8-2019

“Against the good Widdow no harme we doe know:” Examining Aristocratic and Gentry Widows’ Roles and Influence in England from 1500-1650

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“AGAINST THE GOOD WIDOW NO HARM WE DOE KNOW:” EXAMINING ARISTOCRATIC AND GENTRY WIDOWS’ ROLES AND INFLUENCE IN ENGLAND FROM 1500-1650

by

Alyson D. Alvarez

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History
(Women and Gender Studies)

Under the Supervision of Professor Carole Levin

Lincoln, Nebraska
August 2019
“AGAINST THE GOOD WIDDOW NO HARMEO WE DOE KNOW.” EXAMINING ARISTOCRATIC AND GENTRY WIDOWS’ ROLES AND INFLUENCE IN ENGLAND FROM 1500-1650

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University of Nebraska, 2019

Advisor: Carole Levin

This dissertation explores how English aristocratic and gentry women utilized their widowhoods to actively craft their personal image as well as influence and alter their communities. Free from the common law principles of coverture, English widows gained new legal autonomy. Additionally, many affluent women received substantial inheritances at the deaths of their husbands thus providing them with the financial freedom.

While widowhood offered English women new independence, it was also accompanied by a multitude of expectations. Sixteenth and seventeenth century authors and scholars developed and perpetuated specific conduct deemed appropriate for widows. The behaviors created for widowed women contributed to their negative depiction in popular culture. Knowing the expectations and the popular representations of widows helps to better understand the opportunities and challenges these women encountered.

Although widows remained burdened by numerous societal expectations and traditions these women challenged generalizations and demonstrated personal agency and capability. Women utilized their widowhoods to fashion their own identities and legacies by the commission of art and charitable endowments. In creating their own legacies through the patronage, philanthropy, and bequests widows actively contributed to their communities.
Acknowledgments

I sincerely hope in the future that I can help to guide and inspire in students in the same manner that I received during my time as a graduate student. From professors’ academic advice to the gentle words of encouragement from family and friends, this dissertation is a result of immeasurable support from many individuals.

I am indebted to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and History Department for continually providing the opportunities for me to research and write. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln’s Othmer Fellowship allowed me to focus on my graduate courses as I began thinking about and preparing for this project. Additionally, The Marguerite C. and Clare McPhee Memorial Fellowship, awarded by UNL History Department, was instrumental in allowing me the time to complete this dissertation. The financial support and personal experience that I gained from my involvement with the Medieval and Renaissance Studies Program also played a significant role in my ability to work on this project.

Completing this dissertation without my advisor, Carole Levin, would have been impossible. Dr. Levin’s constant optimism and encouragement has been immensely influential in my graduate career, as she worked endlessly to help me improve my scholarship. From the first day that I met Dr. Levin she has been more than just an attentive and generous mentor, she has also been a wonderful friend.

I am very thankful to my committee Amy Burnett, James Coltrain, Jessica Coope, and Julia Schleck. They have not only guided me on this project, but have also graciously provided me the with their time and mentorship throughout my time as a graduate student. The knowledge and feedback that I have received during my time in their courses has been invaluable to my education.

I wish that could adequately thank my friends and family for their never-ending encouragement. I owe many thanks to so many friends for taking time to discuss my ideas and work with me. I want to thank Catherine Medici-Thiemann and Courtney Herber for carefully reading my drafts. My parents, Angelo and Cindy Alvarez, not only provided unending support as I pursued my education, but modeled dedication and hard work. My sisters’ continual reassurance helped me as I sought to balance all aspects of
my life. I am beyond grateful to my brother, whose memory inspired me to persevere during the long days.

I could not dream of chasing my dreams without my husband, Daniel, and daughter, Josephine. I remain eternally grateful for Daniel’s steadfast faith in me. As I reflect on the time I took to complete this dissertation, I could not feel more blessed to have had the opportunity to work every day with my Josephine Ida by my side.
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Introduction

In her 1619 will, Margaret Hawkins, widow of Sir John Hawkins, stated that £800 was to be given towards the maintenance of a free school in Keinton. Hawkins’ will also specified monetary gifts were to be awarded the poor of the parishes of Keinton, Amelly, Hereford, Debtford, Woodford, Chigwell, Essex, and S. Dunstan. Only after Hawkins stipulated how her money should be distributed for charitable causes, did she award any of her estate to specific members of her family. Margaret Hawkins’ donations are not unique from the endowments of other wealthy widows in England, as many of these women made efforts to continue supporting specific charities and individuals through their bequests. Hawkins’ will reveals that English widows were able to contribute to their communities through financial support. By closely examining the lives of widows like Margaret Hawkins we can better understand how early modern widows influenced their communities. English aristocratic and gentry widows, although burdened by numerous societal expectations and traditions, actively engaged and participated with their communities. Affluent women challenged negative generalizations concerning widows by demonstrating personal agency and capability during their widowhoods. English women utilized the legal and economic autonomy most women gained when they became widows to alter their personal, communal, intellectual, and religious surroundings through patronage and charity. This analysis explores how English widows defied expectations and stereotypes and actively fashioned their image and actively contributed to their communities.

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Under the common law principles of coverture, when women married, they lost a
number of their legal rights, as man and wife were viewed as one person, and that person
was the husband. The concept and customs of coverture were legally solidified in
statutes passed in the reign of King Henry VIII. As widows, women gained back their
full legal status, which awarded them more legal autonomy. Under English common law,
widows were allowed to create and sign legal documents, including wills, without the
consent of their husband or father. While all widows’ legal rights became more inclusive,
the opportunity to exercise these privileges often depended on the widow’s social status,
as aristocratic and gentry widows cultivated their influence and exerted autonomy
through patronage, charity, and bequests.

My investigation examines the ways in which widowhood provided these women
the opportunities to actively create their own image and contribute to their families and
communities at large. This study first explores the multitude of expectations sixteenth
and seventeenth century authors and scholars created and perpetuated for women in their
widowhoods. My analysis continues in Chapter Two by exploring different notions and
beliefs concerning affluent widows by examining their representation in popular
literature. Knowing the behaviors deemed appropriate for widows as well understanding
the popular representation of wealthy widows reveals both the opportunities and
challenges these women encountered. Lastly, this analysis explores how women in early
modern England utilized their widowhoods to fashion their own identities and legacies

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2 Sara Heller Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, Women in Early Modern England, 1550-1720 (Oxford &
Administration of the Law According to the Order of Subjects. Vol. 1. (London: J. Bitterworth and Son,
1817), 44.
through patronage, philanthropy, and bequests. Stephen Greenblatt suggests that early modern identity was reliant on a combination of cultural institutions and their own personal presentation.\(^4\) By examining how widows created their own identities, I am able to elaborate on ways English widows contributed to their communities by actively choosing to support particular individuals and institutions. This project’s relevance stems from its ability to demonstrate the different ways that early modern widows challenged expectations and notions associated with widowhood to create their own image and help shape their communities. I suggest that by fashioning their own identities through bequests and philanthropic ventures, gentry widows played important roles within their local communities.

The vast majority of the widows addressed in this analysis stem from the English aristocracy and gentry. This investigation analyzes the widowhoods of numerous aristocratic and gentry widows in several different contexts as it explores multiple aspects and factors that contribute to these women’s lives. In addition to the abundance of records associated with widows of prominent social status, the personal or familial affluence of most aristocratic and gentry families presented these widows with both unique opportunities and obstacles. While all English widows encountered numerous societal expectations and customs concerning their behaviors upon the death of their husbands, widows of high social standing were often scrutinized as their actions needed to reflect the rank of their husbands. Wealthy widows were also burdened with negative

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\(^4\) For this argument, I am working within concept of “self-fashioning” articulated by on Stephen Greenblatt. Greenblatt argues that the sixteenth century marked a cultural shift in which people became more self-aware of about their own personal identity as well as their ability to construct this identity. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
depictions and stereotypes as they were continually mocked and pitied in popular literature. Although aristocracy and gentry widows faced social pressures, they also possessed the financial independence, as most received a comfortable inheritance. The financial autonomy widows gained allowed these women pursue personal goals through patronage and charity.

This evaluation focuses on widows mostly from Essex County and London. Concentrating on these regions provides a solid overview of the different opportunities and treatment that widows encountered in rural and urban areas. The epilogue examines how the expectations and treatment of widows extended to the British American colonies. Evaluating the north American British colonies demonstrates how English cultural beliefs about widows remained deeply ingrained in these new communities.

This study utilizes a variety of early modern sources including conduct books, religious texts, ballads and broadsides, plays, letters, court records, and wills. I use educational treatises and conduct books that directly address how women should behave during their widowhoods in order to identify and analyze common perceptions concerning the proper behavior for widows. Along with analyzing the conduct suggested for widowed women, I also consider how authors writing for more popular audiences represented widows through the analysis of ballad and broadsides. Through the analysis of letters and court records, I explore some of the obstacles and challenges some women faced when they became widows.

Additionally, I spend ample time surveying wills of both men and women. While I utilize wills from different locations in England, the majority of wills I engage with are from Essex. The wills of Essex represent several English counties during the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries, as they demonstrate the rise of the landed gentry.\footnote{During this period, the gentry became very influential over their local governments and economies as they gained more and more control of both land and political positions.}

Furthermore, Essex wills reveal the gentry’s great concern over their families’ position and prestige by illuminating how men and women distributed their assets. The Essex wills are also accessible, as the Essex Record Office has digitized the many of their holdings, including their wills. Additionally, F.G Emmison’s four volume compilation, *Elizabeth Life*, provides Essex a substantial quantity of records. The evaluation of numerous widows’ wills not only discloses their personal property, but their bequests reveal who and what they valued. By exploring widows’ wills we can better understand how these women interpreted both their surroundings and their place within the community.

**Historiography**

Despite the significant role that many widows had within early modern society, the research on how they contributed to their communities remains limited. While some scholars have examined the opportunities specifically afforded to widows, the majority of studies do not fully address how these women utilized this autonomy. Most of the works that examine English widows focus on the Middle Ages. In the late 1980s and 1990s scholars were eager to examine how the European Plague of 1340s effected women’s position within society. Historians were interested in how the consequences of Plague, including a dramatic decline in population and breakdown of community institutions and structures, altered medieval women’s economic and social opportunities. These new studies focusing on medieval women gave rise to the debate over the extent of women’s
agency and autonomy in the aftermath of Plague. One of the ways that scholars evaluated medieval women’s position in society was by looking at widows.⁶

The late 1980s and 1990s brought new research on medieval widows as scholars took a new interest in how women, including widows, contributed to their communities. Peter Franklin’s “Peasant Widows’ ‘Liberation’ and Remarriage before the Black Death” explores the economic and cultural independence of medieval peasant widows in Thornbury, Gloucestershire.⁷ Franklin’s 1986 article not only suggests that through land transfers and remarriages widows were able to maintain independence in the late middle ages, but also acknowledges how previous historians have often looked past the important role that widows play in their community, specifically in the transfer of property. Scholars adhered to Franklin’s call, as an abundance of work focused on medieval women emerged in the 1990s.

In the 1990s medieval widows received ample attention, as historians and literary scholars showed a great interest how the roles these women performed functioned within their different villages and towns. Louise Merrier’s edited collection, Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe, examines both historical realities for widows as well as literary representations of these women.⁸ Sue Sheridan Walker’s collection of essays, Wife and Widow in Medieval England, provides a comprehensive analysis of how medieval English women engaged with local

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⁶ Although numerous studies refer to the medieval period or the middle ages in their analysis each study typically identifies a more specific time period that they investigate.
⁸ Although Mirrier’s text provides a solid overview of medieval widows, the breadth of the collection does not allow for reader to grasp a full understanding of the nuances of widows’ lives in different countries. Louise Mirrer, Upon My Husband’s Death: Widows in the Literature and Histories of Medieval Europe (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
and state laws and customs. Walker’s collection demonstrates how widows utilized legislation to protect and secure their inheritances.\textsuperscript{9} Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton also provided edited collection dedicated to widows, \textit{Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500} utilizes case studies to draw conclusions about widows from different social standings.\textsuperscript{10} Mavis E Mate’s \textit{Daughters, Wives, and Widows After the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350-1535} continues the work of the previous scholars by exploring how social standing, economic situation, and location shape women’s lives. Mate suggests that despite a woman’s economic position she was still limited by the expectations and regulations placed upon medieval women. Mate’s chapter on widows follows previous scholarship as it focuses mainly on the widows’ legal and economic opportunities.\textsuperscript{11}

Lori Gates looks at medieval women’s legal opportunities after the death of their husbands in her article 2007, “Widows, Property, and Remarriage: Lessons From Glastonbury’s Deverill Manors”. In addition, this article compares a widow’s rights after she is remarried.\textsuperscript{12} Barbara Hanawalt’s \textit{The Wealth of Wives: Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London} possesses two chapters that are helpful in an analysis of medieval widows: “Inheritance, Dowry, and Dower” and “Recovery of Dower and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Barron and Sutton’s introduction argues that while many widows were visible, in terms of their ability to create, sign, and appear on legal records, historians have avoided studies focusing entirely on English widows. Barron and Sutton specifically seek to remedy lack of analysis on working and poor widows with their inclusion of Derek Keene’s “Tanner’s Widow 1300-1350”, Robert A. Woods’ “Poor Widows” among other case studies that focus on widows of lower stations. Caroline M. Barron and Anne F. Sutton, eds., \textit{Medieval London Widows, 1300-1500} (London: Hambledon Press, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{11} Mavis E. Mate, \textit{Daughters, Wives, and Widows After the Black Death: Women in Sussex, 1350-1535}. (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998).
\end{itemize}
These chapters demonstrate the important role that inheritance played in the lives of medieval widows.

The ample scholarship concerning medieval widows collectively provides detailed images of challenges and opportunities for these women. The scholarship concerning medieval widows reveals that while possessing some autonomy most of these women remained subject to their economic and social position. Although there are numerous differences between the lives of widows medieval and early modern widows, the abundance of scholarship focused on medieval widows, specifically English widows, provides a solid framework for scholars assessing the legal and social traditions associated with early modern widows.

While there is clearly an abundance of scholarship on medieval widows, including English widows, finding studies specifically on early modern English widows remains difficult. The majority scholarship mentioning English widows is relegated to either an article or chapter. Early works that address early modern English widows argue that most of these women were subject to their economic position. These early studies suggest that while some wealthy widows obtained limited economic autonomy, most widows struggled financially.

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14 Some later studies on medieval widows began looking beyond the economic and legal capabilities possessed by these women. Katherine Clark’s “Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages,” explores how the evolving concept purgatory altered the perceptions about widows and their responsibilities to their deceased family members. Clark argues that widows were often perceived as either pious, and at times prophetic, or sinful, due to actions of late husbands. Clark further explores how the of dichotomy concerning the images of widows persisted in later literary pieces. Clark’s analysis demonstrates a new aspect in the study of medieval widows, as her work looks at other avenues that medieval widows could pursue. Katherine Clark, “Purgatory, Punishment, and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Later Middle Ages,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 16, No. 2 (May, 2007) 169-20, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30114232.
15 Two of the first works that discuss early modern English widows are Peter Laslett’s *The World We Have Lost* and Margaret Spufford’s *Contrasting Communities: English Villages in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth*
One important article that helped shape historiography of early modern widows is Charles Carlton’s “The Widow’s Myth and Female Reality in 16th and 17th Century England.” This fundamental essay explores how widows are depicted as overly sexual and aggressive in sixteenth and seventeenth century English literature in contrast with the reality of widows who actually remarried. Carlton insinuates that because widows obtained personal autonomy and disrupted the social order, society constructed and accepted negative stereotypes of these women. Carlton’s work remains significant as it highlights the importance of the portrayal of widows in early modern England as well as attempts to reconcile literary portrayals of them with the actual historical reality of their behaviors. Carlton’s early essay greatly contributes to the study of early modern widows as the majority of studies examining widows incorporate and respond to his work.

Following Carlton’s essay several scholars engage in a debate concerning sixteenth and seventeenth century widows’ remarriage patterns. Researchers concerned themselves with which widows were remarrying and why there was a decline in widow remarriages at the end of seventeenth century. Barbara J. Todd’s 1985 essay, “The Remarrying Widow: A Stereotype Reconsidered” explores remarriage demographics to better understand the early modern literary stereotypes about widows. Todd’s study of

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*Centuries.* Laslett’s significant text suggests that only widows of wealthy and business owning men were able to exercise some social and fiscal freedom, while most widowed women were subject to their economic circumstances. Spufford’s work argues that most widows did not receive sustaining inheritances and became reliant on their children. These two works, while not focusing exclusively on widows, do highlight important aspects of early modern widowhood by demonstrating the challenges many of these women faced. These early studies remain relevant as historians continue to respond and challenge the notions established these scholars. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Scribner, 1965); Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).


Abingdon widows builds on Carlton’s foundational article by carefully collecting and analyzing more statistics concerning widows’ remarriage patterns. Vivien Brodsky’s "Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations" explores remarriage in London. Brodsky’s research proposes that poor London widows were unappealing as marriage candidates.18 Jeremy Boulton’s 1990 article, “London Widowhood Revisited: The Decline of Female Remarriage in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” directly responds to Brodsky’s study with a demographic evaluation of Stepney widows. Boulton’s investigation shows that poor widows were more likely than wealthy widows to remarry. Boulton argues that economic necessity forced poor widows to remarry.19 Todd again contributes to the debate with her article, "Demographic Determinism and Female Agency: The Remarrying Widow reconsidered…again," where she asserts that widows did not simply marry out of necessity, but rather other factors, which included opportunity and preference, played roles in their choice to remarry.20 Todd’s study presents the notion that because most widows received an inheritance, they had the privilege of enhancing their life, whether economic or personal, through marriage.21 Todd’s study demonstrates how a widow’s inheritances greatly contributed to her personal agency as it afforded her ability to choose her second husband on her terms.

21 Furthermore, Todd implies that just recognizing demographic shifts and remarriage patterns do not provide enough information to draw conclusions about the attitudes towards widows.
In addition to the studies concerning widows’ remarriage patterns scholars began looking more closely at women’s economic prospects during their widowhoods. Amy Louise Erikson’s “Common Law versus Common Practice: The Use of Marriage Settlements in Early Modern England” closely considers how English law and local customs provided for widows. Erikson examines the different ways that English women attempted to retain and protect personal property through marriage settlements. Erikson demonstrates how women in early modern England actively worked to exercise their autonomy and protect their assets. Esther S. Cope’s chapter “‘the Widdowes Silvar’: Widowhood in Early Modern England” explores the diversity of widowhood in England. Cope’s brief chapter suggests that economic status, age, and social standing were the major factors affecting widowhood. Cope’s article serves to encourage future scholars to evaluate widows by examining multiple aspects of their lives. Erikson and Cope demonstrate English widows’ autonomy was highly variable depending on different factors, especially their financial provisions.


23 Erikson argues that many women, not just gentry, employed marriage settlements solely to preserve their property and protect family wealth.


While some scholars remained preoccupied with the remarriage and economic opportunities of early modern widowhood, others began looking at more closely as the social factors affecting the lives of these women. Joan Larsen Klein’s collection, *Daughters, Wives, and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England*, contains different seminal writings about women and marriage from the sixteenth and seventeenth century.° Klein argues that these writings, which include collections of legal statutes, religious treatises, and conduct books, played major roles in developing and maintaining expectations concerning women’s roles, including widows.° David Cressy’s 1997 foundational text, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England*, surveys how English men and women dealt with, celebrated, and honored, major events in their lives.° Cressy’s chapter, titled “Funerals and Burials” explores English expectations and customs surrounding funerals of men and women of all social status. This chapter provides some brief information concerning the responsibilities of the family members left behind, including widows. Klein and Cressy’s texts reveal some of the cultural factors that influenced the lives of widows by exploring the social behaviors expected for widows.

Tim Stretton’s monograph, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England*, contributes to the study of early modern women widows by bringing together economic and social history to give his readers a more thorough understanding of the women’s lives and their agency. Stretton explores how widows utilized English courts to protect their

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° Klein suggests that value of the texts selected stem from their popularity, as many people would have been familiar with the ideas present in these writings.


° This substantial text investigates how the English Reformation altered significant moments in the lifecycle of people in Tudor-Stuart England.
interests. Stretton’s work adds previous scholarship by highlighting the ways in which women were able to succeed in the English court system as well as demonstrate their personal autonomy and agency.

Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner’s *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* is one of the first collections that possesses several essays focused specifically on early modern widows. Elizabeth Foyster’s “Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: The Male Perspective,” builds on earlier analyses as her chapter examines remarriage patterns for widows. Foyster argues that widows who remarried utilized their experience to help negotiate their relationship with their second husband. Furthermore, Foyster suggests that the popularity of literature that portrays widows negatively not only served to warn men against marrying widows, but also allowed them more easily to blame marital strife on the remarried widow. Tim Stretton’s “Widows and Law in Tudor Stuart England” argues that while widows possessed more legal opportunities than married women, they faced numerous obstacles that men rarely encountered. Stretton’s essay stresses that widows were able to emphasize their vulnerability, due to either age or economic circumstance to win sympathy within the courtroom. “The virtuous widow in Protestant England” by Barbara Todd, looks specifically at how the English Reformation altered ideas about widowhood. Todd asserts

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31 While this collection contains essays on medieval and continental widows, there are several essays that look specifically at early modern English widows. Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner eds., *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Singapore: Longman; Harlow, U.K.; New York : Pearson Education Ltd., 1999).
that after the development of Anglicanism, English authors preached that only through God’s grace and continued piety could a woman become a respected widow.  

Each of these essays provides thorough synthesis of the subject that serves as strong starting point for anyone interested English widows.

Amy M. Froide’s essay “Marital Status as a Category of Difference: Singlewomen and Widows in Early Modern England” in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* examines the distinctions between single women and widows.  

Froide’s essay suggests that status of “widow” offered opportunities and securities not awarded to women who never married.  

Barbara J Harris’s *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* contains an extensive chapter specifically on aristocratic widows.  

In highlighting the interconnectedness between women’s legal capabilities and their social restrictions, Harris reveals the importance of understanding how these women functioned within their communities.

Lynn Botelho’s article, "'The old woman's wish': Widows by the Family Fire? Widows' Old Age Provisions in Rural England, 1500–1700," looks more closely at the diversity of widowhood in rural England. Botelho’s work suggests widows’ inheritances and economic provisions were dependent on her age and social status. Botelho’s study

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challenges early studies that suggest that most widows struggled to take care of themselves and relied on family and communities by demonstrating the diverse economic situations of rural widows.\(^ {38}\)

One interdisciplinary work that concentrates on widows is Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler’s, *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England: Her Life and Representation*. This collection pulls together essays focused on how the opportunities and challenges facing single women were depicted.\(^ {39}\) Allison Levy’s chapter, titled “Good Grief: Widow Portraiture and Masculine Anxiety in Early Modern England” explores the different ways in which widow portraiture reflects the memory of both the mourner and the mourned. Levy argues that portraits of widows not only demonstrate the ambiguous nature of early modern widowhood, but also reflects male anxiety of widows’ positions and their own legacy.\(^ {40}\) This same year, Levy also published her own compilation on widows, *Widowhood and Visual Culture in Early Modern Europe*. Levy’s collection of essays and images analyzes how widows are depicted as well as how they presented themselves. Levy’s collected work is divided into four distinct sections; the first part explores models and representations of the ideal widow, the second section looks at women that utilized their image as a widow to gain agency, the third section concentrates on the ways that widow utilized patronage to create memory, and the last chapters focus on the complexity and multiplicity of the

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presentation and memory of widows.41 J.S.W. Helt’s chapter, “Memento Mori: Death, Widowhood and Remembering in Early Modern England” carefully examines how English widows were responsible for creating and preserving their husband’s memory. Helt’s analysis explores how widows were held accountable for numerous traditions that produced a “good death” for the deceased.42 Helt’s work provides a thorough understanding of the English rituals that occurred directly after death and how women functioned to facilitate these practices. Additionally, she briefly explores how widows were subject to social expectations concerning their expression of grief while executing duties for the dead.

My research builds on previous scholarship by acknowledging the independence that aristocratic and gentry widows obtained from their inheritance. I continue this scholarship by exploring the challenges widows faced and how they asserted their autonomy through patronage, philanthropy, and bequests. My work differs from previous studies, which focus mostly on widows’ legal and financial independence, by concentrating on how widows utilized their autonomy to fashion their own identities.

Considering the works previously discussed, the study of early modern widows remains a topic that requires more scholarly investigation. By thinking solely about widows, my project explores the multiple facets of widowhood in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This analysis will thoroughly explore how women utilized their position as widows to create their own identities and contribute to their communities. Furthermore, the specificity of the topic provides the opportunities to address both the

positive legal and economic opportunities that these women encountered as well as the challenges they faced. The concentration on widowhood also allows me to investigate the continuities between aristocratic and gentry widows in England and briefly in the British colonial settlements in North America.

Chapter 1: Expectations for Widows

The legal and economic autonomy that women gained upon the death of their husbands altered their positions within their community as they were awarded a unique independence. Although most women remained subject to the financial and social positions they were left in at the death of their husbands, these women gained new opportunity to engage with society. The financial and legislative liberation of widows challenged the structure of England’s patriarchal communities. Early modern English communities perpetuated rigorous rules and etiquette that widows were expected to follow. Sixteenth and seventeenth century authors built on traditional customs and one another’s ideas as they detailed how women must behave in their widowhoods. This chapter evaluates how authors established and perpetuated expectations for women in their widowhoods. I suggest that widows were encouraged to maintain their honor by devoting themselves to a spiritual life. I argue that expectations dictated and reiterated for widows attempted to limited their personal independence.

Immediately after the death of her husband, a woman was subject to numerous expectations concerning her role as a mourner and the planning of memorial services. As previously mentioned, Helt describes a widow’s role as the “rememberer” of her husband’s passing and explains the responsibility she bore in producing the narrative of a “good death” as she was accountable for executing the traditional rituals performed after
death. Helt argues that the concept of Memento Mori, a medieval tradition of performing rituals after someone’s death, which include, cleansing the body, winding the deceased, and watching the body remained present in England even after the English Reformation. Although affluent widows would have paid maidservants to cleanse and dress the body of their husbands, these rituals would have occurred under the widows’ supervision.\textsuperscript{43}

Wealthy widows were expected to have draped black cloth all around the house, or at least the room in the family home where their husband’s body resided until the funeral.\textsuperscript{44} Guests attending funerals expected widows to grieve in a moderate and controlled manner.\textsuperscript{45} Guests judged widows negatively if they were too stoic or if they demonstrated excess grief, which would have been interpreted as insincere. Additionally, widows were expected wear proper mourning attire. Like all women in early modern England, widows’ clothing were subject to sumptuary laws. Most affluent widows donned mourning veils that symbolized “her empathetic death with her husband” and her submission to God’s will.\textsuperscript{46} Similar to the guests at their husband’s funeral, a widow wore all black immediately after the loss of her partner.\textsuperscript{47} While the traditionally mourning period in England lasted one year, how long a widow donned her mourning attire was highly variable.\textsuperscript{48} The mourning attire required of widows represented her new chastity and her humble acceptance of her loss.

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\textsuperscript{43} Helt, “Memento Mori: Death, Widowhood and Remembering,” 48.
\textsuperscript{45} As the chapter continues, I explore grieving practices deemed acceptable for sixteenth and seventeenth century widows.
\textsuperscript{47} Cressy, \textit{Birth, Marriage, and Death}, 441.
\textsuperscript{48} Cressy notes that the large-scale mourning practices were reserved for the wealthy as these rituals the required both money and time.
\end{flushright}
One of the most important roles that widows were forced to embrace was the role of hostess as friends and family came to honor the deceased. While the widow waited for the funeral, it was her responsibility to provide food and alcohol for all the friends and family who came to the home. Most funeral services occurred within two days of death; the celebrations for high ranking men and women often required more planning time, as their social status necessitated a more elaborate ceremony. Although instructions for funerals were theoretically laid out in a person’s will, most men only specified where they wanted to be buried.\textsuperscript{49} The lack of detailed instructions gave widows independence as they organized memorial celebrations. Memorial celebrations for aristocrats and gentry were expected to be extravagant in terms of the amount of food and drink provided. Like most early modern celebrations, the degree of lavishness depended on the social position and ranking of the deceased person.\textsuperscript{50} David Cressy argues that English Reformation had little impact on the extravagance of memorial services for England’s elite.\textsuperscript{51} From the moment that a woman became a widow she inherited expectations about how she should honor her husband’s memory and conduct herself. The specific traditions that widows were obliged to follow concerning the burial and celebrations of their husbands’ lives were relatively straightforward compared to the array of unrealistic and contradictory expectations for widows’ daily lives dictated by early modern writers.

\textsuperscript{49} Although relatively uncommon, some men’s wills did dictate a monetary sum specifically for the food and drink to be provided at their funeral services.

\textsuperscript{50} Customs for English royal families differed from the aristocracy and the gentry as etiquette dictated they were not to view the deceased. Typically, a trusted family member of the extended family would supervise the dressing of the body as well as plan the funeral. After the death of Prince Arthur, Catherine of Aragon was spared from the traditional duties assigned for the majority of widows as Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey, accompanied Arthur’s body in the funeral procession and made all the arrangements for his funeral.

\textsuperscript{51} Cressy, \textit{Birth, Marriage, and Death}, 449.
Although the sixteenth and seventeenth century writers used Scripture as foundation for many of their ideas concerning widows, their writings were also affected by the translations they used, later Scriptural interpretations, as well as personal perspective. Since early modern writers remained deeply influenced by religion most of the books and treatises that attempted to dictate how women should behave utilized Scripture and biblical references in their writings.

The majority of the references to widows in the Bible call for protection for these women. Both the Old and New Testaments, which were written for different audiences, typically mention widows in the context of needing both provisions and protection. While most references to widows in the Bible simply demand that care and charity to be extended to widows, some suggest that a widow’s family is responsible for her care.

A number of verses that demand widows’ protection also call for the security of the fatherless. Referencing widows and orphan children together presents the idea that widowed women are as vulnerable as children without parents. The idea that women are in desperate need of the support and guidance of a husband is one of the notions that was later echoed by early modern authors. The Bible’s commands for the protection for widows assumes that these women are in dire need of support, but sixteenth and seventeenth aristocratic and gentry widows often found themselves financially and materialistically well provided for. The wealthy independent widow does not fit the mold of helpless widow referred to in Scripture, thus early modern society did not have a clear model of how to recognize and treat these women.

52 Both the Gospel of Luke and Gospel of Mark promote the notion that widows are to remain protected and unharmed Luke 20: 47, Mark 12:40 (The King James Version).
53 1 Tim. 5: 16 (KJV).
While the Bible remains mostly concerned with highlighting the vulnerability of widows and emphasizing the importance of protecting these women, it also implies that widows are expected to dedicate themselves to their families and their worship.\(^5\) These ideas concerning widows’ commitment to their family and devotion to God are continually reiterated by both religious and secular authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as widows are continually encouraged to look to God for spiritual comfort in their time of sorrow.

As previously mentioned, Scripture only served as starting point for many early modern authors, as they were also influenced by interpretations and local culture. Although the English Reformation and the establishment of the Anglican Church brought substantial religious changes to England, many of the ideas about Catholic widows remained.\(^6\) As I discuss later in this chapter, many religious and secular tracks composed in Anglican England echoed the early sixteenth century expectations and traditions for widows.\(^7\)

Using Scripture to add authority to their new texts was an imperative tactic for early modern authors who understood the important role that religion played in the lives of women. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prayer books and etiquette books used Christian texts and notions to dictate proper behavior for women. Numerous early

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\(^5\) 1 Tim. 5: 3; 1 Tim. 5: 10 (KJV).

\(^6\) Practical traditions for aristocratic and gentry widows, including funeral customs, were relatively unaffected by the English Reformation. Helt, J.S.W. “Memento Mori: Death, Widowhood and Remembering in Early Modern England.”

\(^7\) While Barbara Todd’s Protestant widow “The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England” suggests the William Page’s *The Widdowe Indeed*, an unpublished manuscript, demonstrates a divergence from traditional Catholic ideas concerning the behavior of proper widow the majority of texts I examine continue Catholic views about widowhood. Looking specifically at the changes and continuities between the Catholic and Anglican views, especially concerning remarriage, requires additional analysis of supplementary religious texts. Todd, “The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England,” *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 66-83.
modern texts expressed suitable behavior for women in different stages of their lives, including specific expectations for widows.

Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives’ *Instruction of A Christian Woman* was one of the most influential sources in defining the expectations for widows. Vives’ 1524 work, originally published in Latin, was translated into French, Italian, German, and Spanish in the first half of the sixteenth century.\(^{58}\) Due in large part to Richard Hyrd’s translation to English in 1529, Vives’ ideas concerning widows became well known in England. Vives’ views were instrumental in outlining appropriate behavior for widows in England as English writers utilized many of his ideas well into the seventeenth century.\(^{59}\)

Vives’ text, which was dedicated to Catherine of Aragon, then queen of England, is divided into three books. The first book looks at the appropriate ways to raise and educate a daughter. The second book details how to be a proper wife and mother. The last book explores how women should behave in their widowhoods.

Vives begins his third book by considering the appropriate way for widows to mourn. Although Vives is critical of women who do not outwardly express their sorrow, he also encourages women to not indulge in their grief, “Nowe a wydowe, let her bewayle her husbande with harty affection, and nat crye out nor vexe nat her selfe with dasshyng of her hands, neither beatynge of her body: but let her so mourne, that she remembre sobernes & measure, that other may vnderstande her sorowe, without her owne bostyng & vtteraunce”\(^{60}\) Vives entreats widows to demonstrate their affection for their

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\(^{58}\) Cavallo and Warner, *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, 7.


\(^{60}\) Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, 164.
late husband, but refrain from any behavior that would draw attention to themselves.

Vives continues by advising widows to “study for consolation” soon after. Here Vives suggests that widows actively attempt to overcome their personal sorrow by studying religious texts. One of the ways that Vives suggests that widows limit their mourning is by continuing to consider herself a wife, “Wherfore a good wydowe ought to suppose, that her husbande is nat utterly deade, but liueth, both with lyfe of his soule, whiche is the very lyfe, and besyde with her remembraunce.” Vives advocates the concept of a perpetual wife, as he suggests a widow continue life as if her husband were not dead.

Chapter three of Vives’ third book focuses entirely on widows’ chastity. This chapter remains preoccupied with the notion that widows are to dedicate themselves to Jesus, “and that a syngle woman gyue her selfe hollye to Jesu Christe whiche is spouse of all good and vertuous woman.” Vives continues this idea by arguing that widows should work to protect their chastity by abstaining from public life. Discouraging remarriage for widows had practical benefits, as remarriage could lead to more children which could potentially threaten the inheritances of the first husbands’ heirs.

Vives’ views on mourning and his thoughts on remarriage remain contradictory, as they encourage widows to remarry and also to refrain from the world around them. Vives’ devotes an entire chapter to remarriage, where he lays out which widows and under what circumstances these women should remarry:

I wolde counsaile a good woman to continue in holy wydowhed, namely if she haue children: which thyng is the intent & frute of matrimonye. But & she dout, lest she can nat auoyde the prickes of nature with that life, let her gyue an eare vnto saint Paule thapostel, writyng vnto the Corinthies in this wise: I say to unmaried women and wydowes, it were good for them, if they kepte them selfe as

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61 Vives, The Instruction of a Christen Woman, 164.
63 Vives The Instruction of a Christen Woman, 168.
I am: but yet if they can not suffre let them marie. For it is best to marie thanbourne.\textsuperscript{64}

Vives is clear that living a chaste widowhood is his ideal lifestyle for a widowed woman. Vives, suggests that if a woman already has children, then there is no purpose for her remarriage. While Vives works to discourage widows from remarrying, he conversely encourages the deed if widow is unable to live a chaste life. Vives ends this chapter continuing the idea that remarriage will protect widows’ honor. Vives believes that if a widow cannot remain chaste, then she must embrace a new marriage in order to protect herself from adultery. Vives’ detailed work served not only to teach widows how to behave, but also clarified what the community should expect from these women.

Instruction of A Christian Woman remained one of the most influential sources on widows until the end of the sixteenth century. While Vives’ works stayed relevant, the religious changes of the English Reformation did have an effect on the expectations of widows. Barbara Todd’s “The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England” explores how the religious and cultural changes occurring in England altered beliefs about widows. Todd argues that by the early 1600s it was only through God’s grace and respectable behavior that a widow could be perceived as proper.\textsuperscript{65} Todd focuses her analysis by exploring the dissimilarities between Vives and William Page’s The Widdowe Indeed. Page, an Oxford educated scholar, composed this treatise concerned with widowhood for his mother.\textsuperscript{66} Todd notes that Page’s treatise, which was written around 1620, suggests changing expectations for widows following the English Reformation. While Page did publish

\textsuperscript{64} Vives, The Instruction of a Christen Woman, 177.
\textsuperscript{65} Todd, “The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England,” Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe, 66-83.
other works within his lifetime, it is unclear whether *The Widdowe Indeed* was published or privately circulated. Page’s piece discusses three widows: the evil widow, the miserable widow, and the good widow. Page describes the evil widow as a woman concerned only with her own pleasure. The miserable, or worldly, widow is described as widow that remains comfortless. The good widow is recognized for her ability to endure sorrow and still look to God’s grace. Although Page’s writing indicates new roles for widowed women, it is unclear how many Englishmen had access to his philosophies. While Page’s articulations may serve to represent emerging ideas concerning widowhood, there were several other texts that upholds Vives’ about widowhood.

In 1582, Thomas Bentley, a churchwarden at St. Andrew’s Holborn, complied *The Monuments of Matrones*, which also discussed how widows should behave.67 *The Monuments of Matrones* remains an impressive early modern text as it is composed of over 1,500 pages. This massive collection features prayers, excerpts from the Old and New Testaments, writings and translations by notable early modern women, along with other devotional texts.68 Bentley’s compilation remains unique not only because it was composed for a female audience, but because it also attempts to define women’s roles within the Anglican church.

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67 Colin B. Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley, Compiler of the Monument of Matrones (1582)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 2 (2000): 323-348, 324: Thomas Bentley, *The monument of matrones conteining seuen seuerall lamps of virginitie, or distinct treatises; whereof the first fiue concerning prayer and meditation: the other two last, precepts and examples, as the woorthie works partlie of men, partlie of women; compiled for the necessarie vse of both sexes out of the sacred Scriptures, and other approoued authors, by Thomas Bentley of Graies Inne student. Lamentacion of a sinner. Lamentacion of a sinner. Prayers or meditacion. Prayers or meditaciones* (London, 1582).

68 *The Monument Matrons* features writings by royal women including, Queen Elizabeth I, Margaret of Navarre, Katherine Parr, and Anne Askew. Colin B. Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, "The Identity and Life of Thomas Bentley, Compiler of the Monument of Matrones (1582)," 323.
This extensive collection, compiled specifically for women, is composed of seven parts, referred to as lamps. Lamp one possesses biblical prayers intended to help women with their piety. Lamp two consists of women’s religious writings and translations. The third lamp is dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I and features prayers and meditations. Lamp four contains prayers for daily life, from days of celebration to personal and community problems. The fifth lamp is comprised of prayers for women in different stages of their lives. The sixth lamp utilizes the biblical excerpts to demonstrate acceptable Christian behavior and duties. The concluding lamp depicts the lives of biblical women.

The fifth lamp includes several prayers for widows that reveal expectations for them. The first prayer for widows in the fifth lamp is to be said immediately after the death of her husband. The prayer, intended for the widow to recite, beseeches God to provide her with solace, “for my soule is become a widowe, and I am alone and comfortlesse: looke vpon the teares of my widowhood, and behold mine afflaction and miserie” The beginning of the widow’s prayer laments the sorrow that women feel from the death of their husband. The immense grief that is displayed in this prayer acknowledges the emotional suffering widows experience. While his prayer recognizes the affliction of loss, it also dictates that only God’s mercy will provide comfort. Like Vives’ writing, this prayer encourages widows to turn to religious life, by promoting the notion that the sorrow of widowhood can only be mended through seeking God.

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70 Thomas Bentley, *The fift lampe of virginitie conteining sundrie forms of christian praiers and meditations, to bee vsed onlie of and for all sorts and degrees of women, in their seuerall ages and callings ... A treatise verie needful for this time, and profitable to the Church: now newlie compiled to the glorie of God, & comfort of al godlie women, by the said T.B. Gentleman.* Imprinted at London: By H. Denham, dwelling in Pater noster Rowe, at the signe of the Starre, being the assigne of William Seres, (London, 1582), 178.
Although most of this devotion focuses on grief, this prayer also asks for worldly support and comforts. The prayer requests, “let me find patrons and honest men, which will haue a tender consideration of this my present estate, and succour me at times with godlie counsell.”71 Differing from the first half of the prayer, here widows are entreated to appeal for men who can support her in her widowhood. Because the widow is to pray for company that will award her with counsel, it suggests that widows are incapable of navigating their new lives.

This first prayer for widows continues, asking God for protection from people looking to take advantage of the women in their widowhoods. “Deliuer me, O Lord, from slander, and from the obloquie of wicked men, which with poisoned words haue bent their bowe to cast downe the poore and needie, and to slay such as be of a right conuersation.”72 This invocation suggests the widows are compelled to ask God for preservation, implying that the widows are in great need of protection. This not only insinuates that widows are vulnerable, but also that it is expected that widows are “poore and needie.”73 Similar to Vives, this prayer evokes the notion that widowed women are responsible for living a chaste life, “I beseech thee, giue me grace to live in this my desolate state of widowhood, chastlie, and godlie, shewing my selfe an example of godlines to others, and trusting wholie in thy mercie at all times.”74 Not only does this prayer call for a life of chastity, it suggests that widows ought to become models of godliness.75

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71 Bentley, *The fift lampe of virginitie*, 178.
72 Bentley, *The fift lampe of virginitie*, 178.
73 Bentley, *The fift lampe of virginitie*, 178.
74 Bentley, *The fift lampe of virginitie*, 178.
75 Bentley, *The fift lampe of virginitie*, 178.
While the majority of content in these prayers for widows requests sympathy and support for the widow, the prayers also ask God to help them to live a more spiritual life:

Put the axe of thy mercie, to the roote of my wanton nature, and cut it off, that I doo not marrie the vanitie of this wicked world; but put vpon me the garment of innocencie, and tie about my hart the iewell of faith, that I maie onelie marrie thee in the covenant of thy heauenlie father, louing Iesus, and haue nothing to doo with the adulterer the diuell, the father of deadlie fornication.⁷⁶

This prayer is intended to encourage widows to embrace a more godly existence by entering a spiritual marriage to Christ. This metaphorical marriage to Christ would encourage the widow live a more spiritual life and better avoid worldly and sinful temptation.

The prayer for said widows explicitly requests that these women, “continue in supplications and praiers night and daie, auoiding filthie pleasure, vncomelie gesture, and vndecent behauiour, whereby either others may bee offended, or our selues defamed, or at the least suspected of lightnes.”⁷⁷ This prayer presents the notion that the public should pray that widows avoid undesirable behavior. The idea of praying for widows to remain righteous is again reiterated in an extended version of a prayer. The longer version of the devotion asks that widows remain, “neither wanton, light, idle, wandering from house to house, no tatlers, nor busie bodies, no speakers of things vncomelie, nor giuers of occasion, whereby thy word may be blasphemed.”⁷⁸ Again this prayer demonstrates the concept that widows are susceptible to immoral behavior. The extended version of the prayer, which clearly specifies the negative actions that the widow should work to avoid

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⁷⁶ Bentley, The fift lampe of virginitie, 179.
⁷⁷ Bentley, The fift lampe of virginitie, 180.
⁷⁸ Bentley, The fift lampe of virginitie, 183.
through God’s grace, creates expectations of widows, limiting what behavior is acceptable to for these women.

Vives’s writings and the prayers within Thomas Bentley’s compilation both contend that widows, unless they must remarry, are expected to remain chaste. Later authors, including Puritan preacher Robert Cleaver, reiterate this idea of the chaste widow in their writings. Cleaver’s 1598 advice book, A Godly Form of Household Government maintains that all widows are to remain chaste: “it is good for them if they abide euen as I doe: but if they cannot abstaine, let them marrie: for it is better to marrie, then to burne.” Although Cleaver is writing almost seventy-five years after Vives, both his words and sentiment about an unchaste widow are very similar.

Alexander Niccholes’ 1615 text, A discourse, of marriage and viuuing and of the greatest mystery therein contained: how to choose a good wife from a bad, discusses different aspects of marriage. Niccholes’ text includes fifteen chapters featuring advice, based mainly on ancient works, for a man who is planning to wed. While Niccholes addresses several issues of marital life, he specifically devotes several chapters to helping men choose proper wives.

In addition to containing an entire chapter on widows as marriage contenders, A discourse, of marriage and viuuing also includes a cautionary tale about a widow who ended her own life after remarrying a young opportunist:

An Aldermans wife, sometimes of London, her husband deceased, and shée a rich widdow left, but as old in yeares, as rich in substance (more for desire of portion

79 In later editions of A Godly Form of Household Government John Dod is also sometimes named as a co-author.

80 Robert Cleaver, A godlie forme of householde government for the ordering of priuate families, according to the direction of Gods word. Whereunto is adioyned in a more particular manner, the seuerall duties of the husband towards his wife: and the wifes dutie towards her husband. The parents dutie towards their children: and the 6787masters. Gathered by R.C. At London: Printed by Felix Kingston, for Thomas Man (1598). This idea references the passage 1 Corinthians. 7: 8-9 RSE.
then person) was solicited to an unequall banes and marriage, by a yong and courtely Gentlemen (and which afterwards ended her bane) whose desire being obtained, and hée maister of her substance, most leudly lauished it away vp on royoitous and euill company, grew carelesse of her regard, and utterly abandoned her society, both bed and boord, which when with sorrow shee perceiued, with her too late repentance, her selfe thus rifled of her goods, vpbraided of her friends, forsaken of her husband, destitute of all comfort, shée tooke the evenuing to her mourning, went into a Spring neere Shore ditch (a place that takes the name from a like fatall accident) and there ended her daies, and sorrowes by drowning, which Fount to this day is christned by her name, a remembrance of her misery, and warning to aftertimes, and called (by her name) Dame Annis a Clere.\footnote{Alexander Niccholes, A discourse, of marriage and viuung and of the greatest mystery therein contained: how to choose a good wife from a bad. An argument of the dearest use, but the deepest cunning that man may erre in: which is, to cut by a thrid betweene the greatest good or euill in the world. Pertinent to both sexes, and conditions, as well those already gone before, as shortly to enter this honest society. By Alex. Niccholes, Batchelour in the art he never yet put in practise. (1615), 18.}

This account of a widow’s remarriage serves to warn widows of predatory suitors. The narrative is clear that the young man seeking to marry the widow is only after her money. The anecdote emphasizes how the new husband carelessly spent the widow’s wealth and abandoned her in “bed and boord.” While the author does not directly blame the widow for trouble caused by her new husband, he does reference “her too late repentance,” suggesting that should be repentant and remorseful for her remarriage.

While is unclear if the tale of Annis a Clere, or Clare, is true, there is a London well named for the widow.\footnote{“Historical introduction: The well of Dame Agnes Clare,” in Survey of London: Volume 8, Shoreditch, ed. James Bird (London: London County Council, 1922), 25-29. British History Online, accessed April 14, 2018, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol8/pp25-29} Reference to Clere’s drowning can be found in Richard Johnson’s *The pleasant vvalkes of Moore-fields Being the guift of two sisters, now beautified, to the continuing fame of this worthy citty*, “Marry where they stand, tunnes vnderneath the common shore from a spring called dame Annis de Cleare called by the name of a rich London widow, called Annis Cla[...]e, who matching her selfe with a riotous Courtier in the time of Edward the first, who vainely consumed all her wealth,
and leauing her in much pouertie, there drowned she herself.”  

Whether or not Annis Clere’s tale is true, this story was clearly well-known and resonated with the people of London, as playwrights such as Thomas Dekker and Richard Bromes referenced the unfortunate account.  

Although this tragic tale attempts to show the vulnerability of wealthy widows, women who received a large inheritance from their late husbands also often possessed liberty and opportunity.  

In addition to Niccholes’ warning about Annis a Clere, he also devotes an entire chapter, “Aduice for choice, and whether it be best to marry a Widdow, or a Maide,” that discusses the disadvantages of marrying a widow. Niccholes begins by discouraging men from marrying widows for financial gain writing, “shee hath that will pay for new dressing, shee seemes to promise security in her peace, yet inuites many times to a troublesome estate”  

Niccholes suggests that while marrying a widow may seem to provide a life of security there is a risk that a widow may have trouble securing her inheritance. Niccholes’ opposition to marrying a widow not only rests on a financial argument, but on the notion that the widow is only remarrying for convenience, “The end of her Marriage is lust and ease, more then affection.”  

Niccholes accuses widows of not being able to give their new husbands affection as widows are still emotionally connected

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83 Richard Johnson, *The pleasant vvalkes of Moore-fields Being the guift of two sisters, now beautified, to the continuing fame of this worthy citty.* (1607), 2.  
84 Additionally, Clere’ drowning is also referenced by author Thomas Dekker in *Satiro--mastix. Or The vntrussing of the humorous poet As it hath bin presented publikly, by the Right Honorable, the Lord Chamberlaine his servants; and priuately, by the Children of Paules and Richard Bromes’ A Jovial Crew, or the Merry Beggars.*  
85 Alexander Niccholes, *A discourse, of marriage and vviuing and of the greatest mystery therein contained: how to choose a good wife from a bad. An argument of the dearest vse, but the deepest cunning that man may erre in: which is, to cut by a thrid betweene the greatest good or euill in the world. Pertinent to both sexes, and conditions, as well those already gone before, as shortly to enter this honest society. By Alex. Niccholes, Batchelour in the art he neuer yet put in practise.* 1615, 24.  
to their deceased spouses. Niccholes continues by contradicting the idea that widows are still attached to their first husbands by accusing widows of quickly forgetting their husbands and hastily remarrying. Niccholes asserts that, “[…] I like them the worse that they will marry, dislike them utterly they marry so soone, for shee that so soone forgets the flower and Bride-groome of her youth, her first loue and prime of affection.”

Here, Niccholes criticizes any woman that remarries soon after the loss of her husband by alleging that a choice to marry again disregards her husband’s memory. Like other authors of this period, Niccholes preaches that widows are responsible for upholding their husband’s legacy. Niccholes’ text demonstrates the contradictory expectations for widowed women concerning remarriage. Widows were accused of being unable to properly devote themselves to their new groom due to their loyalty to their first husbands, while simultaneously being faulted for too quickly remarrying and forgetting their former husbands. Niccholes’ argument reveals that under any circumstance, the remarriage of a widow should be condemned.

Niccholes continues his argument against the remarrying of widows by warning men that that widows’ marital experience will challenge their new husbands, “At the decease of their first husbands, they learne commonly ye trickes to turne ouer the second or third, and they are in league with death.” Niccholes implies that the widows’ knowledge that she gained in her first marriage is dangerous for a second husband as he cannot easily control his wife. Niccholes’ statement proposes that a woman’s first marriage offers her the opportunity to learn the skills that would allow her to better negotiate within her marriage. While Niccholes suggests that widows’ experience as

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87 Niccholes, *A discourse, of marriage* 25.
wives is hindering and undesirable, his statement also acknowledges the anxiety that men felt about a widow’s life experience. Magdalen Newport Herbert of Shropshire lived as a widow for eleven years before marrying her much younger second husband, John Danvers. Although Herbert can be painted as a vulnerable widow, Herbert competently took care of her two sons and even patronized London authors, including John Donne, in her widowhood. Although Herbert was almost twice the age of her new husband, Danvers only praised his wife for her wit. The experience that Herbert gained as both wife and widow may have contributed to the resistance that Danvers’ family demonstrated toward the marriage. Despite the opposition to the couple, Herbert and Danvers remained close to each other choosing to dwell together at their Chelsea estate. Another aristocratic widow who created a scandal when she married a man much younger than herself was Frances Grey. The entirety of the English court was stunned when Lady Frances Brandon, daughter of Charles Brandon and Mary Tudor, took a second husband well under her station. Frances’ first husband, Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, was executed for attempting to place their daughter Lady Jane Grey on the throne and his participation in Wyatt’s rebellion in 1554. Frances successfully pleaded with Queen Mary for her life, and the next year the widow married Adrian Stokes. Stokes served as her Master of the Horse and was fifteen years his wife’s junior.

Seventeenth century historian William Camden commented on Frances and Stokes’

nuptials by accusing the remarried widow of disregarding her noble ancestry, “she herselfe forgetting the Nobility of linage”.⁹¹ Camden continues by discrediting Stoke’s character calling him, “a meane Gentleman, to her dishonor, but yet for her security.”⁹² While clearly the disparity in social standing between Frances and Stokes caused issues for the English court, the fact that Frances was much older than Stokes would have also caused gossip.

In addition to Niccholes spending ample time highlighting the difficulties that he believes men may encounter when they marry widows he also takes time to praise a widow who does not remarry. Niccholes builds his case for widows remaining unmarried and chaste by examining the virtue of ancient widows who remained single. Niccholes references how Arthemesia, the wife of Mausoll King of Corinth, never remarried and stated “Vpon thy pillow shall neuer second rest his head.”⁹³ Niccholes continues his praise of the chaste widow by discussing the monuments they erected for their husbands. Niccholes also states that righteous widows would never remarry, “Such a Widdow couldst thou marry shée were worthy thy choyce, but such a one shee could not bee, because shee would not then marry.”⁹⁴ Niccholes clearly states that if a woman is a proper widow, she would not consider remarrying. Niccholes’ admiration of an unmarried widow reiterates the idea that widowed women should remain single.

In 1631, Richard Brathwaite published the conduct book, The English Gentlewoman. The English Gentlewoman followed Brathwaite’s The English Gentleman,

⁹¹ William Camden, Annales Or, The History of the Most Renowned and Victorious Princesse Elizabeth, Late Queen of England: Containing All the Important and Remarkable Passages of State, Both at Home and Abroad, During Her Long and Prosperous Reigne, Trans. Benjamin Fisher (1635) 55.
⁹² Camden, Annales, 55.
⁹³ Niccholes, A discourse, of marriage, 25.
⁹⁴ Niccholes, A discourse, of marriage, 26.
which was published the year before. Both of these conduct books were well received by
the English public as they each received several editions and expansions.\textsuperscript{95} \textit{The English
Gentlewoman} aims to help aristocratic widow properly navigate their new status by
explaining how respectable widows should behave.

Although the majority of \textit{The English Gentlewoman} discusses appropriate
etiquette for maids and wives, Brathwaite also takes time to consider suitable behavior
for widows. Following early writers, such as Vives, Brathwaite suggests widowed
women should remove themselves from public life, “Great difference then is there,
betwixt those widowes who liue alone, and retire themselues from publike concourse, and
those which frequent the company of men. For a widow to loue society, albeit her
intentions relish nothing but sobriety, giues speedy wings to spreading infamy.”\textsuperscript{96}
Brathwaite argues that widows who continue to participate in society will earn a
tarnished reputation. Brathwaite continues insinuating that widows who do not live a
chaste and Godly life will be perceived negatively, “we usuallie terme such widowes the
greatest associates and assistants of vices, whose too much delicacy in bringing vp their
children, makes them ofttimes-depraude, and to all inordinate liberty addceted.”\textsuperscript{97} While
Brathwaite’s statement acknowledges widows’ independence, it criticizes women who
exercise their autonomy as “liberty addicted.”\textsuperscript{98} Brathwaite argues that if a widow must
participate in her community then she should avoid unnecessary attention. Brathwaite

\textsuperscript{95} Sanders, J. “Brathwaite, Richard (1587/8–1673), poet and writer” \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National

\textsuperscript{96} Richard Brathwaite, \textit{The English gentlewvoman, drawne out to the full body expressing, what
habilliments doe best attire her, what ornaments doe best adorne her, what complements doe best
accomplish her. By Richard Brathvait Esq.} (1631) 110.

\textsuperscript{97} Brathwaite, \textit{The English gentlewvoman}, 112.

\textsuperscript{98} Brathwaite, \textit{The English gentlewvoman}, 112.
explains that widows should not attempt to draw attention to themselves with outwardly appearance and specifically notes that widows are to avoid dressing more “gaudily or gorgeously” than young women. Brathwaite’s command that widows should not dress like young women contributes to an idea, found in sixteenth and seventeenth popular literature, that widows and maids are competing for husbands.

In addition to explaining what behavior widows should avoid, Brathwaite also dictates how widows need to spend their time. Following previous authors, Brathwaite preaches a widowhood dedicated to God, “A widow ought to pray feruently, to exercise workes of deuotion frequently, that the benefit of her prayer redound to her effectually and fruitfully; and not returne backe from the throne of God drily or emptily.”

Brathwaite attempts to convince widows to utilize their time praying and engaging with biblical texts. Lettice Morison Cary serves as an example of a proper widow as she dedicated herself to pious lifestyle after the death of her husband. Lettice Morison secretly married Sir Lucius Cary, son of Henry Cary, first Viscount Falkland, in 1630. Although the marriage did not have blessing of the Viscount, which was due to Lettice’s modest dowry, the couple had four sons and remained together until Lucius’ death in 1643 at the Battle of Newbury. As a widow, Lettice spent her time in prayer and conversing with clergy. Shortly after Lettice was widowed, she opened her home to John Duncon, an Essex clergyman, to serve as her spiritual advisor. In 1648, after her death, Duncon published his description of the widow’s progress in *The Holy life and death of*  

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the Lady Letice Vi-Countess Falkland with the returnes of spiritual comfort and grief in a devout soul: Represented in letters to that honorable lady and exemplified in her. 

Duncon notes, “O had you heard her fervent prayers, (the key With which the open’d, and lock’t up the day) Had you ere in her week-day temple been, Her consecrated closet; and there seen This Lady on her knees, Whilst with her eys She climb’d the stars, and did invade the skies; Of tears she rained at penitential howrs;”  

In addition to daily catechism, Lettice spent hours each day in private prayer. Additionally, the widow also utilized her inheritance for charitable deeds including the building of schools and providing work for her neighbors.  

Lady Dorothy Stafford also embodied the ideals of a good widow. Dorothy Stafford, daughter of courtiers Henry and Ursula Stafford, was raised under the supervision of Elizabeth Howard, Duchess of Norfolk. In 1545, Dorothy married her cousin Sir William Stafford, widower of Mary Boleyn. The two had six children and were married until Stafford’s death in 1556. Although Dorothy was only thirty years old when her husband died, she never remarried. Two years after Dorothy became a widow, she began serving Queen Elizabeth as a lady of her privy chamber. Dorothy, who spent years of her married life in Geneva, was known for her strong protestant beliefs.  

102 John Duncon, The Holy life and death of the Lady Letice Vi-Countess Falkland with the returnes of spiritual comfort and grief in a devout soul: Represented in letters to that honorable lady and exemplified in her (London: Royston, 1653) 57.  
106 After William Stafford’s death, John Calvin fought Dorothy Stafford for the guardianship of their youngest son as the reformer believed that Dorothy would convert back to Catholicism. Dorothy was held custody of her son and continued her life as protestant. Kristin Bundensen, A Biographical Encyclopedia of
Dorothy, who previously garnered prominent social prestige serving her queen, was considered a good widow as she remained single and spent her time attending to her children. When Dorothy died in September 1604 she was buried in Saint Margaret’s Church at Westminster Abbey. Dorothy’s monument reads,

She continued a true Widdow, from the age of 27. till her death. She served Queene Elizabeth 40.yeeres, lying in the Bedchamber, esteemed of her, loved of all, doing good all she could to every body, never hurted any; a continuall remembrancer of the suites of the poore. As shee lived a religious life, in great reputation of honour and vertue in the world, so she ended in continuall fervent meditaction and hearty prayer to God. At which instant (as all her life) so after her death shee gave liberally to the poore, […]

The inscription on Dorothy’s tomb suggests that she was considered a respectable widow. The inscription on her monument references her religious fervor, an expected attribute for a proper widow, as it explicitly mentions her constant prayer and meditation toward the end of her life. Dorothy’s decision to remain without a husband also aids in her image as a “true” widow of “honour and vertue.” The English Gentlewoman continues the literary tradition of encouraging widows to live life dedicated to religious devotion.

Like previous authors who have discussed widowhood, Brathwaite was also preoccupied with the idea of a chaste widow. Brathwaite argues that a chaste life is be deeply valued and preserved by widows. While Brathwaite’s preoccupation with the notion that widows should remain alone serves to discourage women from remarrying,

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108 J. S., *The illustrious history of women, or, A compendium of the many virtues that adorn the fair sex represented not only in lively and pathetical discourses grounded upon reason, but in sundry rare examples of virtuous love, piety, prudence, modesty, chastity, patience, humility [sic], temperance, conduct, constancy, and firmness of mind ... : with the prophesies and predictions of the Sybils ... : the whole work enrich’d and intermix’d with curious poetry and delicate fancie suitable to so charming a subject* (London printed for John Harris at yᵉ Harrow in yᵉ poultry, 1686).
several aristocratic women did choose to remarry. Penelope Darcy Trenchard Gage Harvey was only sixteen when she took her first husband, George Trenchard, but after only a few months of marriage Penelope became a widow. Following Trenchard’s death, Penelope married Sir John Gage. When Gage died in 1633, Penelope wed Sir William Harvey.\textsuperscript{109} Katherine Gordon, who continually found the favor at the royal court, married four times. Katherine, daughter of the George Gordon, Second Earl of Huntly and Elizabeth Hay, married Perkin Warbeck in 1496. Perkin Warbeck, who later was identified as the son of Jehan Werbecque and Nicaise Farou, famously claimed to be the missing son of King Edward IV. Warbeck’s claim to the throne garnered support from the both English and Scottish aristocracy, but by the late 1490s fervor for the rebellion waned, as Warbeck confessed his true identity. In 1499, after holding Warbeck in the tower, Henry VII ordered the imposter’s execution. Despite Warbeck’s challenges to the King’s authority, Katherine remained in good standing with the monarch as Henry funded her journey to London and where she joined the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting. In 1511, Katherine married James Strangeways, a Gentleman Usher of the King’s Chamber. At Strangeways’ death in 1516, the Katherine was named executor of his estate. In 1517, Katherine married the Welsh knight, Sir Matthew Cradock of Swansea and soon after moved to Wales. Katherine married once more in the early 1530s, her last husband Christopher Ashton of Fyfield, Berkshire, was another well-liked courtier. Lady Katherine’s will lovingly acknowledges her last three husbands and requests to be buried beside Ashton.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109} Carole Levin, “Penelope Darcy Trenchard Gage Harvey” \textit{A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen}, 156.

\textsuperscript{110} John Montgomery Traherne, \textit{Historical Notices of Sir Matthew Cradock, Knt., of Swansea, in the reigns of Henry VII. and VIII} (Llandovery, 1840), 24.
Famously, Elizabeth Talbot, also known as Bess of Hardwick, married four times. Elizabeth Hardwick was the daughter of a prosperous gentry couple, John and Elizabeth Hardwick. In 1543, while still in her teens, Elizabeth married Robert Barlow. The two were only married for one year before Elizabeth became a widow. In 1547, Elizabeth married William Cavendish, Treasurer of the King’s Chamber. During her ten-year marriage to Cavendish, Elizabeth had eight children. A year after Cavendish’s death, Elizabeth married the very wealthy William St. Loe. When St. Loe died in 1565, his will dictated that Elizabeth was to receive the majority of his estate. Two years after St. Loe’s death, Elizabeth took George Talbot, the sixth earl of Shrewsbury, as her fourth husband. After separating from Talbot, Elizabeth comfortably retired to her Chatsworth estate. Despite her separation from her last husband, Elizabeth still received one-third of Talbot’s estate at his death. The multiple marriages of both these women serve as examples of widows who defied the idea that women should remain single after the passing of their husbands. While wives gained new legal rights at the death of their husbands, marrying remained a viable option for many women who had young children or were left without an inheritance. Widows who did receive substantial inheritances from their first husband could use a second marriage to increase their social position. Furthermore, affluent widows had the ability to negotiate the conditions of their marriages. Wealthy widows were attractive marriage candidates as many titled men eagerly sought to improve their financial situations. Brathwaite, along with other early modern authors diligently push chastity for widows in order to limit the normalization of remarriage. Brathwaite expands on the notion of a chaste widow by stating that the

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celibate life of a widow should serve as a model for young women. “For she ought to be as a Glasse to young Maids, wherein they may discerne their crimes.”112 Brathwaite presents an ideal widow that is so profoundly committed to a virtuous life that she inspires maids to remain chaste.

Thomas Fuller’s *The Holy State* is another conduct book which explores acceptable behavior for widowed women.113 Fuller, author and clergyman, published his extensive text in London in 1642, which contains numerous essays, biographies of historical figures and advice for life events. The first two books explores how to negotiate family relationships and livelihoods in a godly manner while the third and fourth books explore rules of conduct. The last book, known as *The Profane State*, offers advice on how to navigate pernicious individuals.

Fuller contributes to the etiquette of widowhood by preaching moderation in mourning. Fuller suggests that widows should grieve, but not demonstrate intense agony, “*But our widows sorrow is no storm but a still rain.* Indeed some foolishly discharge the surplusage of their passions on themselves, tearing their hair, so that their friends coming to the funerall, know not which most to bemoan the dead husband, or the dying widow.”114 Fuller stresses that widow must not openly divulge in their own sorrow.

While Fuller argues that a widow should stifle her intense anguish, he also stipulates that she should express some grief. Fuller is critical of women who not do mourn for at least a year. He suggests that it is unacceptable for widows to only mourn for a few weeks.

114 Fuller, *The holy state*, 24-25.
While Fuller does not specifically address Mary, Queen of Scots in his text, the Scottish Queen infamously drew attention to herself after she attended the wedding of her chambermaid only days after the murder of her husband, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley. Queen Mary’s attendance of the celebration caused great uproar as her subjects expected the Queen to be in mourning. Mary’s wedding to James Hepburn, Lord Bothwell only three months after Darnley’s murder harmed her reputation further. In addition to Fuller outlining how a widow should handle her sorrow, he also details how women should protect their late husbands’ legacy. Fuller requests that women preserve their husband’s memory by taking good care of their children, including giving them a “carefull education.” A widow is also responsible for keeping her husband’s legacy by embracing and hosting the friends he left behind. If a husband lived immorally, then a widow was instructed to keep “his vices wrapped up in silence.” Fuller implies that widows are not only responsible for their own behavior, but also for creating and maintaining their husbands’ legacy. Fuller’s specific instructions about mourning exhibits the burden of the expectations that were placed on widowed women.

Unsurprisingly, Fuller preaches that widows must foster a chaste existence, as he refers to widowhood as “the second part of virginity.” Like so many authors previously discussed, Fuller actively discourages women from seeking a new husband, “She doth not

116 Queen Mary alleged Lord Bothwell captured and raped on her journey back to Edinburgh and she was forced him to protect her honor. Scholars debate Mary’s kidnapping and rape. Although Antonia Fraser argues that Mary was forcibly taken and assaulted by Bothwell, James Mackay argues that Mary allowed herself to be seized by Bothwell, in order to calm the religious strife in Scotland. John Guy also suggests that Mary engaged in a consensual relationship with Bothwell.
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onely live sole and single, but chaste and honest.” Fuller believes that widows should not remarry, but rather remain single and chaste. Fuller continues “and it is not enough to be unmarried, but to be undefiled.” Although Fuller continually reiterates the idea that widows should continue a solitary existence, he later discusses practical matters of widowhood, including how women should treat their family members after remarriage. Although Fuller continues the literary tradition of bestowing praise on the chaste widow, his inclusion of advice for remarried women demonstrates an acknowledgement that widows did take other husbands. Elizabeth Stonor Compton Walshe Hoby maintained her relationships and prominent social position while marrying three times. Elizabeth, daughter of English courtiers Walter and Anne Stonor, married her first husband, Sir William Compton, in the mid-1520s. After Compton’s death in 1528, Elizabeth enlisted Walter Walshe to help her secure the jointure she was promised. Only a year after Compton’s death, Elizabeth wed Walshe and the couple had three children together. Following Walshe’s death in 1538, she married courtier and diplomat, Philip Hoby and the couple spent much of their time at the court of King Henry VIII and Katherine Parr. While Elizabeth’s social status contributed to her ability to rebuild her life after the death of each of her husbands, her remarriages did not keep her from rejoining society as she was able to eventually gain access to her jointure as well as engage socially at the royal court.

Furthermore, Fuller prompts widows to retreat from public life and refrain from “instert[ing] themselves into‘ the society of men,” by limiting her time conducting

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120 Fuller, The holy state, 25.
121 Fuller, The holy state, 25.
business or traveling abroad. Widows are encouraged to refrain from engaging with the public, including conducting business, “Though going abroad sometimes about her businesse, she never makes it her businesse to go abroad.” Again, Fuller suggests that if a widow needs to manage business affairs abroad it is best that she find a male friend to take on the task. Unlike previous authors, Fuller briefly dictates how widows should manage their inheritance by stating that a widow should not attempt to use her bequests to influence a new husband. Fuller’s text highlights the expectations and restrictions the women encountered as they entered their widowhoods.

Despite the fact that Brathwaite’s and Fuller’s texts were composed over a hundred years after Vives’ *Instruction of Christian Woman* it is clear that there are numerous similarities in how the three work discuss appropriate behavior for widows. Brathwaite and Fuller’s reiteration of the ideas found in the *Instruction of Christian Woman* and *The Monuments of Matrones* demonstrates the how ingrained these beliefs about widows were in English society.

Widows’ work began immediately after their husbands’ death as they moved forward as the central organizer of memorial celebrations. Additionally, aristocratic and gentry widows also needed to adhere to social expectations of their status in terms of their mourning fashions and the provisions of the funeral celebrations. Widows upheld their husbands’ memory through the execution of the rituals and customs of the memorial services.

While acting as the hostess of the funeral widows remained under the watchful eye of guests who carried preconceived notions about how a proper widow should

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123 Fuller, *The holy state*, 25.
behave. Throughout the funeral festivities widows were obligated to show their personal sorrow in a constrained manner. In addition to the controlling their grief, widows remained encumbered with a multitude of conflicting and ideas about how a widow should behave. While sixteenth and seventeenth authors utilized Scripture in creating their notions about widowhood, many elaborated on the requirements needed to be considered a proper widow. Authors encouraged widows to manage their grief through piety, which served to reinforce the importance of, and loyalty to their religion and kept widows occupied in a manner deemed respectable. Writers fostered the idea that pious widows would be able to abstain from immoral behavior. English authors not only praised the chaste widow, but condemned widows who found themselves interested in remarrying. Authors presented contradictory advice concerning remarriage. While early modern authors demonstrated clear preferences for single widows several also suggest that marriage would protect widows’ honor. Additionally, several writers acknowledged the practical benefits of remarriage.

Widows were not only expected to maintain their personal honor, but they also remained responsible for their husband’s memory through their behavior as proper widows. The many expectations created, dictated, and reiterated for widows attempts to limit and control the independence widowhood afforded women.
Chapter 2: Representations of widows

The figure of the widow remained prominent and well known in early modern literature, as she can be found in popular sixteenth and seventeenth plays and ballads. This chapter focuses on different ways that widows are represented in popular literature. Although popular literature serves as only aspect affecting English widowhood, it should be recognized for its ability to highlight cultural beliefs as well social anxieties. While I address the depiction of widows in plays, my analysis concentrates on the representation of widows in ballads and broadsides. Ballads, while most prevalent in London, were popular across England. Since broadside ballads were printed on one page and set to well-known tunes many early modern people found them accessible. Due to the availability and accessibility of broadsides and ballads people were exposed to the different music, ideas, attitudes, philosophies, and stereotypes portrayed in the popular literature. Ballads had numerous purposes depending on their genre. While some ballads relayed currents or local gossip, others provided warnings or advices. The content and the general purpose of the ballad remained highly variable.125 Broadsides and ballads not only served as a response to societal concerns and beliefs, but also helped shaped them. While broadside ballads contain various themes and characters, one common figure depicted is the widow. Some broadside ballads portrayed the character of the widow as vulnerable and pitiful, in great need of sympathy, while others display wealthy widows as attractive or unattractive marriage candidates. Utilizing Stephen Greenblatt’s notion that that literary texts not only demonstrate culture patterns, but also contribute to shaping these patterns I examine how the representation of widows contributed to how early

125 The variety of the ballads contribute to their historical and literary value as they reveal cultural interest.
modern society viewed, accepted, and treated widows. I argue that popular literature, specifically ballads, reinforces expectations for widows by focusing on and criticizing on the women who defied these notions.

**Historiography of Literary Widows**

In the last three decades, historians and literary scholars have embraced widows in their analyses, as several recent studies explore the representations of widows. Although the majority of the literary and historical scholarship concerning the representation of widows focuses on theatre, their analyses provide insight on how the portrayals of widows in broadside ballads can be interpreted. As mentioned before, historian Charles Carlton’s 1975 article, “The Widow’s Myth and Female Reality in 16th and 17th Century England,” played a key role in the study of both historical and literary widows as he explores the continuities between the realities of remarriage and its representation.

Decades later, Elizabeth Foyster also addresses the presentation of English widows by concentrating her 1999 analysis on how writers negatively portrayed these women in “Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: The Male Perspective” by exploring the reality of which widows married and why. Foyster suggests that widows’ first marriage aided women as they navigated and negotiated their second marriages.

Jennifer Panek’s ""My Naked Weapon": Male Anxiety and the Violent Courtship of the Jacobean Stage Widow" addresses why Jacobean comedies utilize sexual aggression to

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woo wealthy widows. Panek argues that Jacobean playwrights focused on suitors’ sexual prowess in order to highlight their masculinity, which may be threatened by the status, wealth, and experience of the pursued widow. Panek suggests that by depicting widows as “lusty” authors diminish the freedom and autonomy that many early modern widows possessed. Panek’s article serves a precursor to her 2004 monograph, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy*, which expands her ideas concerning how authors depict the stage widow. Panek’s discussion revolves around the notion that while widows heightened the anxiety of their male suitors, marrying a “lusty” widow served men well.\(^{129}\) Panek’s work demonstrates the different ways that authors utilized the character of the wealthy widow to reflect the anxiety and insecurity of male inability to control independent widows.

Ira Clark also explores the stage widow in "The Widow Hunt on the Tudor-Stuart Stage" as she examines how playwrights utilizes the motif of gallants ruthlessly pursing affluent widows. Clark suggests that this theme serves as a way for men, particularly younger sons, to achieve wealth and status.\(^{130}\) Elizabeth Hanson’s "There's Meat and Money Too: Rich Widows and Allegories of Wealth in Jacobean City Comedy" takes a new perspective on wealthy widows by concentrating her analysis on the benefits of wealth. Hanson suggests that the power and independence of the stage widow stems from her wealth, rather than her legal status as a widow.


Dorthea Kehler’s analyses moves away from the “lusty widow” and looks toward the diverse representations of widows found in the works of William Shakespeare. Kehler’s *Shakespeare’s Widows* concentrates on the parallel between Shakespeare’s fictitious widows and historical widows. Kehler’s 2009 analysis demonstrates that the aversion that Elizabethans felt toward widows stemmed mainly from the belief that their sexual needs and desires were insatiable.

The ample references to widows in both comedies and tragedies have provided scholars with material that allows them to draw conclusions about how and why sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century authors depicted these women. Two of William Shakespeare’s plays, *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Titus Andronicus* represent the dichotomy of the “good” and the “bad” widow found during this time. In *All’s Well That Ends Well*, the Countess of Rossillion demonstrates a “good” proper widow who remains focused on her son and the girl she raised. *All’s Well that Ends Well* contains two portrayals of proper widows, the countess Rossillion and the Widow Capilet. The countess can be considered a proper widow due to her intense focus on her son, Bertram, and her surrogate daughter, Helena. The countess exhibits her dedication to her son after he has abandoned his mother and Helena:

Countess: In delivering my son from me, I bury a second husband.
Bertram: And I in going, madam, weep o’er my father’s death anew: but I must attend his majesty’s comment, to whom I am now in ward, evermore in subjection.

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132 In recent scholarship, the character of the Countess has been criticized for being meddling and over bearing. Dorthea Kheler’s “Problematic Widowed Mothers” points out the how the Countess and widow Capilet put their children in compromising positions in order to pursue their personal goals.
Despite Bertram’s careless desertion of his mother and ungrateful attitude toward the king, the countess still exhibits tremendous loyalty to both her son and her late husband. The countess’ mention of her former husband portrays her as a grieving widow, an accepted archetype preached and expected by the early modern audience. The wealthy countess’ ability to arrange her son’s marriage, which eventually results in a heir, demonstrates a widow concerned only with the continuation of her familial legacy. Like the Countess, the widow Capilet also works tirelessly to help her daughter secure a sizable dowry that would result in an advantageous marriage. In addition to helping their children find spouses that would revive and continue their family positions, these widows also accomplish their goals without the assistance of a husband, thus protecting their own virtue. The widows’ choice to remain unmarried even though a marriage could help them as they attempt to arrange marriages for their children, reveals women that are to be honored.

While *All’s Well that Ends Well* portrays two proper widows, *Titus Andronicus* depicts a seductress in its representation of the remarried widow, Tamora, Queen of the Goths. The play begins with a defeated and sympathetic Tamora as she is dragged to Rome as a prisoner of war. Tamora’s publicly begs the Roman general, Titus Andronicus, to spare the life of her eldest son, but the general decides to continue with the execution. Tamora’s capture and the ruthless murder of her son create an image of a tragic and helpless widow, yet Tamora reveals herself as a villain upon her remarriage to the Emperor of Rome, Saturninus.\(^{134}\) Not only has Tamora defied the expectation that widowed women remain

\(^{134}\) Although Tamora’s clearly acts as the villain as she seeks revenge against the Andronicus family, scholars like Catharine Stimpson, have defended the queen as a victim to the patriarchy. Catharine
single, she also demonstrates her villainy by carrying on an adulterous affair. Tamora’s overt sexuality serves as only one of the ways she defies the expectations created for widows, as she uses her sons for her own purpose of revenge. Tamora manipulates her two sons into killing Bassianus by reminding them of the murder of their older brother. She continues her physiological manipulation of the two men in her encouragement of the violent assault against Lavinia, “Therefore away with her and use her as you will /The worse to her, the better loved of me.”135 Tamora’s comment suggests that in order for her sons to prove their love to their mother they must commit heinous acts against Lavinia. Tamora further reveals her wickedness as she attempts to convince her sons to murder the illegitimate child she conceived with her lover because the physical attributes of the child would reveal Tamora’s adultery. Although Aaron prevents the death of the baby, Tamora’s efforts to do away with her own babe ironically demonstrates a lack of maternal protection. Despite the fact that Tamora is driven for revenge after the death of one of her sons, her exploitation of her sons and her willingness to forsake her illegitimate child displays a corrupt and immoral widow. Tamora’s disregard of the expectations of early modern widowhood allow the audience to accept the punishment of her eating her own sons before being killed at the hands of Titus Andronicus. While is likely that the early modern audience would the accept Tamora’s violent end, the death of her sons and her murder may evoke some sympathy for her as

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many widows were subject to their former husbands’ actions and often were limited in their opportunities.

The widows in *All Well That Ends Well* and *Titus Andronicus* depict the contrast between the popular representation of the “good” and “bad” widow. The countess Rossillion and the Widow Capilet represent good widows by remaining unmarried and focusing on securing their children’s futures. Tamora’s villainess behavior is exacerbated by her blatant defiance of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century expectations of widows. While Tamora’s incitement of rape and violence reveal her as an antagonist, her quick remarriage and adulterous behavior contribute to her villainy. Similar to the presentation of widows in plays, several early modern ballads also depict exaggerated portrayals of widows.

**Remarried Widows in Ballads**

One prominent theme of ballads about widows concerns whether or not a man should take a widowed woman as his wife. This popular topic demonstrates different perspectives as some ballads support the idea of marrying while others clearly condemn it. One 1622 anonymous ballad explains why a man should choose to marry a widow over a maid. “Nobody his Counsaile to chuse a/ Wife: OR, The difference betweene Widdowes and Maydes[:]/To the Tune of the wanton Wife of Westminster” argues that maids are lustful and difficult and widows are willing and dutiful. The refrain highlights the dichotomy this ballad creates between widows and maids, “For Maydens are wanton/...”

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136 Although Tamora agrees to the marry Saturninus, as a captured prisoner, her options would have been limited.
137 Although many ballads I reference can be interpreted as satire, the ideas that they present remain relevant as that highlight notion the audience would be familiar with.
and often times coy:/But Widdowes be wilfull/ and never say nay.”\textsuperscript{139} While this refrain contends that widows are strongminded wives, it also implies widows are always sexually available. The author repeats that a widow is “willing” in a different context, “She will be as willing,/ to yeeld to a man:”\textsuperscript{140} These two lines directly state that widows will not challenge their husbands, but rather concede to their husbands’ desires. In addition to this ballad claiming that widows make agreeable wives, this song also promotes the notion the widow will provide for her husband, “He that's matcht with a widdow,/ by! that is a winner:/ Sheel'e stay and heare Service,/and then provide dinner:”\textsuperscript{141} Here, the ballad states that widows will “provide dinner” which overtly means that remarried widows will prepare and serve dinner, and subtly suggests that widows will provide economically for their new husbands. The 1630 ballad, “A Fooles Bolt is soone shot./Good Friends beware, I'me like to hit yee,/What ere you be heer's that will fit yee;/Which way soever that you goe,/At you I ayme my Bolt and Bowe” tells of a man who is openly confessing his plot to go around and shoot people he deems foolish.\textsuperscript{142} While first part of the ballad describes the follies of the foolish man, the second part focuses on the different people’s unwise behavior. The speaker dedicates a stanza a widow who remarries:

\begin{quote}
A Widow that is richly left,
that will be Ladifide,
And to some Gull or Roaring-boy
she must be made a Bride,
His Cloathes at Broakers he hath hir’d himselfe not worth a groat,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{139} Anonymous, “Nobody his Counsaile to chuse a/ Wife.
\textsuperscript{140} Anonymous, “Nobody his Counsaile to chuse a/ Wife.
\textsuperscript{141} Anonymous. “Nobody his Counsaile to chuse a/ Wife.
\textsuperscript{142} Anonymous, “A Fooles Bolt is soone shot./Good Friends beware, I'me like to hit yee,/What ere you be heer's that will fit yee;/Which way soever that you goe,/At you I ayme my Bolt and Bowe. To the Tune of, Oh no no no not yet.” Printed at London for I.G.1630, https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20079/citation
That bastis her hide and spends her meanes
at her I make a shot.  

Like previous ballads, the speaker immediately notes the widows’ wealth and her adornments, which again reiterates the notion widows are to be considered synonymous with wealth. The speaker states that only a “Gull or Roaring-boy” that is “not worth a groat” would attempt to woo a widow suggesting that a man of means or character would not court a widow. The stanza ends with the speaker stating that he would “at her make a shot.” Although the speaker accuses the new husband of abusing his wife and spending her inheritance, it is the widow that is labeled to as the fool. By referring to widow as the fool, the speaker shifts culpability from the abusive and greedy husband to the widow.

Martin Parker, a well-known London ballad author and pamphleteer, also composed a ballad encouraging men to marry widows. Parker’s 1625 ballad, “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot./Tis good to strike while the Irons hott./Or,/Counsell to all Young men that are poore,/To Marry with Widowes now while there is store./To the Tune of, Dulcina,” seeks to encourage men to quickly wed a widow. This ballad suggests that marrying a wealthy widow serves as a good economic opportunity for young poor men. Parker encourages men to quickly take advantage of wealthy widows who “long to match agen.” Parker works to dissuade men from pursuing young maids and “get one with

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143 Anonymous, “A Fooles Bolt is soone shot”.
145 Martin Parker “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot./Tis good to strike while the Irons hott./Or,/Counsell to all Young men that are poore./To Marry with Widowes now while there is store./To the Tune of, Dulcina, seeks to encourage men to quickly wed a widow” Printed at London for Francis Groue, and are / to be sold at his Shop on Snow-Hill. 1625. Pepys Library. EBBA ID: 20179. https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20179/transcription.
146 Parker, “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot”. 
Gold, though nere so old.”

Parker argues that, “Maydens loves are coy and fickle,/ they too much their equalls looke.”

The comparison of maids and widows in these lines suggest that young women are more difficult to please than widows. Furthermore, these statements imply that marriages between young men and older widows were not viewed as equal matches, even when widows possessed great wealth. The ballad insinuates that in relationships between widows and young men, the husband will be able to control his wife. Parker continues to reassure men that widows are good marriage candidates by noting these women are kind after “they tast/ a Young mans love.”

The ballad encourages men to take care of their widowed wife and they will find a loving bride in return:

if thou be true,
and give her due,
Shele nere mistrust thee feare it not,
shele love thee deere,
then doe not feare
But strike the Iron while tis hott.

Parker attempts to reduce any anxiety over marrying widows by claiming that widows will serve as trusting and loving wives. Parker’s continuous efforts to calm any concerns that men may have over marrying widows reveals that there was apprehension that men felt over wedding. Although Parker promotes the marrying of widows, his ballad does not indorse marriage of true love, but rather marriage of convenience. The repetition of the time “But strike the

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147 Parker, “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot”.
148 Parker, “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot”.
149 Parker, “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot”.
150 Parker, “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot”.
Iron while tis hott” demonstrates that the act of marrying a widow was simply an opportunity that should not be discounted.

Parker’s second ballad about widows, published about 1627, openly discourages marriage to widows. “The wiuing age. / OR / A great Complaint of the Maidens of London, / Who now for lacke of good Husbands are vndone, / For now many Widowes though neuer so old, / Are caught vp by young men for lucre of gold.”151 “The wiuing age” directly contradicts the main theme of Parker’s “A Proverbe old, yet nere forgot./ Tis good to strike while the Irons hot” by openly discouraging men from marrying widows. “The wiuing age” claims that there is “great strife” between maids and widows as these women are in direct competition for husbands. This poem representations the two groups of women very differently. Maids are portrayed as virtuous and vulnerable while widows are depicted as aggressive and lusty. This ballad repeatedly implies that widows are promiscuous:

Most Widowes are impudent, they cannot blush,
For speech of the people they care not a rush:
They are very free and their money is flush.
They will have a young-man their aprons to brush
Oh this is a wiving age.
Oh this is a wiving age.152

This stanza begins by referring to widows as immodest, claiming that there is nothing that makes them “blush.” By stating that widows are “free,” Parker suggests that widows are sexually unrestrained. Parker also pushes the notion that widowed women, in

152 Parker, “The wiuing age”.
comparison to maids, are sexually aggressive, “Yong maidens are bashfull, but widowes are bold.” Parker’s statement not only highlights widows’ sexuality, but also reiterated the comparison and competition between widows and maids. While Martin Parker’s contradicting messages in his two ballads reflect common notions about marrying widows, they also reveal the economics of the ballad industry, as his contrasting perspectives would increase his market.

Another ballad that promotes the notion that maids are in competition with widows for husbands is, “An Excellent New SONG,/CALL'D, / The Baily of Hounslow: / SHEWING/ How he would Marry the Hopping Widow, and fling/ off poor Dorothy, who has had Three Children by/ him,” as it reports of a man abandoning his wife in favor of a widow. The title of this undated ballad itself promotes the idea women should be wary of widows who remain appealing marriage candidates. Like other seventeenth century ballads, this ballad suggests that the widow’s appeal rests solely in her wealth:

But now a lame Widow is Courted,  
that's excellent at selling of Gloves.  
With a fa la la, etc.

For she has a very good Calling,  
and can get her Guinea a day;  
Then prithee Dol. don't make a bawling,  
I'll keep thee both Gallant and Gay.  
With a fa la la, etc.

In the speaker’s first reference to the widow, he claims that while she is physically lame, she is able to make an income. The speaker continues on by suggesting that the widow

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153 Parker, “The wiuing age”.  
155 Although “An Excellent New SONG,/CALL'D, / The Baily of Hounslow:” remains undated, its references to “guinea,” an English coin, suggests that ballad used here was likely printed after 1663.  
156 Anonymous, “An Excellent New SONG,/CALL'D, / The Baily of Hounslow:”
also has access to capital and that she would be willing to spend her money on her suitor to, “keep thee both Gallant and Gay.” The speaker reminds the audience that the woman “undone” is not the only person that will suffer if her lover leaves, “For Mischief perhaps they'll be more yet./if that you this Widow should Wed./Her Sons they'll kill you they've swore it./that's William, brisk John, and bold Ned.”157 Cleary the speaker is implying that father of these boys is obligated to provide for them or suffer at the hands of their resentment. As the ballad continues, the speaker claims that although the widow attempts to negotiate her treatment in marriage, she cannot actually exercise her power, “And as for the Widows strange Folly,/ in tying you up in a Bond,/ Of a hundred Pound nere to strike Molly./ when Wed, Obligations are gone/ With a fa la la, etc.”158 These lines dictate that although the widow brought wealth into the marriage and demands fair treatment, her husband is under no obligation to respect her requests. This sentiment of the husband asserting his authority within the marriage despite the widow’s economic contribution counters the speaker’s warning against marrying widows. This curious stanza implies that although widows may have enjoyed personal autonomy and have had a financial advantage in marriage negotiations, they are subject to their husbands’ wills once they are married. While wealthy widows may have had the opportunity to negotiate specific conditions in their second marriages, enforcing these terms could be difficult for wives. Although this stanza seems to counter the speaker’s argument against marrying widowed women, it reveals a larger societal concern over widows’ power. In addition to this ballad exposing shared anxiety over the monetary autonomy of widowed women, it also continually reiterates the idea that all women should not engage in sexual activities

158 Anonymous, “An Excellent New SONG,/CALL'D, / The Baily of Hounslove:”
without being married. The ballad ends claiming that a woman should “trust not to any Man's Tongue” and that a man should choose to marry the woman “who's undone for your sake.”

Although some ballads present a stark rivalry for husbands, many wealthy widows were actually concerned with helping young women find husbands. *The illustrious history of women* names several widows who monetarily gifted women in hopes it would help them marry. Widow Jane Baker, “gave to the reliefe of poore maids marriages, an hundred pounds.” Another widow, Joan Doxie, also, “gave to poore Maids marriages, twenty pounds.” Katherine Woodward also left £200 to be, “distributed unto poore Scholars, the Hospitals, poore Prisoners, poore Parishes, poore Householders, poore Maids marriages.” These gifts to poor maids demonstrate that many affluent widows sought to help these women find husbands. The monetary bequests for “maids marriages” suggests that widows understood the precarious positions poor unwed women could find themselves in during this period.

Another common theme that appears in ballads that mention widows concerns widows’ wealth. Martin Parker’s “The wiuing age” continually emphasizes widows’ wealth. Even the title of the ballad insinuates that widows use their wealth to secure husbands, “For now many Widowes though never so old,/Are caught up by young men

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159 Anonymous, “An Excellent New SONG,/CALL'D, / The Baily of Hounslove:”
160 John Shirley, *The illustrious history of women, or, A compendium of the many virtues that adorn the fair sex represented not only in lively and pathetical discourses grounded upon reason, but in sundry rare examples of virtuous love, piety, prudence, modesty, chastity, patience, humility [sic], temperance, conduct, constancy, and firmness of mind ... : with the prophesies and predictions of the Sybils ... : the whole work enrich'd and intermix'd with curious poetry and delicate fancie suitable to so charming a subject* (London printed for Iohn Harris at ye Harrow in ye poultry, 1686).
161 Shirley, *The illustrious history of women*, 110.
162 Shirley, *The illustrious history of women*, 110.
163 Shirley, *The illustrious history of women*, 110.
for lucre of gold.” Parker reiterates the notion that old widows use their inheritance to snare young husbands, “They tempt poore yong men with their silver and gold,/For love now a daies for money is sold,/If she be worth treasure no matter how old.” Parker continues to suggest that money is a widow’s only appeal, “Though they have foule faces the're beautifull purst.” This line insinuates that men will ignore a widow’s physical appearance if she possesses enough wealth. Like the early modern conduct and etiquette books, Parker’s ballad also focuses on widows who choose to remarry. Parker’s criticism is concentrated on widows who remarry soon after the death of their husbands:

For one maid now married theres widowes a score,
Their husbands scant dead a whole fortnight before,
They cannot live single they'le mary therefore.
With any yong man though hees never so poore.

While Parker clearly condemns widows who remarry, he more strongly denounces a widow who weds soon after their husband’s death. Parker accuses widows of being unable to remain single and rushing to marry any suitor. Suggesting that widows “cannot live single” not only attacks a quickly wed widow, it also hints that widows are unable to be chaste, which promotes the stereotype that widows are overly sexual. Parker’s ballads, while demonstrating very different messages on marrying wealthy widows, further the stereotypes about widowed women cultivated by authors and audiences. Although Parker’s ballads may express his personal ideas about widowed women, it is more likely, as someone who composed ballads for a living, that his contradictory representations of

164 Parker, “The wiuing age”.
165 Parker, “The wiuing age”.
166 Parker, “The wiuing age”.
167 Parker, “The wiuing age”.
widows in two of his ballads allowed him to capitalize on and further the common notions surrounding widows.

“A Batchelers resolution, or, Have among you now, widowes or maydes For I come a woing as Fancie perswades. I must haue a Wife”, be she Older or Younger, For I cannot, nor will not lye alone any longer, sung to the tune of The blazing torch” shows a desperate man who will take any woman but a widow as a wife. While the first part of the ballad the speaker explains that he would gladly marry almost any woman, the second part expresses his opposition to marrying a widow. One of the reasons that the speaker rebuffs the idea of wedding a widow is the fear of being controlled by a wife:

But yet if I my choice may have
a Mayde should be my wife,
I would not be a Widowes slave,
Ide rather loose my life:
If I should wed a Widow old,
I had better take a younger,
For Widowes will not be contrould,
Yet I can stay no longer.

The speaker insisting that he will not be a “Widowes slave” reveals the popular anxiety concerning the autonomy many wealthy widows possessed. The apprehension surrounding widows’ independence is again highlighted in the line “For Widowes will not be contrould.”

While other ballads suggest that widows are physically unappealing, “A Batchelers resolution” explicitly degrades widows’ attributes. This ballad attempts to

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168 Anonymous, “A Batchelers resolution, or, Have among you now, widowes or maydes For I come a woing as Fancie perswades. I must haue a Wife, be she Older or Younger, For I cannot, nor will not lye alone any longer.” 1629. Pepys Library. EBBA ID: 20105, http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20105/image.
169 Anonymous, “A Batchelers resolution”.
170 Anonymous, “A Batchelers resolution”.
stifle a widow’s appeal by negatively addressing her age, “A withered Crone whose blood's decayed.”

In this line, the speaker demonstrates clear repugnance towards the aging widow as he only uses harmful and offensive language to describe her. That ballad continues to degrade the widow by describing the imagined interactions between the speaker and the widow, “If she should have a stinking breath/ I never should abide her,/ For that to me is worse then death,/ I had rather touch a Spider:” By comparing widows to spiders the speaker suggests the widow is disgusting and yet the comparison also suggests that the widow is to be feared. The association between a widow and spider inadvertent awards the widow power as the speaker recoils in the presence of a widow. These demeaning comments do not actually represent widows but rather discredit the widows’ independence and authority. Like Parker’s “The wiuing age”, this ballad also accuses widows of remarrying soon after their husbands’ deaths.

They say that Maides and Widowes now for Husbands daily strives, Therefore I shall be quickly sped, sith both for Husbands hunger, With any man theyle quickly wed, Theyle lye alone no longer

This stanza blatantly accuses widows, as well as maids, of hastily seeking husbands. The speaker implies that widows and maids are desperate for any husband. By stating that women “With any man theyle quickly wed” the speaker suggests that women have no discretion over their partners, nor do they have any choice in their suitors. The refrain of

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171 Anonymous, “A Batchelers resolution”.  
172 Anonymous, “A Batchelers resolution”. 

this stanza, “Theyle lye alone no longer” again highlights the women’s sexuality as it reiterates the idea that widows are sexually insatiable.\textsuperscript{173}

One early tale that reiterates the treachery of a widow who continually remarries is “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn that had. v. husbandes and all kockoldes she wold make theyr berdes whether they wold or no, and gyue them to were a praty hoode full of belles.”\textsuperscript{174} This 1525 poem tells of Emlyn, a woman who continually abused her five husbands. While the poem begins by stating that Emlyn could charm the men she knew, “She coude so well spynne /Louynge to go gaye” it follows by acknowledging her negative characteristics “Ofte wolde she seke/ The tauernes in the weke/ Tyll her wytte was thynne.”\textsuperscript{175} The song continues to relay Emlyn’s undesirable behavior by telling of adulterous affairs “Thus with her playfere/ Maketh she mery chere /The husbande knoweth nothynge /She gyueth money plente.”\textsuperscript{176} The speaker in the poem expresses more disapproval of Emlyn due to her behavior as a widow:

\begin{verbatim}
That his lyfe he dyd lese
Than made she mournynge
And dranke deuoutly for his soule
The handbell ofte dyd she colle
Full great sorowe makynge
This sory wydowe
But a whyle I trowe
Mournynge dyd make
Whan he was gone
A yonge lusty one
She dyd than take\textsuperscript{177}
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{173} Anonymous, “A Batchelers resolution”.
\textsuperscript{174} Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn that had. v. husbandes and all kockoldes she wold make theyr berdes whether they wold or no, and gyue them to were a praty hoode full of belles.” 1525. Early English Books Online, http://eebo.chadwyck.com.libproxy.unl.edu/search/fulltext?SOURCE=var_spell.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=D0000998411960000&WARN=N&SIZE=15&FILE=/session/1548708488_25653&SEARCHSCREENER=CITATIONS&DISPLAY=AUTHOR
\textsuperscript{175} Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn”.
\textsuperscript{176} Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn”.
\textsuperscript{177} Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn”.
This tale echoes the notions that widows are eager to forget their husbands and find a new companion, “To hast the weddynge/ And all for beddynge/ Some sorte to make/ Her herte to ease/ And the flesshe to please”  

The speaker suggests that the widow rushed to marry simply to satisfy her lust. The idea that improper widows remarry too quickly is again mentioned in the song, “As a woman that careth nought/ So for his soule she prayes / And bycause she was seke/ She wedded the same weke”  

The negative representation of widows who remarry so soon after the deaths of their husbands that is repeated in this poem demonstrates the anxiety over widows refusing to accept expectations. The end of the poem reveals Emlyn suffering and in poverty before she died, “Suche fortune had she tho/ God dyd bete her surely/ With the rodde of pouerte/ Or she dyde hens go/ Than she dyed as ye shall”  

Although the majority of the tale tells of Emlyn’s wicked deeds to caution men from marrying widows Emlyn is punished in the conclusion.

**Cautionary Tales for Widows**

While many of the ballads concerned with widows marrying serve to warn men about the perceived treachery of taking a widow as wife, some ballads aim to caution widows about opportunistic men. John Cart’s “The cunning age, or, A re-married woman repenting her marriage, rehearsing her husbands dishonest carriage being a pleasant dialogue between a re-married woman, a widdow, and a young wife : to the tune of The wiuing age” presents two widows, one who is in an unhappy marriage and one who is

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178 Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn”.
179 Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn”.
180 Anonymous, “Here is the boke of mayd Emlyn”.

chooses to remain unmarried.\textsuperscript{181} The ballad, which is dialogue between three women, demonstrates the regretful widow who regrets having taken another husband, “Oh, woe is me, Gossip that e’re I was borne,/I marry’d a Boy, that now holds me in scorne.”\textsuperscript{182} The remarried widow confesses that she has wed a young man who now hold her in contempt. As the ballad carries on, the remarried widow explains that her husband “romes among Whoores” while she stays at home. This re-wedded widow continues to lament her unhappiness to the other women:

The griefe that I suffer can hardly be told,  
Among Whores and Knaues he consumeth my gold,  
And if I reprooue him, he tels me I scold,  
I dare not dispose of mine owne as I would.  
\textit{Oh fie on this doting Age},  
\textit{Oh fie on this doting Age}\textsuperscript{183}

Again, the remarried widow explains how her new husband mistreats her by using her money to spend time with unscrupulous company. This stanza not only warns widows that husbands would abandon them, but also of spouses who would deplete their inheritances. Although the dialogue in this ballads attempts to prevent widows from remarrying immoral men, it also reinforces the notion that men are only interested in widows for their wealth. Additionally, “he tels me I scold” perpetuates the idea that widows are controlling. The unmarried widow acknowledges the complaints of the remarried woman and pledges to remain single, “Two Sutors I haue, but I both will

\textsuperscript{181} John Cart, “The cunning age, or, A re-married woman repenting her marriage, rehearsing her husbands dishonest carriage being a pleasant dialogue between a re-married woman, a widow, and a young wife : to the tune of The wiuing age” 1625. Pepys Library. EBBA ID: 20194, https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/20194/transcription.  
\textsuperscript{182} Cart, “The cunning age”.  
\textsuperscript{183} Cart, “The cunning age”.
The promise to remain unmarried suggests that only way for widows to protect themselves and their inheritance is to rebuff any suitors.

Another ballad that emphasizes the vulnerability of wealthy widows is a “A merry new Song of a rich Widdowes wooing That married a young man to her owne vndooin.”

This 1625 anonymous ballad tells of a man maliciously attempting to romantically pursue an old widow. This song begins with speaker promising to help the widow take care of her lands:

Ile till thy pasture ground,  
and mow thy pleasant meddow:  
My mother me told,  
I must be bold  
in wooing of a Widdow.  
Have at thy coat old woman,  
Have at thy coat old woman:  
Here and there, and every where,  
Have at thy coat old woman.

In this stanza, the suitor promises to take care of the widow’s land. This double entendre about the widow’s estate not only implies that suitor is concerned with the widow’s property, but also suggests that he will satisfy his wife sexually. By stating that he “must be bold” the speaker implies that he does not need to respectfully court his widow, but rather act aggressively. The speaker’s intention of boldness hints at the belief that widows are more sexually accessible than maids. Like other ballads of this period, here we see the idea that marrying a widow is an economic opportunity and suitors are willing to devote time and energy to securing the hand of a wealthy widow. The suitor continually offering

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184 Cart, “The cunning age”  
186 Anonymous, “A merry new song of a rich widdowes.”
his coat to the old woman, “Have at thy coat old woman:/Here and there, and every where,” demonstrate his persistence in wooing the widow.

The common idea that widows are overly sexual is again emphasized in this ballad as the speaker hints at his ability to sexually please his widow, “Ile give thee all those joys/ a young man may afford thee:/And ride each day/With thee any way,/and bravely will maintaine thee.”187 The speaker willingly promises the widow sexual satisfaction which again insinuates that widows are sexually insatiable.

The second part of the ballad describes how the suitor, now the husband, has taken advantage of and mistreated his new wife. The speaker explains how her new husband has abandoned her property and sold off pieces of her estate. In addition to forsaking the widow’s estate, the husband began starving his bride, “He gave her Bull-beefe,/but once a weeke to feede on.”188 The speaker reveals that after only two months of marriage, “Her coffin he fild/ with her consumed carkasse.”189 The song closes with an overt warning to widows, “Old women take good heede,/ and trust your selves with no man:/ For as you doe heare,/She hath paid full deare.”190 The tragic ending of the widow demonstrated the danger for wealthy widows who choose to remarry, as they lose their status as a femme sole. Widows who have elected to take new husbands become subject to those husbands’ wills, as these men now have legal authority over what once belonged to the solely to the widow. While this song tells of a corrupt man who took advantage of a wealthy widow, it also reinforced negative stereotype about widows, mainly that these women are sexually insatiable. Although this ballad seems to offer a genuine warning to

187 Anonymous, “A merry new song of a rich widdowes”.
188 Anonymous, “A merry new song of a rich widdowes”.
189 Anonymous, “A merry new song of a rich widdowes”.
190 Anonymous, “A merry new song of a rich widdowes”.
wealthy widows who are considering remarrying, they can also be interpreted as scare
tactic. The dramatic and devastating outcomes for the affluent widow who remarried also
serves to discourage widows from starting new relationships.

The 1635 ballad titled, “A pleasant new Ditty: intituled,/ Though rich golden
Booties your luck was to catch,/Your last was the best, cause you met with your match”,
describes the efforts of wealthy bachelor’s attempt to secure a rich widow as his wife.\textsuperscript{191}
The ballad begins with the first speaker explaining that the greedy bachelor refused many
young maids of sufficient means in his desperate pursuit of fortune. The bachelor then
explains, “There is a brisk Widdow that dwelleth hard by,/In money hath ten thousand
pounds at the least,/ Ile spruce my selfe up then incontinently,/And to her Ile goe as a
shuttering Gest.” After the bachelor describes his efforts woo a rich widow, the first
speaker then remarks on marriage and the widow herself:

\begin{quote}
This Batchelour soone did attaine his desire,
The day was appointed when they should be wed
His youthfull faire Bride was but threescore and ten,
For shee had but a tooth and a halfe in her head.\textsuperscript{192}
\end{quote}

The speaker’s first comment about the widow mocks her age by sarcastically calling her
youthful and then immediately stating that she is 70 years old. The speaker continues the
degradation of the widow by commenting on her lack of teeth. The ballad resumes by
describing that the widow died just a couple years later and the bachelor immediately
pursued another widow:

\begin{quote}
His Mothers smock sure did this Widdower weare,
For no sooner wood but he presently sped,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{191} Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty: intituled,/Though rich golden Booties your luck was to catch,/Your last was the best, cause you met with your match./To the tune of, I know what I know” Printed at London: for I. Wright junior, dwelling at the upper end of the Old Baily. 1635, https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A20514.0001.001?view=toc
\textsuperscript{192} Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty”
A Licence he fetcht, and he marrid her straight,
Then she threw downe her Stilts, & she hobbld to bed.

Not full ten yeeres older then was his last wife,
Was this same dryd mummey that lay by his side,
With snorting and grunting she aird so the Bed,
That never had Groome such a night by a Bride.193

The speaker suggests that the second widow eagerly married the bachelor in order to consummate her marriage. Suggesting the second widow “threw downe her Stilts, & she hobbl̄d to bed” furthers the notions that widowed women are hyper sexual. The speaker also comments on the age of the second widow, referring to her as “dryd mummey.”

Predictably, the second widow does die and the bachelor sets out looking for another widow to marry. Like the first two widows, the third is presented as undesirable with false teeth, a bald head and a wooden leg:

Two rowes of white teeth she tooke out of her mouth,
And put em straight into a little round Boxe,
A Glasse eye likewise she pulld out of her head,
Which made the man fear that his wife had got knocks

Her pouldred curl̄d Locks that so faire did appeare,
Came off with more ease than a new scalded Pigge,
I wonder her Husband could laughing forbeare,
When he saw his wife looke like an Ostridge egge.

Then strait way down stooped this comely sweet Bride,
Unlact, and ungirded, her neat woodden legge […]194

The speaker suggests that third widow’s look were so offensive that “The Bridegroome was like to runne out of his wits […]”195 The negative description of the last widow, which concludes by referring to her as a “Hagge”, again demonstrates the idea that

193 Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty”
194 Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty”
195 Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty”
widows are physically unappealing. Following the death of the last widow, the ballad deviates from its previous pattern as the bachelor finds a young maid as his wife:

No love nor no liking this young wife ere had,  
Because she was forct to be wed to her hate,  
He sickned and dyde, and was laid in his grave,  
So she did enjoy his three Widdowes estate.

Although the ballad concludes with the death of the bachelor and his young widow enjoying the fortune he amassed though his three marriages, the song remains harmful to widows. This ballad thoroughly demonstrates the common trope that widows are only desirable for their money. Each time the bachelor marries another widow she is described as having more money, yet she is also more harshly labelled. Furthermore, this ballad also reinforces the notion that widows are eager and desperate to marry, which coincides with the belief that widows are sexually insatiable.

Another ballad that attempts to frighten widows into living a chaste life is “The Revvard of Murther, / In the Execution of Richard Smith, for murther- / ing Mary Davis widdow, to whom hee made a promise of / Marriage after he had gotten her with Childe: she was found drownd / in a Pond neare More Fields, the 27. of November last, and the / said Richard Smith, executed this present Saterday, being / the 12. of December, 1640. for the same fact.” Richard Smith, the speaker of the ballad, confesses the murder of the widow, Mary Davis. The song begins with the Smith arguing that he “lived in

196 Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty”
197 Anonymous, “A pleasant new Ditty”
198 Anonymous, “The Revvard of Murther, / In the Execution of Richard Smith, for murther- / ing Mary Davis widdow, to whom hee made a promise of / Marriage after he had gotten her with Childe: she was found drownd / in a Pond neare More Fields, the 27. of November last, and the / said Richard Smith, executed this present Saterday, being / the 12. of December, 1640. for the same fact. Manchester Central Library. EBBA ID: 36085, https://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/36085/album.
credit good” and “wealth and fame” before he met his future lover. Smith then describes the character of the widow Davis and the affection she felt for him, “Well borne and bred was she/to many people knowne,/ She well affected me,/ and loved me alone.”

The speaker’s positive description of the deceased widow suggests that even widows from distinguished families and of good reputation can still face a harsh fate if she compromises her virtue. Although the speaker claims that he did return the widow’s love, he remained more concerned with her money:

I for her mony car’d
more then for her God knows,
As plainely it appear’d,
by giving her some blowes.

Her Chastitie to wrong,
I caught both night and day,
At length my tempting tongue,
Made her to goe astray.  

Smith reveals that his desire for the widow’s money surpassed his regard for his lover.

Smith’s yearning for wealth by the means courting a wealthy widow reiterates the notion that widows are only worthy as wives if they are wealthy. Like the other ballads of this period, this song echoes the stereotypes that widows sexually insatiable. While the speaker admits to actively pursuing the widow “both day and night” eventually the widow succumbs to his advances. The ballad does not detail the murder of the widow Davis, but rather ends with the with Smith asking for sympathy. While this song attempts to present a guilt-ridden confession, it actually reflects a man who does not show remorse for his wicked deed. This ballad, like others aimed at widows, serves to frighten women into living chaste lives.

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200 Anonymous, “The Revvard of Murther”.
201 Anonymous, “The Revvard of Murther”.
Another song that attempts to warn women of the challenges they may face in widowhood is “The first part of the widdow of Watling street & her three daughters, & how her wicked, [sic]son accused her to be an harlot, and his sisters bastards. To the tune of Bragandary.” This 1650 ballad conveys the story a widow who must contest her wicked son, as he attempts to claim his late father’s estate for himself. The ballad begins with the husband proclaiming his appreciation for his wife and appointing her executor of his will, “And therefore sole Execu toile heere, /I do thee onely make: /To pay thy debts & legacies, the rest vnto thee take.” Although the husband clearly trusts his wife as his sole executrix, she insists her son join as an executor, “Not so my husband deare (quoth she)/but lat your sonne be ioynd with me: /For why he is our child (she sayd) /we can it not denie.” The wife’s desire to share the duties of carrying out her husband’s will is only to demonstrate what a loving mother and selfless person this woman is, since many English women were appointed sole executor. To the great dismay of the new widow, her son immediately attempts to seize all of his late father’s estate, “her wicked sonns doth worke his will./ Possession of the house he took, in most despite full wise/ throwing his sisters out of doors, /With sad lamenting cryes.” These lines highlight the financial vulnerability the female family members faced at the deaths of their kin. Despite many men having clear and specific wills, often times wills were contested by male family members who felt entitled to the testators’ estate. The second part of the song demonstrates the legal action that the widow was forced to take against her son. “Kings

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203 Anonymous, “The first part of the Widdow of Watling street”.
204 Anonymous, “The first part of the Widdow of Watling street”.
205 Anonymous, “The first part of the Widdow of Watling street”.
Counsell of Noble degree” required the selfish son, “To answer the vile abuses” against his mother and sisters.\textsuperscript{206} The son, who hired vagabonds as witnesses, accused his mother of adultery and his sisters of being illegitimate:

\begin{verbatim}
Her sonne sayd also shee's a harlot most vile,
And those be her bastards that stand here in place,
And that she hath often her body defilde,
By very good witnesse Ile prone to her face,
This thing of thy Mother thou oughtest to smother,
Tis shame for a child to speake ill of his Mother.\textsuperscript{207}
\end{verbatim}

In this stanza, the speaker reports the son’s claims of adultery against his mother in order to defame her character. Because early modern society highly valued chastity for all women, accusing any woman of cuckoldry would garner attention from the counsel hearing the case. Although the son alleges that his mother had committed adultery, it is clear the speaker does not believe the accusations and demonstrates great sympathy toward the widow. The speaker concludes with the son’s hired witnesses confessing under the pressure of the counsel, “Who fell on their knees incontinent, /Saying they were hired for money that day: /Quoth they it is so the truth for to show, /Against the good Widdow no harme we doe know.” The witnesses themselves profess that they were paid to lie about the character of the widow, they also express that they unaware of any immoral and unscrupulous behavior committed by the widow. The counsel sitting in judgement of the conflict between mother and son rules on the side of the widow and forces the son “To forfeft euen all the goods he possest.”\textsuperscript{208} While in this ballad the widow receives her proper share of her late husband’s estate, this poem remains a warning for the challenges that widows, even ones that are known to have good character,

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{206} Anonymous, “The first part of the Widdow of Watling street”.
\textsuperscript{207} Anonymous. “The first part of the Widdow of Watling street”.
\textsuperscript{208} Anonymous. “The first part of the Widdow of Watling street”.
\end{verbatim}
may face at the hands of their male relatives and the lack of loyalty a son could have towards his mother.

Many of these broadside ballads demonstrate an open contempt for widows, as they are depicted as unattractive and overly sexual. The most common theme concerning affluent widows in ballads is remarriage. While some ballads warn of “treachery” in marrying an experienced and controlling widow, the majority focus on the financial advantages of marrying a widow. Although much of the criticism of widows attacks the appearance and age of these widowed women, the underline source of the disparagement stems from these women choosing to become romantically involved with another man, which reveals their personal agency. The damaging stereotypes about widows found in these ballads serve as a direct result of the social expectations that widows should remain chaste. These ballads portray widows who are willingly defying the expectations of proper behavior and therefore are openly mocked and berated. While the negative representation of widows in these ballads not only normalizes the degradation of widowed women, it also reinforces the idea that these women should remain chaste.

While numerous ballads highlight the monetary gain in marrying a wealthy widow and encourage the pursuit of nuptials, others work to provide widows with warnings about predatory suitors. These cautionary ballads portray widows’ suitors as cruel and greedy and wealthy widows as vulnerable and desperate. Furthermore, the ballads centered on aggressive suitors reinforce the notions that widows are both incompetent without a husband and sexually insatiable. Sixteenth and early seventeenth century ballads also create and emphasize competition for husbands between widows and maids. Widows and maids as marriage candidates are continually compared to one
another. The created competition between the women not only reiterates the stereotypes associated with widows and maids, but also attempts to create tension between these two groups.

The depiction of proper widows in *All’s Well that Ends Well* reflects the notion that widows should remain single and dedicate their time to children. *Titus Andronicus*’ Tamora’s remarriage and adulterous behavior highlight the negative stereotypes associated with widows. Most of the criticism of widows in popular literature, whether it concerns their sexual behavior, appearance, or vulnerability, revolves around the idea that these women are considering taking another husband. Popular literature, specifically ballads, can openly criticize widows because they are challenging the expectation that proper widows should remain single. The blatant mocking and offensive depiction of widowed women in ballads and broadsides stems from the numerous social expectations forced upon widows.
Chapter 3: Authority and Challenges of English Widowhood

English women faced multiple challenges as they entered widowhood, from personal grief to securing their inheritances. This chapter concentrates on legal authority and personal autonomy widows obtained and the trials they encountered while attempting to claim their inheritance.

Widows, and widowers alike, were first confronted with the emotional burden of losing their spouse. While it is difficult to measure the sorrow each woman felt over the loss of her husband, we can assume that for many women their husbands’ deaths would render an emotional response. Mary Stuart famously expressed her grief over the death of her first husband, Francis II, King of France, through poetry that demonstrated her sorrow and honored the late king. In one poem, composed shortly after Francis’ death Mary relays her overwhelming despair:

[…] I feel the deepest sadness
Of the most grievous hurt.
Nothing now my heart can fire
But regret and desire.
He who was my dearest
Already is my plight.
The day that shone the clearest
For me the darkest night […].

Mary not only communicated her grief and heartache from the loss of her childhood companion through verse, but also in perfectly honoring the mourning traditions of the French court. The young queen’s grief became well known amongst the European nobility as Venetian ambassador, Michiel Surian, reported Mary’s genuine sorrow:

\[\text{209 Mary’s writings on her husband’s death were originally composed in French. Mary Stuart,}\ \text{The Poems of Mary Queen of Scots, ed. by J. Sharman (London: Basil Montagu Pickering, 1873).}\]

\[\text{210 After Francis’ death, Mary immediately went into a seclusion for forty days. While taking refuge in her private chambers, Mary donned white mourning attire. Mary refused any visitors to her chambers, with the exceptions of her close family and her bishops.}\]
So by degrees every one will forget the death of the late King except the young Queen, his widow, who being no less noble minded than beautiful and graceful in appearance, the thoughts of widowhood at so early an age, and of the loss of a consort who was so great a King and who so dearly loved her, and also that she is dispossessed of the crown of France with little hope of recovering that of Scotland, which is her sole patrimony and dower, so afflict her that she will not receive any consolation, but, brooding over her disasters with constant tears and passionate and doleful laments, she universally inspires great pity.  

Surian’s comments on the queen’s behavior not only reveal a deep understanding of Mary’s situation, but also of loss in general. Lettice Morison, countess of Falkland also demonstrated great sorrow at the loss of her husband, Lucius Cary, viscount Falkland, who was killed at the Battle of Newbury in 1643. Lettice and Lucius had married in secret, and while Lucius spent his last years away from his wife fighting in the English Civil Wars Lettice remained bonded to her husband. John Duncon, Lettice’s spiritual advisor, eloquently notes the heartache Lettice experienced at the death of her husband, “In whom all loose though did so coldly grow, That they who courted her, made love to snow.” After relaying the widow’s grief, Duncon praises the countess in her ability to overcome that grief through her spiritual practices, “Yet in coldness, and obdurate oft, still burn’d a holy conceal’d, not lost.” While Lettice, who Duncon refers to as “a most disconsolate widow,” expressed anguish over the loss of her husband, she was also upheld for being able to cope with her grief through her piety. In addition to dealing

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211 Michiel Surian Calendar of State Papers Relating To English Affairs in the Archives of Venice, Volume 7, 1558-1580. ed. Rawdon Brown and G Cavendish Bentinck (London, 1890), 278


213 John Duncon The Holy life and death of the Lady Letitce Vi-Countess Falkland with the returnes of spiritual comfort and grief in a devout soul: Represented in letters to that honorable lady and exemplified in her her life time, and exemplified in the holy life and death of the said honorable lady / published for the benefit and ease of all who labour under spiritual affliction. (London: Royston, 1653).

214 Duncon, The Holy life and death of the Lady Letitce Vi-Countess Falkland.

with personal grief, women were also faced challenges as they gained new legal and financial responsibilities.

Women in early modern England were most often taught passivity and obedience. From a young age, girls were encouraged to be “more restrained, and to preserve their chastity.”216 The education of English women varied tremendously depending on wealth, social position, and parental interest. While many aristocratic daughters benefitted from some education, their instruction often looked vastly different from their male counterparts. While elite English girls learned literacy and basic arithmetic, their education focused on household management.217 While most gentry and aristocratic girls received more education than the majority of the English population some affluent women had access to extraordinary educations. The daughters of Anthony and Anne Cooke were well known for their exceptional education and intellect. The Cooke sisters were educated alongside their brothers at the hands of their father, a humanist scholar.218 Not only did the Cooke sisters receive a classical education, but they utilized their knowledge throughout their adulthood as they became prominent courtiers and published writers. Daughters typically remained under the guardianship of their fathers until they married and entered the care of their husband under the concept of coverture. Coverture is the notion that when man and woman marry they are viewed as a single person. Under coverture, husbands were legally responsible for their wives, as these women were

excluded from entering into contracts or bringing lawsuits as an independent person.\footnote{Mendelson and Crawford, 37-39.}
Wives involved in any legal disputes needed their husband to represent their cause, which contributed to a wife’s dependence on her partner. With some limited exceptions in the aristocracy, coverture also severely limited a wife’s ability to own her land, as any property or belongings a woman brought into the marriage became the legal property of her husband. Wealthy families could attempt to protect their daughters and safeguard their property through marriage contracts created before the wedding. A marriage contract could protect women through establishing a separate estate or providing the promise of pin money, which allowed wives a yearly stipend that they could use for their personal maintenance.\footnote{Amy Louise Erickson, \textit{Women and Property in Early Modern England}. (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 26.} Pin money amongst the affluent served the purpose of allowing women to adorn themselves appropriately for their rank. Unfortunately, even with a contract, it would have been difficult for a woman to collect this yearly income from an obstinate husband.\footnote{Erickson, \textit{Women and Property in Early Modern England}, 26.}

Some wealthy widows diligently managed to protect their previous inheritances through these negotiated contracts. Margaret Donington Kitson Long’s marriage contract for her marriage to John Bouchier, second earl of Bath, permitted the gentlewoman to retain control over the personal property she brought into the marriage. Margaret, who had already been widowed twice, noted in her contract that she would have the opportunity to bequeath her personal property in a will if she were to die before the earl.\footnote{Barbara J. Harris, \textit{English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers}. (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2002), 20.} Furthermore, Margaret’s contract not only protected her personal estate, but also
attempted to establish a prominent position for her daughter by arranging a marriage between her daughter and her new husband’s heir. Margaret’s marriage contract was signed and supported by her sons-in-law, which lent legal and social authority to the agreement.  

Elizabeth Cecil Hatton Coke vehemently fought for her daughters’ marriage negotiations. One year after the death of her first husband, Sir William Hatton, Elizabeth married Edward Coke. Elizabeth and her second husband quarreled over her inheritance from Hatton, as she wanted to remain in control of the lands that she brought into the marriage. Additionally, Elizabeth clashed with her second husband over who her daughter and step-daughter would marry. Elizabeth refused to consent to the marriage of her daughter, Frances, to John Villiers, the brother of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, who suffered from bouts of mental illness throughout his life. In order to prevent the marriage, Elizabeth took her daughter and attempted to escape Coke’s plans. With the support of King James, Coke apprehended his wife and daughter and forced the marriage. Despite the tumultuous circumstances, Elizabeth was able to negotiate an income for her daughter. Elizabeth’s efforts to help provide stable income for her heir suggests that she wanted to help her daughter to avoid any conflict that might arise within or after marriage. The marriage proved to be a disaster, as Frances eventually left her husband and was convicted of adultery. Due to both continual competition and inter-marriage between aristocratic families, most obtained formalized marriage contracts that

would preserve familial wealth if a spouse should die or the couple did not produce an heir.

Under the notions of coverture, husbands were theoretically obligated to protect and help their wives in legal matters yet this practice actually limited women’s power as they became subject to their husbands’ wills. Although some aristocratic women that were able to maintain a measure of monetary independence through maintenance of their personal lands, most English women were reliant on their husbands for both legal and financial support.

**Rights of Widows**

Being a widow in England not only afforded many wealthy widows personal autonomy, but also a new financial independence. Legal contracts and negotiations often protected widows as most aristocratic women entered their marriage having settled their dowers or jointures. A dower, which refers typically to the property a husband bequeathed his wife, functioned to financially safeguard widowed women. Under English Common Law the dower was expected to be one third of her husband’s estate, although the majority of men chose to leave their wives with more. A jointure was based on the medieval concept that either a widow or widower is entitled to the income of a property they both occupied within their lifetime. Aristocratic jointures were typically discussed during the marriage negotiations and the amount set in the marriage settlement. The money that a woman would bring into a marriage would typically be used to purchase land that yielded rent to be used if the woman should be widowed. Jointures were

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225 Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 131
advantageous for landed wealth, as it allowed property to remain undivided for the benefit of the widow and ultimately the heir. Amy Louise Erikson asserts that brides and their natal families worked to establish lifetime jointures, which would allow widows to remarry and still reap financial benefits from her first marriage. Most aristocratic jointures were awarded as annuities, which allowed for great variation in the amount of money that widows received. The longer a wife survived her husband the more annuities she would receive, thus the amount a widow received for the totality of her jointure depended on how many years she lived as a widow. While there was disparity between the amounts that women received from the dowers and jointures, both these financial safeguards permitted women a new autonomy.

One of the ways that wealthy widows were able to assert their new independence that stemmed from their widowhood was to accept the role as executor to their husbands’ estates. The executor of a will accepted numerous responsibilities. The duty of an early modern executor was planning and paying for the funeral of the deceased. Aristocrats carried certain expectations for funerals and some widows were criticized for the effort they did, or did not, put into their late husband’s memorial services. Margaret Donnington Kitson Long Bouchier faced disapproval for hosting a funeral for her third husband, John Bouchier, second earl of Bath, that was deemed too modest for a person with the title of earl. Following the funeral and burial arrangements, the executor carried out the stipulations of the will which included settling any debts of the deceased.

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227 Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, 120.
228 Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, 119.
229 Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, 156.
After the death of her second husband, William Cavendish, Bess of Hardwick lobbied for forgiveness of her husband’s debts to the Crown. At the time of his death, Cavendish owed over £5000 to the Crown and state authorities were attempting to seize Bess’s properties.231 In 1558, Bess, who did not have resources to repay her late husband’s debt, reached out to Sir John Thynne asking for his assistance in preventing a bill that would allow the crown access to her estates:

[…] ther ys abyll yn the parlamente howse agenste me. yt ys aganarall byll and dothe towche many. and yt passe yt wylly not only ondo me and my poore chyldery[n] but agreat number of hotheres yt hathe bene twyse rede yn the lorde howse and yt shalbe brought yn agayne of monday or tewyesday. so that yt ys thoughte yt wylbe wedyynnesday or thourysday or yt be brought yn to the lowar howse. yf yt wolde plese you to be here at that tyme I shulde thynke my selfe mouste bowden to you. and thought I be nowayes habyll to recompence you yt dewrynge my lyffe I wyll neuer be forgotfoull.232

Bess’s pleas to halt the orders that would permit the seizure of her property seemed to have worked as the widow was able to retain her land. After unsuccessfully attempting to have Cavendish’s debts absolved, Bess and her new husband, William St. Loe, negotiated to pay £1000 to the crown.233 Although it is unclear that Bess was explicitly named executor of her husband’s will, as no will has been discovered as of yet, her liability for his debts suggests that she was most likely designated to serve as his executor.

While the position of executor could be burdensome, this position did offer legal control as they enacted out the requests stated in the will thus ushering many widows into


a new position of autonomy. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century as many as seventy-seven percent of English noblemen chose to make their wives sole executor of their will. Although a high proportion of women served as their husbands’ executors in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, by the early 1700s men began moving away from naming their wives as their sole executor. Widows who served as executors for their husbands also had the legal right to utilize their children’s portions of the inheritance during their minority, as it was assumed the mother of the child would have child’s best interest in mind. The decision to appoint a wife as the sole executor demonstrates a husband’s confidence in the capability of his partner which in turn reveals the aptitude and work ethic of English wives. While many husbands strategically divided up all their belongings, there were men who bestowed their wives with the entirety of their estates. In 1558, Edward Chishull’s short will awarded his wife all he possessed, “To Agnes my wife lands free and copy and my goods, whom I make executrix.” Judge Thomas Owen’s 1598 will dictated that his wife, Alice Owen, serve as the sole executor of his estate, “And also for more better securitie and assurance thereof I do ordayne and make the said Alice my lovinge wife my full and sole Executrix for and concerninge all leases termes of yeares plate naperie howshouldstufte goodes chattalls debts and money [...]” Alice utilized her authority as executrix and her inheritance to the fund almshouses, establish a school, and partake in other charitable ventures as will be

235 Amy Louise Erickson.. *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, 158
236 Only the mother of the heirs to an estate had the ability to utilize a minority child’s inheritance, any other person that accepted the executor title did not have access to children portion. Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, 171.
discussed in the next chapter. In 1577, Thomas Sexton bequeathed his wife great authority and freedom as he stipulated that his wife was to be sole executor of his estate. After naming the estates that should go to his wife for life, Sexton requested that an unspecified “remainder to Mary and Susan our daughters.” Like many early modern husbands, Sexton did not articulate a monetary amount for his daughters, but rather trusted that his wife would negotiate and provide an appropriate dowry for their daughters. Similarly, Walter Darrell also appointed his wife as his executor in addition to awarding her his entire estate. Although many women were accountable for managing their husbands’ properties, some women acquired the responsibility of overseeing additional estates if their husbands were serving as executors at the time of their death. In 1635, Jane Sowton assumed responsibility as executrix for her husband and her father-in-law, who died previously. Jane’s position as executrix to two estates remains unusual as many people would appoint co-executors in order to avoid having their estate transferred to the hands of someone they did not trust.

Although many widows were granted the position of sole executor, some widows’ authority was limited by the appointment of an overseer or supervisor, who was very often male. Although an overseers’ responsibilities and authority varied, their appointment suggests an attempt to reassert male authority as his job was to monitor an executrix. In addition to appointing co-executors and overseers, men also attempted to

242 Amy Louise Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, 156.
stifle widows’ power and ability as they enact their husband’s will by dictating particular stipulations for people, including their widows, who were receiving his bequests.

While only about 10 percent of wills included stipulations for their widows, there were husbands who attempted to limit their wives.243 Richard Cartmell generously awarded his wife on the order that she “maintain and educate my hour children […]”244 Similarly, William Beryffe’s will awarded his wife several properties until their son was out of his minority, “on the condition that she bring up my two children William and Sarah during their minority, setting them to school and learning until he can read and cast account and she can read and sew and that my wife pay my legacies and keep my tenements, gates and palings in good reparations.”245 Although it is likely that widows would have offered their children a proper upbringing, the stipulations of these wills demonstrate that many men were concerned with the rearing of their children.

Some wills that contained specific requirements focused on preventing a widow from remarrying in fear that the heirs of the first husband would not receive their proper inheritance. Richard Cartmell stated that if his wife were to marry before their children were out of their minority their children should be “bound to my brother-in-law” and “to pay each of my children £10 at 21 or marriage.”246 John Bridges of Clemsford also attempted to discourage his widow from remarrying by ordering that she be stripped of some of the inheritance originally awarded to her, “[…] if she remarry she have only a third part according to the laws of this realm.”247 Robert Browne awarded his wife a

243 Amy Louise Erickson, Women and Property in Early Modern England, 166.
mansion, along with her full jointure and other dwellings, as long as “she remain a widow.”248 Although some men named specific conditions in their wills to keep the property intended for their heir out of the hands of widows’ new husbands, some men avoided this by purposely excluding their widow from inheriting. Farnham gentleman Rowland Eliot’s will stated “Because my wife may remarry another husband, who by reason of a grant from my son-in-law Thomas Jernegan to us for our lives come to the possession of lands and houses[…]” 249 Eliot’s will directly addresses the concern that his wife could remarry not only by limiting her inheritance, but by openly stating his reasoning.

English widows were not only challenged by men’s efforts to infringe on a widow’s authority by appointing overseers and placing stipulations in their wills, some women also faced trials in securing their inheritances. Most aristocratic widows were able to easily secure their inheritances or jointures since they were most often negotiated by the families prior to the marriage, but there were women who struggled to gain their jointures or inheritances. While some of the problems that widows faced revolved around the Crown holding on to the deceased property, the majority of the conflicts arose from male kin attempting to claim widows’ inheritance.

**Widows Fighting for their Inheritances**

After the deaths of their husbands, some women were left in economic limbo as they worked to obtain their inheritances, typically their jointure. A widow might encounter troubles with her jointure if her late husband did not clearly allocate his land holdings, as widows had to fight for the income of a property that was occupied by heirs

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Another issue that could influence the dispersal of a jointure occurred when a widow pleaded a common-law dower over their husband’s estate. Although several different issues could interfere with the dissemination of a widow’s inheritance, there were also numerous possible resolutions for widows, including taking their case to court or using their connections to appeal directly to a royal official. Some very well-connected widows seeking support over their inheritances were able to receive responses from the monarchs themselves. The crown’s influence over an inheritance dispute would surely shape the outcome for many prominent aristocrats. While the vast majority of widows did not attempt to reach out personally to the reigning monarchs, some high-ranking women looked for royal favor. King James assured the wealthy heiress, Elizabeth Southcott, “of his care to protect her from wrong, touching her fears of hard concerning her jointure.” Although most widows seeking their jointures did not have the privilege of the monarch’s direct support, most women looked to prominent connections for support as they settled their finances.

Courtier Elizabeth Stonor was unable to secure her jointure after the death of her husband, Sir William Compton, despite specific instructions in his will. In the late 1520s, Elizabeth married Sir William Compton and when he died in 1528, his will stated, “100l. a year to be paid to his wife during her life, for her jointure, besides her inheritance in Barkeley's lands.” In November 1529 Elizabeth married Walter Walshe, a member of

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250 Harris, English Aristocratic Women, 134.
251 Under English common law if husband died without a will his widow was entitled to one third of the property that her husband possessed at any time during their marriage.
the Privy Chamber, and together they attempted to settle her jointure. Despite Walshe’s position, Elizabeth’s finances were remained unresolved when he died in 1538. Elizabeth moved back to her family home where she and her father, Walter Stonor, began campaigning for her proper jointure. Walter Stonor, who previously served as both the King’s Sergeant-at-arms and Lord Lieutenant of the Tower and had long history of correspondence with Thomas Cromwell, began writing letters to Cromwell on his daughter’s behalf:

I recommend me to your Lordship, and so does my daughter Compton, who has sent your patent, according to my promise when last with you, with the fee for one year at Michaelmas next, after which you shall be paid yearly. We both desire your Lordship's favour in her causes, else she is like to be wronged. I will show the causes at my next coming up, if I can ride, or else write them.  

Stonor, who had clearly communicated with Cromwell about his daughter’s circumstance, remained insistent with his request. Stonor’s father’s prior positions and his connections at court afforded him the ability to directly ask for Cromwell’s assistance. Stonor’s support for his daughter’s cause resulted in the Stonors’ favor as Cromwell helped Elizabeth finally receive her jointure.

Anne Savage Berekeley, who worked meticulously to cultivate her relationships at Henry VIII’s court, also reached out Thomas Cromwell in order to procure her jointure after the death of her husband. Widows without connected and supportive family members had to work much harder to claim their properties. In 1533, Anne Savage matched very well when she married Lord Thomas Berkeley.  

Anne thrived at the

254 Sir Walter Stonore, Sir Walter Stonore to Cromwell. SP 1/141 f.234. ff. 234. The National Archives of the UK.
255 Anne stemmed from the Cheshire family who lost their prominence at the accession of Henry VIII, who were accused of for unnecessary violence and had the majority of their lands and titles stripped. Barbara Harris “The View from My Lady’s Chamber: New Perspectives on the Early Tudor Monarchy” 215-216.
English court as she openly supported Henry VIII’s divorce and his relationship with Anne Boleyn. When Anne was widowed after only one year of marriage, she immediately sought support back at the court from the monarchs whom she had carefully encouraged. In a letter to Thomas Cromwell, dated May 1st, 1535, she explained that she was struggling to secure her jointure from the Master of Wards. Anne mentioned that the “fee of Silebe” was unpaid and she would be unable to unable to do so until she had possession of her jointure. Anne again reached out to Cromwell in a letter a couple of months later asking him to speak to the Master of Wards on her behalf. Almost two years after her first appeal to Cromwell Anne was able to secure her jointure.

Lady Elizabeth Carew, daughter of courtiers Sir Thomas and Margaret Bryan, also encountered obstacles while trying to obtain her inheritance after her husband was executed. In 1514, Elizabeth married Nicholas Carew of Beddington and the two remained in good standing at Henry VIII’s court until Nicholas was charged with high treason in 1538. The charges brought against Nicholas revolved around his involvement with Henry Courtenay, first marquess of Exeter, who was accused of plotting to depose King Henry. All of the Carews’ property was immediately seized and Nicholas was placed on trial, including Elizabeth’s outstanding jewelry collection, much of which was given to her by King Henry. In February 1539 Nicholas was convicted and executed on March 8th. Despite Nicholas’ downfall, Elizabeth’s natal family was able to help her...

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256 Anne Berkeley. Anne Lady Berkeley to Cromwell. SP 1/95 f.41. ff. 41. 1535. The National Archives of the UK.
257 Anne Berkeley. Anne Lady Berkeley to Cromwell. SP 1/95 f.41. ff. 41. 1535. The National Archives of the UK.
259 Lehmberg, "Carew, Sir Nicholas (b. in or before 1496, d. 1539), diplomat and courtier".
remain in good graces at court. Barbara Harris asserts that while Elizabeth’s brother, Francis, maintained his loyalty to his King as he sat on the jury that convicted his brother-in-law, it is very likely that he publicly supported his widowed sister as well.260

Elizabeth and her mother, Margaret, who served as a governess to Prince Edward, wrote to Thomas Cromwell asking him to help Elizabeth to secure her property. Lady Margaret, who wrote Cromwell often on behalf of princess Elizabeth, thanked the chancellor for protecting her and asks him to consider helping her daughter reclaim her assets:

My lord, I most humble thank your good lordship for the great goodness you shew upon my daughter Carew, which bindeth me to owe you my true heart and faithful service while I live. She sendth me word that it is the king’s pleasure that she shall have lands in Sussex, which is to the value of six score pounds, and somewhat above, which I heartily thank his grace and your lordship for; but, good my lord, there is never a house on it that she can lie in. Wherefore, an it would please the king’s grace, of his most gracious and charitable goodness, to let her have that his grace hath appointed now, and Blechingly, which his grace gave her without desiring of her part, which grieveth her sore to forego it.261

Lady Margaret evoked different images of widows in her letter, including the proper pious widow and poor sympathetic widow. Margaret implied that her daughter was a pious widow by suggesting that needed these properties to fulfil her living and, more importantly, her religious needs, “I trust she shall be able to live and pray for the prosperous life of his grace and all his […]”262 Margaret’s carefully worded statement not only reveals her daughter’s pious behavior, but also reiterated her loyalty to the King Henry, who constantly questioned the loyalty of the aristocracy. Margaret closed her letter by framing her daughter as a poor widow in great need, “Beseeching Jesu, that all

262 Bryan, *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*. 
my trust is in, to put it in the king’s grace’s mind to pity her and her poor children; […]”

Margaret divulged to Cromwell that it was only the king’s charity that can assist her daughter and her family. By referencing Elizabeth’s children, Margaret may also be subtly reminding Cromwell of her own prominent position as the governess to the royal children. The King retained the Blechingly property until it was awarded to Anne of Cleves in their divorce settlement. Margaret’s well-crafted letter of support for Elizabeth seemed to have helped convince the crown of her need and in 1539 she was able to reclaim portions of the land confiscated after her husband’s execution to give to her heirs. Elizabeth’s will suggests that at the end of her life she had reobtained the some of her extensive jewelry collection.

Although most widows who struggled to collect their promised property often needed to call on their male kin for support, some widows relied on their female connections.

Widows’ Problems with Male Kin

Most of the monetary problems that wealthy women encountered in their widowhoods stemmed from their male kin, who felt that they were entitled to widows’ inheritances. While many aristocratic men considered their male kin when drafting their wills, personal letters and court records indicate that a number of men believed that they deserved more than they were bequeathed. Often brothers and uncles of the deceased husband believed that property left behind should return to the natal family, rather than support the widow, especially if there were no children within the marriage. If an heir was conceived, the family biologically related to the deceased feared that the widow would remarry, thus jeopardizing the heir’s inheritance. Widows faced resentment and

264 Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 143.
conflict from their late husbands’ kin, as both parties attempted to secure the estate of the deceased.

Maria de Salinas, a member of the Spanish aristocracy and one of Queen Katherine of Aragon’s ladies-in-waiting, met conflict securing her jointure at the hands of her brother-in-law. In 1516, after residing at the English court for about fourteen years, Maria married William Willoughby, tenth Lord Willoughby de Eresby. During their decade of marriage, Maria and William only had one daughter, Katherine, who survived to adulthood. When William died in 1526, his brother, Sir Christopher Willoughby, attempted to claim William’s estate. Sir Thomas More initially tried to settle the formal dispute between widow and the brother of her late husband by dividing and awarding some of William’s estates to the two rivals. Despite More’s efforts to subdue the conflict over the inheritance, both parties remained concerned with the entirety of the late William’s estate. King Henry VIII’s deteriorating relationship with Katherine of Aragon forced Maria to look for powerful new allies and in 1533 her only daughter, Katherine, married Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk. Charles Brandon had a long-standing relationship with the Willoughby family and had actually purchased Katherine’s wardship after William’s death. Maria and Brandon intended for Katherine to marry Brandon’s heir, but after the death of Brandon’s wife, Mary Tudor, Brandon decided to

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266 Retha Warnicke, (2004, September 23). Willoughby [née de Salinas], Maria, Lady Willoughby de Eresby (d. 1539).

marry the fourteen year old Katherine himself. Brandon, who was clearly interested in his new wife’s potential inheritance, worked with Maria to petition for the Willoughby lands. In February 1536, an Act of Parliament dictated that Christopher was to give up two of the manors he was originally awarded in the early 1530s and relinquish any claim to lands in Lincolnshire. Maria’s relationship with Brandon played a key role in her ability to secure her legacy for her daughter. Although male kin could serve as a barrier to a widow’s inheritance, some sons and sons-in-law proved to be helpful supporters.

In 1579 Alice Spencer married Ferdinando Stanley, future earl of Derby. By the time Stanley died in 1594, the couple had three daughters. Stanley’s will dictated that his property was to held in a trust for Alice and following Alice’s death, their eldest daughter was to receive her father’s lands. Despite Stanley’s clear requests in his will, Stanley’s brother William was the heir to the earldom and expected all of his late brother’s wealth. Like any aristocratic women in need of support, Alice looked to powerful male counterparts. Alice wrote to the George Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury and Robert Cecil requesting their assistance. Despite Alice’s early efforts to garner support in acquiring her inheritance, Parliament granted William the Stanley estates in 1609. Although Alice and her daughters were forced to relinquish what their father had bequeath them, their uncle agreed to pay them a large sum of money. Alice, who had secretly wed Sir Thomas

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Egerton in 1600, was able to enjoy her provisions provided by both her current and late husband.

Margaret Clifford worked tirelessly for years to secure her daughter Anne’s inheritance. Margaret, who was part of the well-connected Russell family, married George Clifford, third earl of Cumberland in 1577. With Clifford, Margaret had two sons and one daughter, but sadly both Clifford sons died relatively young. Marital conflict led to separation between Margaret and Clifford which in turn led to Clifford excluding his wife and daughter from his will. In October of 1605 the earl died bequeathing the majority of his estate and his title to his brother Francis, third Earl of Cumberland and leaving Margaret and Anne minimal provisions.  

270 Unfortunately, in 1608, James I sided with the new earl, “The King to the Countess of Cumberland. Her petition against the holding of the Gaol and County Court at Appleby Castle, has been decided against her. The rights of her daughter, Lady Anne Clifford, will be properly considered.”  

271 In 1609, when Anne married Richard Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, he self-interestedly pushed for Anne to compromise with her uncle by accepting a sum of money, which he promptly took advantage of. The conflict between Margaret and Francis remained unsettled even after Margaret’s death in 1616. A year after Margaret’s passing, James I ordered that Francis would keep his brother’s estates. Despite the King’s ruling, Anne did not give up her quest and continued to challenge her uncle in court. The conflict was mostly settled

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http://go.galegroup.com.libproxy.unl.edu/mss/i.do?id=GALE|MC4323506393&v=2.1&u=linc74325&it=r&p=SPOL&sw=w&viewtype=Calendar
when Francis’ son died in 1643 and Anne was accepted at the rightful heir. Although the English Civil War limited Anne’s ability to claim her inheritance, the jointures she received from Sackville and her second husband Philp Herbert, earl of Montgomery kept her very comfortable.²⁷²

**Widows Challenged by Sons**

Brothers-in-law were not the only male kin that objected to widows’ inheritances; at times stepson and sons also contested their fathers’ wills. Jane Fyneux Roper also argued with her eldest son, William, over the conditions of her husband’s will. Jane, daughter of Sir John Fyneux, married Sir John Roper sometime before 1498. Prior to his death, John ordered that his estate was to be equally bestowed to his sons. Although dividing property equally among sons was a common practice in Kent, Jane’s oldest son accused of his mother of pressuring her husband into changing his will.²⁷³ William Warham, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to Cardinal Wolsey about Jane’s conflict with her son and her requests to be acknowledged as her husband’s executor.²⁷⁴ Jane and William continued their skirmish for the five years, as Jane insisted that John’s provisions for his son was sufficient. With the support of his father-in-law, Sir Thomas More, William was able to get his will over turned by Parliament and inherited the bulk of his father’s estate. Although William’s close connection to the chancellor awarded him a

²⁷³ Andrea Nichols, “Jane Fyneux Roper” *A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen*, 103-104
favorable outcome in his conflict with his mother, Jane’s inheritance from her father allowed her to give generously to her younger son.\textsuperscript{275}

Although it was rare for a son to challenge his mother’s inheritance, as he was likely to be one of her heirs, some sons did contest their fathers’ wishes. Elizabeth Whethill argued with her son over the portion that she and his sister were to receive. Elizabeth Muston married Sir Richard Whethill in 1491 and together the couple had fourteen children, although only seven survived to adulthood. Shortly before his death, Richard altered his will to recognize his sons’ need for income and his daughters’ necessity for dowries. Despite the changes in his will, when Richard died in 1536 the majority of his estate was left to his widow. The couple’s eldest son, Robert, insisted that he should receive the Caswey home and farm in which his mother resided. In 1537, Elizabeth wrote to Cromwell the explaining that she has generously agreed to award her son more than his father’s will dictated, and yet he wants her farm and insists, “he and his wife should have half and live with me”\textsuperscript{276} Cromwell agreed with the widow, stating, “he thought fit to compel Robert Whethill, son of lady Elizabeth Whethill, to stand to the agreement made with the lady Elizabeth Whethill, his mother, and allow her to enjoy the farm called the Cawsey.”\textsuperscript{277} Although Elizabeth was able to protect the farm, Robert was awarded considerable revenue from various rents. Additionally, Robert was ordered to provide for his younger siblings, including providing dowries for his sisters. The conflict remained unsettled and Elizabeth disinherited her eldest son. Elizabeth’s choice to leave Robert out of her will resulted in him suing her executor, John St. John. St. John argued

\textsuperscript{275} Andrea Nichols, “Jane Fyneux Roper” \textit{A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen}, 103-104.
\textsuperscript{276} Arthur Plantagenet. Lisle to [Cromwell]. SP 1/128 f.4. 1538. The National Archives of the UK.
\textsuperscript{277} Arthur Plantagenet. Lisle to [Cromwell]. SP 1/128 f.4. 1538. The National Archives of the UK.
that Robert not uphold the conditions of his earlier agreement with Elizabeth. Furthermore, St. John maintained that he had already distributed Elizabeth’s estate before Robert made his claims against his mother’s will.  

Lady Jane Carlisle Dacre had trouble securing her inheritance at the hands of her stepson, William Dacre. Although Jane Carlisle and Sir John Lowther never married, the two had three daughters together and when Lowther died he left Jane a significant inheritance. Following Lowther’s death, Jane married Sir Thomas Dacre. When Dacre died in 1565 he awarded the majority of his estate to Jane. Dacre’s son from a previous marriage, William, contended that Jane’s inheritance belonged to him. While Jane won the lawsuit brought by her stepson, she chose to reside in the Whitehall mansion in Carlisle, a property that she had inherited from her natal family. Agnes Rys Banyton also struggled during to secure her inheritance during her widowhoods. Agnes’ first marriage to William Stourton was entrenched in controversy as his family claimed that she was only his mistress, since he was already married to Elizabeth, daughter of Edmund Dudley. Although it is unclear whether or not William actually bigamously married Agnes, he did bequeath much of his estate to her, including Stourton house. William’s son from Elizabeth, Charles, vigorously protested his father’s will. Charles attempted to sue Agnes for the majority of goods left to her by William, but was only granted the

Stourton house.\textsuperscript{280} In 1557, Charles was executed for murder and Agnes was able to recover some of the revenue from Stourton estate.\textsuperscript{281}

Anne Rede, who was widowed three times, also struggled to secure her inheritances from both her second and third husbands. Anne’s second husband, Adrian Fortescue, was executed for treason after refusing to accept Henry VIII’s Oath of Supremacy on July 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1539.\textsuperscript{282} After Fortescue’s execution the majority of his property was confiscated by the crown leaving Anne without much of an inheritance. Anne’s last husband, Thomas Parry, helped her to obtain some of Fortescue’s estate.\textsuperscript{283} When Parry died in 1560, Anne became embroiled in conflict with her stepson after she discovered that she was not receiving adequate payments from him. Anne, who recruited help from a chaplain and friend, Henry Gold, took her stepson to court over the disbursements she had received.\textsuperscript{284} Anne, with Gold, carefully gathered her evidence against her stepson and in 1566 the court awarded Anne a generous annuity for the rest of her widowhood.\textsuperscript{285}

Judith Lytton Smith Barrington also found conflict with her step-son over her inheritance. By her first husband, Sir George Smith, Judith had two sons before Smith’s death in 1620. Judith, who received a comfortable inheritance, married again in 1624. Sir


\textsuperscript{281} Charles Stourton, along with his servants, were convicted for the murder of William and John Hartgill following a long-standing conflict that he had with the two men. Roger Virgoe “Bayton, Edward (c.1520-93), of Bromham and Rowden, Wilts” http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/bayton-edward-1520-93


\textsuperscript{284} Harris, \textit{English Aristocratic Women}, 146.

\textsuperscript{285} Harris, \textit{English Aristocratic Women}, 146.
Thomas Barrington, Judith’s second husband, already had five children with Frances Gobart. In 1644, when Barrington died, her relationship with her eldest stepson, John Barrington, began to rapidly deteriorate as he began to petition Judith’s inheritance.  

John accused his stepmother of damaging his inheritance by cutting down a number trees for her own profit, but Judith replied that she cut down trees to preserve structures on her jointure lands that would increase their value. John continued to berate and threaten his stepmother over the trees:

> Madam if you proceed in this business to make a needless, if not a total waste my timber, I verily believe you will find you hazard your credit, your honour, you reputation, which should be dearer to you than any profit coming in such a way as is detestable: and dear than the fulfilling of your own will in doing me one of the greatest injuries you are able upon your jointure I should be very sorry to see that esteem the world hath of you to be lessened, and especially endangered by your own actions, which let them be what they will, I hope you shall always find me Your obedient son

Whether John felt that Judith could not successfully manage her estates or simply felt that he was entitled to the lands, he clearly attempted to intimidate his stepmother into relinquishing control of her rightful inheritance. Despite John’s continuous efforts, Judith was able to maintain her bequests until her death.

While most widows worked to obtain their personal inheritance Joan Thomas attempted to help other widows in her pursuit to secure her jointure. Joan took it upon herself to petition the Commons not only for her jointure, but for all widows struggling to gain access to their inheritance. In 1624, Joan, widow of Samuel Thomas wrote to the

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Royal Commons to asking for assistance securing her jointure from the Lord Keeper, John Williams:

on behalf of herself and all the widow jointuresses of the kingdom, to the Commons, for a full and fair hearing of her cause against the Lord Keeper, who has illegally decided that the lands left her in jointure are liable for the debts of her son, Sir Ant. Thomas, has sequestered her rents, stayed her suits against the tenants for not paying rent to her, and had her goods violently seized. 288

While Joan protested that her jointure was being unjustly seized to pay for the debts of her son the court found the widow liable. On May 24, only a few weeks after her formal complaint the court acquitted Williams of corruption charges. Although Joan did not gain her full jointure, the court did decide that she should not be punished for her erroneous allegations against the Lord Keeper. 289

For the most part, the wealthy widows discussed above were successful in securing their dowers and jointures. Although most affluent widows were able to utilize their personal connections to build their cases against anyone looking to encroach on their inheritances there were instances in which aristocratic and gentry widows who found themselves in financial disarray. While most of the inheritance problems recorded involving widows focus on obtaining their promised bequests, some widows struggled to retain control of money and property they brought into the marriage thus greatly affecting their widowhoods.

Elizabeth Cecil Hatton Coke struggled to retain control of the lands she inherited from her first husband, Sir William Hatton, after she remarried. As previously mentioned,

288 Joan Thomas, Petition of Joan, widow of Sam. Thomas, on behalf of herself and all the widow jointuresses of the kingdom, to the Commons, for a full and fair hearing of her cause against the Lord Keeper, who … SP 14/164 f.39. ff. 39. May 5 1624. The National Archives of the UK.
after Hatton’s death in 1597, Elizabeth inherited a significant amount of property and retained custody of her stepdaughter, Frances Hatton.\footnote{Kate Aughterson, “Hatton, Elizabeth, Lady Hatton [née Lady Elizabeth Cecil; other married name Elizabeth Coke, Lady Coke] (1578–1646), courtier.” \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}. 4 Feb. 2019. http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.unl.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-68059} One year after Hatton’s death, Elizabeth married Sir Edward Coke. Elizabeth and Coke quarrels began over Coke’s refusal honor the promise and bequests of William Hatton’s estate.\footnote{Joanna Luthman, \textit{Love Madness and Scandal: The Life of France Coke Villiers, Viscountess Purbeck} (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2017), 9-10.} Coke remained determined to control the extensive and lucrative property that Elizabeth brought into the marriage, which included Hatton House, located in Holborn, Corfe Castle, and the Isle of Purbeck.\footnote{Kate Aughterson, “Hatton, Elizabeth, Lady Hatton”} Elizabeth argued that Coke purposefully kept income from Hatton’s estate from her, “those three years she never received penny for her maintenance.”\footnote{Statement entitled “The Proceedings between the Lady Elizabeth Hatton and Sir Edward Coke, Attorney General to Queen Elizabeth.” On the marriage of Lady Elizabeth and Sir Edward …” \textit{Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the reign of Charles I, May 1634-Mar 1635, preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty’s Public Record Office}. Ed. John Bruce. Vol. 7: May 1634-Mar 1635 (London, England: Longman, Green, Longman), http://go.galegroup.com.libproxy.unl.edu/mss/i.do?id=GALE|MC4324401696&v=2.1&u=lincl74325&it=r&p=SPOL&w=w&viewtype=Calendaroberts and Green, 1864.} Additionally, Elizabeth argued that Coke did not properly provide for their two daughters and made false promises concerning their future inheritances. After receiving support from her father, Thomas Cecil, first earl of Exeter, Elizabeth negotiated an annual allowance of £2,000 from her husband.\footnote{Joanna Luthman, \textit{Love Madness and Scandal}, 10.} Despite Coke’s promises to his wife of an annual income, he halted these payments after the couple fought over their daughter, Frances’ marriage arrangements. When Coke died in 1634 Elizabeth was still struggling to regain control of the estates awarded to her by Hatton.\footnote{Laura Estill, “Elizabeth Cecil Hatton Coke” \textit{A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen}, 99-100.} Having only one year
between Hatton’s death and the marriage to Coke may have contributed to Elizabeth’s problems as she was unable to successfully implement a protective marriage contract.

Joan Bromley Greville was born into a wealthy family, as daughter of Lord Chancellor Sir Thomas Bromley and Elizabeth Fortescue. In 1583 Joan married Edward Greville of Milcote. Joan raised the couples’ daughters, as their only son died, while Greville secured a number of prestigious positions. Despite holding different political positions, Greville accrued immense debt due his unsuccessful investments and lifestyle of extravagance. Greville’s finances became so unmanageable that he sold his title to Milcote in Sir Arthur Ingram for £21,000 and £900 annuity. Despite the sale of Milcote, Greville still accumulated more debt and in 1630 Joan was forced to give up her annuity and her jointure. When Greville died in 1634, Joan inherited her husband’s financial troubles. Joan was forced to sell her personal belongs and when she died of illness in 1636 she could not provide adequate funding for her funeral. While Joan’s financial troubles stemmed from her husband’s mismanagement of their funds, her lack of familial support contributed economic problems. Anne Aucher Gilbert struggled financially after her husband, Sir Humphrey Gilbert was lost at sea in 1583. Anne, who married Gilbert in 1570, had inherited substantial amount property from her father, John Aucher. Gilbert took advantage of his wife’s wealth to finance his overseas expeditions. When Gilbert died Anne did not have the means to maintain her lifestyle. Almost immediately after her husband’s disappearance Anne became engaged in conflict over his estates. Even after

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Anne settled in Kent with lands provided by Queen Elizabeth, she faced the financial trials. While Anne’s children invested in oversea adventure it is unclear why Joan Greville’s children could not assist their mother.

The financial troubles that Anne and Joan met in their widowhoods began long before the deaths of their husbands. Anne and Joan’s experiences reveals that although women gained new autonomy in their widowhoods, it is clear that financial independence was dependent on their late husbands. The plight of these two heiresses demonstrate the vulnerability that widows could encounter if they did not have a designated inheritance.

As widows, English women entered into a new legal status which afforded them both personal and financial independence. Women’s release from coverture at the death of their husbands allowed widows the authority to create and endorse legal documents on their own. Wealthy widows often wielded newly awarded autonomy in the role of their husbands’ executors and embraced the responsibility of distributing their husbands’ estate.

For some widows their new autonomy came at a cost as it also left them vulnerable to those interested in their inheritance. Most wealthy women were protected by marriage contracts and easily secured their rightful inheritance, but there are numerous records that demonstrate challenges that some widows faced after their loss of their husbands. Most of the conflict widows encountered over their inheritances came at the hand of their late husbands’ male kin, who felt they had a claim to the widows’ estate. The families of the deceased may have challenged a widow’s inheritance in an attempt to preserve familial wealth or increase personal capital. Widows utilized various strategies

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to collect and maintain their inheritances, including securing support within their social networks. Despite widows’ legal capabilities, these women relied on the assistance of prominent members of the community to aid them in their pursuits of their rightful inheritance. Widows’ dependence on their social network highlighted the importance of cultivating and maintaining their relationships. The expectations established for widows remained important as numerous widows needed to present an image of a proper widow in order to obtain support in their pursuits. While some widows struggled in procuring their inheritance, most wealthy women entered widowhood and secured their incomes with limited interference as community members and local authorities attempted to execute the requests of husbands’ wills. Despite some limited legal and fiscal challenges, the majority of affluent widows gained and utilized their new legal and financial independence.
Chapter 4: Widows Patronage and Charity

Early modern patronage can be defined as a relationship where one person or family provides financial support or gifts to another individual with the intentions of creating art, building relationships, expanding influence, or promote ideas. Typically, patrons offered funds to their clients and these clients produced pieces of art that glorified their patrons. While patronage almost always resulted in a physical article, many of the benefits for the patron came in the form of relationships, influence, and prestige. Although men and women both served as patrons, because women did not have the same ability as men to engage public life the purpose and motives of their commissions can be interpreted differently. Women, who could not hold government offices, serve as religious leaders, or engage in public politics, used patronage to cultivate their sphere of influence. Patronage allowed wealthy women access to power and influence as it awarded them the opportunities to promote their personal, religious, or political views. Additionally, aristocratic women utilized the power of patronage to encourage advantageous relations that benefitted their dynastic interests. Patronage not only allowed women to build and maintain relationships, but also permitted women to informally participate publicly in their communities through the creation and alteration of all forms of art.

In addition to patronage, numerous English widows utilized their inheritance to sponsor more charitable endeavors by giving to different institutions including schools, local religious charities, hospitals, and almshouses. Widows’ continued support of charitable causes not only allowed them to help numerous men, women, and children improve their prospects, but also awarded them the opportunity to build their own legacy.
Whether widows funded different charities to exercise their personal piety, help their local communities, or shape their own memory, their generous gifts enhanced and influenced their surroundings.

**Widows’ Patronage**

Although the evaluation of married women’s patronage can lead to better understanding of women’s influence on artistic culture, because these women did have husbands it becomes difficult to distinguish a woman’s personal choices. Catherine Medici-Thiemann argues that wives at Queen Elizabeth’s court utilized patronage not only for their own personal purposes, but also to acquire favor for husbands. Exploring patronage through widows exclusively reveals how women in their widowhood commissioned works to craft their own image.

One of the first commissions that female patrons made after the deaths of their husbands were memorial monuments. Aristocratic widows were expected host a funeral for their deceased husbands as well as preserve their memory with a memorial marker. Though there were expectations for the types of tombs deemed appropriate for titled nobility and some men did leave details concerning their tomb in their will, for the most part widows had creative autonomy in the erection of monuments. The commissioning of memorial monuments not only allowed widows the opportunity demonstrate their loyalty to their late partner or family member, but also reveal their independence and competence as they oversaw construction of a tomb. Though most men stated where they were to be buried, in terms of specific location, in their wills most did not leave any instructions on

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the construction of their tomb, and thus widows enjoyed relative freedom as they commissioned tombs. Affluent widows particularly were able to exercise creativity as most were unburdened with the costs of such commissions because tombs were viewed as a way of honoring a loved one, rather than a lavish construction. Although widows hired people to actually construct memorial monuments most wealthy widows would have influence over the design of a tomb that they were financing.

Affluent widows often possessed the ability to honor their marriage and their late husband through the commission and construction of a memorial monument. Alice Fanshawe, daughter of Thomas Fanshawe and Joan Symth, married Sir Christopher Hatton, a cousin of Queen Elizabeth’s favorite also named Christopher Hatton, in 1602. The couple had twelve children and demonstrated great affection toward one another in their letters to one another. In 1623, four years after the death of Hatton in 1619, Alice completed her late husband’s memorial monument located in the lower Islip chapel in Westminster Abbey. Alice’s inscription for her husband represents her deep devotion as she suggests that she humbly waits to be reunited with him, “Alice, his future companion in the tomb, as she was the companion of his bed, in her grief raised this dwelling for her husband and herself, that they might not be divided in death.” Alice furthered demonstrated her loyalty to her husband by choosing to be depicted in her mourning veil for memorial monument. At her death in 1640, Alice was buried beside her husband.

301 Hatton Family. https://www.westminster-abbey.org/abbey-commemorations/commemorations/hatton-family/
Anne Sapcote, who married three times, erected a chapel in her third husband’s honor, Sir John Russell, first earl of Bedford. While Anne’s first two husbands, Sir John Broughton and Sir Richard Jerningham, both were both well connected and financially established, her match to John Russell brought her great wealth and prestige. At her wedding to Russell in 1526, Henry VIII gave the couple a Buckinghamshire manor.\footnote{Diane Willen, “Russell, John, first earl of Bedford (c. 1485–1555), courtier and magnate.” Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. 6 Feb. 2019. http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.unl.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24319.} After a long and successful career working beside English monarchs Russell died in 1555 at the age of 70. Anne, who served as one of her husband’s executors, honored her husband with construction of a chapel to house his tomb at Chenies, an estate Anne brought to the marriage, in 1556. The chapel, which contains different references to the Russell family accomplishments, also contains a plaque with an inscription that reads, “Anno Dni 1556: Thys chappel ys built by Anne Countysse of Bedforde, wyfe to John Erle of Bedford, according to ye last wyll of the said Erle.”\footnote{“Parishes: Chenies,” in A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 3, ed. William Page (London: Victoria County History, 1925), 199-203. British History Online, accessed February 6, 2019, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/bucks/vol3/pp199-203.} Anne’s construction of the chapel was recognized as a great tribute to her husband. Anne honored her husband and emphasized her own lineage by building at Chenies.

When Dorothy Catesby Dormer Pelham was widowed for a second time, her husband, William Pelham, was in debt and she did not receive a substantial inheritance. Dorothy became reliant on the properties that she inherited at Wing and Eythrope, Buckinghamshire from her first husband, William Dormer.\footnote{Cynthia Sampson, “Dorothy Catesby Dormer Pelham,” A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen, 210.} Dorothy returned to her estate at Wing where she erected an armored marble effigy in Dormer’s honor in the apse.
of All Saints Church. While Dorothy lived on for over thirty years after the death of Dormer, she too was buried at Wing. Her monument, which resides to the right of Dormer’s, displays their seven children in prayer. Although Dorothy remarried and had two children with Pelham her efforts to preserve Dormer’s memory demonstrates her loyalty to her first husband. Dorothy’s decision to erect a monument for Dormer may have been an effort to forever ally herself and her children with the well-established Dormer family. Additionally, the monument may have served as symbol of gratitude for Dormer, who generously provided for his children and widow.

Mary Beaumont Villiers Rayner Compton also worked to create her own memory and emphasize her connection to her first husband, Sir George Villiers, through the memorial monuments she commissioned for the both of them. With Villiers, Mary had four children, including George Villiers, future the duke of Buckingham and favorite of King James I. After the death of Villiers, Mary was briefly married to William Rayner but he died after less than a year of marriage. Mary’s last husband, Sir Thomas Compton, was both wealthy and well-connected as member of the Compton family. Although Mary’s third marriage expanded her social connection, her position as mother of the king’s favorite brought her the title of countess of Buckingham in her own right. Even though Mary took three husbands in her lifetime, her memorial monument only honors her first husband who died nearly thirty years prior. Mary’s decision to create a

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307 Sir Thomas Compton was the brother of Sir William Compton, a prominent courtier that held numerous positions at Henry VIII’s court.
memorial for her first husband demonstrates her desire to be forever associated with the Villiers family. By associating herself with George Villiers she highlights her connection to her son, the Duke of Buckingham, who is also buried at Westminster Abbey. Mary’s tomb, commissioned in 1631, one year before her death and located in St. Nicholas’s Chapel at Westminster Abbey, is shared with Villiers. Mary’s effigy demonstrates her wealth and status through her regal attire as she is portrayed wearing a robe lined with ermine and a jeweled necklace. The inscription on the memorial reads:

To the good memory of George Villiers Kt. [Knight]. His most devoted wife, Mary Countess of Buckingham, had this statue placed next to her own, out of piety, to a well deserving husband.
To God the best and greatest. The bones of Mary Beaumont, Countess of Buckingham, descended from five of the most powerful kings of Europe, by five direct descents. She lived 62 years, 11 months and 19 days. She caused this monument to be made for her husband.

The inscription on the Mary’s tomb not only stresses her relationship with her first husband, but also attempts to glorify her own lineage. Although Mary’s inscription claims that she is “descended from five of the most powerful kings of Europe” it offers no other information about how to trace these connections. Mary utilized her memorial monument to the craft her memory through emphasizing her particular relationships.

In addition to her patronage of art and literature that I previously discussed, Anne Clifford Sackville Herbert also commissioned memorial monuments for her family. Anne, who had already inherited a great deal of wealth after the death of her uncle, became even more financially fortunate at the death her second husband, Philip Herbert, earl of Pembroke and Montgomery. Anne had several memorial monuments erected to

honor her loved ones beyond her husband, including her mother, a cousin, her tutor, and
the poet Edmund Spencer.\footnote{Debra Barrett-Graves “Anne Clifford Sackville Herbert” A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen, 49.} While married Anne Clifford built her mother, Margaret Russell, a memorial tomb in 1617 at the Church of Saint Lawrence in Appleby. However, it was during Anne’s widowhood that she erected the Countess Pillar in her mother’s honor. Anne’s diary reveals the sorrow she felt at the death of her mother, “Upon the 29th Kendall came and brought me the heavy news of my Mother’s death which I held as the greatest and most lamentable cross that could have be fallen me.”\footnote{Anne Clifford. The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford with an introductory note by V. Sackville-West (London: W. Heinemann ltd 1923), 32.} In 1656, Anne honored the memory of the last time she saw her mother with the Countess Pillar at Brougham. The pillar, which features the arms of the both the Clifford and Russell families, reads:

This pillar was erected, anno 1656,
By the right honourable Anne Countess Dowager
of Pembroke, and sole heir of the right
Honourable George, Earl of Cumberland, &c.
With her good and pious mother the right honourable
Margaret, Countess Dowager of Cumberland,
The second of April, 1616. In memory whereof
She also left an annuity of four pounds,
To be distributed to the poor within this
Parish of Brougham, every second day of April
For ever, upon the stone table.
Laus Deo.\footnote{The Churchman’s companion, Volumes 11-12 (London: Joseph Masters and co, 1852), 229 https://books.google.com/books?id=qicEEAAAQAAJ&pg=RA1-PAG22&dq=The+countess+pillar+margaret+russell&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjVqlaByNbcAhVPR6wKHa1KCyEQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=The%20countess%20pillar%20margaret%20russell&f=false} Anne’s dedication to her mother’s memory served to accentuate her mother’s virtues, by referring to both her piety and generosity. Furthermore, the dowager Anne’s dedicatory words to her mother demonstrates Anne’s efforts to highlight her place as “sole heir” to

\footnote{310 Debra Barrett-Graves “Anne Clifford Sackville Herbert” A Biographical Encyclopedia of Early Modern Englishwomen, 49.} \footnote{311 Anne Clifford. The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford with an introductory note by V. Sackville-West (London: W. Heinemann ltd 1923), 32.} \footnote{312 The Churchman’s companion, Volumes 11-12 (London: Joseph Masters and co, 1852), 229 https://books.google.com/books?id=qicEEAAAQAAJ&pg=RA1-PAG22&dq=The+countess+pillar+margaret+russell&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjVqlaByNbcAhVPR6wKHa1KCyEQ6AEIKTAA#v=onepage&q=The%20countess%20pillar%20margaret%20russell&f=false}
her father’s legacy. After Margaret and Anne’s lengthy struggle to obtain Anne’s inheritance, Anne made tremendous efforts to correct any doubt that she was George Clifford’s true heir through different avenues of patronage. In 1632, Anne Clifford completed the building of the Beamsley almshouse that her mother, Margaret Clifford, began decades earlier.\(^{313}\) After finishing the construction of the Beamsley almshouse, Anne ordered that it was to house poor widows. Construcing almshouse specifically to serve widows demonstrates an understanding of the hardship that many less fortunate women faced during their widowhoods. Anne continued building almshouses and commissioned the St. Anne’s Hospital in Appleby. Anne clearly utilized her inheritance to reiterate the ownership of her inherited land and to promote her family through her charitable commissions.

While many aristocratic and gentry widows honored their family with extravagant memorial monuments, paintings, and literature others chose to preserve their husbands’ memories by supporting projects about which their husbands were passionate. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, many men left the bulk of their estates to their widows and heirs, and some men dictated that a portion of their estate was to go to a particular charitable contribution. Elizabeth Cornwallis Kitson honored her late husband by overseeing the erection of almshouses that he requested in his will.\(^{314}\) Numerous widows demonstrated a concern for their husband’s charities in their own wills, which I discuss in more detail in the following chapter.


Through patronage of the arts women had the ability to contribute to development of English culture. While many aristocratic and gentry wives utilized their personal financial resources to patronize, widows possessed a specific autonomy in regards to what and who they choose to support. Anne Clifford attempted to highlight her family wealth and importance when she commissioned a painting of the Clifford family. The painting of the Clifford family, better known as The Great Picture, remains an impressive piece as it is about eighteen feet across and nine feet tall.\(^{315}\) Anne commissioned the imposing piece of art in 1646 and it was mostly likely painted by Jan van Belcamp.\(^{316}\) In addition to Anne highlighting her family’s importance through paintings, she also ordered the expansion of her family records, which came to be referred to as Great Books. The Great Books, which consists of diary entries, biographies, family trees, letters, and other documents, reveal the important role the Clifford family played in English politics. Anne’s drawn out engagement with lawsuits to secure her proper inheritance of the Clifford lands and her commission of The Great Picture and the Great Books demonstrates Anne’s awareness of the significance of personal legacy and familial prestige in early modern England.

Prior to her widowhood, Alice Spencer Stanley Egerton, whose trouble securing her jointure has been previously mentioned, had great interest in supporting theater. Alice’s first husband, Fernando Stanley, earl of Derby, served as a patron for the company, Lord Strange’s Men. When Stanley died in 1594, Alice continued to finance the company of players, which were now referred to as Countess of Derby’s Men. Very


shortly after Stanley’s passing, the Countess of Derby’s Men merged with the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Countess Alice was also particularly fond of masques and she served as both a patron and participant in the early 1600s. Alice partook in several courtly masques, including Ben Jonson’s the *Masque of Blackness*. Alice did more than simply perform, she also sponsored theatrical ventures. While Alice was well-known for her patronage of the theater, she was also recognized as great supporter of literature. Alice supported a number of prominent authors including Edmund Spenser, who dedicated *Tears of the Muses* to her. In her later years, Alice also became a patron for John Milton.

When William Cavendish died in 1628, he left his wife, Christina, and four young children. As a widow, Christina gave her children a proper and well-rounded aristocratic education, including sending her children on European tours and employing Thomas Hobbes as their tutor. Christina’s efforts in educating her children is only one of the ways that she demonstrated her passion for learning and literature as she also patronized different authors, including John Evelyn and Edmund Waller. William Herbert dedicated one of his books of poems to Christina, who was his cousin and patron. The poet John Donne’s son, also named John, thanked Christina for helping to preserve Herbert’s work when he published Herbert’s poems in *Poems Written by the Right*
Honorable William Earl of Pembroke, Lord Steward of His Majestie’s Household, whereof May Which Answered by Way of Repartee by Sir Benjamin Ruddier Knight.\textsuperscript{322}

The dedications to Christina and other widows demonstrates how their personal patronage fostered literary culture. Widows’ support of authors was beneficial to both parties as writers were able to continue their craft and widows are recognized as generous patrons. Flattering dedications not only enhanced a widow’s reputation amongst her peers, but also contributed to her memory.

The sponsoring of artists, writers, and playwrights was valuable for widows who received the opportunity to promote their personal religions or social perspective through artworks. Additionally, widows utilized patronage to help shape both personal and familial legacies. Widows such as Anne Clifford worked to enhance her family name through the commission of works that highlighted the grandeur of her family. Patronage of arts remained an important way for widows to shape their personal image, increase their influence, and directly contribute to artistic culture.

\textbf{Widows’ Charity}

While artistic patronage often played a major role in the widowhoods of affluent Englishwomen, many widows chose to support more charitable endeavors. Numerous aristocratic and gentry widows utilized their inheritance to found and support charitable causes. Giving to charity took various forms in England as donations to many different causes were interpreted as charity. Most wealthy English widows engaged in charity by funding institutions that helped the less fortunate, including schools, hospitals, and almshouses. Whether widows chose to establish schools for poor children or restore

deteriorating almshouses, many of these women embraced the opportunity to fund charitable causes. Similar to patronage of the arts, widows who focused on giving to charity used their contributions to craft their own legacy.

Because most aristocratic women received their education from private tutors, donating to local schools for the poor, providing scholarships for universities, and commissioning the construction of schools permitted widows to participate in and help shape a community with which they traditionally had limited engagement with. Ann Radcliffe dedicated a portion of her inheritance toward helping scholars receive an education. Ann Radcliffe was born into a successful and prominent London family. Ann’s father, Anthony Radcliffe, was a member of Merchant Taylors’ Company and eventually became an alderman of London. In 1600, Ann married a wealthy London merchant named Sir Thomas Moulson. Moulson’s business ventures continued to garner success in both England and abroad and in 1634 he was elected as the Lord Mayor of London. Moulson, who was known for both loaning and donating to parishes, used his will to set up annuities for a minister and schoolmaster for a school he built in Hargrave, Cheshire. His will also awarded monetary bequests to hospitals and the different companies to which he belonged. When Moulson died in 1638 Ann became a wealthy widow as she was awarded half of her late husband’s estate. Ann, who served as the executrix to her husband’s will, collected all the debts owed to Moulson and continued run several of her late husband’s businesses. In addition to continuing her late husband’s

work, she also built on his legacy of charitable contributions by creating a scholarship for a student attending Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ann decided to support a scholarship after meeting Thomas Weld, a Puritan minster, who was attempting to raise money to finish his studies. In 1643, Ann formally agreed to help financially support Weld, who wrote “I have received of the Lady Ann Mowlson of London widow the full & intire some of one hundred pownds current English mony the wch she hath freely given to Harvards Colledge in New England.” Ann’s bequest continued on to specify that she would support scholars beyond Weld with a yearly stipend, “according to her good & pious intention is to be & remaine as a perpetuall stipend for & towards the yearly maintenance of some poore scholler which shalbe is to injoy the sd yearly stipend only till such time as such poore scholler doth attaine to the degree of a Master of Arts […]” Ann’s gift is recorded as the first scholarship award by a woman in Harvard University’s history, and the university honored Ann in 1894, by renaming “Society for the Collegiate Instruction of Women” Radcliffe College.

Throughout her life, Alice Wilkes Owen remained interested in utilizing her familial wealth to help others through education and other charitable causes. Alice was born to prominent Islington landowner Thomas Wilkes. Alice’s first marriage to Henry Robinson, a member of the Brewers’ Company, resulted in eleven children. When Robinson died in 1585, Alice was left a widow with several children to care for and chose to remarry in 1587. Alice’s second husband was William Elkin, a mercer and alderman in London, with whom she had one daughter. When Elkin died in 1593, in

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addition to leaving his wife her inheritance, he gave to the poor through Christ’s Hospital in London and prisoners. Elkin’s will also donated money to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.\textsuperscript{328} Alice was only married to her last husband, judge Thomas Owen, for about four years before she was again widowed. Similar to Elkin, Owen also chose to donate to the “poore” after taking care of his heirs,

in the countie of Salop, ymmediately after his death; and he wills that they should employ the profits thereof for the purchasing of some lands tenements rents or heredytaments of the rentes whereof shall be bestowed and given yearlie to poore decayed householders of the parishes of Saint Chaddes in Shrewsbury, where he was bornem, and to the poore and ympotent persons there.\textsuperscript{329}

As a widow, Alice continued to give charitable and educational intuitions: “she gave to the Library in the Vniversitie of Oxenford, the summe of two hundred pounds. She gave also to the Library in the Vniversity of Cambridge the summe of twenty pounds.”\textsuperscript{330}

Alice further supported education by establishing her own school, as “she builded a Schoolehouse and a Chappel of ease, that the poore might not goe over-far to Church, the charges whereof did cost her the summe of three hundred, sixty one pounds. Yeerely also shee gave good summes of money, to poore Preachers unbeneficied”\textsuperscript{331} Alice not only ordered and funded the construction of the school, she also dictated rules for how the school should run. Alice’s legacy continues today as the Dame Alice Owen’s School in


\textsuperscript{329} Miscellaneous Papers: Charitable Donations; Parish Returns and Poor Clergy. Session 8 November - 12 July 1814-1815 Volume XII. (1815), 180

\textsuperscript{330} J. S., The illustrious history of women, or, A compendium of the many virtues that adorn the fair sex represented not only in lively and pathetical discourses grounded upon reason, but in sundry rare examples of virtuous love, piety, prudence, modesty, chastity, patience, humility [sic], temperance, conduct, constancy, and firmness of mind ... : with the prophesies and predictions of the Sybils ... : the whole work enrich’d and intermix’d with curious poetry and delicate fascie suitable to so charming a subject (London printed for Iohn Harris at ye Harrow in ye poultry, 1686), 111.

\textsuperscript{331} J. S., The illustrious history of women, 111.
Hertfordshire is still open and operating. Traditionally, the school has made tremendous efforts to honor Alice through statues throughout the grounds, including part of her original effigy and the Frampton Statue of Dame Alice Owen, which was erected in 1897. Furthermore, the school created a song dedicated to Alice, “Honour Dame Alice Owen”:

Lift your hearts and lift your voices,  
Sing Dame Alice Owen’s praise,  
In her name our School rejoices,  
May her wisdom guide our ways.

Our noble Foundress sowed the seed,  
Bear fruit well: in thought and deed  
Honour Dame Alice Owen.

This first stanza and chorus demonstrate the school’s effort to recognize Alice as the creator of their school. Alice’s effort to create rules for the school and establish an annual income allowed for her legacy to continue. In addition to Alice Owen’s ordering the construction of a school for poor children and her other charitable bequests during her widowhood, her 1623 will also called for money to be utilized for maintenance of this school:

By her last Will and Testament, Note in marg: Gifts appointed by her will. she hath provided, that 22. pounds yeerely shall be purchased, for the maintenance of the Schoole at Islington. She hath bequeathed to poore Preachers the summe of 35. pounds. She hath given to the Parish of Bashingshaw, (wherein sometime she dwelt) to increase the stocke of the poore there, twenty pounds. She hath given to the Prisons, eight pounds.

Alice’s effort to provide for the school she founded demonstrates her commitment to education. By securing funding for her school, Alice also ensured her own legacy, as her

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memory and name will continue on with each student who attends her school. Avice Gibson Knyvett provides and earlier example of someone who inherited, rather than founded, a charity school. Avice’s first husband, Nicholas Gibson, bequeathed her a school at Radcliff at his death. Gibson, who earned significant wealth with the Grocer’s Company, established The Free School of Coopers Company school in 1536. Gibson’s will specified:

[…]all his real and personal property to his wife Avice in trust, to convey and assure all his lands, tenements and hereditaments, for the maintenance of a free-school and almsmen and almswomen for ever; and that she should have all the rents issues and profits of his real estates during her life, for the purpose of keeping and maintaining the said school and almsmen and almswomen, in the same manner as had kept them during his life.335

Gibson’s generous bequest to his wife demonstrates his passion for his personal charity as well as his faith in the capabilities of his wife. When Avice received control of the school, it had the capacity to serve sixty boys, thirty of whom were free scholars.336 Only a year after Gibson’s death, Avice married Sir Anthony Knyvett, a well-connected gentleman at King Henry VIII’s court. In 1552, Avice was again widowed and relocated to a property in Radcliff where she served as the school’s trustee. Lady Knyvett remained active in the maintenance of the school as she dictated salaries for the schoolmaster and the usher.337 Although Lady Avice Knyvett did not solely found the

charity school, her continued attentiveness to this charitable project reveals her influence and contribution to the development of this school.

Lettice Morison Cary, Viscountess Falkland, gave generously to establish a school at Great Tew. Lettice was devastated by death of her husband, first Viscount Falkland, in 1643 and resolved to dedicate herself to a pious life. One of the ways that Lettice chose to demonstrate her piety was through her charitable contributions. Lettice, who was a scholar, focused charitable work on providing education for children whose families could not afford schooling.338 Lettice’s spiritual counselor, John Duncon, noted in The Holy life and death of the Lady Letice Vi-Countess Falkland with the returns of spiritual comfort and grief in a devout soul that she commissioned the building of a school for poor children, “To other poor children she contributed much, both for their spiritual, and their temporal wel-being; by erecting a Schole for them.”339 Lettice ordered that the children who attended her school, “were to be taught both to read, and to work.”340 Duncon continued by suggesting that the widow believed that providing education to children would prevent idleness, “So that her principal care herein was to keep them from idleness (that Root of all sin and wickedness for by another contrivemen of her

339 Although Lettice’s bequest does not specify that girls should attend the school she founded her later interesting erecting a school for young women suggests an desire to educate boys and girls alike. John Duncon The Holy life and death of the Lady Letice Vi-Countess Falkland with the returns of spiritual comfort and grief in a devout soul: Represented in letters to that honorable lady and exemplified in her (London: Royston, 1653), 153.
The school room built by the widow, located on north west corner of the church at Great Tew remained intact until it was torn down in the eighteenth century. While only one school was built under Lettice’s instruction, she had additional plans for schools specifically for women. Duncon reported that Lettice remained interested in creating a school that would serve the spiritual and educational needs of women, “But that magnificent, and most religious contrivement, that there might be places for the education of young Gentlemen, & for the retirement of widows (as College and the Inns of Court and Chancery are for men) in several parts of the Kingdom, This was much in her thoughts.” Lettice’s desire to build a school for women demonstrated her constant efforts to help provide for the people around her in both religious and practical matters. Lettice’s concern for the education and spiritual welfare of children demonstrate the goals of several aristocratic and gentry widows, as many of these women chose to dedicate much of their inheritance to educational charities. While many wealthy widows financially maintained schooling for poor scholars for altruistic reasons, the support of education also highlighted the values of the donor. As previously mentioned, most aristocratic women did receive comprehensive educations, but did not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts to publish as scholars. Although there were notable exceptions of well published women, including Mary Sidney and Aemilia Lanyer, women were not encouraged to pursue scholarship after they were married. The establishment of the schools provided widows the opportunity to utilize their own

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education to design and implement their own curriculum. Founding schools as widows not only allowed these women to exert control in construction and management, but also to provide the opportunity for them to help their community, as most schools were established for the poor. Awarding specific scholarships to English universities created a connection between widowed women and the educational institutions that excluded them. While women were unable to attend universities, widows’ donations to colleges allowed them to capitalize on the status and esteem of the well-known educational institutions. Affluent widows’ monetary gifts to education through the founding of schools and the support of scholarships not only contributed to their community, but also allowed them to establish a connection with places of learning.

Widows who sought to help their community through their bequests often looked to local almshouses and hospitals. John Stow notes that several wealthy widows, including Elizabeth Smith, Margery Simcotes, Margaret Search, Joane Doxie, Jane Allington, and Margaret Audley, all donated to Christ’s Hospital.344 Alice Carter honored her late husband by building an almshouse at their parish in Brill. In 1590, Alice, widow of George Carter, selected trustees to work with the curate of Brill to manage five properties with adjoining grounds to serve five poor widows. Alice’s gift stipulated that the widows receiving board must demonstrate proper and honest behavior. Alice’s conditions for her almshouses suggests that the social expectations for widows, which were perpetuated by early modern authors, had some effect on widows’ ability to receive aid.345

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Alice Owen’s founding of schools was not only her only charitable venture as she also established an almshouse. As a widow, Alice purchased the Hermitage Estate, the same estate where she had a near death experience as a child when an arrow pierced the hat she was wearing. It was on this property where she commissioned an almshouse:

his Mistris Alice Owen, caused (in her life time) an Hospitall to bee builded at Islington, for tenne poore women, with very convenient roomes, and Gardens to them adjoyning. Many other good workes were by her performed, and in her life time: and according as shee franckly and freely gave them, so will I set them downe in order, as followeth. 346

Alice specified that her almshouse would aim to serve ten poor widows. 347 Alice’s bequest articulated that only widows who met specific requirements would be served at her almshouse. They must be at least “fifty years, unless through impotency, the governors should think fit to receive them at a lesser age; that they be of good fame and reputation.” 348 Furthermore, widows were to “remain unmarried” while staying at the Islington almshouse. 349 Widows who stayed in Alice’s almshouse were required to follow rules that included tending their yard and attending prayers twice a day. 350

Widows could not host strangers or be away from the almshouse for more than three days without permission. 351 Ordering that widows should have priority within her almshouse

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346 J. S., The illustrious history of women, 110-111.
350 Rose, Alice Owen, 95.
351 Rose, Alice Owen, 95.
not only exhibits an understanding of the struggles that many poor women faced at the deaths of their husbands, but also a true interest in helping these widows. Alice made tremendous efforts and put forth substantial amounts of money to create environments that provided more opportunity for people who were less fortunate than herself. Although Alice’s almshouse attempted to help struggling widows, the requirements for the women who could stay there reinforced societal expectations for widows. By requiring the widows receiving the benefits of almshouse to attend daily prayer and maintain a positive reputation Alice’s charity continued the idea that widows should dedicate themselves to a spiritual and chaste life.

Cynthia Lawrence suggests that the men were more likely to erect large public buildings and paintings, while women were more likely to commission religious works.\textsuperscript{352} There are many different reasons women might be drawn to financially supporting religious endeavors, but the first and most obvious motive would be genuine piety. Another purpose of commissioning works relating to religion would be to publicly demonstrate piety. With religious patronage, early modern women had the opportunity to express their personal religious stances with the artists and work that they maintained. Furthermore, women who chose to support works associated with religion may have had a desire to engage with public spiritual life, as women could not hold formal positions of power within the church. Whether a widow chose to sponsor a minster or to establish an almshouse, widows’ charitable contributions contributed to shaping the religious atmosphere of their communities. Many widows invested their energy and resources to helping the less fortunate through local religious institutions, including giving to the poor.

\textsuperscript{352} Cynthia Lawrence, “Introduction” Women and art in Early Modern Europe: Patrons, Collectors, and Connoisseurs (Penn State Press, 1997), 11.
of particular parishes. Anne Smith, widow of William Nisam, “gave weekly to be dealt
in bread to the poore of this parish upon every Sunday 2. s’. for ever, to be paid out of the
company of Drapers in London.”\textsuperscript{353} Not only did Anne choose a specific parish in which
to distribute money to the poor, she also donated directly to the church, as she “gave a
pulpit cloth and cushion to this Church.”\textsuperscript{354} Joan Smales, widow of John Cooke,
“bequeathed also 40. l. yeerly to be given to the poore of our Parish.”\textsuperscript{355} Anne Smith and
Joan Smales trusted that their gifts to the community would be properly distributed by
their parishes. Joan Bradshaw, who lived as a widow for forty years after the death her
second husband, gave generously to her local parishes. Joan’s second husband, Henry
Bradshaw, chief Baron of the Exchequer, provided his wife with a sizeable inheritance at
his death in 1553. Joan took her income and commissioned the building of a chapel at
Noke, Oxfordshire. Joan also donated relief funds to the poor of parishes in Halton and
Wendover, Buckinghamshire. Joan established a trust with a stipend of £20 per year to be
distributed to the poorest inhabitants of the parishes.\textsuperscript{356} Giving to the poor through the
local parish remained a common practice, as many aristocratic and gentry widows
utilized this format in their wills.

Some widows’ charity manifested in the form of spiritual gifts as they provided for
preachers. One way for a widow to demonstrate her personal piety would be to maintain a
preacher like “Mistris Venables, widdow, in her love to Christian Religion, gave for the
help of poore Preachers, the summe of five thousand pounds.”\textsuperscript{357} Joan Smales gave an

\textsuperscript{353} J. S., \textit{The illustrious history of women}, 473.
\textsuperscript{354} J. S., \textit{The illustrious history of women}, 473.
\textsuperscript{355} J. S., \textit{The illustrious history of women}, 473.
\textsuperscript{357} J. S., \textit{The illustrious history of women}, 110.
“allowance for 4. sermons every yeere on foure Holy dayes: Namely, the feast day of S. John Baptist, S. Michael, S. Stephen, and the Purification of the Virgin Mary.”

Elizabeth Moseley, a York widow, generously endowed £800 to the welfare and security of a minister at St. John’s parish. In addition to Ann Radcliff’s bequests for education, she also fostered her religious leanings by helping to sponsor a puritan minister for her local parish. Religious bequests not only helped widows express their personal piety, but also allowed them to help the less fortunate. Bequests involving a religious institution, whether its sponsoring of a preacher or giving to the poor, helped widows fashion an image of both generosity and piety.

As we have seen, aristocratic and gentry widows utilized their inheritance for patronage and charity to both fashion their own images and contribute to their communities. One of the first opportunities women had to patronize artists after the death of their husband was the building of memorial monuments. The construction of tombs allowed for widows to honor their husbands and other family members and highlight their relationships.

Affluent widows embraced the chance to create their image and legacy by sponsoring artists. Widows sponsored artists and works of art that somehow praised or honored the widow. Patronage provided wealthy women the opportunity to utilize their formal educations by engaging with artists and authors concerning commissions. The art the widows supported not only brought recognition to the widow as a patron, but also contributed to the body of art.

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359 W. K. Jordan, 384.
Charitable donations, like patronage, allowed widows to extend their personal influence through the funding of particular people and projects. Widows also awarded charitable donations for a multitude of reasons, including personal piety, the furthering of religious beliefs, and creating a reputation for generosity and piousness. Charitable donations to schools and scholars also allowed widows to employ their educations as they dictated specific conditions concerning their gifts. In addition to supporting education, affluent widows also helped their communities by funding institutions that directly supported the poor, including almshouses, hospitals, and local parishes. Widows’ charitable endowments also contributed to widows’ personal image as altruistic. Wealthy women utilized the economic independence they gained in their widowhoods to create their image and contribute to their communities through acts of patronage and charity.
Chapter 5: Widows’ Wills

While numerous aristocratic and gentry widows participated in their communities through patronage, running estates, and educating family members, many also contributed by leaving property to particular people and institutions in their wills. This chapter explores the different ways that widows utilized their wills to be effective in their communities. By exploring widows’ wills specifically, we can better understand how these women interpreted both their surroundings and their place within the community.

Susan James’ *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* explores how wills reveal the personal beliefs and ideas of women of all stations.360 F.G. Emmison’s transcriptions of English wills allows for analysis of cultural and personal meanings within individual bequests. By looking at wills of English widows, the majority from Essex, this chapter explores how and why widows donated their inheritances. Understanding the allocation of women’s goods in early modern England is instrumental in comprehending what these women valued in their lives and their communities.

England’s move away from Catholicism in the latter half of the sixteenth century awarded widows more creative freedom as they drew up their commissions and bequests, as they were unburdened with the formulaic structure of traditional Catholic wills.361 Although English wills contained tremendous diversity when accounting for personal finances and heirs, many wills did adhere to some conventions. Most English wills,

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composed by both men and women, typically followed the tradition of primogeniture as the eldest male heir typically received the largest portion of estate. Younger sons would likely inherit a small portion of land or a sum of money and some movable goods and daughters usually collected monetary sums and an assortment of movable goods. Daughters almost always received money from either of their parents specifically for their dowry. If a daughter was already married, she was more likely to inherit movable goods, although some married women would still receive money that could provide her leverage within her current marriage. In the distribution of personal items and household goods the eldest children typically received the items deemed most valuable. Furthermore, the awarding of personal items remained gendered, as daughters conventionally were gifted women’s clothing and sons would receive household furnishings. Although these customs appeared in many wills, widows not did not always adhere to these conventions. Susan James asserts that English widows chose to award a favorite child or a child with limited options more generously. Dame Mary Judd’s will provided three of her daughters and their husbands with numerous household goods and valuable pieces of jewelry, yet only awarded her other two daughters and sons with a couple of household items each. Although Mary Judd’s will does not account for any gifts of land or money that she may have gifted her sons before her death, there is clear a discrepancy in how she awarded her daughters. Additionally, James claims that widows attempted to provide for their heirs more evenly, as opposed to their male counterparts.

362 The majority of household items, with the exception of jewelry, are named specifically for her sons-in-law, rather than her daughters. Awarding her sons-in-law may have been an effort to avoid any conflict or mismanage concerning her estate, as her married daughters would have been under coverture. Mary Judd, Will. Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry and Merchants, 23.
who customarily favored the eldest son.\textsuperscript{363} Widows without direct biological heirs often awarded other relatives, friends, and local charities. Lady Margaret Curson distributed the majority of her estate to the poor of several different parishes and a few maidservants. Margaret divided the rest of her money amongst several people in her social circle, including her godchildren. Margaret’s will ended with leaving her executors the remainder of her estate.\textsuperscript{364} English widows frequently concluded their wills with awarding their executors and overseers as a token of appreciation for their work in executing the demands of a will. Margaret Bourne provides for both her executor and overseer in her 1594 will, “I ordain Robert my executor and William my supervisor and for his pains a silver and gilt goblet. The residue of my goods to Robert.”\textsuperscript{365} Although most executors and overseers were typically awarded by the will maker as they were either trusted family members or friends, their service in these roles often granted them additional compensation.

In general, most widows’ wills were more specific than their husbands’ as they carefully divided out their estate. While men’s wills focused on awarding their wives and close biological members of their families, specifically their heirs, widows’ wills tended to include extended family, friends, and hired help. Unlike many men who simply left the bulk of their estate to their wives and heirs, widows’ wills demonstrate a conscientious and strategic effort in the parceling out of their property. A widow’s efforts to provide for different members of her family and social circle demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of her personal network as bequests gave widowed women the opportunity

\textsuperscript{365} Margaret Bourne. Will. *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry and Merchants*, 162.
to foster relationships that may be beneficial to her family. Additionally, the cautious distribution of goods found in widows’ wills may have been an effort to limit any inference or misappropriation of her goods by other family members.

Barbara Harris suggests that widows creatively fashioned their own identity through active construction of their memory as they wisely utilized their wills to dictate desired details of their tomb. Many aristocratic widows provided instructions on how their tomb should appear by describing their preferences, including size, materials, personal shield, and epitaphs. Some widows were so invested in their own post-mortem image, that they commissioned their tomb years before their death. Dame Frances Powlett, widow of Edward Waldegrave, gave brief instructions about the building of her memorial in her will, “For the making of a convenient tomb in the church over my body, I allow 100 marks, to be made within three years of my decease.” Alice Spencer Stanley Egerton’s, buried at Harefield Church, demonstrates how widows attempted to refine their own image and memory through the tombs. Countess Alice’s elaborate memorial refers to her as the wife of Ferdinando Stanley and the daughter of John Spencer and features her three daughters. Alice herself is depicted as a young woman with long hair and a striking red gown, despite the fact she was nearly eighty at the time of her death. Frances Sidney, Countess of Sussex worked to preserve her own memory with the commission of her memorial monument. Frances’ will arranged for money for her funeral and the completion of her tomb. Frances’ tomb, located in the Chapel of St. Paul, at

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Westminster Abbey, is composed of marble and alabaster.\textsuperscript{370} Frances’ effigy features a representation of herself in a long red robe with an ermine lining signifying her aristocratic status. Frances’ tomb not only demonstrates her social status through her clothing in her effigy, but also highlights her Sidney lineage. Frances’ tomb emphasizes her connection to the Sidney family through a porcupine statue, as the porcupine was depicted on the Sidney family crest. Frances again reiterates her connection to her family as it reads, “most honorable ladye Frances, sometyme Countess of Sussex daughter of Sir William Sidney of Pencehurst [Penshurst] Knight wyfe and widowe to ye most noble, most wyse and most martiall Gent: Tho[mas] Radclif Earle of Sussex.”\textsuperscript{371} Frances’ commission of her tomb suggests that she was interested in creating her own memory through her relationships. Aristocratic and gentry widows also took the opportunity to construct and reconstruct the memory of their different relationships through the tombs they commissioned.

As previously mentioned, some widows honored their husband’s legacy with extravagant memorials, while others purposefully distanced themselves from their deceased spouse. Blanche Stanney, Lady Foreman, who married three times, only mentions two of her husbands in her will. In addition to the commission of her own memorial, Blanche also ordered tombs for two of her husbands.\textsuperscript{372} Blanche’s will also tied her memory to her natal family as she chose to donate money to the poor of Oswestry, where she was born. Furthermore, Blanche set up an interest free loan for five young


\textsuperscript{372} James, Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603, 65.
Oswesty men interested in becoming craftsmen. Blanche’s donations to Oswesty not only demonstrates her desire to help the community where she was raised, but also reveals her interest in being associated with her natal kin.

**Widows Awarding their Heirs**

Both men and women of the English gentry understood the importance of maintaining family wealth and prestige through the inheritances of land, movable goods, and monetary gifts. Strategic bequests allowed for widows to foster advantageous relationships with their immediate relatives and extended kin and maintain familial status. Wealthy widows utilized their wills to award members of the family and social circle to create and further their personal legacies.

Numerous affluent widows displayed concern for gaining and maintaining wealth through inheritance throughout the early modern period, as bequests allowed for women to contribute to the legacies of their families. In 1588, Elizabeth Cracherood, widow of William Cracherood, utilized her will solely to award her sons land. Elizabeth followed the primogeniture custom, gifting her eldest son the majority of her land and dividing her movable goods amongst her younger sons. Elizabeth Tuke’s 1593 will only grants gifts to five family members. Tuke’s short will parcels out sums of money to her male kin and awards her sister a gown. Cracherood and Tuke’s wills reflect a number of early modern wills as they exhibits how the gentry worked to build their family prestige via multigenerational retention and acquisition of land.

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373 James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603*, 70.
In addition to shaping the status and memory of their families, widows also furthered their personal legacy with bequests to particular individuals as they left tangible pieces of their lives behind. The household and personal items bequeathed remained an important component of widows’ wills as these possessions were often functional and sentimental. Unlike the wills of the general population, the wills of the affluent members of society remained concerned with distribution of their most beloved possessions, leaving the residue of their belongings to their heir. The wills of wealthy widows also follow the pattern of prioritizing their valuables in their allocation of goods, thus revealing what they valued. The division of household and personal belongings reveal widows’ interactions as they utilized their bequests to honor their relationships. Gifting household and personal possessions were important aspects of widows’ wills as they not only had intrinsic value but also functioned to continue the memory of the widow each time the items were utilized or referenced. Many of the items that widows listed in their wills stemmed from their bedroom or the kitchen, as these two spaces were traditionally considered feminine domains. Belongings awarded from both bed chambers and the kitchen were typically awarded to daughters. Jane Michell’s will, which is mostly concerned with small monetary awards, specifies important household items to be given to her children, “To Grace Bartrige my daughter my featherbed with bedstead over the parlour, and £10, and to Jane Harley my other daughter my other bed over the parlour, to wit, the bedstock, the featherbed with coverlet that was upon her father’s bed that came from court, and £10.”

alludes to the item’s monetary value, but also the elite social connections of her late husband.

Susan Ileback’s will specifically awarded a number of household items to Mary Hogges, who was likely her daughter-in-law, “To Mary Hogges divers household goods, comprising apostle spoons, a girdle of silver and key hangers of silver, and a purse and knives hanging at the same girdle, sheets of Holland, six pairs of fine ‘pillowbeeres,’ tablecloths of diaper and damask, one ‘feild bedsted’ with curtains, vallance, and covering of green ‘saie,’ two feather beds upon the said ‘bedsted’ and two ‘boulsters’ and two pillows, a pair of ‘nedleworke vallance’ and a border for a ‘cupbord,’ a ‘courte cupbord cloth of Tissewe.’”

Susan’s gifts to her daughter-in-law demonstrate how items from bedrooms were typically transferred from woman to woman. Although daughters often received movable belongings, at times some widows chose to supply their sons with the household goods. Dame Joyce Carye’s will names the vast majority of her household items for her three sons, rather than her daughter. Joyce carefully listed all the items her sons were to receive while giving her two daughters each a gold bracelet and a gown and leaving her last daughter “a salt of silver gilt which her father gave me.”

Joyce’s choice to gift her sons her household possessions, as well as the remainder of her estate, rather than her daughters, likely resulted from a lack of land that was available for her sons.

In contrast to lower status women, aristocratic and gentry widows typically possessed significant jewelry collections to award. Jewelry pieces often became a key

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aspect of widows’ wills not only because of their monetary value, but also because they served as a marker of status. Furthermore, pieces of fine jewelry were commonly passed down from generation to generation, thus these valuable adornments came to represent a family and their wealth. Like household items passed down to family and friends, jewelry also served to preserve the memory of the person providing the gift. Anne Wiseman, wife of John Wiseman, explicitly explained her purpose for leaving her husband a ring, “To John my husband my ring with a turquoise, which I commonly wear, for a perpetual remembrance.”\(^{379}\) Anne’s gift of her ring to her husband, which was the first bequest of her will, clearly demonstrated her desire for her husband to carry on her memory. The bequeathing of jewelry was not only a valuable gift, but also contributed to the memory of the person granting present.

In addition to generously providing for three of her daughters in household goods, Dame Mary Judd also gave them pieces of jewelry. Mary’s will ordered that her daughter, only referred to as wife of Emmanuel Wolley, was to receive, “my ring of gold with an emerald in it, being a green stone.”\(^{380}\) The second daughter listed, Jane Huntely, was awarded, “my chain of gold and my best ring of gold being a pointed diamond.”\(^{381}\) Mary’s will also listed that her daughter, Martha Golding, was entitled to “my ring of gold with the best ruby.”\(^{382}\) Unlike Mary’s household bequests, which were awarded to both her daughters and sons-in-laws, the gifts of jewelry were given solely to her daughters. These gifts of valuable jewelry designated solely to her daughters.

demonstrates Mary’s desire to have her daughters retain control of these items for sentimental purposes or financial security.

While the first half of Margaret Hawkin’s 1619 will awarded her heirs with land and monetary gifts, the second half divided her jewelry collection. Margery was careful in her will to describe each piece of jewelry she left, such as her “best pair of ‘Spanish borders,’ enamelled black and trimmed with pearls, the upper border containing nineteen pieces and the nether border seven pieces.”383 and “to her goddaughter Margaret, daughter of Sir Richard Hawkins, Knt.,” she left a “‘Carcanett’ enamelled black and blue, containing eleven pieces set with sixty-six pearls, having a ‘Tortis.’”384 These detailed descriptions functioned to limit any confusion for the executor which exhibits how important jewelry bequests were to widows while composing the will. Margaret’s descriptions of her fine jewelry are even extended to reveal how she acquired the piece, “to the Countess of Leicester a pointed diamond ring which the Countess of Warwick gave her;” which shows how widows’ jewelry bequests were important in emphasizing and continuing relationships. By awarding a piece of jewelry given to her by a prominent aristocrat, Margaret was tying herself and her memory to both the person that gave her the piece and the person that received it.

Dame Anne Petre also took great care in awarding her family her jewelry as her will not only bequeaths her personal jewels, but also provided sums of money for the purpose of creating or obtaining additional pieces of jewelry. Anne’s distribution of her

jewels began with providing for her grandson and his wife, “To William son and heir of my son my best ring with a diamond and £40 to him a chain at 21.” After Anne parceled out her collection she bequeathed her daughters sums to create their own pieces of jewelry, “To my daughter [Elizabeth] Gostwycke £6 13s. 4d. to make her a jewel or a ring. To my daughter [Dorothy] Waddam 4 marks to make her a jewel or ring.” Anne’s direction for her daughters to utilize their monetary gifts for jewelry demonstrates the important role leaving jewelry played in England.

**Widows and Charitable Bequests**

While many widows focused on retaining family wealth, many attempted to balance their bequests to their family with their gifts to charities. Susan James’ analysis suggests that widows were typically more generous than men with their charitable contributions. Although widows were more likely to give to charities than their male counterparts, most men’s wills remained preoccupied with providing a proper inheritance for the wives and children they were leaving behind. Archer’s study of charities in early modern London proposes the notion that although charitable bequests were often awarded to institutions, the patron retained the ability to dictate how their gift was used. By looking at how widows utilized their wills for charitable bequests, we can better understand the legacy they attempted to create. I argue that the charitable gifts that widows awarded not only reflect their personal familiarity with different people and causes, but also their values and ideals.

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387 James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603*, 41.
W. K. Jordan’s analysis of charities in London suggests that the English Reformation altered charitable giving as English men and women moved from personal almsgiving to awarding specific charitable institutions, including almshouses, schools, hospitals, and parishes. Jordan further suggests that wills demonstrated a steady rise in charitable contributions during the Elizabethan period. Jordan’s ideas can be supported by examining the wills of widows in the lower gentry, who very typically gave to the poor. Most widows, even the ones of modest means, ordered that some amount of capital or items were to be distributed to the poor. In 1519, Joan Ingram left the 18s in wax for six lights of her church of North Marston and £3 6s 8d for repairs to highways of her parish. Ellen Brockhouse, a widow located in Beaconsfield, left “8s for the poor of her parish and 1s for the use of its church;” Margaret Disley left £3 to be distributed to the poor of Aylesbury. Agnes Hawes’ will ordered 13 s 4 d for the poor of Stewkley. Anne Deane’s will asked executors to give 10s to the needy of Wolverton. Agnes Friar of Little Marlow’s will “bequeathed to the churchwarden and overseers of the parish £1 p.a. to be distributed to twenty of the poorest women dwelling in Great Marlow.” Ursula Calam, a York widow, ordered £7 15s for the poor, in addition to her donations for the repair of three almshouses.

One of the ways that widows demonstrated their generosity in their wills was by gifting their maids and servants. Typically, within a gentry household maids and servants

did not belong to the family they worked for, and while it did not directly benefit the members of the gentry politically or socially to give money to their help, many people did request their hired help receive some type of bequest. While both men and women gave to their personal servants, men most often gave monetary gifts while widows bequeathed both fiscal awards and personal possessions. John Semer’s 1559 will simply states, “To every of my household servants 20d apiece”\textsuperscript{396}. While Semer’s bequest states that his “household servants” should receive money, he does not distinguish between his servants, or provide any names. Semer’s impersonal bequests to his servants suggests that these monetary gifts may have been a formality, rather than a personal and thoughtful gift. Similar to Semer’s will, William Atwood’s will, composed in 1600, states, “and every manservant and maidservant 12d”\textsuperscript{397}. While Atwood did award members of his family with very generous monetary gifts, the majority of his will allocates his personal belongings to his kin, which demonstrates the value he placed on his personal items. Atwood’s choice to give all his servants a set amount of money suggests that Atwood may have been following a convention of giving with his bequest.

Unlike most men’s bequests to their servants, widows who chose to give to their help were very specific about their gifts. Many widows elected to give their maidservants personal items or thoughtful monetary gifts. On February 20\textsuperscript{th} 1597 the Essex widow, Dame Mary Judd, wife of Sir Andrew Judd, carefully divvied up her possessions for her family members. In her will, Mary Judd awarded the great majority of her belongings to her children and their spouses. After Mary awarded items of her household to her


immediate family members, she then divided the rest of her belongings to her extended kin. Mary’s will stated that her servants were to be given 40 shillings and new clothes for her funeral. Mary’s decision to give her servants money specifically for clothing for her funeral demonstrates her concern for public appearance. Whether Mary awarded her servants new clothing to continue fashioning a particular image or simply gave to the people who helped her run her household, it remains clear that Mary did feel compelled to reward her help. Elizabeth Tuke’s will carefully detailed the division of her most valuable assets almost solely to her family. Elizabeth’s will awarded several of her family members her cherished personal possessions, including her jewelry, clothing, and linen. Elizabeth also gave some clothing and small monetary gifts to her maidservants, “To my maid Margaret Tossell my gown of tawny frizado, with her wages after 5 nobles by the year.” Elizabeth also generously gave monetary bequests to the servants of her siblings, “To Mistress Elizabeth Harrison, servant to my sister-in-law Elizabeth Tuke, my black taffeta gown. To the menservants and maidservants of my brother Mr. Peter Tuke’s family with him at the time of my decease 2s. 6d. apiece.” Elizabeth’s gifts demonstrate her gratitude for the work of both her and her siblings’ maids. Jane Mewte’s 1577 will stipulates that her butler is to receive a, “little gilt bowl, £10, 2 kine, the stray nag, 2 platters, 6 dishes, 6 saucers, a Chamber, and the red covering on my own bed.” Jane also gives generously to her maids, “To Margery my maid servant of 2 years’ wages” Unlike Mary Judd, Jane Mewte provided her servants with gifts that would

398 Leaving mourning clothing or cloth for funeral attendees was a common practice for English widows. Mary Judd, Will. *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry and Yeomen*, 23.


allow them the time to find new employment. Dame Mary Gate also gave money to her help in her 1582 will, “true and faithful menservants John Taverner and Thomas Heyward £10 apiece, my trusty and faithful womanservant Joan Birde £20, every of my other menservants 40s. apiece, my womenservants 20s a piece, and ploughboys 13s. 4d. apiece.”

In addition to Gate’s generous gifts, she also extended kind words to her servants, which demonstrates a great appreciation she felt for her help. Dame Elizabeth Hoblethorne also stated in her will that every one of her servants was to receive 5 shillings. While Elizabeth’s bequests to her servants seems relatively small, the gift does not reflect her generosity, or rather, lack thereof, but rather her personal finances. With the exception of her very close kin, Elizabeth only made small bequests. Many of the widows who chose to give to their servants did not give to any other public or private institutions. While some wills, like Mary Gates’, reveal a close relationship a widow had with her servants, we can infer that widows viewed the bequests to their servants as charitable contributions. Widows’ efforts to detail what exactly their servants should receive might reveal their personal relationship as well as demonstrate their concern for their help.

In addition to widows awarding their servants in their wills, many wealthy women used their last requests to fund specific institutions including schools, almshouses, and hospitals. Dame Margery Hawkins also gave generously to both schools and poor houses. Margery Hawkins, widow of Sir John Hawkins, began her will by awarding “the sum of eight hundred pounds to be laid out on the purchase of lands or tenements towards the

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maintenance of a free school in Keinton.”

Similar to Alice Owen, Margery not only donated money to specific organizations, she also created one. Hawkin’s will specified that the school created with her 800 pounds was to be free, thus giving the children from poor families the opportunity to attend. Hawkins’ will also donated to local parishes, “sums of money to the poor of the parishes of Keinton and Amelly, co. Hereford, Debtford, Woodford and Chigwell, co. Essex, and S. Dunstan in the East.”

Like numerous other widows, Margery Hawkins’ will specified bequests for the poor of several different parishes that she knew. Margery’s will not only demonstrated her piety and concern for poor associated with these local parishes, but also her concern for free education. Margery Hawkins’ contributions reveal she had an interest in truly helping the poor by offering them the opportunities to better their social and financial situation through education.

Dorothy Catesby Dormer Pelham’s will ordered the construction of an almshouse at Wing, Buckinghamshire. After the death of her second husband, Sir William Pelham, Dorothy returned to Wing, an estate she inherited from her first husband, Sir William Dormer, in 1575. The almshouse, which cost over £200 to construct, also included land that would provide a small income of £4 per year for the eight poor men and women who resided there. Dorothy’s 1613 will also ordered for £100 in clothing to be distributed to the poor. Additionally, she requested capital sums go to benefit the needy of Aylesbury,

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Great Wycombe, and Wing. In 1640, Ursula Calam, widow William Calam, left rent charges for the repair of three almshouses. Ursula’s donations reveal her great concern for the sick and underprivileged. Elizabeth Hatton utilized her will to sponsor the sick. Elizabeth’s will, dated December 31, 1645, left £100 to the endowment of an almshouse at Stoke Poges. Additionally, her will created a trust of £100 for the relief of the poor and ordered £500 for the maintenance and relief of the poor parish of St. Andrew at Holborn. These aristocratic and gentry widows used their wills to fund the institutions that cared for the sick, which reveals how these women extended their influence. The sponsorship of these charitable organizations allowed widows to help their communities by awarding those less fortunate with basic care.

Widows Helping the Poor

While it is clear that many wealthy women in their widowhoods and through their wills supported educational and charitable institutions, other widows helped their communities by giving to charity through religious institutions. Although some historians, such as J.D Alsop, argue that religious donations were formulaic and did not dictate spiritual belief, other scholars, including Susan James suggest that religious gifts do reveal personal belief. While most wives of the English aristocracy and gentry concentrated their charitable efforts on the patronage of religious pieces of art and literature, affluent widows donated to different religious causes. One way that widows revealed their piety is by giving to their local parishes.

By awarding local parishes with items or monetary sums, widows were able to help their community by supporting the poor and demonstrate their faith. Bridget Langley’s 1558 will first awarded money to the poor of Flintham, which is where she requested to be buried alongside her late husband.

I bequeath to the poor people five marks, to be dealt by penny dole unto the most impotent people, at the day of my burial; 6s. 8d. to be bestowed on my seventh day amongst the poor, and to the priest for mass and dirge; 20s. to the poor people of Flintham the first year after my decease, and 20s. the second year as aforesaid; 6s. 8d. to the high altar for tithes forgotten, and 6s. 8d. for burial.412

Dorothy Josselyn gave equally to family and parish. In June 1579, Josselyn began her will by donating to her local parish, High Roothering Church. Josselyn’s will begins, “To the poor people of High Roothering Church 20s. at the day of my burial, and within after my decease 1 quarter of wheat to be baked and given in bread to the poor of High and Aythorpe Roothering”413 Josselyn’s specific instructions for the baking and distribution of bread demonstrates a genuine concern for the people that would be receiving this gift. Additionally, Josselyn’s will differs from the other wills previously analyzed because it starts with charitable bequests, rather than gifting her family. Following her altruistic gifts, Josselyn then awarded her children a few of her personal items. The will specified that her children were to receive a gold ring “for remembrance” worth 20 shillings, which was the same amount that she awarded her to High Roothering Church. By bestowing her children an object worth the same amount as her donation to her parish, Josselyn reveals the sincerity of her gifts.

412 Bridget Langley, Will of Bridget Langley, widow, of the parish of Flintham. SP 15/8 f.194. ff. 194. May 23 1558. The National Archives of the UK.
In her 1582 will, Dame Anne Petre, widow of Sir William Petre, gave generously to both her family and charitable institutions. Petre gave her children and extended family all of her valuables, including jewelry with diamonds and other precious stones, silver, and fine cloth. Petre also detailed how charitable monetary donations to should be distributed to the poor. Anne Petre’s stated, “To the 40 poorest householders in Ingatestone, Writtle, Mountnessing, Butterbury and stock £100 pounds, to be delivered with 5 years after my decease, viz. to each 10s. yearly at Michaelmas to buy wood and fuel.” In addition to this generous gift, Petre also dictated that a portion of future income should also be given to the poor, “Out of £30 a yearly annuity of £10 to 10 poorest people in Ingatestone, Writtle, Butterbury, 20s apiece”. Both of Anne’s donations demonstrate a deep interest in the continual wellbeing of her local parishes.

Alice Maynerd also demonstrated her religiosity by selling a portion of her land and giving the profit to local parishes in 1584. Alice received the majority of her lands from her husband, John Maynarde, “Alice my wife shall occupy my lands and mills free and copy for life, keeping them sufficient reparations and maintain my woad house.” After clarifying that her children have been secured financially, Maynerd stated that seven of her acres at Dawne Hill were to be sold and the profit given to the poor. Maynerd continued by specifying how the profit of the sold acres should be distributed, “To the poor people the town of Clochester and liberties £13 6s. 8d. to be distributed in every parish, some at my burial.” Although Alice gave generously to her local

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parishes, the majority of her estate went to her daughters and their husbands. Alice Rochester’s 1585 will consists almost exclusively of charitable donations. Although Alice’s will begins by giving her son some money and goods for himself and to pay for the debts of her funeral the rest of the will offers specifics about her to gifts to charitable donations:

To the parson and churchwardens of the church of S. Michael next Crooked Lane and their successors a certain tenement in S. Michael's Lane within the parish, charged with the yearly payment of forty shillings for the relief of poor children in Christ's Hospital; the residue of the issues and profits to be applied to the repair of their church and the relief of the poor of their parish.418

Clearly, Alice contemplated how her donations should be spent, as she noted where her money should be used. Alice did not simply make a large donation to the church of Saint Michael, but rather established reoccurring donations that would allow many people to benefit from her gift. Alice’s short will exhibits her great concern for how her monetary donations should be utilized. Anne Bacon, daughter of Nathaniel Bacon, gave generously as a widow, despite a lack of financial security. Anne Bacon married John Townshend in 1593 and together the couple had three children. When Anne was widowed in 1603 she inherited her husband’s debt and lost wardship of her son, Roger, to Lady Berkeley.419 Although Anne was responsible for the debt accumulated by her husband, she was still able to maintain her lifestyle and at the end of her life, donate much of her wealth to the poor. Although Anne’s will provided for her family, she gave abundantly to the poor.

Widow Alice Hanbury’s last requests focus on providing for the church wardens and the poor of her local parish:

[...] shall pay to the Church-wardens of the said parish, and their successors, to the use of the poore and impotent people there, 13. s. 4. d. yeerely for ever, at the Feasts of the Annunciation of our Lady, and Saint Michael the Archangell, by even portions: Or else to assure to the said parish, the like value in some other place: which summe (by consent of the parish) is given in coales amongst the poore yeerely for ever at Christmas.420

Alice’s 1595 will’s specific requests concerning how the parish is to utilize her gift reveals Alice’s knowledge and interest in her community. By choosing to award coals at Christmas Alice demonstrates a genuine concern for the poor of her parish.

Jane Stanhope, daughter of Sir Michael Stanhope, married Sir Roger Townshend in 1566 and together the couple had two sons. When Townshend died in 1590 he left Jane a substantial inheritance, as she received most of her late husband’s land and £1000 a year.421 Jane remarried Henry Berkeley, seventh baron of Berkeley in 1597. As a married woman, Jane continued to maintain and grow her wealth as she purchased land from her own sons to relieve their debt. When Berkeley died in 1613, Jane’s shrewd investments allowed her to remain well-off financially. Although Jane’s will generously awarded her kin, she also gave to parishes, “£20 p.a. to be divided among five rural parishes in Gallow Hundred where her first husband, Sir Roger Townshend, held estates.”422

In 1603 Susan Ileback also bestowed surrounding parishes. Susan, previously married to John Ileback, began her will by giving to her children. Following the bequests for her immediate family, Ileback carefully detailed how she would like the

420 J. S., The illustrious history of women, 154
421 Jane Whittle and Elizabeth Griffiths, Consumption and Gender in the Early Seventeenth-Century Household The World of Alice Le Strange (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44.
churchwarden to use her gift, “To the parson and churchwardens of S. Mary Stayning she leaves the sum of six pounds thirteen shillings and fourpence, to be bestowed upon a "bearing clothe" for Christian burial, having her name embroidered thereon, for the use of the parish.”

Susan Ileback’s specific instructions reveal her investment in this particular parish. In addition to giving to Saint Mary Staying, Ileback also gave, “sums of money to the poor of the parishes of S. Mary Stayning, S. Bride, S. Sepulchre, and others.” While Ileback’s donations to particular parishes shows her piety, her more personal gift to Stayning suggests a personal connection to the parish.

Lady Frances Hobart’s life exemplifies the close relationship between widows, religious institutions, and charity. In 1622, Frances married Sir Henry Hobart and had seven children, although only one child survived to adulthood. Eventually, when John Hobart was elected to Parliament, the couple moved from Blickling Hall in Norfolk to London. In the city, Frances met Presbyterian minster John Collinges. Collinges, who served as the chaplain of Hobart household, worked closely with Frances and later dedicated some of his writings to her and wrote her biography. When John Hobart died in 1647, Frances moved to Chapelfield in Norwich where she continued to display tremendous piety. In Norwich, Frances converted rooms in her home for Collinges to use.

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424 Susan Ileback ’Wills: James I (1603-25).
426 Collinges, John. The excellent woman discoursed more privately from Proverbs 31. 29, 30, 31, upon occasion of the death of the lady Frances Hobart / by J.C. D.D. , London : [s.n.], 1669 and Par nobile two treatises, the one concerning the excellent woman, evincing a person fearing the Lord to be the most excellent person, discoursed more privately upon occasion of the death of the Right Honourable the Lady Frances Hobart late of Norwich by J.C. , London : [s.n.], 1669
to preach. In the early 1660s, after local Norwich authorities attempted to stop Collinges
from preaching, Frances avidly disputed the investigations and fought to keep her
chaplain. Frances’ efforts and connections worked, as she continued to hold services
within her home. Each month Frances would donate a quarter of her expenditures to
charitable causes, including hiring doctors to treat the poor Christians.427 In November of
1665 Frances died and was buried beside her beloved husband. While Frances awarded
members of her family and household much of her other estates, she also dictated that the
poor of several villages were to receive money for “Christianly” widows and orphans.
Clearly, Frances Hobart dedicated her time, energy, and wealth to support and promote
her religious beliefs. Mary Slaney Weld, daughter of merchant and Lord Mayor of
London, Stephen Slaney, and his wife, Margaret, also the utilized her inheritance for
charitable causes. Mary married twice during her lifetime, her first husband, Richard
Bradgate, left her a widow in 1589 with a modest inheritance. In the year after Bradgate’s
death, Mary wed Sir Humphrey Weld, a member of the Grocers’ Company. Weld
achieved great financial success through different trade investments, Additionally, Weld
also garnered public esteem as he was elected Lord Mayor of London in 1608.428 When
Weld died in 1610, Mary received a substantial inheritance that she utilized for charitable

www.oxforddnb.com.library.unl.edu/view/article/66725
428 Archer, Ian W. 2008 “Weld [née Slaney], Mary, Lady Weld (bap. 1560?, d. 1623), benefactor and
http://www.oxforddnb.com.libproxy.unl.edu/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-
9780198614128-e-66941.
donations. Mary, well known for supporting different religious endeavors, notably awarded £2000 to purchase impropriations to assure the support of minsters.\footnote{During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, impropriations guaranteed that religious leaders were provided for through tithes. Archer, Ian W. 2008 "Weld [née Slaney], Mary, Lady Weld (bap. 1560?, d. 1623), benefactor and patron of ministers."}

Although most widows attempted to build their own legacy through their bequests, some widows simply chose to continue supporting their late husband’s charities. Elizabeth Craven, widow of London merchant Sir William Craven, bequeathed £100 for the poor. Furthermore, Elizabeth added to charitable endowments left by her husband in Burnsall.\footnote{Jordan, The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660, 239.} Ellen Cutler also enhanced her late husband’s charitable bequests in her own will. Ellen, widow of Thomas Cutler, ordered £320 to help fund the lectureship at Stainborough Chapel. Ellen’s will also awarded property worth £100 to the poor of Silkstone. Ellen’s endowment built on her former husband’s bequests, who had originally founded the endowment for the Stainborough lectureship and ordered £40 to the poor of Silkstone.\footnote{Jordan, The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660, 238-239.} Alice Duncombe’s will also added to the charitable awards of her late husband. Alice’s husband, William Duncombe Esq., of Aston, ordered that £10 per year of revenue from his lands were to be given to the poor. Alice added £2 15s yearly to Duncombe’s trust.\footnote{W. K. Jordan, The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660, 35.} Dame Troth Mallory, widow of Sir John Mallory, also enhanced her husband’s donation with her own will. At his death in 1602, Mallory ordered “£100 to the poor of Rotherham and eight adjoining townships” and in 1616 Troth added an additional £100 to her husband’s original endowment.\footnote{W. K. Jordan, The Charities of Rural England, 1480-1660, 237-238.} By choosing to increase the donations of their late husbands, widows were able to both help the poor and honor their husbands’ memory. Although widows possessed the legal capability to
bequeath their inheritance at will, their choice to support the same charities as their husband demonstrates an active effort to preserve their husband’s legacies.

**Widows Helping Women**

Although many widows tended to follow the established traditions of property distributions, many widows’ wills demonstrate a great concern for their daughters and other female kin. Widows’ attempts to financially provide for other women demonstrate an awareness and understanding of the challenges and prejudices that early modern women faced. Some widows used their wills to help women in their inner circle gain authority by naming them executor. Elizabeth Barney, a widow from Essex, named Lady Anne Mautravars as her executrix and stipulated that “To the poor people of the world £50 to be distributed at the discretion of my executrix.” Clearly, Elizabeth believed that her executrix would appropriately manage her estate. Although a number of widows appointed their sons as their executors, many chose their sisters or other female kin. Jane Scott’s 1595 will awards the entirety of her “goods, jewels, etc.,” to her “well-beloved sister Abdias Scott, whom I make my sole executrix.” The high prevalence of female executors reveals that both men and women felt that women were more than competent to fulfill the important role of executor.

Some widows chose to help other women by gifting to them directly in their wills. Numerous English widows attempted to supplement the financial situation of their female kin.

Jane Rampsone of Manningtree awarded her the vast majority of her estate, which included “lands and houses” to Francis and Justine Thimblethorpe, who were also named

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her executors. Jane’s 1567 will only portions out a few of her personal and household belongings before specifying, “The rest of my lands with all my goods as plate, jewels, and implements of the household to Justine.” Although Jane named both Francis and Justine as the recipients of her land and homes, her will offered Justine personal control over the items in her home. While Jane’s decision to gift Justine the items of her household may have been a result of the association between women and the domestic life, it may have also been a strategic effort to provide Justine with economic leverage within her marriage. Elizabeth Gonson, a widow from Essex, also demonstrated a great concern for helping her female kin:

The residue of my portion due to me by my grandfather I leave to my executrix towards my funeral charges and consideration of my sickness and my portion of my father, whatsoever it be, I leave to my three sisters that be unmarried, to be equally divided.

Elizabeth’s 1582 will revealed how she worked to help her secure her sisters’ future financially by leaving them the money that she had inherited from their grandfather. While not explicitly stated in Elizabeth’s will, it could be inferred that money she awarded to her unmarried sisters would likely contribute to their dowries. Elizabeth’s attempt to aid her sisters in finding suitable husbands with appropriate dowries also exhibits her desire to create financial stability for her female kin. Essex widow Marcelyn Halles attempted to provide income for two widowed women in her family:

To Cecily Fullwoode, widow, my sister, for life, a rent of £6 13s. 4d. out of my manor and lands called Gilles in Epping in the tenure of William Harem and a rent of £3 6s. 8d. to Thomasine Nicholles widow, my daughter-in-law, for life, also the new house on the manor, […] also for life 6 loads of wood yearly growing thereon, to be delivered[…]

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Marcelyn’s award of rents for life to her sister and her daughter-in-law suggests that she was thinking of their well-being long term. Marcleyn chose to provide these two widows with a stable income, rather than a lump sum, which could more easily be squandered. Marcleyn’s decision to award life annuities to her female family member indicates an effort to provide security for these women. Marcleyn’s bequests reveal a genuine concern for her widowed kin, who may have faced financial struggles without husbands. Cecily Barnyshe’s 1563 will also awarded her two sisters with small pensions, Cecily’s sister Elizabeth, received a small pension of “£4 for 21 years” while her other sister, Jane, was gifted “for life 26s. 8d.” Cecily’s also named her sister Elizabeth executrix and awards her “the rest of my goods […].” 439 Cecily’s will demonstrates an effort to provide a small and consistent income for her two sisters. Agnes Salmon, a widow from Leigh, utilized her humble will to award several women she knew, “the wife of Thomas Dill, the wife of Henry Sayer, widow Dryver junior, widow Duffyll, the wife of Thomas Kensey, the wife John Lowe, Agnes Hopwood my kinswoman, and my maidservant Margery, 10s. each.” 440 Anges’s 1596 will worked to grant small sums of money to women who were not her kin. Anges’ choice to give to women specifically, rather than award a husband and wife, demonstrate her interest in providing solely for these women.

As previously mentioned in my discussion of the crafted competition between widows and maids, many wealthy women left poor women sums of money to serve as their dowries. In 1580, Helen Branch, widow of Sir John Branch, Lord Mayor of London, “gave also to pooe Maids marriages 10 (pounds)” 441 Since most aristocratic and gentry

439 Although Cecily appointed her sister Elizabeth as executrix, she also appointed Sir John Wentworthe as an overseer of her estate. Cecily Barnyshe. Will. Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry and Yeomen, 22.
441 J. S., The illustrious history of women, 236.
women received sufficient inheritance at the deaths of their husbands they were able to enjoy the autonomy they found in their widowhoods and bequests to poor maids reveals a desire to provide a similar opportunity for other women. Alice Golding, widow of Henry Golding of Little Birch, gave “To Mary Peryn, daughter of Jane Peryn wife of Henry Peryn, my daughter, £700 at marriage or 21” Alice’s generous monetary gift to her granddaughter, along with an assortment of movable goods she provided for her, showed a great concern for her granddaughter’s future as the sum of £700 pounds would serve as substantial contribution to a dowry. Although Alice Golding provided a dowry and household items for her granddaughter, her will included a stipulation that she must have the approval for her marriage from Anthony Maxey, whom Alice’s will identified as her “trusty and well-beloved cousin Anthony and my supervisor”. Widow Dorothy Josselyn left her granddaughter, Mary Josselyn, “£20 at marriage or at 18.” While Dorothy does not explicitly state that her gift for her granddaughter is intended for a dowry, it could be assumed that this sum would contribute to her marriage negotiations. Alice Barow’s 1558 will not only designated a dowry for her unmarried daughter, it also awarded her four goddaughters. It is clear that affluent women understood that within their communities, it was important to have a husband who could not only maintain a comfortable life for his wife, but also ensure that his widow would be financially secure at his eventual death.

Although a number of widows specifically donated money to younger women in efforts to help them secure husbands, other widows chose to support other women by

445 James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills*, 181.
providing money to institutions to be used specifically for their care. Alice Crome, a Norwich widow, ordered seven almshouses for poor widows of the parish of St. George Colegate. Her endowment ordered that property would be maintained by the rental of one of her homes. Alice’s stipulation that her almshouse was to be utilized by poor widows demonstrates an understanding of the vulnerability that poor widows faced. Blanche Stanney’s will, along with other charitable donations, ordered 100 smocks for poor women, widows, and wives of Oswestry.

English wills demonstrated that aristocratic and gentry widows attempted to provide for family members and aid their communities through their last bequests. Affluent widows judicially parceled out their belongings to their family members in attempts to preserve family wealth and social standing. Numerous widows carefully divided their funds, property, and household items between their family and friends. The personal bequests awarded by widows remained more than useful physical items. They also helped to preserve the memory of the deceased. Most wealthy widows utilized their wills to help communities through their charitable bequests. While charitable donations from widows were highly variable depending on a widow’s financial position, their bequests demonstrated their personal or religious values. Some widows chose to express their generosity by posthumously sponsoring schools and almshouses. The vast majority of widows chose to provide for the poor of local parishes in addition to their other charitable bequests. Whether a widow’s will divvied out cloth for numerous maidservants or provided a large sum for the reparations of a parish, these women remained concerned with helping their communities.

447 James, Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 70.
Many affluent widows also utilized their wills to help other women. In addition to widows parceling out their belongings to close family members and servants, widows also ordered incomes or annuities to be paid to female kin. Other widows also ordered monetary gifts to be awarded to poor women for the purpose of a dowry. Numerous wills reveal widows attempted to provide for other women in addition to their female kin. Widows’ attempts to help other women to find a husband or secure an income demonstrates widows’ understanding of challenges that single women may have faced.

The distribution of funds and goods through wills afforded widows the opportunity to provide for their families, friends, and communities. Widows’ bequests not only provided for their families and favorite charitable institutions, but also helped them create and secure their memory. Whether widows used their wills to further familial wealth, express their piety, help the less fortunate through charity, support other women, or fashion their own memory, their efforts helped to shape their community.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The lives of English aristocratic and gentry women changed dramatically upon entering widowhood as they gained legal and financial autonomy. Under English Common Law, widows maintained legal abilities that allowed them to wield new authority as they managed their personal estates. The economic independence possessed by affluent widows afforded them the opportunities to craft their personal image and legacy through their personal contributions. Widows’ patronage, charity, and bequests not only fostered their own memory, but also influenced their communities.

The legal and financial independence that women obtained at the death of their husbands was accompanied by unreachable expectations. From the moment a woman became a widow she was met with a multitude of responsibilities as she honored the memory of her husband. Widows prepared their homes and organized their provisions for the mourning celebrations. New widows not only planned their husbands’ funerals, but also acted as hostess for the guests. English men and women looked to the widow to provide a festive ambiance during the memorial celebrations while at the same time demonstrating constrained grief. While all widows were expected to honor their husbands, affluent women needed to adhere to the customs associated with the social status of their late husbands.

In addition to the customs and rituals expected immediately directly after a husband’s death and at his funeral services, widows also remained obligated to larger societal expectations provided by Scripture. Both the Old and New Testaments calls for followers to help protect and provide for widows. The defense and safety of widows called for in the Bible remains conditional, as there are also requirements for how
widows need to behave. Although the Bible demands the preservation of widows, the independence often afforded to affluent widows upset the patriarchy. In order to limit widows’ autonomy fifteenth- and sixteenth-century authors added to the behaviors of widows. Early works, such as Juan Luis Vives’ *Instruction of a Christian Woman* and Thomas Bentley’s *The Monuments of Matrones*, played major roles in defining the ideas and expectations concerning widowed women. The majority of sixteenth-century treatises and conduct books addressing widowhood argued that widows must live lives of chastity and prayer. While many authors upheld the notion that widows should pursue a chaste existence, others suggested that re-marriage could protect a widow’s honor. In addition to writers preaching chastity as a virtue for widows to strive for, they also advocated that women in widowhood should look to religion to provide comfort in their grief and distract them from their sinful behavior. The numerous expectations established and continually reiterated for widows not only functioned to control widows, but also protect the memory of their husbands. Widows that behaved properly by living a chaste life and who dedicated themselves to prayer demonstrated a loyalty to their marriage and their deceased husbands. Widows who did not attempt to follow the established behaviors approved for widows were likely to face judgement by their community.

The popular images of wealthy widows not only reflected how early modern society considered women in their widowhoods, but also stereotypes that surrounded these women. *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Titus Andronicus* represent the dichotomy of the “good” and the “bad” widow found in numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays. The widows presented in these two Shakespearean plays built on the notions that proper widows remained unmarried and attentive to their children while “bad” widows
were ruled by their carnal lust. Representations of wealthy widows in ballads and broadsides demonstrated contradictory images of lusty aggressors or vulnerable heiresses. Several ballads presented affluent widows as good marriage candidates as they came with inheritances and carnal knowledge. Although some ballads presented widows’ sexual experience as a positive trait, numerous ballads criticized and degraded widows for their sexual past as a wife. Composers of ballads continually present widows as overly sexual and driven solely by sexual desire. In addition to ballads disparaging widows’ sexuality, several ballads also shamed and mocked widows’ ages and physiques. Another common portrayal of wealthy widows centers on their susceptibility to men looking to acquire their wealth. The ballads that exhibit aggressive and greedy suitors serve to deter widows who were considering remarriage. The damaging stereotypes concerning wealthy widows that can be found in these ballads serves as a direct result of the expectations that widows should remain chaste. These ballads portray widows who were willingly defying the expectations of proper widows by remarrying and therefore were openly mocked and berated. While the negative representation of widows in these ballads not only normalized the degradation of widowed women, it also reinforced the idea that these women should remain chaste.

Wealthy widows were not only encumbered with the societal expectations about how they should behave. Some were also burdened with legal challenges as they attempted to secure their inheritance. Many of the challenges faced by widows came as a result of their husbands’ families attempting to circumvent legal procedures and local customs in order preserve familial wealth or seize pieces of the estate for personal gain. Well-connected widows who were able to gain support from prominent members of the
community were often successful in their pursuit of their inheritance. The experience of widows who did not immediately gain access to their bequests demonstrates how important it was for widows to cultivate their relationships, despite their new legal authority. Although there are numerous records of widows who struggled to secure and protect their proper inheritance, most women were able to transition into widowhood with limited challenges, as most courts worked to honor the will of the deceased husband. Even with some financial struggles, most wealthy widows were still able to exercise their new legal autonomy and personal independence.

One of the ways that affluent women exercised the autonomy they gained as widows was by serving as patrons. Widows actively invested their incomes to sponsor specific artists and writers that produced works that helped to develop these widows’ images and legacies. Widows’ patronage of artists not only helped to fashion their own personal persona, but also contributed to shaping art culture. In addition to funding artists, widows also utilized charitable donations to both alter their images and help their communities. Widows who involved themselves with charitable bequests crafted their personal reputation as both pious and generous. Whether a widow chose to commission a familial portrait or provide for the poor of a local parish, her investments helped generate her personal guise and ultimately contributed to her community.

Writing wills allowed English widows to provide security for their families, help their communities, express their piety, and support other women. In addition to aptly providing for their kin, many affluent widows took great care in providing for their communities through their charitable bequests. Additionally, many wealthy widows utilized their wills to help women specifically. Several wills of widows granted incomes
to female friends or family. Other widows’ bequests awarded a set amounts for poor women to find husbands. By providing for other women in their wills, widows acknowledged that the majority of early modern single women struggled to sustain themselves. Although widows’ bequests differed based on their social standing and financial position, their bequests demonstrated their personal values. Widows utilized their wills to demonstrate their values and passions as they carefully awarded the people around them.

The independence and opportunities that English women gained when they became widows was shrouded in a multitude of societal expectations. Sixteenth and seventeenth century authors created and reiterated ideas about acceptable behaviors for widowed women. Popular representations of affluent widows demonstrated the acceptance of the expectations established for widows as these women were openly criticized and mocked for defying the roles created for them. Despite the restrictive expectations and critical depictions of widows these women utilized their resources to fashion their own identities. Through patronage, charity, and bequests, wealthy widows cultivated their memory. In creating their own legacy through the commission of art and charitable endowments widows influenced and altered their communities.
Epilogue: Widows in the North American British Colonies

In 1907 Historian Alexander Philip Bruce discussed how the Virginia widow, Cecily Jordan, remarried only days after the death of her husband, “The husband of Mrs. Jordan had been dead only three or four days, when Mr. Pooley, fearful lest a rival should start up, earnestly requested Captain Isaac Maddison to broach for him, to the widow, a proposal of marriage. Madison, no doubt, struck with the unseemly haste of such conduct, at first declined to act as intermediary.” Bruce then noted that Madison conceded to the Mr. Pooley’s request knowing, “Mrs. Jordan would marry some other man if she did not marry Pooley.” Bruce explains that the widow agreed to the marriage, but then broke their verbal agreement to wed after he revealed their engagement. Bruce does not mention that when Pooley attempted to sue the widow for breach of contract, Pooley alleged that Cicely pushed aside their promise in favor of marrying Will Farr. Bruce’s comments about the marriage of the widow Jordan reflected the rapid remarriage that occurred in colonial Virginia. When widows in the North American British colonies remarried they reentered coverture and therefore become less visible in the historical record. The lack of sources that address widowed women in the colonies has resulted in limited scholarship that addresses American widowhood. This epilogue serves a starting point for research concerning early colonial widows and seeks to encourage scholarship that focuses on the widowhoods of women in the colonies before 1650.

449 Bruce, Social life of Virginia in the Seventeenth Century, 225.
451 For this epilogue, I will refer to the North American British colonies and colonies interchangeably.
By looking briefly at widows in the North American British Colonies, specifically New England and Virginia, I explore the treatment and prospects these women possessed. While previous scholars looking at colonial women in the eighteenth century have asserted that England’s cultural beliefs concerning women, specifically widows, transferred over to the colonial territories, this analysis suggests that the colonial communities offered different opportunities for women.

As the men and women of England sailed to North America in the 1600s they carried more than their physical goods and supplies, they also brought over their customs, beliefs, and expectations. David Cressy’s *Coming Over: Migration and Communication between England and New England in the Seventeenth Century* suggests that through trade, kinship, and return migration settlers in the North American British colonies were able to maintain close ties with England. Cressy argues that England retained tremendous cultural influence over the colonies established in North America.452 James Horn’s *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* also argues that life in the North American colonies, specifically Virginia and Maryland, was heavily influenced by English cultural values and traditions. Alison Games’ *Migration and the Origins of the English Atlantic World* argues that the American colonies were not simply segregated settlements, but rather were connected with England and one another by migration and trade which fostered cultural exchange. The scholarly work of these historians suggests that colonists in the North American British colonies remained culturally connected to England. These investigations provide a foundation that allows

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me to analyze the beliefs and treatment concerning widows in the colonies.

**Historiography of Early Colonial Women**

The vast majority of scholarly studies concerning North American British colonies focus on the women of eighteenth century. The availability of late eighteenth century sources and the tremendous amount of research focused on the American Revolution has provided scholars interested in women’s lives with a comprehensive historiography. Scholars such as Mary Beth Norton, Jay Fliegelman, Susan Juster, Joan Jensen, Karin Wulf, and Sarah M. S. Pearsall have all produced fundamental texts that explore different elements of the lives of eighteenth-century colonial women. Vivian Bruce Conger’s *The Widow’s Might* remains the only monograph centered on English and colonial widows and although Conger’s work looks at various aspects of widowhood, her analysis focuses on women of late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thus leaving scholarship of early colonial widows to essays and chapters. Conger utilizes portrayals of widows in English literature to argue that American colonists remained subject to the ideas perpetuated by English authors. The lack of sources and the diversity of colonial life has limited scholars’ investigations of colonial women in first half of the seventeenth century. Similar to the studies on widows in early modern England, the research concerning early colonial widows is mostly restricted to chapters and articles.

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Studies focusing on women in English colonies remains dominated by investigations of the Puritan women who resided in New England. The various primary sources provided by the religious based communities of New England has given historians and literary scholars opportunities to explore the lives of women in the northern colonies.\textsuperscript{454}

One cornerstone text, Edmund Morgan’s \textit{The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England} offers great insight into family life in colonial New England. While Morgan’s work does highlight the role Puritan women played within their families, his analysis provides little on women’s role in their community. Furthermore, Morgan does not fully investigate the unique position of widowed women. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s renowned work, \textit{Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750} thoroughly examines how societal ideals and expectations of colonial women coincide with the realities of daily life.\textsuperscript{455} While Ulrich’s encompassing study does address the lives of colonial widows her work does not look at the women in the first half of the seventeenth century. Mary Beth Norton also addressed the lives of colonial women in \textit{Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society}. Norton’s 1997 text explores the intersection between familial roles and public life in colonial New England.

\textsuperscript{454} The majority of the texts that touch on widows in colonial New England actually focus on women accused of witchcraft. John Putnam Demos’ \textit{Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England}, Carol F. Karlsen’s \textit{The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England}, Elizabeth Reis’ women accused of witchcraft in \textit{Damned Women; Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England}, and Mary Beth Norton’s \textit{In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692} remain significant works in the historiography of witchcraft in New England.

England. While Norton’s work does offer valuable information about widows in colonial communities it does not fully analyze the different roles widows could possess. Mary Beth Norton also evaluates women’s agency in a broader context in *Separated by their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic*, which explores the development of public and private spheres and women’s abilities to navigate the political realm of all the colonies.

While the established communities of New England produced an abundance of written sources, the southern settlements remained focused on surviving as these colonists struggled to build stable towns and cities. In addition to a lack of southern sources, scholars have also struggled to discuss the middle and southern colonies as a whole since each colony maintained a distinct character. The tremendous cultural and economic diversity found throughout the southern region has prevented scholars from drawing conclusions and generalities about the lives of colonists living in the middle and southern colonies. The demographics of middle and southern colonies, which reflected a mostly male population, initially limited the analysis of female settlers.

The scholarship produced in the 1970s was instrumental in the development of a body of literature concerning colonial women in the middle and southern colonies. Julia Cherry Spruill’s *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*, which was originally published in 1938, was reprinted in 1972 and became fundamental in the historiography of colonial women. Spruill’s synthesis addresses all elements of colonial women’s lives as it explores their roles both inside and outside their home. Like Spruill’s study, Carr

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and Walsh’s investigation provides background information for scholars who are interested in colonial women’s lives. Another cornerstone text that looked at colonial women is Edmund Morgan’s 1975 seminal text, *American Freedom, American Slavery*. Although Morgan’s encompassing text does not concentrate solely on women, his evaluation of the women in Virginia was instrumental to the study of southern women as Morgan’s perspective has been both accepted and developed by later scholars. Morgan coined the term “widowarchy,” which acknowledges the legal, economic, and personal power that women, especially widows, could gain in Colonial Virginia. The popularity of these two influential texts work inspired scholars to begin looking more closely at the women that lived in the middle and southern colonies.\(^\text{458}\)

Linda Speth and Alison Duncan Hirsch’s *Women, Family, and Community in Colonial America: Two Perspectives* looks specifically at the different roles colonial women could possess. In this book, Linda Speth looks specifically at widows in her chapter “More Than Her ‘Thirds’: Wives and Widows in Colonial Virginia,” which exams how Virginia widows challenged the patriarchal structures of their communities.\(^\text{459}\)

Kathleen Brown’s 1996 text, *Good wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs*:  

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\(^{458}\) Two 1970s articles that evaluate how women arrived to the southern colonies and their roles upon arrival are David Souden’s, “‘Rogues, Whores and Vagabonds’? Indentured Servant Emigrants to North America, and the Case of Mid-Seventeenth-Century Bristol” and Daniel Smith’s “Mortality and Family in the Colonial Chesapeake.” Souden utilizes a Bristol register, which documented the demographic information of men and women leaving to foreign plantations, from the years 1654 to 1679 who was leaving England and why. Souden’s analysis of the Bristol register suggests that the majority servants headed to British colonies were both skilled and unskilled laborers, rather than rogues and vagrants presented in previous scholarship. Smith’s analysis explores Virginian demographics by examining the records of the Charles Parish in York County. Smith argues that the high mortality in the Chesapeake region altered family structure and compromised paternal authority traditionally found early modern England. Although Souden and Smith do not focus exclusively on colonial women, their demographic investigations are fundamental in the development of later scholarship that rely on immigration and population trends. The early studies of life in the middle and southern colonies provided the demographic information that allowed historians to produce more focused studies.

*Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, explores how gender expectations and race relations manifested in early settlements in Virginia. Brown’s text argues that European colonists utilized notions of race and gender in order secure a social order that would allow English males to dominate all aspects of colonial life. Brown’s monograph differs from earlier scholarship not only because it focuses on women, but also because it reflects a scholarly shift toward Atlantic studies. The Atlantic World framework encourages intellectuals to evaluate how movement across the Atlantic Ocean after the European discovery of the Americas led to conflict and cultural exchange. By integrating multiple historiographies, including colonial history, women’s history, and the history of slavery, scholars gained new tools to reinterpret stale narratives and create more encompassing images of southern life. The rise of Atlantic studies contributed to the study of southern women as scholars in the 2000s began evaluating of colonial women’s personal, social, and political agency. Cara Anzilotti’s *In the Affairs of the World: Women, Patriarchy, and Power in Colonial South Carolina* examines how colonial women gained and maintained power within their communities. Anzilotti suggests that women played an instrumental role in the development of South Carolina by fashioning a social order based on personal networks. Although more recent scholarship, including Brown and Anzilotti, have explored the how non-European cultures and communities affected English settlers, the majority of studies looking at early colonial women do not fully consider the influence of non-Europeans. By more closely examining historiographies of indigenous peoples and slaves as well as revisiting

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460 Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*

sources connected to these bodies of work scholars may better understand how these peoples affected the lives of early colonial women, specifically widows. Terri Synder’s *Brabbling Women: Disorderly Speech and the Law in Early Virginia* aims to analyze the nature and consequences of female speech in public institutions in seventeenth-century Virginia. Synder implies that colonial authorities attempted to silence women’s speech in order to strip them of any opportunity to employ autonomy.

Rosemary O’Day’s *Women’s Agency in Early Modern Britain and the American Colonies* provides a brief overview of how widows in England and the colonies navigated personal independence in their patriarchal communities. O’Day provides a single chapter that examines the numerous aspects of widowhood. O’Day’s chapter suggests that while widows possessed legal powers their opportunities remained circumscribed by their social and economic status. Although O’Day’s work provides ample information about women in England and the colonies, the large scope of the project restricts her analysis of the widows’ agency.

Although colonial women have received more scholarly attention in the last two decades, the scholarship on colonial widows in the first half seventeenth century remains limited. This analysis of widowhood in New England and Virginia before 1650 highlights the opportunities and challenges that widowed women faced.

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462 Kristen Wood’s *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* explores widows’ wielded their authority over their household. While discussing eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries this text highlights the important role that slavery played in the lives of southern women, specifically widows. Kristen Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).


Like the men arriving in the English colonies, the varying demographics of the women travelers creates challenges in understanding the motives of women arriving in the North American settlements. Like the men arriving in the North American colonies, English women had numerous reasons to look for a new future across the sea. Whether it was political, personal, economic, or religious English women left their homes in pursuit of a new life. The idyllic images of the new world created an appealing picture for the English men and women dwelling in the crowded cities of England. The growing political, economic, and religious tensions that eventually resulted in the English Civil Wars contributed to Englishmen looking to a future in the New World. Whether Englishmen left their home country in pursuit of religious sanctuary or an opportunity for economic gain, hordes of migrants departed from England for the colonies in the 1620s and 1630s. The masses of people that pursued a new life in the colonies prompted King Charles to order that anyone leaving country needed to obtain a license and provide the monarchy with their demographic information.

Unlike English men, women were not always encouraged to give up their lives in England and set off for new adventures. One 1612 ballad exhibits how popular literature glorified travel to the New World for men and attempted to dissuade women from embarking on these journeys. “A Voyage to Virginia: OR, The Valliant Souldiers Farwel to his Love./Unto Virginia hes resolvd to go,/ She begs of him, that he would not do so;/But her Intreaties they are all in vain,/ For he must plow the curled Ocean Main:/At length (with sorrow) he doth take his leave/And leaves his dearest Love at home to grieve” describes a young man’s goodbye to his love, and portrays how
popular ballads concerning Virginia attempted to appeal to men by portraying a man as willing to sacrifice his love in order to build England’s empire.\textsuperscript{466}

While the colonies worked to establish the legislature that fit their particular settlement each area remained deeply influenced by English Common Law. Like women widowed in England, women’s personal legal rights increased dramatically at the death of their husbands. While each colony dictated different details concerning widows’ rights, in general, most widowed women gained legal opportunities that increased their personal independence.

As single women in the colonies widows had the ability to draw up contracts and compose wills. While women in their widowhood gained new legal authority they also inherited a new vulnerability without their husbands as they could now be sued. Widows could garner limited legal protection by remarrying, but they also would forfeit their abilities to produce legal contracts. Widows were expected to manage their newly inherited estates by maintaining their authority over their household.\textsuperscript{467} Despite colonial widows’ ability to take care of familial and financial responsibilities, widows were excluded from direct political participation.\textsuperscript{468} Widows, especially wealthy widows, maintained ambiguous positions within their communities since they actively acted as

\begin{quote}
must plow the curled Ocean Main:/At length (with sorrow) he doth take his leave/And leaves his dearest Love at home to grieve Printed for J. Clarke, W. Thackeray, and T. Pasinger, 1685. 
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{466} One late seventeenth century ballad that reiterates the idea traveling to English colonies, specifically Virginia, as unfit for proper women is “The Trappan’d MAIDEN:/ OR,The Distressed Damsel./This Girl was cunningly trappan’d,/ Sent to Virginny from England;/ Where she doth Hardship undergo,/ There is no Cure, it must be so:/But if she lives to cross the Main,/She vows she'll ne'r go there again.” This ballad, published sometime between 1685 and 1703, reveals that many English men and women considered the colonial territories to be male spaces. Unlike the ballads that attempt to attract men to the colonies with the promise of wealth and adventure, this ballad works to both warn and dissuade women from colonial life.

\textsuperscript{467} Norton, \textit{Founding Mothers and Fathers}, 139-140.

\textsuperscript{468} Norton, \textit{Founding Mothers and Fathers}, 139-140.
head of their household, and yet were excluded from the majority of political life. Although widows were formally prevented from engaging with local politics, colonial widows did actively engage with their community. By looking briefly at widows in Massachusetts and Connecticut and Virginia, this section evaluates how widows affected their community.

**Widows in Massachusetts and Connecticut**

The majority of English men and women that came to the New England colonies in the first decades of settlement were Puritans. Laudian reforms in England remained a major factor in the immigration of Puritans to New England, particularly Massachusetts. The immigrants arriving in the New England colonies were often in the company of family. The average size of households moving heading to New England in the 1630s was 4.07 persons. The relocation of entire families, and sometimes entire parishes, allowed for these new communities to easily implement English social customs and practices, including beliefs about and treatment of women.

Despite the spiritual equality presented in Puritan theology, the Englishmen headed to the New World brought over traditional European ideas about familial structures. The Puritans of New England created communities centered on the nuclear family where fathers welded both spiritual and secular authority. A Puritan wife served as “helpmate” or “helpmeet” and was expected to tend to her husband’s will as well as manage the household.

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Social stability in the New England communities afforded colonists longer lives and marriages, and therefore most women were not widowed until later in life. If New England women were widowed they were typically popular marriage candidates as they often came with an inheritance.

Like in England most expectations about widows in New England were based on religious notions. New England preachers were instrumental in creating expectations and beliefs about how women should behave. Like widows in England, Puritan widows were expected to show grief for their deceased husband, but were judged if they demonstrated an excess amount of sorrow toward the loss of their loved one. New England widows, similar to their English counterparts, were also expected to spend time in personal prayer after the death of their husbands.472

While there are several commonalities between the expectations of widows in England and New England, one major difference in these two communities was that Puritan beliefs promoted the idea that widowers should adhere to these expectations as well. John Cotton’s 1641 treatise The way of life, or, Gods vway and course, in bringing the soule into, keeping it in, and carrying it on, in the wayes of life and peace explores how someone should interpret loss. Cotton’s writings suggest that both men and women experience the same sorrow at the loss of one another by continually pairing their grief together, “There was a great mourning of wives for husbands, and husbands for wives.”473

473 John Cotton, The way of life, or, Gods vway and course, in bringing the soule into, keeping it in, and carrying it on, in the wayes of life and peace laid downe in foure severall treatises on foure texts of Scripture, viz. the pouring out of the spirit, on Zach. 12. 10, 11, &c., sins deadly wound, on Acts 2. 37., the Christians charge, on Prov. 4. 23., the life of faith, on Gal. 2. 19, 20. 1641, 45. Early English Books Online. Web. 2018.
Cotton’s attempts to ease sorrow through scripture reveals that Puritans attempted to equally mourn individuals despite their relationship to the deceased person.

While English Common Law protected widows in England by requiring their husbands to leave their wives one third of their estates each of the colonial territories had different expectations and customs concerning a widow’s share. Colonists at Plymouth asserted that widows should be able to live in comfort no matter the husband’s financial position at the time of his death.\textsuperscript{474} While some Northern communities created laws that attempted to protect all widows, other settlements felt compelled only to take care of widows deemed worthy by local leaders.\textsuperscript{475}

New England lawmakers hindered widows’ financial autonomy by dictating that local judges had a say in the division of a husband’s assets. Despite the notion that wills were legal and binding, New England authorities had the ability to alter a widow’s share depending on personal circumstances.\textsuperscript{476}

As the seventeenth century approached New England lawmakers worked to limit a widow’s inheritance based on her behavior and relationship with her deceased husband. Carole Shammas’ “English Inheritance Law and its Transfer to Colonies” suggests that colonial widows’ dower rights decreased significantly by the start of the eighteenth century. Although the colonies attempted to provide for widows, lawmakers became more concerned with securing inheritances for children. Shammas suggests that throughout the seventeenth century more men began to limit widows’ inheritances by

\textsuperscript{474} Norton, \textit{Founding Mothers and Fathers}, 144.
\textsuperscript{475} Norton, \textit{Founding Mothers and Fathers}, 141.
\textsuperscript{476} Norton, \textit{Founding Mothers and Fathers}, 145.
adding more stipulations to their wills. The colonies’ abilities to alter inheritance laws as they established their local legislatures allowed for lawmakers to limit the provisions awarded to widowed women. By reducing widows’ inheritances, colonial legislators limited the autonomy widowed women possessed.

While widows were allegedly removed from public life, the reality demonstrates that these women often signed local petitions and attended town meetings. Lucy Brewster, widow of Francis Brewster, a wealthy merchant, found herself in conflict with the New Haven authorities over religious doctrine. In 1646 Francis Brewster was aboard a New Haven ship that was lost at sea, leaving his wife widowed. Prior to her disagreement with her local church authorities, the widow Brewster was known for having a good reputation and being an active church member. Lucy’s legal trouble began after a visit to Mistress Leach’s home to meet her friends. Anne Lloyd Yale Eaton, who had been excommunicated the previous year after facing trial, also met with Lucy at Mistress Leach’s house. In the beginning of June 1646, Lucy, along with two other women were called to trial after being accused of discussing heretical ideas by the servants of Mistress Leach. Lucy, outraged by her private trial, aggressively confronted the two servants that brought on her charges. While Lucy openly criticized the actions of her church leaders and magistrates, she continually denied the accusations brought by the

478 Norton, Founding Mothers and Fathers, 164.
480 Anne Lloyd Yale Eaton, wife of Governor Theophilus Eaton, conflicted with her community elders over her Anabaptist beliefs and her treatment of her household, including her mother-in-law, step-daughter, and servants. Anne was excommunicated in May 1646 for breach of the fifth commandment. Norton, Founding Mothers and Fathers, 172.
481 Norton, Founding Mothers and Fathers, 174.
servants. Lucy’s outspoken disparagement of her community leaders was met only with a heavy fine. The relatively mild reprimand that Lucy received, despite her hostile confrontation with Mistress Leach’s servants and her criticism of the magistrat may be reconciled with her status as an affluent widow. Lucy’s ability to actively protect her reputation and state her personal beliefs about the local authorities acknowledges a widow’s unique position that allowed her to have limited participation in public life. Additionally, Lucy’s punishment suggests that the community believed that her points may have had some validity. Widows’ legal capabilities and personal autonomy challenged established hierarchies within their communities as they managed their own estates and indirectly took part in public life.

**Widows in Virginia**

The immigrant demographic of the Virginia colony did not reflect their New England counterparts, as the majority of individuals who left for the more southern colonies were men travelling by themselves. Additionally, the settlers who headed to southern colonies also differed from their northern counterparts because the majority were Anglican. Although numerous Englishmen from different social and economic backgrounds travelled to the southern colonies, most of the men and women that ventured to the south were indentured servants that originally hailed from London’s laboring class.\(^{482}\) In the first two decades of the seventeenth century, colonial leaders attempted to attract women to the settlements as both wives and domestic laborers.\(^{483}\) In 1619, the Virginia Company discussed a request from Virginia treasurer, Edwin Sandys:

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\(^{482}\) Anzilotti, *In the Affairs of the World*, 14.

\(^{483}\) The administrators of Carolina offered to the pay for passage for wives, children, and maids in order to create a more balanced sex ratio.
that a fitt hundreth might be sent of woemen, Maid[s] young and vncorrupt to make wifes to the Inhabitant[s] who by defect thereof (as is credibly reported) stay there but to gett something and then to returne for England, wch will breed a dissolu[tion], and so an ouerthrow of the planta[tion]. These woemen if they marry to the publiq ffarmors, to be transported at the charges of the Company.\textsuperscript{484}

In addition to offering free passage to the colonies, the leaders and inhabitants of the southern colonies promised numerous incentives to attract women to their settlements.\textsuperscript{485}

The unforgiving environment of the south and the hard work required to maintain cash crops left many women widowed. Settlers in the south faced numerous environmental factors including contaminated water, disease, and malnutrition that led to a high death rate. The high morality was a key factor in developing the culture of the Southern colonies. The lack of nuclear families headed by fathers allowed for the communities to grow without the strict the patriarchal familial structure present in the New England settlements. Furthermore, southerners were unburdened with the religious expectations of Puritan theology. Because southern women often experienced widowhood at young ages and marriageable women remained scarce in the settlements it was expected that widows would remarry. Widows were not only expected to remarry, but were perceived as advantageous marriage candidates as they often entered their nuptials with an inheritance from their first husband.

Widows in the more southern settlements, including Virginia, typically received the bulk of their husbands’ estates as they were expected to remarry soon. In addition to receiving substantial inheritances most southern widows were also appointed

https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evr7775mets.xml
administrator of their husband’s estates.\textsuperscript{486} The fiscal autonomy and personal authority that women could claim as widows was often short lived as most remarried within the year of their husbands’ death.\textsuperscript{487} The idea that southern widows would remarry contributed to the custom of generously awarding widows as these women would not challenge their patriarchal community living independently for long. At his death, the affluent merchant, Abraham Peirsey, left his wife one of the wealthiest people in the Virginia colony. In 1625 Peirsey, who was a widower with two daughters, married Frances West, widow of Nathaniel West. When Peirsey died in 1628, his will appointed his wife executor and stated, “I bequeath unto my dearlie beloved wife (being my sole executrix), my debts and legacies paid, one-third part and one twelfth part out of my estate aforesaid.”\textsuperscript{488} In addition to awarding his wife, Peirsey’s will also adequately provided for his two daughters. One year after Peirsey’s death, Frances remarried Samuel Matthews. Despite boasting about his economically advantageous marriage, Frances and Matthews faced challenges over their property at the hands of the husband of Peirsey’s daughter, Sir John Harvey.\textsuperscript{489} Harvey, who served as the governor of the colony, claimed that Frances’ inheritance belonged to the Peirsey daughters and while Matthews was in England Virginia authorities confiscated their estate. The Privy Council ordered that Frances and Matthews were not indebted to Peirsey’s children and that they should have their property returned.\textsuperscript{490} Frances and Matthews’ ability to recover their estate demonstrate that early colonial widows in Virginia were well provided for. As I

\textsuperscript{486} Edmund S. Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia} (New York: Norton, 1975), 166.
\textsuperscript{487} Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 164.
\textsuperscript{488} James Branch Cabell, \textit{The Majors and their Marriages} (Richmond, Virginia: The W. C. Hill Printing Co., 1915), 121.
\textsuperscript{489} Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 119
\textsuperscript{490} Cabell, \textit{The Majors and their Marriages}, 124-125.
previously mentioned, Edmund Morgan’s text, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, refers to the power that women gained through the transfer of wealth through widows’ inheritances in the 1620s and 1630 as a “widowarchy.”491 Husbands in Virginia often bequeathed their children specific awards, whether it was a sum of money or a portion of their land, and handed the remainder of their estate to their wives. Similar to situations in England and New England, although to much lesser extent, some men awarded their wives with the provision that she remained unmarried.492 As the colonies became more settled, inheritance laws were forced to become more specific. Early laws and colonial customs concerning inheritance were ambiguous and varied throughout the colonies, and by the mid-1640s, colonies began implementing English common law in regards to inheritance.

Although Sarah Offley married three times during her lifetime, she was able to wield her power during her second widowhood to negotiate the conditions of her third marriage. Sarah Offley first married Lieutenant Colonel Adam Thorowgood in 1627. Thorowgood died in 1640 and by 1641 Sarah had remarried the Captain John Gookin. After Gookin died in 1643, Sarah remained unmarried for the next four years. During these years as a widow, Sarah took advantage of her personal autonomy as she collected the debts due to her late husbands. Sarah also went to court to defend her daughters and herself against slander at the hands of Bathsheba Lovett.493 When Sarah finally decided to remarry she chose a prominent member of the community, Francis Yeardley, and

negotiated a marriage contract that protected her inheritances from her first two husbands. Not only did Sarah retain control of her property, she also managed the estates for her minor children.\footnote{Cynthia A. Kierner, \textit{Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700–1835} (Cornell University Press, 1998), 12.}

Although English colonists brought over ideas about widows the circumstances of their new surroundings altered how women in these places were perceived and treated. The Puritan ideology that dominated New England communities restricted widows’ opportunities by creating legislature that limited their inheritances. Furthermore, New England communities also created social barriers that hindered women’s abilities to secure their bequests. The harsh environment and high death rate of the south altered the traditional English patriarchal family structure thus allowing widows to exercise great fiscal independence. While southern widows often inherited the bulk of their husbands’ estates, their tendency to remarry limited their ability to exercise legal and monetary independence. Although the English settlements created in North America attempted to establish societies that resembled life in England the circumstances of their new locations altered both their beliefs and realities. Early colonial widows, while subject to the expectations of their local communities, they remained relatively removed from the English assumptions and expectations concerning widows.
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