, granting her prolonged access into her husband's world. 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. 35 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, Giovanni delle Bande Nere? I want to examine still further the politics of black clothing at court and the ways in which, if men, too, wore black, identity could be problematized.

33 This passage is borrowed from the title of SIMONS, Alert and Erect (s. note 28).
34 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.
35 SHEILA FFOLLIOHT, Catherine de' Medici as Artemisia: Figuring the Powerful Widow, in: Margaret W. Ferguson/Maureen Quilligan/Nancy J. Vickers, eds., Rewriting the Renaissance; The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe, Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, 227-241, has written on the strategic fashion choices made by Catherine de' Medici following Henry II's death in 1559 and the subsequent authority granted to her.
According to Baldesare Castiglione, as dictated in *The Book of the Courtier*, the most agreeable color is black, and if not black, then at least something fairly dark. Among princes and courtiers, the color signified grace, seriousness, respect and distinction – not necessarily mourning; indeed, men wore black for most of their adult lives, regardless of their emotional state. Black dress – for men – was a social uniform. On the other hand, black dress for women, as prescribed by male writers, marked them as mourners. Despite these social significations of black dress, gender distinctions were often blurred; the widow, then, necessarily, had to be re-configured.

Already in 1450, the Florentine bookseller, Vespasiano da Bisticci, praised Alessandra Bardi, an ideal widow, whose black costume was quite plain, her dress high up to her neck, as becomes a widow, with a veil over her eyes. According to this etiquette, black dress preferably „effaced and desexualized“ the widow. Vespasiano’s admonition would prove necessary; in 1459, 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. To be sure, a series of sumptuary laws, which regulated expense and conspicuous consumption, had already been passed; but, by 1384 in Florence, exemptions from such restrictions could be bought. Thus, though designed to enforce cultural prescriptions, such as the one cited above by Vespasiano, and, thus, to counter ambiguity, sumptuary legislation could be cleverly and successfully circumvented.

In contrast to Vespasiano’s reading of these particular fashion statements – blatant violations of sumptuary legislation – as immoral, Strocchia interprets them as „part of a larger set of social strategies.“ By purposefully manipulating mourning dress and, thus, rejecting, to a certain degree, an imposed moral prescription, early modern women gained a sense of personal expression and social recognition. Seen even another way, then, what else could the widow gain through such clever maneuv-

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38 This phrase is borrowed from STROCCHIA, *Death and Ritual* (s. note 12), 174.

39 As cited by STROCCHIA, *Death and Ritual* (s. note 12), 174-175.


41 STROCCHIA, *Death Rites* (s. note 12), 176.
vering? Black is, of course, the colorless color; it 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 "the privileges claimed by grief."42

One could propose that women, in turn, re-appropriated the black costume, and claimed for themselves the authoritative and empowering gestures previously reserved for men in black.\textsuperscript{43}

In light of this, Maria Salviati’s mourning costume, though understated, should not be underestimated. Indeed, in a portrait attributed to the workshop of Pontormo, her compromised costume with its revealing bodice, counter to the type of mourning dress favored by Vespasiano, points toward the potential failure of patriarchal fixity within portraiture (Fig. 9).\textsuperscript{44} Finally, then, 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. Indeed, if Lanci’s stage set suggests 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 potential transgressions of the Florentine widow. Taking a last look back at Alberti, then, in response to his insightful motto, \textit{Quid Tum} („what next“),\textsuperscript{45} this revision of Renaissance portraiture calls for a continuation of this task of undressing widows and ripping the seams of the early modern discourse on mourning and masculine memory.

\footnotesize{aside, by the mid-nineteenth century; CHARLES BAUDELAIRE, The Salon of 1846, in: Selected Writings on Art and Literature, trans. P.E. Charvet, London: Penguin, 1972, 105, would equate men’s black dress, specifically the black frock-coat, with death: „Is it not the inevitable uniform of our suffering age, carrying on its very shoulders, black and narrow, the mark of perpetual mourning? … All of us are attending some funeral or other.“ How, then, is black, the color of death and of perpetual mourning, further manipulated in men’s dress? What, exactly, are „the privileges claimed by grief?“ In other words, could men wear black prematurely to ensure their own remembrance? Were they already mourning their own inevitable death?

\textsuperscript{43} 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, 373-4, 376, 377, 382-83.

\textsuperscript{44} See LANGEDIJK, The Portraits (s. note 24), 1262-64, who lists the identification of both artist and sitter as uncertain, though probable.

\textsuperscript{45} Here, Alberti sketched his emblem on a manuscript version of Della Famiglia, dated around 1438. It is especially curious that Alberti, never married and, thus, always without a primary mourner, wrote this treatise on family relations, see, esp. T. KUEHN, Reading between the Patriline: Leon Battista Alberti’s Della Famiglia in the Light of his Illegitimacy, in: I Tatti Studies 1 (1985), 161-87.