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Dying Virgins and Mourning Mothers: A Study in American Mourning Iconography

Robin Veder
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

DYING VIRGINS AND MOURNING MOTHERS:

A STUDY IN AMERICAN MOURNING ICONOGRAPHY

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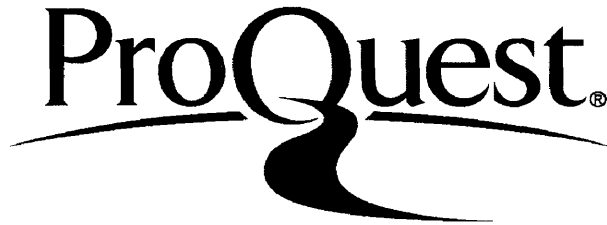
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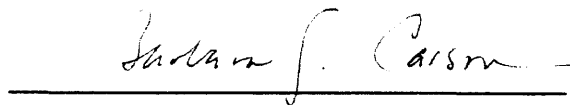
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ABSTRACT

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, changing cultural concepts about death and women intersected; each idea influenced the formation of the other. Mourners took center stage in the social drama of death, and romanticism focused on the female mourner as an archetype of virtue. The rhetoric of republican motherhood and domesticity simultaneously revised the meaning of motherhood and enhanced the value of expressing empathetic emotions.

This association of ideas about death and gender was expressed in many forms; it was particularly evident in the image of a female mourner at a tomb, shaded by a weeping willow tree. This image was very popular during the period in question, and it appeared in several forms, including embroidered mourning pictures, mourning miniatures, memorial prints for George Washington, and literary illustrations. There are strong connections between this image, which I call a mourning icon, and the histories of art and funeral rituals. The iconography of the image and the contexts for its production and usage suggest that it commented on and contributed to contemporary ideas about the relation between death and gender.

Specifically, the mourning icon visually reflected and expressed a symbolic exchange that offered women social acceptance at the time of their own death, or when they mourned the death of others, as a compensation for their failure to achieve or maintain socially legitimate motherhood. Instead of only being seen as a loss, death was interpreted as an occasion for virtue to be gained. The terms of the compensation were as follows: Women who died as virgins or as the result of childbirth (whether married or not) were thought to have died unfulfilled. In order to remedy the potentially diminished reputation of the deceased, and the disappointment this generated for the mourning community, when a woman died under these circumstances, her death was celebrated as a sign of her virtue. When married women suffered the death of a child, they lost the social status that came with motherhood. Mourning for dead children was a way for women to maintain their status as mothers.

This transaction of lost motherhood for enhanced virtue through death or mourning occurred not on a practical level, but on an ideological level; it was a socially constructed ideal. We know that this exchange was a cultural ideal because it was unmistakably expressed in several forms, including funeral rituals, visual arts, literature, and political rhetoric. The mourning icon was repeatedly used in these contexts, and therefore can be seen as integral to the way this ideology was conceived and communicated.

DYING VIRGINS AND MOURNING MOTHERS:

A STUDY IN AMERICAN MOURNING ICONOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,

Alone, shall come fulfillment to our dreams

And our desires.[1]

Envision a green and lavender dusk. Under the shade of
a weeping willow tree, a solitary figure yields to grief and
covers her face. Georgian mansions and distant evergreens
dot the background's undulating hills. In the foreground, an
oak stump tells the story of a hardy tree felled prematurely.
The mourner's white handkerchief and dress match the wreath
of roses she has draped over the tomb. The plinth itself
seems overgrown, a substantial monument. The urn which tops
it is similar in form to the lachrymatories used by Romans to
preserve mourner's tears, but would never fit on a silver
chain around a young maiden's neck. The inscription?
"Sacred to the memory of . . ."

The scene I have described was painted on ivory mourning
miniatures and embroidered into silk mourning pictures made
in America during the period 1780 to 1830. In this study,
the generic term "mourning icon" should be understood to
encompass all artifacts bearing the standardized image of
female mourner, tomb and willow. The image illustrates
contemporary ideas about death and gender. I will argue that

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[1]Wallace Stevens, "Sunday Morning," in *The Top 500 Poems*, ed. William
Harmon (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 922.

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in America the "mourning icon" both reflected and contributed to the idea that mourning or even death could enhance femininity.

The mourning icon gave tangible form to a symbolic compensation that offered women social acceptance through dying or mourning as a consolation for their failure to achieve socially legitimate motherhood. Women who died as virgins or as the result of childbirth (whether married or not) were thought to have died unfulfilled, so to compensate their death was celebrated as a sign of their virtue. When married women suffered the death of a child, they lost the social status that came with motherhood. Mourning for dead children was a way for women to maintain their status as mothers. This exchange of glorified death or mourning for lost motherhood occurred at a conceptual level: in funeral rituals, visual arts, literature, and political rhetoric.

Although I have not thoroughly traced the underlying motives for this symbolic compensation, I do believe that the women of the period I am discussing were sensitive to its presence. The women who made or owned objects bearing the mourning icon were of the educated upper class, so they would have probably encountered this concept in at least one of its other forms. During this period, most women encountered in their own experience, or through their friends, fears relating to death through childbirth, the death of a child, or the potential repercussions of premarital pregnancy. These conditions may have contributed to the popularity of an

image that promised virtue in death or mourning in exchange for lost motherhood. Whether presented as part of a mourning miniature or mourning picture, the mourning icon provided a daily reminder of this connection between death and motherhood.

In essence, I am suggesting that the mourning icon was an ideological carrier. An ideology is an idea, or set of ideas, that a given cultural group has accepted as normal to the extent that it becomes unspoken and unquestioned. Depending upon the motives of the ideology's source, the effects may be benevolent or malevolent. Either way, the ideology is generally communicated in a covert fashion. In this study, I use the term ideology to describe an idealized perception of reality that was presented as rational.

Objects can function ideologically when they influence people's activities and self-definitions. Material culture scholar Robert Blair St. George has argued that objects, as well as literature, can be

> rife with metaphors of dominance, deference, and
> mystery. . . . Material life makes the experience
> of ideology a constant process that is both
> intellectual and sensual. Material life argues
> that the routines and processes that shaped daily
> life in America derived much of their affective
> force from . . . the complex fashion systems that

framed the design, exchange, and use of these

expressive forms.[2]

Both the appearance and the construction of mourning

miniatures and mourning pictures contributed to their potency

as ideological carriers. When the visual image that I call

the mourning icon showed a woman serenely posted at a tomb,

it ideologically provided a model for ideal female mourning

behavior. When the inscription for a mourning miniature that

contained a lock of the deceased's hair read, "Sacred will I

keep thy dear remains," the object was again ideologically

instructing the owner on how to mourn properly.

Although as a visual image, the mourning icon was

consistent, its ideological intention and effect varied

according to context. There are two potential

interpretations of the mourning icon that support my

contention that it ideologically paired death with

motherhood. The first draws connections between the mourning

icon and the European tradition of the wedding-funeral, in

order to illustrate my argument that nobility in death was

described as a compensation for the failure to achieve

motherhood. Memorials for George Washington provide the

context for my second interpretation, which focuses on

mothers as mourners. Although each reading of the mourning

icon claims a different influence and meaning, both bodies of

evidence contribute to my overall thesis that the mourning

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[2]Robert Blair St. George, "Introduction," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 10.

icon presented death or mourning as consolatory substitutes for lost motherhood.

Any reader familiar with the mourning icon will probably immediately recognize it as an element of the romantic and neoclassical visual traditions. Although these aesthetic movements certainly played a part in the popularity of the mourning icon, I propose that this image also had roots in the English "wedding-funeral" tradition. Wedding-funerals were reserved for virgins (usually female), women who died in childbirth, and prostitutes: all women who failed to achieve legitimate motherhood. A woman who died under these circumstances was represented in the wedding-funeral as a virgin bride -- the next best alternative to motherhood in the social ranking of feminine achievement. Her barren physical body was ritualistically replaced with an acceptable social body that remained in the collective social memory. Some defining elements of this funeral ritual, like the required similarity between the primary mourner and the deceased, can be seen in the American mourning icon. Like the wedding-funeral, the mourning icon also provided a symbolic solution for women who died without issue; the memorial object testified to the virtue of the deceased.

In the Washington-inspired mourning icons, a second layer of meaning, originating from a different source, compounded the connection between motherhood and death. The Washington memorials suggested that when it was not the woman, but rather her child who died, motherhood could be

salvaged if it was extended beyond the grave by mourning. Although Washington's mourners resembled mourners at a wedding-funeral, they were creating a neoclassical version of greco-roman heroic funerals. As in late-eighteenth-century paintings of classical funerals, male virtue was rewarded with funerary tributes while female virtue was demonstrated in the figure of the loyal widow.[3] The important difference in the memorials for George Washington was that the female mourner Columbia was not supposed to be his widow, but rather an allegorical image of the nation as his mother.

During the federal period, motherhood was interpreted as the primary civic duty for American women, a phenomenon Linda Kerber has dubbed "republican motherhood".[4] Yet, childbirth often meant death for women, so motherhood was a difficult status to attain. Moreover, infant mortality rates were very high, so the privileged title of mother was also difficult to maintain. By following the example of George Washington's allegorical mother Columbia, women could continue to claim the status of mother by mourning for dead children.

Rather than view these two interpretations of the mourning icon as mutually exclusive, I have chosen to present both as aspects of a "formation." The term formation comes from Raymond Williams' concept of an event or series of events that involve multiple players, and therefore multiple

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[3]Robert Rosenblum, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 28, 40-42.

[4]Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

meanings. To study a group of events or objects as a formation requires an investigation of the range of sources and environments that influence production and reception, as well as an analysis of the events or objects themselves.[5] The mourning icon can be likened to an event that is at the center of a formation because the mourning image was visually consistent, regardless of form. Like an event with more than one organizer, experienced simultaneously by many people, the image retains its own character, regardless of how many interpretations it accrues. It is with an idea of the mourning icon as a formation composed of many spokes of meaning, meanings that may support or negate one another, that I present two variations on how the mourning icon contributed to contemporary perspectives on motherhood and death.

During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, American beliefs about death and women changed; these two shifting belief systems intersected, entwined, and became inseparable by the 1830s. Therefore, a study of attitudes about death during this period must account for the growing association of death and mourning with the feminine domestic sphere. Although beliefs about death were not as central to gender constructions as gender was essential to ideas about death, they did influence popular ideas about

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[5]Raymond Williams, *Sociology of Culture* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

femininity. Instead of undermining a woman's control over her domestic circle, death and mourning might contribute positively to her feminine aura. I see the mourning icon as a crystallized moment in this convergence between ideas about death and women. Therefore, these conditions provide an important context for my study of mourning icons.

Among scholars who study western attitudes about death, there is a general agreement that during the late 1700s and early 1800s, the mourner's role in response to death was re-evaluated. Previous attitudes were reversed, so that a concern for the deceased's soul became second in importance to the mourners' own feelings. According to Philippe Ariès, the growth of "family feelings" was responsible for this change, which was first reflected in new methods of managing the deathbed environment.[6]   By the end of the eighteenth century, mourning artifacts like the miniatures, mourning pictures, and memorial prints I will be discussing also showed this intensified focus on the mourners rather than the deceased. Visually, the miniatures and mourning pictures represented the mourner. The inscriptions were written in the voice of the mourner rather than the deceased. The function of the objects was to mark and console the mourner, whereas earlier death-related objects were symbolic gifts to the deceased or like indulgences, meant to buy prayers for the soul of the deceased. The post-mortem portraits,

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[6]Philippe Ariès, *Western Attitudes toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

mourning costumes and rural cemeteries of the middle nineteenth century were a further development of this trend.[7]

The intellectual and aesthetic movement called romanticism is partially responsible for the new attitude about mourning that developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Romanticism was the outgrowth of a reaction against scientific rationalism and industrialization. Philosophically, its proponents criticized political and social conventions, esteemed individuality, and preferred emotion to reason. Eventually, romanticism infiltrated many aspects of western culture as a fashion in feeling. In romantic art and literature, emotional expression, particularly melancholy and sympathy, were invested with moral worth. Any act of remembrance, including mourning, could be interpreted as virtuous. Meditations on death, whether that of the self or another person, provided individuals an opportunity to experience and exhibit romantic feelings, and therefore virtue.

The romantic idea of "sensibility," which Colin Campbell calls an "ethic of feeling," was especially associated with the female mourner.[8] Although men also indulged in virtuous emotional vulnerability and expressiveness, Philippe Ariès has recognized the widow, a "symbol of inconsolable grief,"

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[7]Martha Pike and Janice Gray Armstrong, *A Time to Mourn: Expressions of Grief in Nineteenth Century America* (Stony Brook, New York: The Museums at Stony Brook, 1980), 17. See also: Martha Pike, "In Memory of: Artifacts Relating to Mourning in Nineteenth Century America," in *Rituals and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, ed. Ray B. Browne (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Press, 1980).

[8]Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

as the center of the romantic "cult of remembrance".[9] Jane
Austen's fictional character Marianne Dashwood is the
embodiment of sensibility pushed to a satirical extreme; when
Marianne's father dies, she and her mother

> encouraged each other . . . in the violence of
> their affliction. The agony of grief which
> overpowered them at first was voluntarily renewed,
> was sought for, was created again and again. They
> gave themselves up wholly to their sorrow, seeking
> increase of wretchedness in every reflection that
> could afford it, and resolved against ever
> admitting consolation in future.[10]

As parodied in *Sense and Sensibility*, the archetype of
sensibility is frequently, though not exclusively, female in
romantic fiction.

In art, the neoclassical vision of the virtuous widow
represents one of the few intersections between neoclassical
and romantic aesthetics. Robert Rosenblum comments that the
depth of a widow's grief, as shown in Greuze's *Inconsolable
Widow*, provided an example of the strength of her "marital
fidelity." This representation contributed to the creation
of a gender-specific moral economy of sensibility, for
neoclassical artists intended the virtuous widows of the past
to serve as "moral paragons" for contemporary female

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[9]Phillippe Ariès, "The Reversal of Death: Changes in Attitudes toward
Death in Western Societies," *American Quarterly* 26 (December 1974): 547.
[10]Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811; reprint, New York: Signet
Classic, 1961), 8.

viewers.[11] For real women who took the romantic ethic to heart, loss created the opportunity to experience and display feelings of sorrow and piety, emotions that were thought especially suited, and moreover, flattering, to their gender.

Lewis Saum and Charles Jackson, both specialists on American attitudes about death, have characterized the late-eighteenth-century change in attitudes towards death as a "domestication and beautification" movement.[12] For them, domestication refers to the home and family, but not specifically to the woman-centered idea of domesticity. Instead, their interpretation refers to a conceptual merging of the earthly and heavenly home. Nineteenth-century Protestants increasingly saw death as a temporary separation that would end when the family reunited in heaven. In Virginia, Protestant Episcopal ministers helped romanticism to "beautify" death by describing mourning as a pleasant virtue. In preparation for this study, I have explored Southern Protestantism primarily in regard to its "beautifying" function, and thereby its specific message for female mourners.

[11]Rosenblum, 28, 32-42.

[12]*Passing : The Vision of Death in America*, ed., with commentary Charles Jackson (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1977), 5-6; Lewis O. Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," in *Passing*, 65-90. For studies on death specific to Virginia, see David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Lee-Ann Heflin, "Attitudes Towards Death: Colonial Virginia" (master's thesis, George Mason University, 1990); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Norman Vardney Mackie, III, "Funerary Treatment and Social Status: A Case Study of Colonial Tidewater Virginia" (master's thesis, College of William and Mary, 1986); Thad W. Tate, "Funerals in Eighteenth Century Virginia" (research report, Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., 1956).

According to Diana Combs, the mid-nineteenth-century rural cemetery movement was a direct outgrowth of the late-eighteenth-century romantic "cult of memory" and the early-nineteenth-century "ideals of domesticity."[13] Combs links the romantic and domestic ideologies through a study of commemorative objects. She traces mid-nineteenth-century gravestone designs back to eighteenth-century English high funerary art, and then mourning miniatures, prints and pictures. The mourning icon of a tomb, willow, and female mourner, which is the matrix of my study here, also occupies a central position in Combs' analysis. She suggests that this image provided a prototype for cemetery landscape design and a model for mourning behavior. "The symbols that cultivated remembrance, meditation, prayer, and mourning in the home now assured a physical reality within the . . . rural cemetery."[14] Therefore, it was partially through the influence of the mourning icon, which was initiated in romantic-neoclassical art and then absorbed into the aesthetics of the domestic rural cemetery, that the importance of the female mourner, Ariès' centerpiece of the "cult of remembrance," continued to be inflated during the early nineteenth century.

Studies of women's history comprise the second body of information consulted for this study. Just as I have

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[13]Diana Williams Combs, *Early Gravestone Art in Georgia and South Carolina* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 180, 188.
[14]Combs, 183.

attempted to give a general sense of the ideas Americans held about death during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, I will outline the contemporary gender ideology as it pertained to women. In particular, I will again highlight points of intersection between beliefs about death and femininity.

In women's history scholarship on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, there appears to be an assumption that republican motherhood, beginning during the revolutionary era, gradually became the "cult of true womanhood" or "cult of domesticity" in the 1830s. I think a study of gender ideology for 1800-1830 is needed to confirm or dispute this assumption, but the question is too large for me to tackle here. Consequently, I have relied upon studies of colonial and federal era women for information on the late 1700s, and looked to the literature on domesticity for signs of later, potentially related developments.

American gender ideology experienced a radical change during the revolutionary period. Whereas previously women were considered to be more emotional by nature, and therefore weak and immoral, they were increasingly described as morally superior to men, partially because of their presumed emotional susceptibility and expressiveness. Ruth Bloch, who originally posited this analysis of gender symbolism, sees the rhetorical shift as a precursor to Victorian female domesticity.[15]

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[15]Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs* 13 (1987): 37-58.

In accordance with this re-evaluation, the term virtue, previously meaning virginity, was now applied to women who contributed to the public sphere of politics through the backdoor of motherhood. Bearing and ethically raising sons to be good republicans was described as the best way for women to contribute to the public good. This campaign, directed at women during the 1780s and 1790s, has been called "republican motherhood," by historian Linda Kerber. One of the results of republican motherhood was that at least rhetorically, mothers were replacing fathers as the ethical stronghold of the family.

The majority of my analysis is aligned with Kerber's, in that I focus on prevalent cultural ideology. However, in order to understand how ideas about death and gender may have been interpreted by real women, I have also consulted writings by Mary Beth Norton, Suzanne Lebsock, and other historians who have discovered signs of women's self-perceptions in diaries, letters, and other primary documents.[16] The findings presented by these scholars suggest that women did experience some anxiety about the economic and emotional dangers of marriage, and the risk of death in childbirth.[17] Later in this text, I will suggest that these

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[16]Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1984), and Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1980).

[17]For background on death through childbirth see: Nancy Schrom Dye and Daniel Blake Smith, "Mother Love and Infant Death, 1750-1920," *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 329-353; Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "'The Clear Leadings of Providence': The Problems of Self-Realization for Women in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (summer 1985): 197-221; Judith Walzer Leavitt, "Under the Shadow of

maturity-related fears may have contributed to the popularity of the dead virgin as an ideal woman; this archetype never achieved motherhood, but rather took the shortcut to virtue by dying unspoiled.

The importance of mourning for gender formation is noticeably absent in studies of federal era women. Yet, an important material source asserts itself in the illustrations Kerber chose for *Women of the Republic*: Washington memorials. In these memorials, Columbia, an allegorical representation of the nation personified as George Washington's mother, is seen mourning at his tomb. This image was invoked in sermons, and recreated in processions that were held across the country on February 22, 1800, the first commemoration of George Washington's birthday following his death in 1799. At these events, Columbia was consistently held up as a model for feminine virtue, using a rhetoric that specifically confirms Kerber's thesis. Yet Columbia's motherhood was not her only virtue. She demonstrated that mourning was in itself a feminine civic duty, and moreover, an extension of motherhood. I found it disappointing that Kerber did not pursue an analysis of the images of Columbia, for this would have added an interesting dimension to her argument. Instead, Kerber interprets the Washington memorials along the standard lines of Columbia as an abstract allegorical representation of neoclassical and national virtues. This

Maternity: American Women's Responses to Death and Debility Fears in Nineteenth Century Childbirth," *Feminist Studies* 12 (spring 1986): 129-154; and Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

iconographic perspective is shared by scholars who specialize in the study of mourning pictures. It is a sensible and legitimate interpretation, but it is also incomplete.

According to the rhetoric of domesticity, which blossomed around 1830, women were the moral light of society and of the home. Caring for the dying and mourning for the dead were integral parts of the domestic ethic. A woman was expected to do the emotional caretaking for her family, and was considered responsible for maintaining family cohesion. Her responsibilities included preserving the memory of dead family members, and catechizing her children and husband, so that they might all be accepted into heaven, where they would experience reunion in domestic bliss. Making mourning pictures and dressing in mourning clothes were activities that directly related to the virtues of domesticity. A range of artifacts, presented in the exhibit, "Death Brings Us Together: Mourning Ceremonies in Virginia," attests to the centrality of women as mourners, and to mourning as an essential component of the domestic ideology that defined women's roles in the first half of the nineteenth century[18].

In preparation for this adult role, girls were encouraged to contemplate their own death with resignation, and even pleasant anticipation. By taking turns sitting at the deathbed and visiting cemeteries, they learned that while mourning had its virtues, death could transform an ordinary

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[18]Robin Veder, "Death Brings Us Together: Mourning Ceremonies in Virginia" Virginia Historical Society (1994).

girl into a martyr in the eyes of her family, peers, and society at large. The sentiment, "She was too good for this world," frequently appears in mid-century literature and epitaphs. This may have contributed to the appeal of delicacy, and eventually illness, as cultivated by fashionable women in imitation of fictional heroines.[19]

Referring to the mid-nineteenth-century rural cemetery movement and late-nineteenth-century consolation literature, Ann Douglas and Mary Ryan are the most notable of the few women's history scholars who have given extensive attention to the connection between domesticity and a gendered approach to death.[20] Diana Combs' work on rural cemeteries, cited above, is influenced by both Douglas and Ryan. Unfortunately, the research by both of these women's history scholars is beyond the chronological focus of my study.

Anita Schorsch, Davida Tenenbaum Deutsch, and Betty Ring are the most widely published specialists on embroidered

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[19]Lois W. Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 51-55; and Barbara Welter, "Coming of Age in America: The American Girl in the Nineteenth-Century," in *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens,Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1976). For a satirical treatment of this phenomenon, see the character Emmeline Grangerford in Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1884), 140-145.

[20]Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity 1830-1860* (New York: The Haworth Press, Inc. 1982); Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: the Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Welter, *Dimity Convictions*.

mourning pictures.[21] All three have looked into design

sources, influential practitioners, and the contexts for

production. Although I have no particular disagreements with

these scholars, I generally find that their analysis resides

too frequently in the realm of formal description, rather

than the social contexts for production and usage. There is

general agreement that mourning pictures reflect romantic and

neoclassical aesthetics, and that neoclassical patriotism is

manifested in the Washington memorials. The presence of

gender ideology in the images has been briefly acknowledged,

but not explored as deeply as I believe the subject merits.

Betty Ring's argument that the mourning picture was the

finishing touch to a young woman's education is an important

step in this direction.[22] In this study, I rely most heavily

upon the authority of Ring's interpretation.

I have focused on Virginia artifacts for two reasons.

At first it was a matter of convenience; I had the

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[21] Davida Tenenbaum Deutsch's work includes: "Samuel Folwell of
Philadelphia: An Artist for the Needleworker," *Antiques* 119 (February
1981): 420-3; and Deutsch with Betty Ring, "Homage to Washington in
Needlework and Prints," *Antiques* 119 (February 1981): 406; Betty Ring's
work includes: "Memorial Embroideries by American Schoolgirls," *The
Magazine Antiques* 100 (1971): 570-75; "The Balch School in Providence,
Rhode Island," *The Magazine Antiques* 107 (1975): 660-71; and *Girlhood
Embroidery: American Samplers and Pictorial Needlework, 1650-1850* (New
York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); Anita Schorsch's work includes: *Mourning
Becomes America: Mourning Art in the New Nation* (Philadelphia: Pearl
Pressman Liberty, 1976); "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection in
America," *The American Art Journal* 8 (May 1976): 4-16; and "'A Key to
the Kingdom': The Iconography of a Mourning Picture," *Winterthur
Portfolio* 14 (1979): 42-71.

[22] For smaller scale studies of mourning pictures as a part of female
education, see Mirra Bank, *Anonymous Was A Woman* (New York: St. Martin's
Press, 1979); Kurt C.Dewhurst, Betty MacDowell, and Marsha MacDowell,
Artists in Aprons (New York: E.P. Dutton in association with the Museum
of American Folk Art, 1979); and Janet Stewart, "Friends Departed Live"
(master's thesis, College of William and Mary, 1987).

opportunity to study Virginian mourning miniatures and mourning pictures first hand while curating an exhibit on mourning customs for the Virginia Historical Society. As my interpretation of these objects came into focus, it seemed that Virginia was in fact a very appropriate geographical choice because Virginia was closely aligned with English culture without the strong influence of Puritanism experienced in the North. Most previous studies of the mourning icon as seen in mourning pictures have focused on the northern and mid-Atlantic regions, but there is little documentation or interpretation of Virginia artifacts. This has resulted in interpretations that try to reconcile the mourning iconography with the religious aesthetics of the North.[23] If the objects have a relationship to English high-style decorative arts, English romanticism, and English funeral customs, then perhaps Virginia is the best place to explore this American icon.

In fact, the image has neither marked regional nor denominational qualities. In terms of demographics, the objects bearing this image were generally owned by the white economic elite. While these social circumstances lead me to believe that the mourning icons in my study were owned primarily by Episcopalians, I consider the image itself to have a non-sectarian basis. This decision is partially prompted by James Deetz' analysis of the urn and willow motif

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[23]Schorsch, "A Key to the Kingdom."

as ultimately secular.[24]   As objects, the mourning pictures
produced in young ladies' academies have a consistent
formula, regardless of region or the branch of Christianity.
Just to illustrate the spectrum: with little variety, the
same image was produced at the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,
academy run by Reformed Presbyterian/ex-Quaker Samuel
Folwell, Maryland's Catholic St. Joseph's at Emmitsburg, and
the Moravian academies in Lititz, Pennsylvania, and Salem,
North Carolina.

Throughout this study, I will illustrate my analysis by
referring to two groups of materials: twelve mourning
miniatures and four embroidered mourning pictures. These are
objects that I was able to discover at or through the
Virginia Historical Society. They were chosen according to
the following criteria, in order of priority: original
ownership by a Virginian, Virginia-made, and a reliable date,
preferably on the object itself. For the most part, these
are items that have not been included in previous studies of
mourning icons.

The crux of my argument is this: the American mourning
icon was an ideological carrier for a symbolic exchange that
treated the virtues of mourning or dying as an indemnity if a
woman could not achieve or sustain motherhood. Contemporary
ideas about death and women were intertwined, and support

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[24]James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten* (Garden City, NY: Anchor
Press/Doubleday, 1977).

this connection. In the pages to come, I will use a variety of documents to assert that upper-class Virginians were familiar with the mourning icon and with its meaning.

In the first chapter, I will describe the production and physical characteristics of Virginia objects bearing the mourning icon. The painter Angelica Kauffman helped to make the design popular in eighteenth-century English and American decorative arts. Itinerant painters, jewelers and embroidery teachers came to and from Virginia. The remaining artifacts show design influences from England and the American eastern seaboard. Reminders that women were at first the primary consumers, and later the primary creators of these objects, surface at key moments throughout the chapter.

In the second chapter, I will open the discussion of symbolic imagery by describing the connections between rural English "wedding-funerals" and the American mourning icon. In addition to visual similarities, the wedding-funeral and the mourning icon served a similar purpose: to prove or redeem the virtue of the deceased. This was done by creating a double image of the individual as a physical and social body, an approach that is especially clear in mourning icons for women who died in childbirth. The historical context suggests that premarital pregnancy and death in childbirth, both extremely common in the late eighteenth century, were acts of the physical body that undermined a woman's social body. A potential remedy for this situation, as articulated

in fiction and the mourning icon, was to interpret death as an alternative path to virtue.

In chapter three, I turn to mourning mothers. When George Washington died, Americans re-enacted the classical hero's funeral, a ritual that used some of the same props as the wedding-funeral. Through Columbia's example, women were told that in the unfortunate but common case of a mother outliving her children, she could extend her virtuous status as a mother by mourning for her children. This message was codified in memorial prints, and then personalized in mourning pictures made by young women in seminary schools. Makers and owners of mourning pictures and miniatures identified themselves with the mourning figure, and therefore with her virtues. When young women were sent to seminaries to learn how to fulfill the socially designated roles of wife and mother, they also learned about the prestige associated with another archetype of femininity, the female mourner, as embodied in the mourning icon's female figure.

The mourning icon presented a consoling message to federal era women about the ways in which a woman might fulfill the expectations associated with her gender. Seen through the lens of the wedding-funeral, women who died without achieving legitimate motherhood were celebrated as virgin brides, untouched and yet fertile. Death could also erase sin. Women who found themselves mourning a husband or child could see themselves as the virtuous Columbia,

fulfilling their civic duty. The mourning icon reminded
women of these potential paths, and allowed them to visualize
the part they might play in the spectacle of death.

CHAPTER I

STYLE, DISTRIBUTION AND OWNERSHIP

The mourning miniatures and embroidered mourning pictures that were produced in Virginia during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries show a combination of English and American design styles. Itinerant artisans who worked from these designs opened channels of stylistic dispersion between the northern and southern United States, creating a consistent, non-regionally specific style. Virginia mourning miniatures were produced in the greatest numbers during the 1790s. Mourning embroideries appeared in the 1790s, and continued through the mid-1820s, with variations on the materials appearing until mid-century. After 1800, engraved mourning prints for George Washington helped to codify a particularly American visual vocabulary for these mourning objects. By looking at the artifacts and artisans of Virginia, this chapter will show that a cross-section of English, northern and southern United States influence was evident in Virginia.

It is significant that the mourning objects that displayed the mourning icon became increasingly associated with female consumers and then producers during their period of popularity. Large mourning brooches were primarily presented to, and worn by, women. The mourning picture became an important part of the curriculum in female

seminaries. As the emotionalism that characterized romanticism became part of the gender-specific language of domesticity, the expression of family affection and loss became, rhetorically, the responsibility of women. When women wore or made objects that represented women as mourners, they contributed to this ideal.

Anita Schorsch has described Angelica Kauffman's *Fame Decorating the Tomb of Shakespeare* (1772) as the archetype for embroidered mourning pictures made in America before 1800 (fig. 1).[25] Allegorical virtues were a favorite subject for Kauffman, a Swiss-born, Italian-trained artist who was active in England during the years 1766 to 1781.[26] Kauffman eagerly grafted neoclassical and romantic subjects onto the visual imagery of mourning. Her representations of women in the attitudes of mourning and melancholia set the standard for the late-eighteenth-century mourning icon.

English and American variations of her designs were recreated in several decorative arts forms, including embroidered mourning pictures and mourning miniatures set into brooches, lockets and rings. Among her contemporaries, Kauffman had the greatest influence on vernacular decorative forms.

[25] Schorsch, "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection," 9.
[26]Wendy Wassyng Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman: A Continental Artist in Georgian England* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 190-192.

Fig. 1. Angelica Kauffman, *Fame Decorating the Tomb of Shakespeare*, c. 1772. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 103.

Through the medium of engraving, her designs
reached a wider public and were given a greater
diversity of use than those of any other decorative
painter of her generation. They appear on interior
elevations and chimney pieces, on furniture and
porcelain, on the exquisite accessories of
eighteenth century social life, such as snuff-boxes
and cameos, as well as book illustrations and
needlework pictures. . . . Kauffman came, by virtue
of her decorative designs, to personify fashionable
good taste.[27]

During the post-Colonial period, the material culture of
Virginia was still strongly reliant upon English imports. In
their domestic manufactures, Virginia artisans continued to
borrow from English high-style design in order to attract
elite patronage. Under these circumstances, Kauffman's
designs, with their aura of gentility, were an appealing
source for Virginia artisans.

We know that Kauffman was admired by painters Charles
Willson Peale and Henry Benbridge, who worked in Virginia.
After visiting Kauffman in London, Peale wrote, "Angelica
Kaufman [sic] is an Instance of the perfection in painting
which her studies enabled her to execute."[28] Peale, who
christened some of his twelve children after famous artists,

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[27]Malise Forbes Adam and Mary Mauchline, "Kauffman's Decorative Work,"
in *Angelica Kauffman*, 121-122.
[28]Charles Coleman Sellers, *Charles Willson Peale* (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1969), 64.

named one of his daughters Angelica, in homage to Kauffman.
Henry Benbridge owned one of her paintings, which he held up
as a model for his student Thomas Sully to copy.[29] Peale,
Benbridge, and later Sully were important purveyors of visual
culture as they traveled the Chesapeake region, painting
portraits for the upper class. Their respect for Kauffman's
work provides evidence of her influence on Virginian taste.

Although Kauffman was not the only artist of her time to
take up the neoclassical mourner as a theme, "the drooping
female figure" was especially associated with her name.[30] In
her portraits and historical paintings, she consistently
invoked neoclassical and romantic mourning female forms.
Kauffman's mourners can be identified in two specific
postures, which I will describe as the "Fame" and "Poor
Maria" poses.

Fame Decorating the Tomb of Shakespeare came to America
in the form of colored prints made by the Italian engraver
Francesco Bartolozzi in 1782.[31] In figures modeled after
Fame, the mourner stands by the tomb, decorating it with
flowers, sometimes formed into a string or garland. The
figure of Fame is actually a revision of Kauffman's earlier

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[29]William Barrow Floyd, "Thomas Sully" lecture, 16 March 1973
(Farmville, VA: Longwood Foundation, Inc., 1973, photocopy), 5. Also on
Benbridge and Sully see : Carolyn J. Weekley, "Henry Benbridge:
Portraits in Small from Norfolk," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative
Arts* 4 (November 1978): 54-56. Benbridge's original Kauffman is
unknown, but it may be Kauffman's 1785 *Cornelia, the Mother of the
Gracchi, Pointing to her Children as her Treasures*, currently owned by
the Virginia Museum of Art in Richmond.
[30]David Alexander, "Kauffman and the Print Market in Eighteenth-century
England," in *Angelica Kauffman*, 149.
[31] Schorsch, "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection," 9.

Cleopatra Adorning the Tomb of Mark Antony (1770) (fig. 2).
The primary mourner's gesture is essentially the same in both
images. However, I will use the "Fame" nomenclature to
describe this posture because there is a stronger visual
similarity between the American mourning pictures and
Kauffman's allegorical portrait of Fame.

The Poor Maria variation is based on Dürer's
Melancholia. This mourner is a seated woman who cradles her
cheek with one hand as she leans against the tomb. Sometimes
she looks away, but often her head is inclined towards the
tomb. Kauffman references Melancholia in *Penelope at her
Loom* (1764), *Theresa Parker* (1773), *Penelope Weeping over the
Bow of Ulysses* (c. 1775-8), and *Poor Maria* (1777) (fig.
3,4,5,6). In *Andromache Weeping over the Ashes of Hector*
(pre-1772), the two figure types mourn together (fig. 7). It
was William Wynne Ryland's engraving of *Poor Maria* that
received the most attention of this group. In the English
decorative arts, *Poor Maria* inspired reproductions in several
media, including Wedgwood ceramics.[32]

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[32]Adam and Mauchline, 135.

Fig. 2. Angelica Kauffman, *Cleopatra Adorning the Tomb of Mark Antony*, 1770. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 42.

Fig. 3. Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope at her Loom*, 1764. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 12.

Fig. 4. Angelica Kauffman, *Theresa Parker*, 1773. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 40.

Fig. 5. Angelica Kauffman, *Penelope Weeping over the Bow of Ulysses*, c. 1775-8. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 47.

Fig. 6. Angelica Kauffman, *Poor Maria*, 1777. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 107.

Fig. 7. Angelica Kauffman, *Andromache Weeping over the Ashes of Hector*, 1772. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 146.

With these mourning types in mind, Virginia reproductions of Kauffman's designs can be identified in embroidered mourning pictures and mourning miniatures. Among the twelve Virginia mourning miniatures that I surveyed, all but the Shore, Lee and Blunt miniatures show mourners in variations on Kauffman's Poor Maria posture (fig. 8-15). Some stand, and others sit, but all face the tomb and lean their heads heavily on one elbow that rests either on their knee or the edge of the tomb. Turning to the four mourning pictures found in this state, the White, Custis, and Widewelt pieces have Poor Maria mourners (fig. 16, 17, 18). In the Widewelt piece, a Fame-like second mourner drapes the tomb with a string of flowers, as does one of the three mourners in the fourth picture, made by Elizabeth Chinn Nutt (fig. 19). Both of the pieces with Fame figures were made after 1800.

Fig. 8. Mourning miniature, "Richard Eppes died 8th July 1792 Aged 56 years." Collection of Virginia Historical Society, MR975.1

Fig. 9. Attributed to School of Samuel Folwell, mourning miniature, "In Memory of Eliza Potts OB 28 October 179(3?)." Private owner, information courtesy of MESDA.

Fig. 10. Attributed to School of Samuel Folwell, mourning
miniature made in memory of George and Elizabeth Plater,
married 1788 Private owner, information courtesy of MESDA.
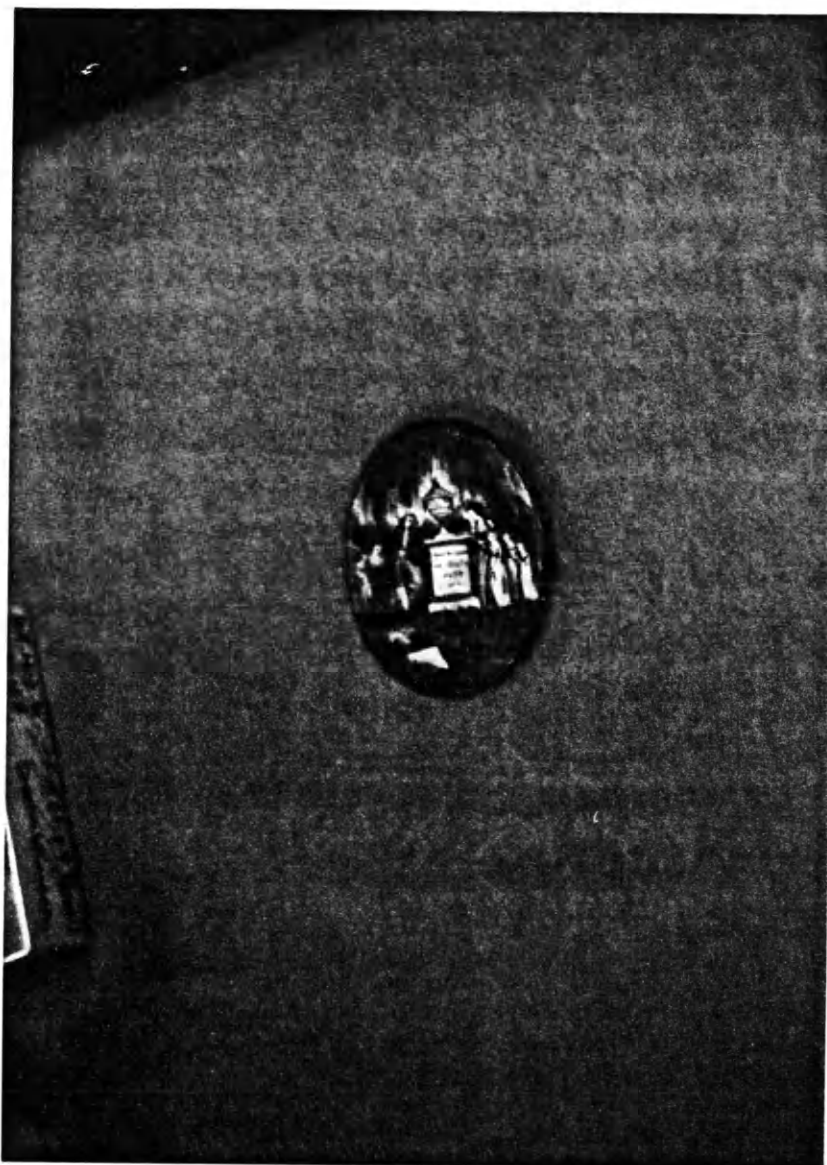
Fig. 11. Mourning miniature, "Abby Nelson/OB Dec. 22/1795/AE 26 yrs." Collection of Valentine Museum, 62.79.2.

Fig. 12. Mourning miniature, "In Memory of Edwin Burwell ob 4 March 1798 AE 23" Collection of Virginia Historical Society, 969.15.
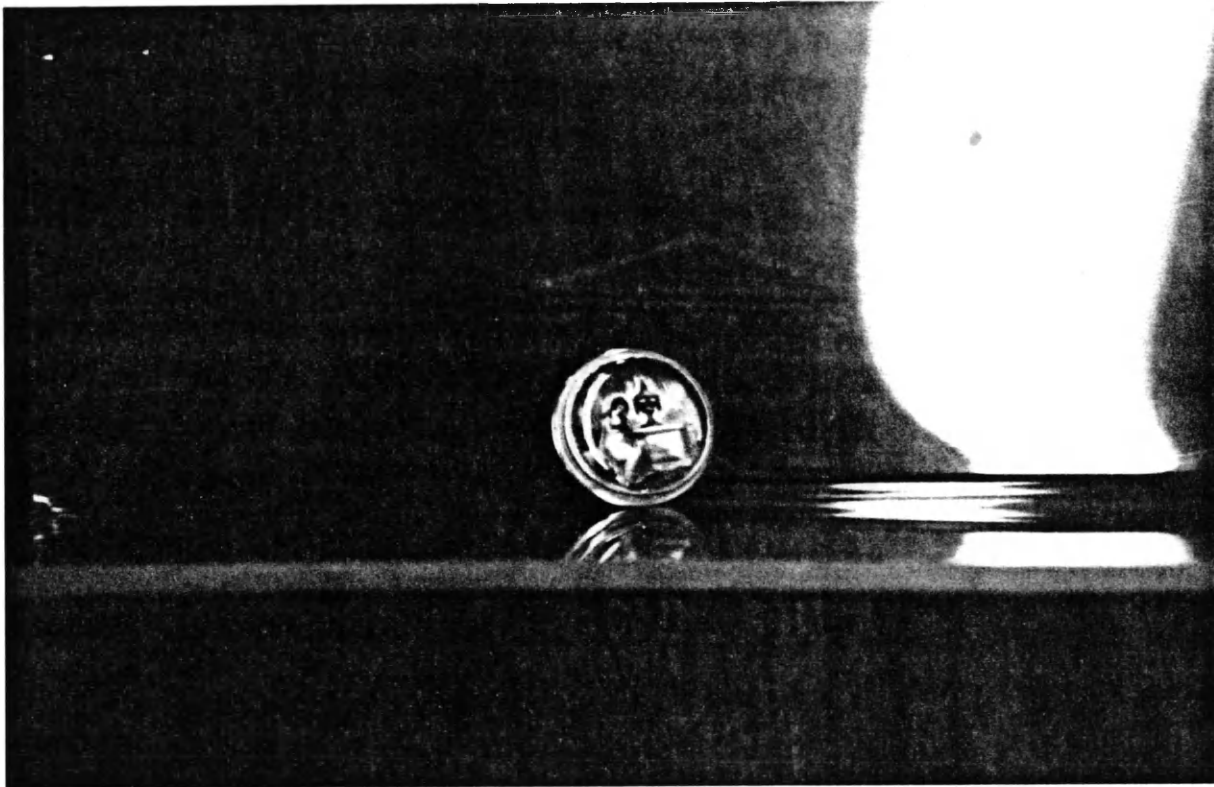
Fig. 13. Mourning miniature, belonged to Mrs. Robert Gamble
(Catharine Grattan) ca. 1800 Collection of Valentine Museum,
60.41.23.

Fig. 14. Mourning miniature made in memory of Lucy Taliaferro of Cleve, King George Co., Virginia. ca 1800 Private owner, information courtesy of MESDA.

Fig. 15. Attributed to School of Samuel Folwell, mourning miniature, "P.C. Doswell/ born apl./27 1793 &/ob nov. 5/ 1806." Collection of MESDA, S-9959
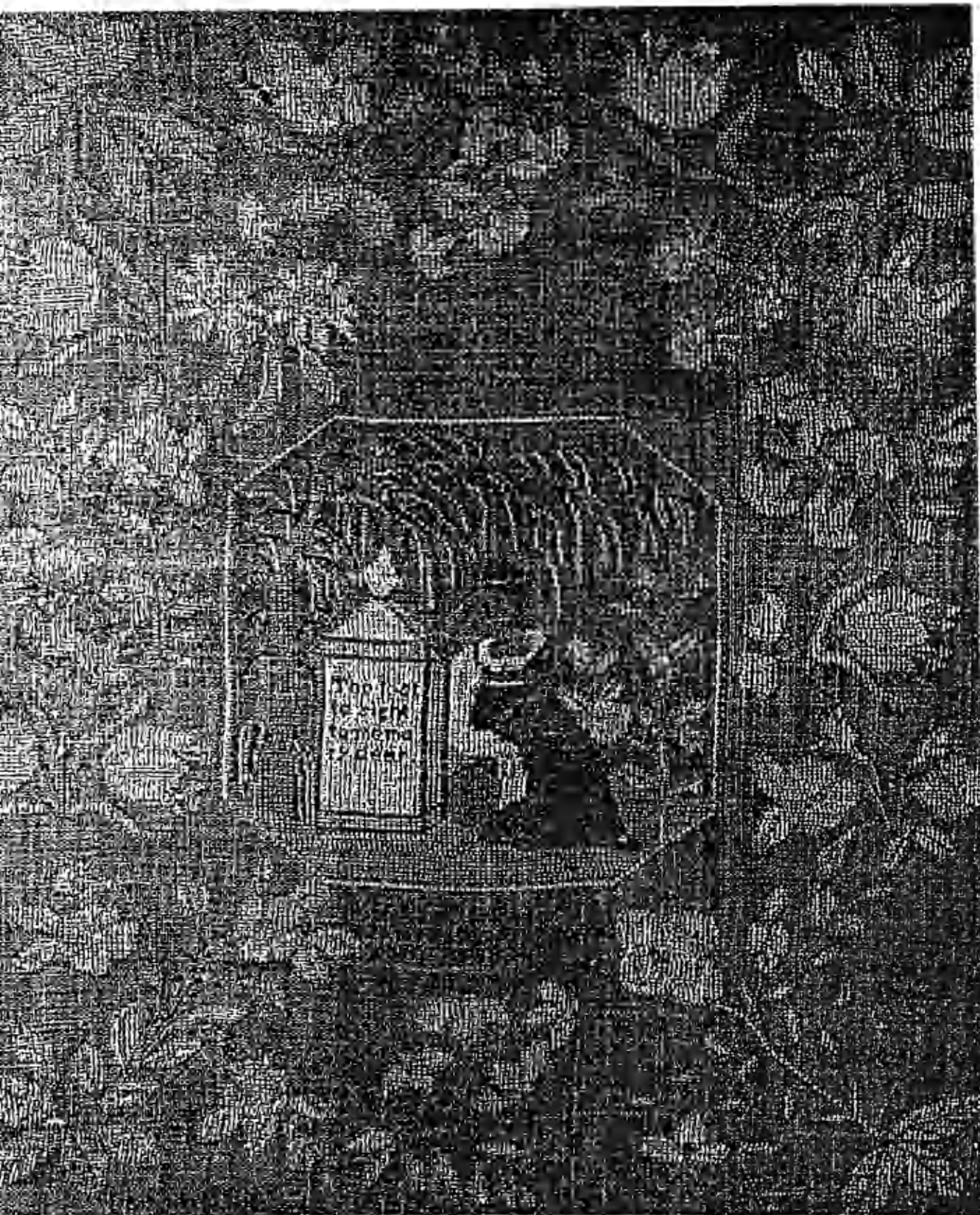
Fig. 16. Mary Calloway White, mourning sampler, no dedication. James Town, November 22, 1834. Collection of MESDA.

Fig. 17. Nelly Custis, mourning picture made in memory of
Fanny Bassett Washington Lear, died 1795. Backing newspaper
dated 1798. Collection of The Mount Vernon Ladies
Association of the Union.

Fig. 18. Maryann Widewelt, mourning picture, "Maryann Widewelt for her Guardian Mr. John Walker 1823 AD." Backing newspaper fragments are from Richmond, VA, July 20, 1827. Collection of Meadow Farm Museum.

Fig. 19. Elizabeth Chinn Nutt, mourning picture, no
dedication. Nutsville, Lancaster County, VA, 1810.
Collection of Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library.

Prior to the last quarter of the eighteenth century, engraved enamel rings were the most common form of American mourning jewelry. It was most likely this type of ring that William Waddill was offering to the public when in 1767 he advertised "at the lowest rates . . . mourning rings of all sorts."[33] Available in white or black, the name, the birth and death dates of the deceased were engraved into the band. Sometimes an enamel death's head or urn, or a small glass case with hair woven into a love knot appears in the setting. Funeral rings expressed the ominous message of the memento mori: be prepared for death. These were gifts given at funerals, and paid for out of the estate of the deceased. Jewelry was commissioned at the time of death, but the type and cost of each piece were frequently predetermined in the will. The recipient's social standing, gender and relation to the deceased all helped to determine the kind of mourning jewelry that he or she might receive. Gift-giving was part of the tradition of buying prayers for the deceased's soul.[34] When the inscription read, "Remember me," it meant "remember to pray for me."

After the mid-eighteenth century, remembrance took on a new meaning, and mourning miniatures expressed that sentiment better than enamel mourning rings. Thomas Gray's "Elegy in a Country Churchyard" exemplified the romantic perspective on mourning:

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[33]*The Virginia Gazette*, 17 September 1767, p. 2, col. 1.
[34]Heflin, 40-1.

> On some fond breast the parting soul relies,
>
> Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
>
> Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
>
> Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

That fond breast, usually female, was becoming the prevalent image associated with mourning. Inscriptions took on the mourners' voices, promising, "Sacred will I keep thy dear remains" and sobbing, "A parent's loss we mourn!" The imagery and the form of miniature mourning jewelry reflect a transition from a focus on the danger of mortality to the beauty of social remembrance. Whereas the inscriptions on and function of pre-romantic mourning jewelry were primarily concerned with the soul of the deceased, romantic pieces painted with images were worn as black clothing was worn, to designate the status and sensibility, or emotional sincerity, of a person in mourning. Romantic mourning jewelry, embellished most frequently with images of mourning women, contributed to a distinctly gendered style of mourning.

Michael Berry has suggested that the "mourning scene was worn facing inward, for the bereaved to contemplate in private."[35] The miniature portrait of Frances Ann Gray from North Carolina illustrates this possibility. Gray wears her mourning miniature on a long strand, tucked into the black

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[35]Michael Berry, "Virginia Mourning Jewelry," *Richmond Academy of Medicine Auxiliary Foundation Antiques Show Magazine* (1985): 17, quoted in M.J. Gibbs, "Precious Artifacts: Women's Jewelry in the Chesapeake, 1750-1799," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 13 (May 1987): 72.

sash of her white Empire style gown.[36] Men kept miniatures,

whether portraits or mourning scenes, in a breast pocket, to

be pulled out in moments of private contemplation, as can be

seen in the 1811 frontispiece to *The Asylum* (fig. 20).[37]. If

the cameo was for private use, then we can imagine that the

mourner looked to it for comfort. With its aura of

romanticism, the image she saw told her that mourning was

inherently beautiful. The mourning miniature reminded the

wearer of the sincerity and decorum expected of her by polite

society.

Like black clothing, the mourning miniature could also

simulate the appearance of mourning if it was not, in fact,

sincere. Most portraits of women with mourning miniatures

suggest that the items were usually worn with the painted

image facing out. Mrs. Elias Edmonds (Sarah Battaile

Fitzhugh) wears her mourning cameo pinned to the neckline of

her dress (fig. 21). Posed with her aunt, young Mary Ingram

holds one for her mother by a doubled cord (fig. 22).   Since

the figure in mourning miniatures was usually understood to

be a direct representation of the mourner who wore it, the

object indicated that the wearer was also, at least mentally,

constantly attending to the memory of the deceased. A

publicly displayed mourning brooch lacked the sense of

intimacy that Michael Berry describes, but it conformed to

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[36]Miniature of Francis Ann Gray, ca. 1830. Archives of the Museum of
Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA). Slide #382.2, A018.2, PF.1.1,
.2.C. Illustration not available for reproduction.

[37]Isaac Mitchell, *The Asylum; or Alonzo and Melissa* (Poughkeepsie:
Joseph Nelson, 1811), frontispiece, reprinted in Cathy N. Davidson,
Revolution and the Word (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 227.
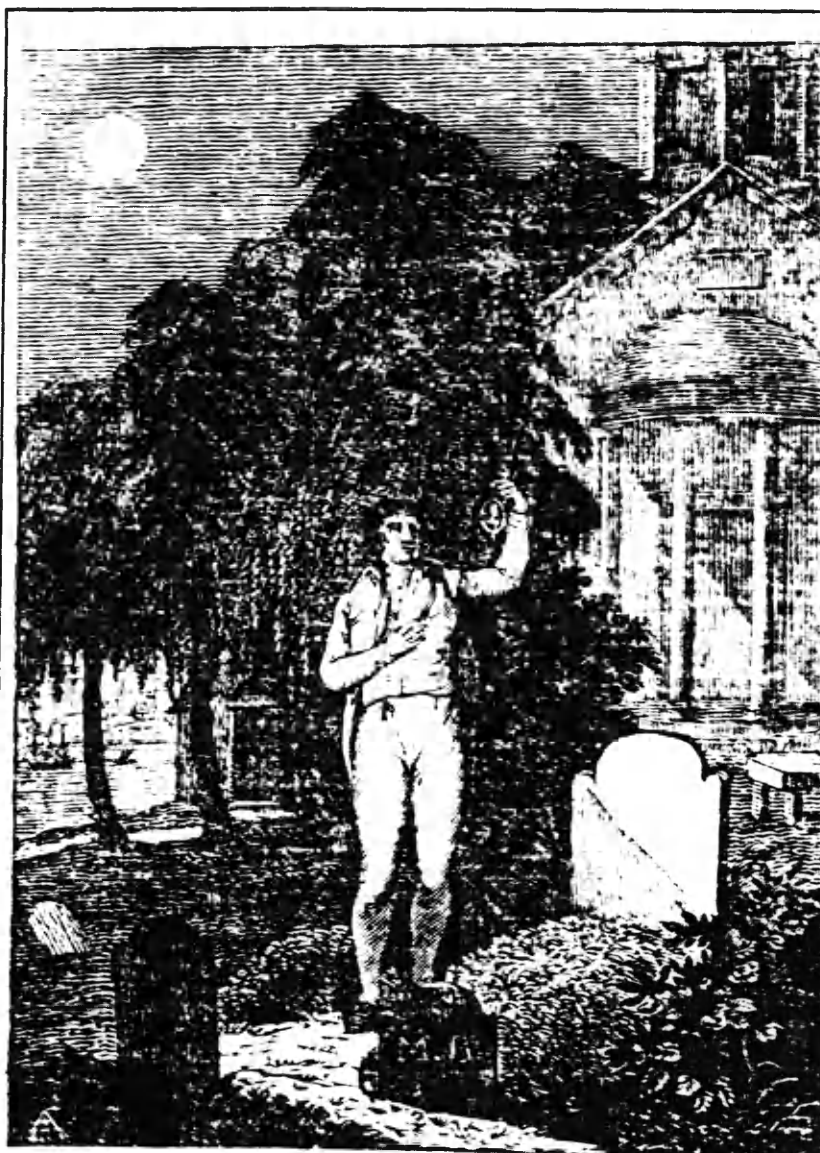
He took her miniature from his bosom, he held it up, and earnest,
viewed it by the moon's pale ray.

Fig. 20. Frontispiece, Isaac Mitchell, *The Asylum*
(Poughkeepsie: Joseph Nelson, 1811). Reprinted from Cathy N.
Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (New York: Oxford
University Press, 1986) Fig. 15.

Fig. 21. Wiliam Joseph Oldridge, *Portrait of Mrs. Elias Edmonds*, 1808. Collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 88.200.1.

Fig. 22. *Portrait of Mrs. Sylvanus Ingram (Alice Littlepage Taylor) and Mary Ingram*, ca. 1826. Collection of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, 84.100.1.

the developing expectation that women should be demonstrative in their mourning behavior.

Mourning miniature jewelry was increasingly a part of Virginia elite culture as the eighteenth century came into its last decades. M. J.. Gibbs claims that the miniatures were produced in Britain and America as early as the 1760s.[38] Surviving mourning miniatures and sales notices indicate that it was not until the mid-1780s that mourning miniatures featuring both a tomb and mourner were produced specifically for Virginia patrons. The earliest extant mourning miniatures evolved from enamel funeral rings into painted ivories set on finger rings during the 1770s. A tomb and willow painted on a ceramic base embellish the 1773 mourning ring for Ann Mason, resident of Fairfax County, Virginia (fig. 23).[39] The 1778 mourning ring for John Tarlton Fleming, aged nine months, and Tarlton Fleming, aged thirty-nine years, of Richmond is made of gold and white enamel, and features an angel flying above an urn and tomb, "To Bliss." Although of unknown geographic origin, the Virginia Historical Society's three dated rings from the 1780s mark the next chronological evolution towards the miniatures that include a mourning figure. At this stage, they are in the form of pointed ovals, and the edges are lined with enamel, seed pearls and paste gems. The 1782 Mary Stretch ring has a

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[38] Gibbs, 73.
[39] Gibbs, 71-2.

three-dimensional tomb against a sepia-tone painted background. Dor'l Burrows' 1785 and Thomas Duddy's 1787 rings introduce more color, and with the addition of a mourner, they are more visually similar to the 1790s figures.

Glass inset cases containing the hair of the deceased, called "hair devices," were increasingly set into mourning rings during the 1780s. Mourning brooches, backed with clasps and/or eyes, came into style in the 1790s. The earliest brooch in my study collection, the 1789 miniature for Ann Gilliam Blunt (fig. 24), maintains the pointed oval shape, as do half of the eight Virginia mourning miniatures surveyed from the 1790s. However, none of these pieces are rings (fig. 10, 11, 25). After 1800, cameos took on a smoother oval shape, and grew from an average measurement of 1" x 1 1/2" to approximately 2 1/2" x 3."

Since it was an aspect of both forms, the presence of hair devices helps to distinguish the transition from engraved enamel rings to mourning miniatures set into rings, pendants and brooches. In 1786, M. J.. Brown announced to the public of Richmond, Virginia, that "he makes and sells the following Articles, vz. Mourning-Rings, engraved and enamelled [sic], with beaded Borders." Miniature pictures and hair devices also appeared on his list.[40] It is difficult to say whether Brown's mourning rings were set with the miniatures or the hair devices, for he mentions each separately. However, a year later Philip Bush, Jr.

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[40]*The Virginia Independent Chronicle*, 15 Nov 1786, p. 3, col. 3.

Fig. 23. Mourning ring, "Ann Mason obt 9 March 1773 age 39."
Collection of Gunston Hall, 82.94. Reprint from M.J. Gibbs,
"Precious Artifacts: Women's Jewelry in the Chesapeake, 1750–
1799," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 13 (May,
1987) Fig. 12.

Fig. 24. Mourning miniature, "A.B./ OB: 19/Aug: 89 Here
virtue finds a rest and in heaven a reward." Made in memory
of Ann Gilliam Blunt of Southhampton County, VA. Collection
of MESDA, 4065.

Fig. 25. Mourning miniature, "Rebecca T. Lee OB Mar 5 1792
AET 17." Made in memory of Rebecca Tayloe Lee of Mt, Airy
and Menokin, piece executed in 1794. Collection of Robert E.
Lee Memorial Association.

HAIR DEVICES.

Fig. 26. Garnet Terry, *Hair Devices*, London, 1795. From *A Book of New and Allegorical Devices* (London: Bowles & Carver, 1795) p. 32. Reprint from Anita Schorsch, "A Key to the Kingdom: The Iconography of a Mourning Picture." *Winterthur Portfolio* 14 (1979), Fig. 11.

advertised "Lockets and Mourning Rings with Hair Devices,"
thereby demonstrating the combination of hair devices with
two types of jewelry.[41]. By 1795, the term hair device was
used synonymously with mourning jewelry, as can be seen in a
design book illustration that shows a group of mourning
miniature face designs under the designation "hair devices"
(fig. 26).[42] The 1790s designer appears to have assumed that
most mourning miniatures contained hair devices, and that
hair devices were used almost exclusively in mourning
jewelry.

Another sign of the transition in mourning jewelry
styles is the 1790s trend towards cooperative ventures
between limners and silversmiths. During this decade, four
Virginia businesses advertised mourning and miniature goods
together, often framing the items in adjacent phrases. James
Geddy I & Sons sold a selection of ready-made goods "lately
imported from London, " yet they also offered to "execute, at
the shortest notice, any commands their friends may favor
them with, . . . particularly Mourning and other Devices in
Hair, done and set with Miniature Pictures."[43] Joint ventures
facilitated offering custom-made mourning miniatures to the
public. Three of the four shops that advertised mourning and
miniature goods together are cooperative efforts between

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[41]*Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser*, 11 July 1787, p. 4, col. 3.

[42] Garnet Terry, *Hair Devices* (London, 1795) reprinted in Anita Schorsch "'A Key to the Kingdom,'" 50.

[43]*Virginia Gazette, and Petersburg Intelligencer*, 18 March 1790, p. 4, col. 2.

limners and silversmiths: the Geddys; William Warrock and Samuel Brooks; and Lawrence Sully and the Richardsons.

Miniature painter Lawrence Sully advertised his talents through the goldsmiths and jewelers William and George Richardson in 1792. The next year, Sully made a short trip to Norfolk, where he announced in the local paper, "DEVICES—FANCY—and—MOURNING painted in the very best manner."[44] He would return in 1793, and finally relocate his family to Norfolk in 1801. Like Lawrence Sully, there were other limners who courted the Virginia gentry as independent agents. Francis Rabineau of Richmond, 1802; Enoch Sullivan of Richmond, 1803-1814; and John Somersall of Fredericksburg, 1810 all belong to this category.

When Lawrence Sully moved to Norfolk in 1801, his younger brother Thomas became an apprentice to the portrait painter Henry Benbridge. It was in Benbridge's studio, copying an Angelica Kauffman original, that Thomas Sully mastered full size portraits, for which he eventually became very well patronized. Until 1806, miniatures were the mainstay of his income, selling for fifteen to twenty dollars apiece.[45] I have found six Virginia cameos attributed to Thomas Sully, but only three that are securely documented. Similarities between these six, and other unattributed cameos suggest that with further research, Sully's work may be

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[44]*Virginia Chronicle & Norfolk & Portsmouth General Advertiser*, 20 April 1793, p. 3, col. 4.
[45]Monroe H. Fabian, *Mr. Sully, Portrait Painter* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), 17.

proved the largest known collection of post-1800 Virginia mourning miniatures (fig. 27).[46]

At this time, there are eight Virginia mourning miniatures that have been attributed to the "School of Samuel Folwell," meaning that they show his influence, but not necessarily his hand.[47] The majority of these pieces do have similarities to each other, and to Philadelphia work also attributed to Folwell. The Doswell miniature demonstrates the best combination of attributes found in miniatures attributed to Folwell's style. In the Folwell miniatures, the willow tree is painted with a serpentine trunk, and long strokes overlaid with dots of paint make up the foliage. The tomb is square, the mourner's hair frames her face in loose curls, and the treatment of her figure, especially the modeling of the legs, are also characteristic of this school (fig. 15).

It is likely that Folwell's students were from, or traveled through Virginia, bringing his techniques to their work. Teaching art, peddling miniatures, and executing portraits in oil were common occupational convergences. Inevitable crossovers in style and iconography resulted (fig. 28). This can be seen in the works of Samuel Folwell and Thomas Sully, who were both affiliated with Philadelphia

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[46]See Bruce V. English, "Poe and the Sullys," *The Poe Messenger* 14 (summer 1984): 2; John Hill Morgan, "Memento Mori: Mourning Rings, Memorial Miniatures, and Hair Devices," *Antiques* 17 (March 1930): 228. Also mourning miniature, V.71.578.1, collection of the Valentine Museum, and miniatures MR926.8 a & b, collection of the Virginia Historical Society (VHS).

[47]MESDA Archives: Figures 9, 10, 15, 16, 27, plus S-8612 Hudson, S-1507 Preston, and S-7852 (photo negative identification numbers).

Fig. 27. Attributed to Thomas Sully, mourning miniature made in memory of Mrs. Martha Bickertson Shore, ca. 1803. Collection of Virginia Historical Society, MR937.d.

Fig. 28. Thomas Sully, *Mother and Son*, 1840. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 14.126.5.

and Richmond patrons. An itinerant schoolteacher and
miniaturist, Folwell worked in Charleston (1791, 1805),
Baltimore, New York City, and New Hampshire (1788-1791), and
settled in Philadelphia (1793-1813).[48]   Sully covered much of
the same terrain, spending the years 1792-1799 in Charleston,
and settling in Philadelphia in 1808. Davida Deutsch has
recently uncovered evidence which suggests that Sully,
Philadelphia's "leading portrait painter" in the early
nineteenth century, may have later been employed by Folwell
or James Cox, who ran a drawing school for young women.[49] The
similarities between miniatures attributed to Folwell and
those attributed to Sully suggest that either through a brief
meeting in the 1790s, or through the influence of an
intermediary, Sully may have directly or indirectly adopted
some of Folwell's visual characteristics in his mourning
miniatures.

Samuel Folwell is not only important to this study as an
influential itinerant miniaturist. He is also partially
responsible for the vernacular popularity of embroidered
mourning pictures. Folwell is credited by Schorsch and Ring
as the author of the first distinctly American embroidered

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[48]Schorsch, "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection," 41-2; Ring,
Girlhood Embroidery:, 378-380; and George C. Groce and David H. Wallace,
New York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America (New
Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 233.

[49]Deutsch and Eleanor H. Gustafson, "Collector's Notes: A follow-up on
our man Folwell," *Antiques* 135 (March 1989): 624.

mourning picture, *Sacred to the Memory of the Illustrious Washington* (fig. 29).[50]

Engravers eagerly started making memorials to George Washington, almost before his body was cold. The President had succumbed to a sudden attack of pneumonia on December 14, 1799. By January 20 of the new year, James Akin and William Harrison, Jr. of Philadelphia were marketing their print of *America Lamenting her Loss at the Tomb of General Washington* (fig. 30).[51] Within the year, they were joined by engravers Enoch Gridley (fig. 31), B. Tanner, and Edward Pember with James Lazader (fig. 32), who also produced images of Columbia at Washington's tomb.[52] The Washington memorial prints built upon the existing vocabulary of mourning iconography, but added nationalistic attributes to the familiar scene. The prints were widely distributed, which helped to standardize the image nationwide.

The prints were reproduced in a variety of object forms. In September 1800, the Boston Paper-Staining Manufactory issued wallpaper panels showing Columbia and Justice mourning for Washington (fig. 33). The English creamware jug in the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts is clearly based on Akin and Harrison's design (fig. 34). In their advertisements, these Philadelphia engravers

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[50]Schorsch, "A Key to the Kingdom."

[51]Deutsch and Ring, "Homage to Washington," 406.

[52]W.S. Baker, *The Engraved Portraits of Washington* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Baker, 1880), 188-192.

Fig. 29. Samuel Folwell, *Sacred to the Memory of the Illustrious Washington*, ca. 1800. Reprint from Anita Schorsch, "A Key to the Kingdom: The Iconography of a Mourning Picture." *Winterthur Portfolio* 14 (1979), Fig. 1, 2.

O America lamenting her loss at the tomb of

Fig. 30. James Akin and William Harrison Jr., *America Lamenting her Loss at the Tomb of General George Washington*, 1800.

Fig. 31. Enoch G. Gridley, *Memorial to Washington*, 1810.
Reprint from Joshua Taylor, *America as Art* (Washington D.C.:
Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the
Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), p.31.

Fig. 32. Edward Pember and James Luzader, *Columbia Lamenting the Loss of her Son*, 1800. Collection of the Virginia State Library and Archives, 59.46.1.

Fig. 33. Wallpaper commemorating George Washington, 1800. Reprint from Brenda Greysmith, *Wallpaper* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976) Fig. 61.

Fig. 34. Creamware jug, English, Liverpool. Design derived from Akin and Harrison print. Collection of MESDA, S-14178.

recommended that female needleworkers use their print as a design source.

Philadelphia miniaturist and schoolteacher Samuel Folwell took Akin and Harrison's recommendation to heart. By doing so, he was instrumental in making mourning pictures an essential ingredient of young women's seminary education for the next twenty-five years. Folwell's *Sacred to the Memory of the Illustrious Washington* was so successful that it effectively replaced Kauffman's *Fame Decorating the Tomb of Shakespeare* (from which it borrowed) as the prototype for American mourning pictures. Death had been a common theme in eighteenth-century samplers, and some even included a willow, urn or female mourner.[53] However, after 1800 the mourning scene was not just optional, it was ubiquitous in seminary embroideries.

Schorsch explains this phenomenon as a part of the national mourning that Washington inspired. He was "the ultimate hero for the styles [Folwell] already espoused."[54] Schorsch, Deutsch and Ring have unearthed several mourning pictures that are obvious copies of Folwell's design. After 1810, mourning pictures dedicated to Washington were less common, but the form had taken hold. The image had become a staple of early-nineteenth-century female education. It

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[53] I have excluded from this study the three Virginia memorial samplers that Kimberly Smith has documented because they do not feature the mourning image which is central to my discussion. See Kimberly A. Smith, "'The First Effort of an Infant Hand': An Introduction to Virginia Schoolgirl Embroideries, 1742-1850," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 16 (November 1990): 60-61.

[54] Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 379.

would hold this position until the 1820s when women's education turned towards more serious academic subjects.

Variations on the embroidered mourning picture were dispersed by Folwell, his students, and his contemporaries as they traveled between the northeastern and southeastern United States. Kimberly Smith has documented the presence of 149 embroidery teachers in Virginia between 1742 and 1850. Of these, ten teachers specified instruction in both embroidery and drawing or painting in such a manner that it is likely they included mourning scenes in the curriculum.[55] For example, Mrs. O'Reilly advertised instruction in "Embroidery in chenilles, gold, silver, silks &c. comprising figures, historical and ornamental landscapes, flowers, fruit, bolds, &c. maps wrought in silks, chenilles girds &c. print work in figures on landscapes . . . painting on velvet, gauze, silk, vellum, &c."[56] Mrs. O'Reilly came from Baltimore, and like Mrs. Simson from Philadelphia, she took a southward path through Alexandria and Richmond, and eventually to other points south and west. Coincidentally, on the same date that Mrs. Simson advertised her arrival in Fredericksburg, the artist Jacob Marling, trained by Philadelphian James Cox, opened a new school in town. It is possible that all three of these teachers had at one time crossed paths with Folwell, possibly in an educational

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[55]The ten teachers are Mrs. O'Reilly, Mrs. Simson, Tom Elliott, Julia F. Edmonds, Mrs. DeGruchy, Mrs. Russell, Frances W. Sturdivant, Euphania W. Ferguson, Jacob Marling and Mrs. Peerce. Ferguson also offered miniature painting. For citations, see Appendix 2.

[56]*Alexandria Daily Advertiser*, 1 January 1805, p. 4, col. 3.

setting. Mrs. Simson, who had previously taught in Philadelphia, New York and Charleston, demonstrates the most potential points for intersection with Folwell. Undoubtedly, all three contributed to the dispersal of a standardized mourning design along the eastern coast.

It was common for teachers to provide the designs and execute the drawings themselves, to which the students added embroidery and background watercolors. Mrs. Simson offered this assistance "without any additional Expense to the Ladies," thereby indicating that a surcharge may have been normal.[57] Then again, other students may not have been permitted to draw their own designs. In his contemporary description of the typical seminary teacher, William Dunlap expressed this critical opinion "the cunning and complaisant teacher put his lessons in practice by finishing the work his pupils were utterly incompetent to the production of, and thus cheating papas and mamas, and increasing the reputation of the school."[58] The Culpeper County teacher Tom Elliott promised that if he was not disappointed with his students' work in ornamental embroidery, they might be promoted to learning drawing and painting as well. With this level of control, it makes sense that schools became known for particular renderings of the memorial image.

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[57]*Colonial Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, 24 July 1793, p. 3, col. 3.
[58]William Dunlap, *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (New York, 1834), 2: 236, as quoted in Deutsch, "Collectors' notes," 624.

Because the mourning iconography varied so little from school to school, the differences between the methods of each seminary were reduced to the quality of the needlework, composition and coloring, according to the specialties of each teacher. Constructed with needlework and/or watercolors, seminary mourning pictures are generally small, the average size ranging from 12" x 16" to 20" x 24". The coloring is often in muted shades of gray used as grisaille, with pastel accents and dark green foliage. The depiction is predominantly two-dimensional, with a quite stylized emphasis on line and geometric symmetry.

For the less economically privileged families who were still able to send their daughters to seminaries, mourning pictures made of embroidery on velvet or watercolor on paper were a reasonable and popular alternative to the expensive silk on silk mourning pictures. Many mourning pictures show watercolored faces among the silk embroidery, but this appears to be due more to the difficulty of rendering an embroidered face than to economic circumstances. An interesting aspect of this development was that the pictures done in watercolors are almost simulacra of the embroidered ones because the brush strokes so closely imitate the standard stitches. Although the young woman who made mourning pictures could choose between doing her work in embroidery or watercolors, on paper or fabric backgrounds, she was generally limited to these materials because they were among the few deemed appropriate for use by female

artists. This limitation actually resulted in a quite extraordinary level of skill in the needlework done by young girls.

Previous scholarship on mourning pictures has focused on the North, with almost no documentation of southern, and specifically Virginia mourning pictures. For example, in her new extensive study of "Girlhood Embroidery" Betty Ring cites one Virginia mourning picture, the Mary Calloway White piece from Jamestown (fig. 17). Through correspondence, I was able to discover three other Virginia pieces, previously unpublished by any other researcher of mourning pictures (fig 18, 19, 20).

In Ring's discussion of four embroidered pictures from Virginia, of which one is the White picture, she comments, "These pieces are unusual in having central scenes painted on the linen ground. Their similar patterns and materials suggest that they were made under one instructress between 1817 and 1834."[59] This attribute does not appear in the other two embroidered mourning pictures in my artifact group. Kimberly Smith describes Virginia embroidery as sharing with contemporary decorative arts the characteristic Virginian "neat and plain" style, because the back is often as carefully and cleanly wrought as the front.[60] This is true of

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[59]Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 536.
[60]Smith, 46. In a personal conversation with Linda Baumgarten, textile curator of the DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Gallery, Baumgarten commented that the evidence for "neat and plain" craftsmanship in Virginia textiles has not been confirmed, but that the scarcity of surviving artifacts was not sufficient to disprove this description either.

the White piece, which Smith probably examined while doing her primary research at The Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts. Unfortunately, I have not been able to test this hypothesis on the Widewelt and Nutt pieces since the backs are concealed under original frames.

The mourning picture by Nelly Custis is unusual for its time. It was made entirely in watercolor, on paper, and predates most non-allegorical mourning pictures. Custis was educated in drawing and needlework at Mrs. Graham's school in New York at age ten. Later, she was tutored in drawing by William Dunlap, who, as quoted above, believed that students should do their work fairly independently. The piece in question was executed when Custis was seventeen and no longer under the direct supervision of either art teacher.[61]

Although they were made in different counties, with seventeen years between them, there are some visual similarities between the Widewelt and Nutt mourning scenes. Both use derivations of Kauffman's Fame and Folwell's Liberty motif, a woman draping a tomb with flowers, although in the Widewelt picture there are two figures, and in the Nutt picture, three figures. The treatment of the curls and the facial details definitely have a similar style. Both Widewelt and Nutt group the trees on the left, and have a gable-entry farmhouse in the distance. When these two pictures are compared to a circa 1805 copy of Folwell's

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[61]Christine Meadows, "A Mourning Tribute," *1991 Annual Report of The Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union*, (photocopy), 21-25.

Fig. 35. Washington memorial after Folwell, 1805. Collection
of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center. Reprint from
Virginia Cavalcade (Winter, 1984) p.140.

Washington memorial, the stylistic similarities of the three
become quite evident (fig. 35).

In this chapter, I have presented evidence of the design
similarities between English, Philadelphia, and Virginia
mourning miniatures and embroidered mourning pictures.
Although the materials and context for production changed,
the mourning design was visually consistent. In the
remainder of this study, I will refer primarily, but not
exclusively, to Virginia artifacts and documents.

Objects bearing the mourning image were specifically
produced for use by women. Eventually, female seminary
students were recognized as the largest group of producers of
this image. As I mentioned earlier, the figures depicted in
mourning miniatures were usually identified with the actual
mourner who would own and wear the piece. This
interpretation holds true for mourning pictures. For
example, in the mourning picture made by Nelly Custis for her
cousin Fanny Bassett Washington Lear, Nelly painted herself
in mourning with her spaniel Frish at her feet.[62] The
symbolic importance of the mourning object as a projection of
correct female mourning was strengthened when the piece was
also made by the same person.

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[62]Meadows, 24.

CHAPTER II

THE REWARDS OF DEATH

I saw a funeral train moving across the village

green; it wound slowly along a lane, was lost, and

reappeared through the breaks of the hedges, until

it passed the place where I was sitting. The pall

was supported by young girls, dressed in white; and

another, about the age of seventeen, walked before,

bearing a chaplet of white flowers, a token that

the deceased was a young and unmarried female. . .

. I followed the funeral into the church. The bier

was placed in the center aisle, and the chaplet of

white flowers, with a pair of white gloves, were

hung over the seat which the deceased had

occupied.[63]

The wedding-funeral described above by Washington Irving

is a tradition that has been documented in Europe as early as

1603 and as late as 1913.[64] Cultural proximity between the

Virginia Protestant Episcopalians and English Anglicans

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[63]Washington Irving, *The Sketch Book* (1819; reprint, Ontario: Penguin Books Canada Limited, 1981), 312.

[64]For information on wedding-funerals, see Phillis Cunnington and Catherine Lucas, *Costumes for Births, Marriages and Deaths* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972), 135-7; Claire Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croome Helm, 1984), 69, 117-118; Margaret M. Coffin, *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers, 1976), 96; Heflin, 107, 142; and Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress: A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1983), 182-186.

suggests that they shared secular funeral traditions.[65] In

her study of colonial Virginia's death-related practices,

Lee-Ann Heflin has included wedding-funeral elements as

likely vernacular crossovers of English practice.[66]

This ceremony used wedding regalia to mourn the death of

a child, a young adult who was a virgin (male or female,

although usually female), a woman who had died in childbirth,

and in some cases, prostitutes. Mourners were chosen for

their proximity in age, sex and likeness to the deceased.

They dressed in white and carried garlands and rosemary.

Gloves, scarves and ribbons, which were traditional wedding

gifts, were given to the mourners (fig. 36, 37, 38, 39).

The mourning miniature for Rebecca Tayloe Lee of the Mt.

Airy and Menokin estates in Virginia resembles the wedding-

funeral. Executed two years after Lee's death at age

seventeen, the miniature was made in 1794. The scene shows a

young woman in a white dress, belted with a black sash. She

carefully balances an urn in her arms as she looks away from

the path that leads before her. The trail ends in a Roman

portico shaded by a willow tree. A tomb that looks

remarkably like a bed awaits. The figure could be a mourner

literally protecting Rebecca's physical body by either

cradling the ashes or standing guard at the tomb. She could

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[65]Heflin, 3, 61, 107, 142. On the similarities between English and
Virginian culture, see also Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* and
Fischer, *Albion's Seed*.
[66]Heflin, 39-41.

Fig. 36. *The Bride's Buriall*, imprint from woodcut, c. 1640.
Phillis Cunnington and Catharine Lucas, *Costume for Births,
Marriages and Deaths* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972)
Fig. 44.

Fig. 37. *Pall-Bearers accompanying the Coffin at a Spinster's funeral*, pencil, before 1777. Reprint from Claire Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croome Helm, 1984) Fig. 41.

Fig. 38. Illustration to hymn "The Tolling Bell" published by
S.P.C.K. ReIllus, 1846-1850. Reprint from Lou Taylor,
Mourning :A Costume and Social History (London: George Allen
and Unwin Publishers, Ltd., 1983) Fig. 64.

Bedloes funeral

Fig. 39. *Bachelor's Funeral*, from a set of playing cards celebrating the overthrow of the Popish Plot in 1678, attributed to Francis Barlow. Reitlinger Collection, B.M. Reprint from Claire Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croome Helm, 1984) Fig. 43.

also be Rebecca Lee's spirit, carrying her ashes to the
tomb/bridal bed (fig. 25).

Previous studies of mourning images have described the
mourner as the personification of a neoclassical or romantic
virtue, but there is reason to think that she also resembled
the real mourners who participated in contemporary funerals.
Anita Schorsch describes the mourner as Liberty, Hope, Fame,
Friendship, Melancholia, and Columbia. She has found that
"discovering the cryptic messages in each mourning design was
part of the pleasure in being an educated man or woman of
that day."[67] Yet, Schorsch and others have also recognized
certain visual elements as related to ancient Roman funerals
held in honor of heroes. Classical funeral traditions may
have borrowed from pagan traditions which independently
survived through the folk wedding-funeral, or they may be
more closely related; the evidence is inconclusive. In
either case, many of the mourning icons I surveyed correspond
to the characteristics of the wedding-funeral, which I
believe indicates an awareness of this tradition.

Why pursue the similarities between wedding-funerals and
the American mourning icon? The visual likenesses are
intriguing, and there are clues that suggest Angelica
Kauffman and her followers may have been aware of the
connection. More importantly, the symbolic and social
functions of wedding-funerals can be used as a metaphor for
the mourning icon's ideological function for federal era

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[67]Anita Schorsch "Mourning Art: A Neoclassical Reflection," 6.

women. Mourning icons, as images and as objects, instructed American women that death might preserve the virtue, meaning moral character, of her "social body" even if she did not fulfill the highest assignment expected of her gender: that she marry and have children. A woman's "natural body" undermined her social body when she died a virgin, lost her virginity before marriage, or was unable to survive childbirth, even under the socially sanctioned umbrella of marriage. These failures of the natural body were common occurrences. In popular fiction and educational settings, young women were introduced to the mourning icon as a sign that death had rewards of its own. As a metaphor and a source for the mourning icon, the wedding-funeral helps to elucidate this conceptual exchange of death for a woman's failure to achieve socially legitimate motherhood.

The most important aspect of the wedding-funeral was the likeness of the primary mourner to the deceased. During the ceremony, the primary mourner effectively replaced the social body of the woman who had died, thereby erasing any disappointment associated with her original natural or social body. Originating in post-Reformation England, the dichotomy of the natural and social body was originally a political concept that separated the private rights from the public duty of the king. Protestant teachings endorsed a double identity of body and soul for everyone. In his discussion of memorial sculpture and portraiture, Nigel Llewellyn found

evidence of this separation of the physical and social
identity in visual representations. He explains the context
thus:

> The natural body after death was simply the
> corporeal remains which had to be removed or
> treated to contain the inevitability of decay. It
> was regarded as a source of danger . . . to the
> health of the public body whose dignity and
> immaculate memory could so easily be damaged. In
> the process of dying, the death of the natural body
> was followed by efforts to preserve the social body
> as an element in the collective memory.[68]

By presenting a new vision of the deceased's social body in
the form of the primary mourner, the failure of the former's
two bodies was redeemed.

The primary mourner, who walked directly before the
coffin, was supposed to be a direct surrogate for the
deceased. Pall bearers were traditionally selected for
"their close association with the dead in rank, sex,
sometimes age and as far as possible friendship."[69] When a
woman died in childbirth, if six pregnant women were
available, they carried the pall.[70] If the deceased was a
bride-to-be, the groom might be put through his nuptial paces
with the surrogate mourner, as part of the funeral ceremony.

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[68]Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of Death* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 47.
[69]Cunnington and Lucas, 135.
[70]J.A. Blondel, *The Power of a Mother's Imagination over the Foetus Examined* (1729) (n.p.) quoted in Gittings, 118.

For a prostitute's funeral, her sisters in the trade all put on white gowns and also passed as virgins for the occasion.

In the majority of wedding-funerals, the mourners were expected to be virgins, and the deceased was represented as a virgin. The significance of this is that a virgin represents the purest and most hopeful version of the natural body. There is a long tradition of virgin mourners. In pre-Christian Greek civilization, only women who were professional mourners, virgins, or past menopause were allowed to participate in the procession.[71] The bas relief mourners discovered in the archaeological digs at Pompeii (1763) and Herculaneum (1738) were representations of professional female mourners decking the tombs with wreaths. In Europe, it was essential to the success of the wedding-funeral, when held for the death of a virgin, that the mourners were also virgins. In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imagery, the mourning female figure has often been assumed, by contemporaries, and by modern critics, to be a virgin.

Folklore suggests that the wedding-funeral protected the soul of the deceased. A woman who died before experiencing socially legitimated marriage and motherhood was considered a potentially disappointed, and therefore dangerous soul. Nordic and Slavic traditions held that the soul of a virgin bride was "particularly vulnerable to the workings of harmful

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[71]Robert W. Habenstein and William H. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Bulfin Printers, Inc., 1955), 30-31

spirits."[72] A funeral that simulated a wedding might deceive those spirits. When an expectant mother or a prostitute died, the wedding-funeral provided a compensatory tribute for their failures in life. It combined aspects of traditional wedding garb to give the deceased the pure and yet fertile aspect of a virgin bride.

Some feared that the wedding-funeral was necessary because the unsatisfied soul might haunt the town, but of greater consequence was the poor example she had set with her incomplete life. When pregnant women carried the pall of a woman who had died in childbirth, the community recognized the potential danger of their conditions, and in effect, held them responsible for accomplishing what their contemporary had failed to do. The same applied to funerals held for young women who died before marriage. It was expected that the pallbearers marry, have children, grow old, and continue to contribute to the community for many years to come.

The references to male recipients of the wedding-funeral are sparse, but the similar event described below, held for a man who had also disappointed the expectations of his community, provides an illustration of its transformative powers.

"He that is to be hanged, or otherwise executed,

first takes care to get himself shaved and

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[72]Patricia Williams, "From Folk to Fashion: Dress Adaptations of Norwegian Immigrant Women in the Midwest," in *Dress in American Culture,* eds., Patricia A. Cunningham and Susan Voso Lab (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1993), 98-99; Ruth Edwards Kilgour, *Pageant of Hats, Ancient and Modern* (New York: M. McBride Co., 1958), 205-207.

handsomely dressed, either in mourning or in the

dress of a bridegroom. . . . Sometimes the girls

[among the spectators] dress in white, with great

silk scarves, and carry baskets full of flowers and

oranges, scattering these favours all the way they

go."[73]

If one of these girls offered to wed the criminal, he might

be spared the noose. In response to the similarities between

this event, weddings, and virgin burials, Clare Gittings

commented, "The ritual which legitimizes procreation, and

marriage is used to counterbalance the annihilating force of

death."[74] By reinterpreting the final act of burial into the

liminal act of a wedding ceremony, the community gave itself

an alternative vision of the deceased's future.

In terms of their symbolic functions for the

participants and consumers, both the wedding-funeral and the

mourning icon supplemented the natural body with an idealized

social body. They implied that the mourners and the memorial

objects were extensions of the person who had died, and

served in the stead of the deceased's physical presence. In

the wedding-funeral, the virginal mourner resolved a dilemma

of representation. She replaced the unsightly natural body

of the deceased by acting as a surrogate for the latter's

social body. Yet that social body also required improvement,

which is why the deceased was represented as a virgin.

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[73]M. Mission, *Memoirs and Observations of His Travels over England,* trans. J. Ozell (London, 1719) n.p., quoted in Gittings, 69.
[74]Gittings, 69.

Fig. 40. Robert Edge Pine, *Elizabeth Parke Custis*, 1785.
Courtesy Washington and Lee University. The portrait
miniature is of Elizabeth Parke Custis' father, John Parke
Custis, who died in 1781. Reprint from M.J. Gibbs, "Precious
Artifacts: Women's Jewelry in the Chesapeake, 1750-1799,"
Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts 13 (May, 1987) Fig.
13.

In portraiture, mourning and portrait miniatures are clearly also used as a surrogate for the absent natural body and the potentially defamed social body (fig. 21, 22). For example, Elizabeth Parke Custis wears a miniature portrait of her father, John Parke Custis, who died in 1781, in the 1785 portrait painted by Robert Edge Pine (fig. 40). This implies that Custis' father was still a part of her social world, even though he was dead. Eighteenth-century family portraiture was often used in this way to reinforce the bonds of affection and duty. Earlier in the century, Jonathan Richardson wrote, "The Picture of an absent Relation, or Friend, helps to keep up those Sentiments which frequently languish by Absence and may be instrumental to maintain, and sometimes to augment Friendship, and Paternal, Filial, and Conjugal Love, and Duty."[75] Portraiture was therefore not only a "mnemonic" device, as Margaretta Lovell describes it. Memorial portraiture also augmented, or increased, a sense of respect for the social body of the absent other.[76] This was also the duty of the surrogate social body in the wedding-funeral.

Just as the mourner depicted on the mourning icon was a representation of the real mourner, the object functioned,

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[75]Jonathan Richardson, *An Essay on the Theory of Painting*, 2d. ed. (1725; reprint ed., Manston, Yorkshire, 1971), 13-14, quoted in Margaretta M. Lovell, "Painters and Their Customers: Aspects of Art and Money in Eighteenth-Century America," *Of Consuming Interests*, eds., Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 288.

[76]Lovell, 288. See also: Mario Praz, "Mourning Pictures and Portraits with a Bust," in *Conversation Pieces* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 209-223.

like a relic, as a substitute for the deceased's natural body. In her ruminations on the miniature, Susan Stewart suggests that the miniature portrait allows for possession of the absent physical body, displaced from both the real body and all sense of time. In terms of memorial portraiture, displacement can mean a denial of the natural body's decay. Although Stewart is specifically concerned with portrait miniatures, her conclusion that the miniature "guarantees the presence of an absent other through either contagion or representation" is a potent clue to the meaning of the mourning miniature as an object.[77]   Just as the depicted mourner said to the natural body, her voice represented by the tomb, "Sacred will I keep thy dear remains," the object itself, with its inset of human hair, provided an opportunity for the real mourner to keep that promise. Unlike other body parts, hair does not quickly decay, so even that relic allowed the mourner to distance herself from the reality of the natural body while paying tribute to the deceased's social body. In the wedding-funeral, a chaplet and gloves left at the deceased's pew protected her virtue and reminded others that she was, in a sense, still present. Mourning miniatures similarly compensated for the loss of the natural body.

The dichotomy of the natural and social body, as used in the wedding-funeral, was also visually manifested in memorial

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[77]Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 126.

portraiture that evolved into the tradition of the American

mourning icon. When Llewellyn describes the separation

between the natural and social body, quoted at the opening of

this chapter, he refers to the painting *Sir Thomas Aston at

the Deathbed of his Wife* (fig. 41). This seventeenth-century

painting commemorates the death of Magdalene Aston. Her

corpse is shown, dressed in white, on the bed where she died

in childbirth. At the foot of the bed, dressed in mourning,

is a representation of Magdalene as she appeared in life.[78]

Mario Praz has compared the Aston portrait with *The

Saltonstall Family* portrait (c. 1637). In the Saltonstall

painting, a birth in the family is recorded with a portrait

of the mother still in child bed, swathed in white lace.[79]

Therefore, the Aston portrait may have drawn from a visual

tradition of representing women in child bed. The Aston

double representation, coupled with the circumstances of

Aston's death, suggest that this is an example of the

wedding-funeral tradition transferred to visual iconography.

In the 1803 mourning miniature for Martha Bickerton

Shore, Shore's spirit is seen departing from the physical

world as her husband and three children, one an infant in

arms, stand at her tomb (fig. 27). Her spirit rises above

the mourning scene, supporting on her shoulders two figures

that resemble disembodied infants (more than the usual winged

heads or full-bodied cherubs that appear occasionally at the

[78]Llewellyn, 48. The figure of Magdalene Aston in black mourning raises an unresolved question, which is whether white mourning was used only for women who died in their first attempt at childbirth.
[79]Praz, 210.

foot of the tomb in mourning icons). This configuration is similar to M. C.. Wyatt's 1817 monument for Princess Charlotte, who died in childbirth (fig. 42). Charlotte's corpse and the figures of four kneeling mourners are covered by shrouds which conceal their individual identities, thereby making them interchangeable as physical expressions of death and grief. Above this scene, Charlotte ascends to heaven, joined by two angels, one carrying the infant. When she arrives, her attendants and the babe will verify that she had fulfilled her mission on earth.[80] Charlotte's companions serve the same purpose as that enacted by the wedding-funeral's surrogate mourner: they will reassure the living community that Charlotte's soul has fulfilled her duty.

In an 1818 Corbould design engraved by Kinnersley, Princess Charlotte's double representation, so similar to the wedding-funeral's natural/social body differentiation, is manifested in a form that is distinctly similar to the mourning icon (fig. 43). A solitary mourner is transplanted from Charlotte's deathbed to the foot of a large plinth mounted by an urn. Again, this figure's identity is hidden, but her sorrow is physically apparent. In the background, weeping willows and evergreens grace the landscape. A portrait of Charlotte wearing a garland of roses comprises the upper half of the image. Her somber expression indicates Charlotte's awareness that it is her own death being mourned.

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[80]Nicholas Penny, "English Church Monuments to Women who died in Childbed between 1780 and 1835," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975): 314-332.

Fig. 41. *Sir Thomas Aston at the Deathbed of his Wife*, John
Souch, 1635-36. Reprint from Nigel Llewellyn, *The Art of
Death*, (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), fig. 33.

Fig. 42. M.C. Wyatt monument to Princess Charlotte, Reprint from Nicholas Penny, "English Church Monuments to Women who died in Childbed between 1780 and 1835," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975) p 48, fig. d.

Fig. 43. Kinnersley engraving after a design by Corbould, *A Record of the Life and Death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Charlotte*, 1818. Reprint from Nicholas Penny, "English Church Monuments to Women who died in Childbed between 1780 and 1835," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 38 (1975) p 48, fig. b.

Fig. 44. Angelica Kauffman, *In Memory of General Stanwix's Daughter/ Who was Lost in her Passage from Ireland (The Pensive Muse)*, pre-1774. Reprinted from Wendy Wassyring Roworth, ed., *Angelica Kauffman* (London: Reaktion Books, 1992) Fig. 124.

Although Angelica Kauffman explicitly drew from neoclassical and romantic themes, there are indications that she also self-consciously referenced the wedding funeral. This is best documented in the piece she made *In Memory of General Stanwix's Daughter/ Who was Lost in her Passage from Ireland (The Pensive Muse)* and in the portrait of *Theresa Parker* (figs. 44, 4).[81] The muse in question is a young woman who tenderly gathers an urn into her arms. She is dressed in white. A floral garland with a trailing white veil circles her head. *Theresa Parker* holds her myrtle wreath in her lap. As Roworth interprets the image, Theresa Parker "seems lost in reflection on her absent friend."[82] Parker's gift to Lady Pelham described her affection in the language of the wedding-funeral surrogate's obligation to the deceased.

If Kauffman utilized elements of the wedding-funeral, then there is reason to think this iconography was transferred to the Virginia mourning miniatures that were based on her designs. The mourners' age, sex and dress, and the foliage either adorning the tomb or presented in the background are particular elements that can be compared for their similarities. Two of the Virginia miniatures, for which we know the sex and young age of the deceased, fit into the requirement that the mourners' attributes resemble those of the deceased. The first is the mourning miniature for

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[81] Alexander, 152.

[82] Roworth, "Kauffman and the Art of Painting in England," in *Angelica Kauffman*, 60.

Rebecca Lee, an object that was introduced at the opening of this chapter. Twenty-three-year-old Edwin Burwell met his end "in Hampton after a lingering illness" ten years later.[83] Both Lee and Burwell are mourned by solitary figures, of their own age and sex (fig. 25, 12). Except for the Blunt memorial (fig. 24), which shows William Blunt mourning the death of his young wife, only one year after their marriage, Burwell's mourning miniature is the only one of my artifact group to depict a solitary male mourner. However, female mourners frequently appear alone.

In Western culture, white had been a standard color of mourning since the Roman Empire.[84] Not until the early seventeenth century was black adopted as the symbol for grief. After that time, mourning in white was reserved for the deaths of women and children. White clothing carried the same meaning in the icon as it did in funeral ceremonies: "an attribute of the golden age of youth and sinless innocence."[85] P.C. Doswell, age 9 (sex unknown), Rebecca T. Lee, age 17, and Abby Nelson, age 26, are all mourned by women in white (fig. 16, 24, 11). In only two of the miniatures does a woman in white mourn for a mature male (fig. 8).[86] It should be acknowledged here that the flowing white gowns depicted in the miniature also represent the current vogue for the Empire style, part of the general aesthetic of neoclassicism.

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[83]*Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, 14 February 1798.
[84]Taylor, 248.
[85]Schorsch, "'A Key to the Kingdom,'" 67.
[86]The second mourning miniature is for "Archibald Dunlop/OB: /17 April 1793/AE 58" Collection of Valentine Museum, 54.12.1

However, black Empire gowns can also be seen on mourning icons, so, regardless of fashion, there was some awareness of the propriety of mourning costume in the representations.

Although white wedding dresses did not become de rigueur until after Queen Victoria's wedding in 1840, white was previously recognized as the color of virginity.[87] White bridal veils appeared in the seventeenth century, but were rare until the early nineteenth century.[88] In 1813, New Englander Hannah Wharton presumably understood the reference her mourning costume made to her purity when she wrote,

> We had a melancholy occurrence in the circle of our
> acquaintances . . . in the death of the
> accomplished and amiable Fanny Durdin. Six young
> ladies of her intimate acquaintance, of which I was
> one, were asked to be the pall bearers. We were
> all dressed in white with long white veils.[89]

We can imagine that the girls looked something like the two figures on Eliza Potts' 1793 miniature (fig. 9).

Another part of the wedding-funeral mourners' traditional costumes were virgin garlands, also called chaplets or crantz. The garlands were made of real or paper flowers, the latter making for a sturdier token. The

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[87]Maria McBride-Mellinger, *The Wedding Dress* (New York: Random House, 1993), 24. I learned from consultations with costume historians Colleen Callahan, Ruth Countryman and Patricia Wesp that white wedding dresses were occasionally used in the eighteenth century. They agreed that among the upper class, a woman in white might have been recognized as a bride, but that the symbolic association would have most likely been with virginity.

[88]Cunnington and Lucas, 60-2.

[89]Hannah Wharton, 1813 (n.p.) quoted in Coffin, 96.

garlands were derived from the shiny Nordic/Slavic kraanse or crown worn by virgin brides to protect them against malevolent spirits. At the end of the eighteenth century, bridal garlands were passing out of style for weddings, but they were still prominent in wedding-funerals.[90] The garlands were worn or carried by the surrogate mourner who walked before the coffin. After the ceremony, the garlands "were made to hang in the church as a challenge to any imputation against the purity of the deceased. Once the proper period had elapsed, they were hung from the rafters to act as a continuing symbol of virtue."[91] These objects preserved mourners' memories of the funeral as an event and of the symbolic meaning of their own participation.

When garlands appeared in mourning pictures, as they do in the Widewelt and Nutt pictures, they were usually interpreted as an emblem of friendship, particularly between two women (fig. 18, 19). A miniature attributed to Thomas Sully presents the allegory of "Sincerity" as two women in white standing at either side of a tomb, holding a garland of pink roses between them (fig. 45). Referring to Kauffman's portrait of Theresa Parker (fig. 4), Roworth comments that the wreath Parker holds "represents constancy. . . . [and] indicate[s] the bonds of friendship, allegorical imagery suitable for the portrait of a lady made for a close female

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[90]Cunnington and Lucas, 102. See also Oxford English Dictionary, "Virgin's garland."
[91]Llewellyn, 59.

Fig. 45. Thomas Sully, miniature, "Sincerity," ca. 1800.
Collection of the Virginia Historical Society, 926.8.

friend."[92] The sincerity or constancy of the figures in mourning icons is demonstrated by their vigilance to the memory of their absent friend. That commitment is partially symbolized by the garland.

When the mourners in mourning icons held or wore garlands of roses, the meaning became even closer to that attributed to the virgin garlands of the wedding funeral.[93] Laurel was usually associated with mature accomplishment, and white roses or lilies with purity and youth. Diana Combs has found,

> The rose in high funerary art and in provincial
> carving was identified with the death of the young,
> either a child, "the one sweet flower," or a young
> woman. The commemorative rose further reflected
> the impact of domestic ideals on death; the home-
> mother . . . was regarded as the sole rose
> remaining from Paradise, and as the embodiment of
> prelapsarian purity she was assured of her place in
> Heaven.[94]

If the rose in early-nineteenth-century gravestones was understood to have this meaning, then it seems likely that the metaphor was shared by the rose garlands in mourning iconography.

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[92]Roworth, 60.

[93]Although not many of my samples from Virginia have rose garlands, this is a common feature in mourning pictures. See: Beatrix T. Rumford, "Memorial Watercolors," *Antiques Magazine* 104 (October 1973): 688.

[94]Combs, 204-205.

Rosemary had been a common element to weddings and funerals since the seventeenth century, a tradition that was recognized in this verse:

Grow for two ends, it matters not at all,

Be't for my bridal or my burial.[95]

Mourners carried nosegays of rosemary originally as a health precaution, to purify air contaminated by plague and the stench of decay. As an element of the wedding-funeral procession, rosemary implied esteem for the chastity of the deceased. Sometimes the rosemary was thrown into the grave; mourners sowed seeds as a re-birthday present to the deceased. Frequently though, mourners preserved funeral herbs and flowers as souvenirs. Rosemary acquired a symbolic significance as "plants which fade not a good while after they are gathered and used (as I conceive) to intimate unto us, that the remembrance of the present solemnity might not die presently, but be kept in mind for many years."[96]

In the mourning icons, flowers and trees also have symbolic meanings. An oak stump or a broken column is symbolic of premature death. The evergreens and weeping willows, which bear a resemblance to rosemary, lend themselves as signs of eternal life, or rebirth. Yet "because it bears no fruit, [the willow is also associated]

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[95]Herrick (n.p., n.d.), quoted in Miss Carruthers, *Flower Lore* (1879; Detroit: Singing Tree Press, Book Tower, 1972), 206; Habenstein, 128; Cunnington and Lucas, 139; Irving, 142.
[96]Gittings, 110.

with sterility."[97] In the context of a young death, the
willow also reflects the deceased's virginity or inability to
survive childbirth.

The Virginia mourning icons demonstrate at least a
visual link to the wedding-funeral. Yet, even if the
Americans who were familiar with the mourning icon were not
aware of Kauffman's symbolism in the painting *In Memory of
General Stanwix's Daughter*, or the memorials for Princess
Charlotte, or even the tradition of the wedding-funeral, they
may have still understood the mourning icon in a manner that
makes the comparison relevant. Common elements, like the
white gowns or the garlands, shared a similar meaning in the
wedding-funeral and in the mourning icon.

If the wedding-funeral and the mourning icon shared
visual signs and symbolic functions, then did the mourning
icon similarly remind young women of their responsibility to
bear children? My final chapter will suggest that it did,
under the rubric of republican motherhood. For now, I would
like to suggest that the mourning icon also provided a
glimpse at the alternative route of virtue through death.
The historical context for American mourning icons is fertile
ground for this interpretation, since during the late
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, motherhood was re-
evaluated and given a new prestige. A woman who wished to

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[97] Schorsch "Key to the Kingdom," 65. For more on language of trees and
flowers, see: Schorsch "Neoclassical Reflection," Bertram S. Puckle,
Funeral Customs: Their Origin and Development (London: T. Werner Laurie
Ltd., 1926), and Combs, 184.

comply with the code of republican motherhood would first have to enter the civil death of feme covert, potentially experience emotional distress if she were estranged from family and friends, and then risk physical death through childbirth. Although the third of these conditions was certainly the most intimidating, the other two may have contributed to ambivalence about making the transition from childhood to mature womanhood.

Eighteenth-century concepts of gentility exaggerated the separation of the natural and social body. Bodily control became an essential element of courteous conduct.[98] Death and pregnancy were both physical transgressions that undermined a person's capacity for genteel behavior. In first-hand descriptions of the deathbed, writers praised the dying for their resignation and composure. The account of Edward McGuire's death demonstrates the battle between the natural and social body.

> "His last sickness was long and severe, his
> sufferings extream [sic]. Such was the pain and
> agony which he endured as sometimes to deprive him
> of his reason, But when it return'd, he uniformly
> express'd the utmost resignation to the will of
> heaven, manifested no fear of death, but on the
> contrary often expressed a wish to die."[99]

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[98]For a discussion of gentility, see Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
[99]Alexander Balmain, sermon, 23 November 1806, Claiborne Papers, 1665-1911, Virginia Historical Society.

A similar rhetoric was employed in correspondence to and from women regarding childbirth. This is not coincidental, since childbirth was a common cause of death for women.[100] In 1710, Cotton Mather explicitly described pregnancy as a form of illness when he remarked that at the time of conception, "your Death has Entered into you." As Judith Walter Leavitt has insightfully put it, "Nine months gestation could mean nine months to prepare for death."[101] Both illness and pregnancy alerted a person that her natural body was endangering her social body.

Resignation to death is central to the Protestant creed, yet even among the devout there must have been some anxiety about the extent to which the spirit, as manifested in the social body, and the physical body were aligned. In his funeral sermon for John Foushee Curtis, Nicholas Hamner Cobbs expressed this doubt:

> Though the prospects of the soul may be glorious &
> animating—yet the destiny of the body would seem
> humiliating & revolting. Buried in the earth—cast
> off as an old worn out garment, its end seems no
> better than that of the beasts of the forest. It
> is this fate of the body which adds greatly to that
> repugnance & horror felt at the idea of death. . .
> . This is one of the reasons why we find it so

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[100]Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 72-83.

[101]Cotton Mather, "Retired Elizabeth: A Long Tho' no very Hard, Chapter for A Woman Whose Travail approaches with Remedies to Abate the Sorrows of Childbearing" (1710), quoted in Leavitt, 133.

hard & trying to consign to the grave the bodies of
our departed friends. . . . We can't help feeling
a thrilling interest in those bodies in which we
have so long dwelt:—which have become so intimately
associated—so completely identified with all our
feelings & exercises—with all our joys & sorrows.[102]

Like Cobbs, the Virginia upper-class owners of mourning
miniatures and pictures were likely to be Protestant
Episcopalians. Women were more active than men in the
church, especially during the Great Awakenings of the 1770s
and 1830s. When they used the word resignation, it was
generally with the expectation that a heaven superior to
earth awaited.

Resignation was a concept that required daily
application for married upper-class southern women. With
marriage, women experienced what Suzanne Lebsock has
described as civil death; the loss of feme sole legal status.
As a "feme sole," a woman could make contracts and transact
business under her own name; once married, she became a "feme
covert" (an anglicized version of femme couverte), and
sacrificed all legal independence. Norton found that women
expressed anxiety about the economic hazards of feme covert
status.

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[102]Nicholas Hamner Cobbs, sermon, 1835, Henry Curtis Papers, 1792-1862,
Virginia Historical Society.

Social isolation was also a concern for young brides.[103]
In the early nineteenth century, the idea of "companionate"
marriage, a union based on mutual affection, appeared.[104]
This implied that a woman would experience with her husband
an emotional bond equivalent to that shared with the friends
and family she left behind at the time of marriage.
Naturally, this increased the likelihood of disappointment.
A verse from the eighteenth century reflects one outcome of
this emotional situation:

> . . . I am Dead

> Dead to each pleasing thought each Joy of Life

> Turn'd to that heavy lifeless lump a wife.[105]

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has found that in the early nineteenth
century slaveholding South, male restriction of women's
activities in and outside the home did, in fact, create a
"separate sphere" that was more pronounced than it was in the
North. Marriage could be a very lonely and distressing
experience for a young plantation bride who had formerly been
surrounded by a close community of female relatives.[106] In
the popular novel, *The Coquette*, the semi-fictional main
character Eliza Wharton provides what Cathy Davidson has
called "one of the earliest critiques of the 'cult of
domesticity,'" when she describes marriage as "the tomb of

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[103]Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Family and Female Identity in the Antebellum South: Sarah Gayle and Her Family" *In Joy and Sorrow*, ed., Carol Bleser (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15-31.
[104]Lebsock, 16-30.
[105]Norton, 45.
[106]Fox-Genovese, 15-31.

friendship. The tenderest ties between friends are weakened, or dissolved; and benevolence itself lives in a very limited sphere."[107] I would narrow Davidson's analysis here to suggest that *The Coquette*'s author, Hannah Foster, is more specifically criticizing the ideal of companionate marriage.

It is helpful to look to fiction as an articulation of this anxiety about maturity. In *Revolution and the Word*, Davidson writes, "For the large available audience of unmarried young women, sentimental novels fulfilled the social function of testing some of the possibilities of romance and courtship—testing better conducted in the world of fiction than in the world of fact."[108] One of those possibilities was premarital pregnancy, an event which turned a woman's transition to maturity into a crisis situation. According to the parable voiced in *The Coquette* and other contemporary forums for cultural discourse, a woman who wished to be sexually involved with men had the limited choice of two paths: marriage or infamy. In novels, the disgrace of premarital pregnancy, if not resolved by marriage, led to personal shame, social ostracism, poverty, and a permanent decline in the semi-fictional heroine's emotional and physical health. However, the heroine's death, which usually directly followed the birth of her illegitimate child, could redeem her reputation. This didactic fiction gave female readers a double message. The first was a

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[107]Hannah W. Foster, *The Coquette*, ed., with introduction by Cathy N.Davidson. (1797; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xv, 24.
[108]Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 113.

warning about the dangers of premarital sex. The second was a remedy for the pregnant woman whose beau wouldn't step up to the altar; only death can save your reputation now.

Eliza Wharton is the best example of a fictional character who resists the maturity required in marriage. As expressed in the quote above, Wharton was wary about entering into what appeared to her the death of female intimacy. She also feared that marriage would be the end of her youthful pleasures, which is why she continues to hope for a union with the playful Major Sanford instead of settling down with the staid Reverend Boyer. It is this reluctance to enter into a respectable marriage, even at the age of thirty-seven, which earns her the brand of Coquette.

That old cliché for seduction, "a fate worse than death," has its modern basis in the eighteenth-century sentimental novel. Although the archetype of a woman preferring death to life after rape goes back to Lucretia, Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* took the myth to a new level.[109] The titular character falls in love with the supreme rake, Lovelace, who proposes only after he has raped her. For Clarissa, the seduction is devastating, and she seemingly wills herself to die.

Oliver Goldsmith presented a less romantic version of the exchange of death for recovered virtue in the poem, "When Lovely Woman Stoops to Folly:"

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[109]On the relation of the archetype to behavior, see Harold Speert, "Suicide in Pregnancy and Mortuary Customs in History and Literature" *Suicide in Pregnancy*, ed., George J. Kleiner, M.D. (Boston: John Wright, PSG, Inc., 1984), 3-7.

When lovely woman stoops to folly

> And finds too late that men betray,

What charm can soothe her melancholy,

> What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,

> To hide her shame from every eye,

To give repentance to her lover,

> And wring his bosom -- is to die.[110]

The idea that death was a highly probable, and in fact,

preferable alternative to life as a woman of lost virtue or

the mother of an illegitimate child was repeated in many

late-eighteenth-century American novels, including *The Power

of Sympathy* by William Hill Brown, *The Coquette* by Hannah

Foster, and *Charlotte Temple* by Susanna Rowson.

Leslie Fiedler's comment that Clarissa was "not only the

archetype become a fictional character, but also the

fictional character projected as a moral paradigm," is also

applicable to later works of the same genre.[111] The seduction

novel was unabashedly didactic. Authors claimed a factual

basis, and hoped that young female readers would benefit from

the lesson in morality. Cathy Davidson writes, "Death in

childbirth, in [Susanna] Rowson's era, was as common in

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[110]Oliver Goldsmith, "When Lovely Woman Stoops to Folly," *The Vicar of Wakefield* (n.p., n.d.) in *The Top 500 Poems*, 338.

[111]Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, rev. ed. (1960; New York: Scarborough Books, 1982), 68. On the rise of premarital pregnancy in the late eighteenth century, see also: Kerber, 245.

women's experience as it was in women's fiction."[112] The rise

in premarital pregnancy during the quarter century that

followed the American Revolution has no clear causal relation

to or from this genre (a debate entertained by Brown, Foster,

and Rowson among others) yet it makes sense to think that

young women readers may have been attracted to novels that

reflected concerns of their own.[113] The didactic novels

generally presented the worst case scenario of a pregnant

woman abandoned by her lover, thereby prompting readers to be

cautious in their sexual relations with men.

Having succumbed to the dangers of seduction, the

sentimental heroines anticipated their own death with the

conviction that they would not be worthy of remembrance.

When it is suggested to Charlotte Temple, a pregnant victim

of seduction, that she might one day return to society, she

responds, "Oh never! never! . . . the virtuous part of my sex

will scorn me, and I will never associate with infamy. No,

Belcour, here let me hide my shame and sorrow, here let me

spend my few remaining days in obscurity, unknown and

unpitied, here let me die unlamented, and my name sink to

oblivion."[114] Eliza Wharton, who had more resources for

support available to her, similarly attempted to obscure

herself from society because of the shame of her condition.

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[112]Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, ed., with introduction by Cathy N. Davidson (1791; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xx.
[113]Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*, 45-49, 113-116, 121-125.
[114]Rowson, 96.

For these heroines, isolated death was preferable to outliving their shame.

The authors of *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple* suggested that the posthumously expressed empathy that their heroines received might compensate for their sufferings and failures in life. Following Charlotte's statement, excerpted above, Rowson compares Charlotte's fate with that of Mlle. La Rue, a woman who initiated Charlotte's downfall and later successfully seduced a rich man into marriage. Rowson cautions her readers that the fate of the former is preferable to the fate of the latter; "the tear of compassion shall fall for the fate of Charlotte, while the name of La Rue shall be detested and despised."[115]

And, in fact, that tear did fall for Charlotte and Eliza, in graphics, if not in reality. On the last page of *The Coquette*, Eliza Wharton's tombstone was graphically presented within a delineated rectangle, bearing the following inscription:

> This humble stone, in memory of Eliza Wharton, is inscribed by her weeping friends, to whom she endeared herself by uncommon tenderness and affection. Endowed with superior acquirements, she was still more distinguished by humility and benevolence. Let candor throw a veil over her frailties, for great was her charity to others. She sustained the last painful scene, far from

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[115]Rowson, 99.

every friend; and exhibited an example of calm

resignation. . . .[116]

In the 1811 edition of *Charlotte Temple*, the frontispiece

features a more illustrative version of Charlotte Temple's

tomb. To be more specific, it is a version of the mourning

icon which is at the center of this discussion. Although the

reprint is fuzzy, Charlotte's mourner appears to be dressed

in white, and she adorns the gravestone with a floral garland

(fig. 46). Readers evidently felt it was important to add

their tributes to Charlotte's virtue, for the Trinity

Churchyard has a tombstone inscribed with the name of

Charlotte Temple that many readers have visited, "like

pilgrims to the Promised Land."[117] As in the wedding-

funeral, sincere mourning for Eliza Wharton and Charlotte

Temple vindicated their otherwise questionable virtue.

For a brief period at the end of the 1700s, embroiderers

produced a large number of mourning pictures dedicated to

"Charlotte." In some cases, it is clear that the Charlotte

being mourned is the romantic object of affection in Goethe's

Sorrows of Young Werther. However, Charlotte Temple would

have also been an appropriate subject, especially because her

death actually occurs within the novel. The 1811

frontispiece suggests to me that some of the "Charlotte"

mourning pictures might have been dedicated to Charlotte

Temple.

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[116]Foster, 169.
[117]Davidson, *Charlotte Temple*, xiii.

CHARLOTTE TEMPLE.

Fig. 46. Frontispiece, Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 1811 Reprinted from Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) Fig. 16.

Although Susanna Rowson may not have had any personal influence over the selection of the 1811 frontispiece, she was personally familiar with the mourning icon. Rowson ran a young ladies' seminary in Newton, Massachusetts, from 1797 until 1822. Two surviving embroidered mourning pictures are inscribed with the name of her academy, and at least two others have strong links to her school. These pieces recreate Kauffman's Poor Maria and Fame designs.[118]

It is very important that mourning icons appeared in both popular fiction and in seminary education, for these forms shared a strong influence over young women. Authors and seminary teachers informed women of the social expectations associated with their gender, and prepared them for the problems accompanying maturity, especially exercise of sexuality. Inserted into these contexts, the mourning icon also served a didactic purpose. As its roots in neoclassical and romantic art suggest, the image of the female mourner provided a model of the virtuous widow.[119] If the reader of Charlotte Temple was sympathetic, she might identify with the virtuous mourner. If she was empathetic, then she could hope for the same respect afforded the fictional heroines, despite their weaknesses. The mourning icon reminded a young woman that her failures might be redeemed or even prevented, if she could assume the second

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[118]Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 91-93.
[119]Rosenblum, 28.

identity in the mourning icon: the person who was being mourned.

The archetype of the dying virgin would not have had as potent an appeal if the previously mentioned costs of maturity were not also present. The circumstances I have described demonstrate what was at risk when a woman lost her virginity, under legally sanctioned or promiscuous circumstances: civil, emotional and physical death. If the cultural commemoration of real death was supposed to provide a final saving grace, it makes perfect sense within this ideology that the dying virgin surpassed women who died in childbirth in the amount of reverence they received. The dying virgin had never been tainted by contact with men, so she was like the Madonna; ephemeral and ideal. As Joy Kasson has argued, depictions of women as physically powerless ultimately served to defuse male fears about women's sexuality.[120] In the nineteenth century, Edgar Allan Poe took the beautiful dying virgin to a new level of sublimity, that was topped again in the mid-nineteenth-century consolation fiction. The subject of the dying virgin as an archetype truly deserves a full-length study of its own, for its implications and manifestations extend far beyond the span of my topic here. In this context, it is useful as one element of the mourning icon's formation.

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[120]Joy Kasson, "Power and Powerlessness: Death, sexuality and the demonic in nineteenth-century American sculpture," *Women's Studies* 15 (1988): 343-367.

Seminary exercises often described death as a reward for, and proof of purity. For example, notice how the death of a virgin is treated in this verse, from a 1793 sampler, made in Virginia:

Here Innocence and Beauty lie whose Breath

Was snatch'd by early, not untimely Death.

Hence did they go just as they did begin

Sorrow to know, before they knew to sin.

Death, that does Sin and Sorrow thus prevent,

Is the next Blessing to a Life well Spent.[121]

In the wedding-funeral, virgin death was not, as it is in this verse, a reward within itself. However, to be mourned as a virgin was to appropriate the highest honors as compensation for loss of "a Life well Spent", meaning a life that entailed marriage and legitimate, successful motherhood.

In the nineteenth century, Barbara Welter has found that "the death of a young girl was . . . celebrated as a triumph of beauty and innocence. . . . The dying maiden [was] highly regarded as the quintessence of female virtue, a being literally too good for this world. . . ."[122] The diaries of girls who found themselves possibly approaching death include self-effacing remarks denying their worthiness of that fate. In consolation literature, written by women of the generation that created mourning pictures, deathbed testimony to this effect is prolific. "Oh, it is sweet to die! I love to think

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[121]Sampler, (1793), quoted in Smith, 89.
[122]Welter, "Coming of Age in America," 11.

that I was born to prepare for this hour!" claimed the young heroine Lucy Otis.[123]

Fiction and the mourning icon were very appropriate carriers of this ideology, for they were reproduced in quantity with little variation in content, and were primarily presented to an audience of young women. The didacticism of sentimental fiction was mirrored in mourning pictures as part of female education. In fact, the completion of a mourning picture signaled the end of a young woman's education, and therefore her readiness to become a wife and mother. Multiple sources taught her that her own death might be the result of entering into the world of maturity, and therefore sex. By referring to the wedding-funeral, the mourning icon reassured her that such an end wasn't so bad. While I would not suggest that young women of the time chose to die rather than disappoint the social expectations foisted on their gender, there are signs that it was an acknowledged cultural concept that the promise of purity in death could indemnify a woman against the difficulties of maturity, including the risk of untimely or fatal motherhood .

To close: had I not noticed the visual similarities between the wedding-funeral and the mourning icon, I might never have been able to see the symbolic and social meaning the latter carried for the women who made mourning pictures

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[123]No source, quoted in Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940), 342.

and wore mourning miniatures. A variety of sources, some detailed in the next chapter, insisted that motherhood was the best way for a woman to be a woman, but there were serious consequences for entering maturity. These included emotional distress, social alienation, premarital and potentially illegitimate pregnancy, and death from childbirth. A woman's natural body might easily betray the intentions of her social body to resist a seducer or survive pregnancy. The possibility of a redeemed social body, maintained by loyal mourners, mitigated such dangers. Death was an alternate route to virtue. For, like Charlotte Temple and Princess Charlotte, Virginians like Martha Bickerton and Rebecca Lee were commemorated in mourning miniatures and mourning pictures, objects that remain to this day, telling even this viewer that the subject was worthy of remembrance.

CHAPTER III

THE MOTHERHOOD OF THE DEAD

On February 22, 1800, the citizens of Alexandria, Virginia, joined Americans throughout the country in mourning the death of George Washington. In addition to the military, clergy, masons, and tradesmen who participated in the Alexandria version of Washington's funeral procession, two groups of children marched in the parade:

> Sixteen misses from 9 to 12 years old, with white veils and scarfs trimmed with black, and linked together with garlands of evergreens, two abreast.
>
> . . . Sixteen boys in complete uniform of blue and buff, from 7 to 9 years old, each having an infantry cap, with a motto in letters of gold, in front, 'WASHINGTON *our model*—and an espontoon shouldered—marching by files . . . .

Following Reverend Dick's eulogy, "Major Johnson advancing the stand of colors, the little boys saluted them, uttering the words 'hail sacred relict,' after which they were presented to the sixteen young misses, in rotation, who ornamented them with their wreaths, pronouncing at the same time the following appropriate sentences . . . ." The sixteen statements had two topics: Washington's virtues and Washington's grave. Clearly, the former was meant to be the concern of the boys, who were instructed by the sixteenth miss, "Let the sons of Columbia emulate the character of

WASHINGTON." The symbolic identity of the girls is less immediately evident to the modern reader, but their civic duty to mourn was laid out by the second miss who said, "The Daughters of America shall long lament thy loss."[124] The girls' costumes resemble those worn by the allegorical mother of Washington, Columbia, in the numerous memorials to Washington that were created after his death.

In the previous chapter, I described the garb worn by Washington's female mourners in the context of the wedding-funeral. Yet, remember, a variation on this tradition was also historically used for celebrations of heroism. When Washington passed through Trenton on his way to the 1789 inauguration in New York, he was met by "a Number of young Girls, dressed in white and decked with Wreaths and Chaplets of Flowers, holding Baskets of Flowers," an event he described as "novel" (fig. 47).[125]

This manifestation is equally important to my exploration of the mourning icon as an ideological purveyor of the symbolic compensation of virtuous mourning for lost motherhood. As explained in my introductory chapter, this variation is not another layer that conceals or obliterates the previous one. Instead, it complicates the connection of death and motherhood by recognizing the mourning icon's message for mothers whose children died.

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[124]Franklin B. Hough, *Washingtonia or, Memorials of the Death of George Washington* 2 vols. (Roxbury, Massachusetts: Printed for Elliot Woodward, 1865), 1: 171-175.

[125]Oscar George Theodore Sonneck, *Report on "The Star-Spangled Banner," "Hail Columbia," "America," "Yankee Doodle"* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), 63.

Fig. 47. J.L. Morton after Thomas Kelley, *Washington's Reception on the Bridge at Trenton*. Reprint from Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980) p. 108-109.

Washington's funeral and the mourning that followed
created a particularly American interpretation of death that
contributed to its gendered nature. Funeral processions,
sermons, and mourning imagery prescribed gender roles
emulating those of Washington and Columbia by gender. Men
were urged to imitate George Washington so that they might be
mourned in a similarly heroic fashion. Women were described
in relation to Columbia as mothers, widows and mourners.

Previous scholarship has recognized the crossover in
mourning pictures from Columbia mourning George Washington to
female citizens mourning male friends and relatives.[126] In
Women of the Republic, Linda Kerber uses Washington memorials
as illustrations of republican motherhood.[127] This prompted
me to consider whether this source for the mourning icon also
contributed to the icon's potential as a carrier of gender
ideology. If one source for the iconography was the wedding-
funeral, which had resonance in contemporary discussions of
women who died without achieving socially approved
motherhood, what does it mean when Washington-inspired
memorials drew from a representation of women as mourning
mothers? My conclusions indicate that mourning became a
civic duty joined to motherhood, and that mourning was
simultaneously described as an extension of motherhood. A
combination of romantic and Protestant influences assisted
the success of this rhetoric. American mourning events and

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[126]See: Schorsch, "'A Key to the Kingdom,'" 41-71.; Deutsch, "Samuel
Folwell of Philadelphia," 420-3; and Ring, *Girlhood Embroidery*, 378-387.
[127]Kerber, *Women of the Republic*.

artifacts, created in response to Washington's death, provide

two- and three-dimensional examples of how this gender

division was crystallized in America.

Columbia was the allegorical image of America

personified as a woman. Her title is a feminine derivation

of Christopher Columbus, then believed to be the discoverer

of North America. She was "the most original, popular, and

durable of the emblems inspired by classical mythology." By

1815, the nation's image had evolved from the Indian

Princess, greco-roman Plumed Goddess, and Liberty into

Columbia, a symbol particularly identified with America.[128]

The mourning imagery for George Washington combined the

neoclassical setting for the Plumed Goddess, an urn and tomb,

with Liberty's American attributes, a flag, shield, or eagle.

In this scenario, Columbia is consistently dressed in white,

and although her headgear varies, she often wears or holds a

laurel wreath.

The term "Genius" provides an example of how images of

Columbia came to be almost inseparable from images of

Washington's tomb. In 1782, a version of Columbia was

described as "the Genius of the American Confederated

Republic."[129] At a Masonic funeral procession for Washington,

"the pedestal, beside the urn, which was upwards of three

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[128]E. McClung Fleming, "From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess: The American Image, 1783-1815," *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967): 59. See also Joshua Taylor, *America as Art* (Washington D.C.: Published for the National Collection of Fine Arts by the Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976), 29-34.

[129]William Barton in Hunt, *The History of The Seal of The United States*, quoted in Fleming, 60.

feet in length, and which contained a relic of the
illustrious deceased, bore also a representation of the
Genius of Masonry weeping over the urn, and other suitable
emblems."[130]   This same metaphor was later applied in a print
by Benjamin Owen Tyler.   He wrote,

> As some fond mother who bewails her Child,
>
> And vents her grief in mournful accents wild;
>
> So look'd COLUMBIA'S GENIUS when stern Death,
>
> Relentless Tyrant snatch'd her fav'rite's breath.[131]

Prior to Washington's death, mourning pictures were
usually dedicated to literary or mythical heroes, and only
occasionally, family and friends.   In Samuel Folwell's famous
image, "Sacred to the Memory of the Illustrious Washington,"
the romantic emphasis on individual accomplishment was
married to national identity (fig. 29).   With this new
interpretation, the image became much more popular, and much
more frequently dedicated to real individuals.   In the latter
manifestations of the mourning icon, by referring to
Washington's death and Columbia's mourning, American citizens
borrowed from the status of these idealized national figures.

The first sign of American citizens' playing the parts
of Washington and Columbia can be seen in the funeral
processions held across the country between December 14,
1799, and February 22, 1800.   At memorial proceedings across

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[130]Hough, *Washingtoniana*, 1: 95.
[131]Engraving by Benjamin Owen Tyler of NY, Professor of
Penmanship,"Eulogium Sacred to the Memory of the ILLUSTRIOUS George
Washington." 1817, Virginia Historical Society Collection.

the country, mourners represented Columbia in three-dimensional form. The "misses in white" from the Alexandria procession were present at other commemorative ceremonies in Raleigh, North Carolina; Boston, Massachusetts; New London, Connecticut; Plattsburg and New York City, New York. In the Plattsburg procession, the sixteen children dressed in white represented specific states, led by Virginia, Washington's birthplace. In New York City, there were twenty-four girls, who walked directly before the coffin, "strewing laurels."[132] Boys wore infantry uniforms to realize their role as miniature Washingtons. Funeral sermons at these events consistently united the female mourners with Columbia and the male mourners with Washington, not only in appearance, but also in character.

Young men were urged to emulate George Washington in every way, in life and in death. The Reverend John V. Weylie told the young men of Frederick, Virginia, of the benefits they could anticipate if they imitated Washington's virtues.

> Your life will be respectable, your death will be lamented, and your *memory will be blessed*. In one respect, at least, you will equal WASHINGTON himself. You will enjoy no less than he did, the smiles of an approving conscience; and this, doubtless, was a reward more grateful to his

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[132]Hough, 1:137.

exalted soul, than all the honours which this world

could have bestowed.[133]

If men lived right, they could look forward to being mourned

like George Washington. This was no small affair, as the

numerous processions, odes and memorial images testify.

Death transformed Washington into a god (fig. 10). As

Reverend Joseph Story put it, "We have lost a father but we

have enthroned a saint!"[134]

There are indications that some men aspired to share the

type of honor bestowed on Washington after death. In 1801,

Petersburg carpenter Baldwin Pearce provided funds in his

will for his widow to buy mourning jewelry which "I hope she

will wear as an emblem of her affection and respect for my

memory."[135] When Alexander Balmain preached the 1806 funeral

sermon for Edward McGuire, he was alert to this yearning for

remembrance. "We sometimes take delight in weeping for the

fate of others, and yet such is the perversity of human

nature that our own departure out of this world, often

excites little attention."[136] Pearce, and others like him,

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[133]Rev'd John V. Weylie, "A Funeral Sermon in Commemoration of the Virtues of General Washington, Delivered by the Rev'd John V. Weylie, on the twenty-second of February, at the Parish of Frederick, and county of Frederick [VA]. Published at the request of the audience," 1800, 13. Collection of the Virginia Historical Society.

[134]Joseph Story, A. B., "Eulogy delivered at Marblehead, Massachusetts, February 22, 1800" quoted in Hough, 2:91. On Washington as a god, see also Joshua Taylor, America as Art, 29-34; and Margaret Brown Klapthor and Howard Alexander Morrison, George Washington: A Figure Upon the Stage (Washington D.C.: The Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982), 228.

[135]Baldwin Pearce, will, 1801, MESDA files.

[136]Alexander Balmain, sermon, 23 November 1806, Claiborne Papers, 1665-1911, Virginia Historical Society.

eased their own anxieties by setting aside money for the funerals and mourning that would occur after their deaths.

Although George Washington was referred to as the country's father, he was never a biological father himself. This is important to note because the young men are not encouraged to become fathers, while parenting is central to the way that women can imitate Columbia. In only one eulogy is Washington's fruitlessness mentioned. Governor Morris of New York City queried God, "Was it in displeasure, that to the father of his country thou hast denied a son? Was it in mercy, lest the paternal virtues should have triumphed (during some frail moment) in the patriot bosom!"[137] Morris implies here that non-metaphorical parenting is somehow dangerous to one's rational stability. For men, it is better to be involved with public than with private life.

On the other hand, mothering was central to the praise given Columbia in the Washington eulogies. "What maternal satisfaction must the aged matron have enjoyed, from the consideration of having given birth to the man of such consummate worth, of such unspotted fame!"[138] This description of Mary Ball Washington was grafted onto Columbia as George Washington's allegorical mother. The Pember and Lazader line etching in watercolor specifies this relation in its title, *Columbia Lamenting the Loss of Her Son* (fig. 32).

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[137]Governor Morris, eulogy in New York City, 31 December 1799, quoted in Hough, 2:139-140.
[138]Hough, 2: 113

Reverend John Glendy envied Columbia her status even as he
wailed her loss.

> All hail Columbia! I would felicitate myself
>
> indeed, could I participate individually in that
>
> high honour which America may justly claim to
>
> herself, of being the kind Foster-Mother of THAT
>
> MAN whose love of glory was devoid of Ambition . .
>
> . Mourn America! Your greatest and bravest, best
>
> beloved Son is now no more. . . .[139]

When Reverend Weylie turned his attention to the "fair
Daughters of Columbia," praise for Columbia's success turned
to prescription for young female citizens.

> To you is consigned the pleasing and important task
>
> of *rearing the tender mind, and teaching the young*
>
> *idea how to shoot.* . . . You may cause the gem of
>
> virtue to shoot forth with luxuriance and vigour;
>
> or by unskillful management, you may retard its
>
> growth, and fix it in a long and unprofitable
>
> sterility. It is in your power to retrieve, in
>
> some measure, the heavy loss which your country
>
> hath sustained, by instilling into your children
>
> such principles as may render them the WARRENS, the
>
> GREENES, and the WASHINGTONS of future times.[140]

Weylie's sentiments directly support the ideology of
"republican motherhood" that was mouthed by both men and

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[139]Rev. John Glendy, D.D., *An Oration on the death of Lieut. Gen. G.
Washington* (Baltimore: Printed by Sands and Neilson, 1835), 5-6.
[140]Weylie, 16.

women during the 1780s and 1790s. It suggested that women could best contribute to the nation by "shap[ing] the characters of their sons and husbands in the direction of benevolence, self-restraint, and responsible independence."[141] A virtuous woman helped the men in her life to be good citizens. Raising her son to be the next Washington was one approach.

Columbia and Martha Washington's grief demonstrated another opportunity for patriotic feminine duty. Although men were also depicted in mourning for Washington, women were more likely to be enlisted. Recall the Alexandria funeral cited at the opening of this chapter—it is the daughters of Columbia that mourn. John Mason similarly called for female action: "Daughters of America, who erst prepared the festal bower and the laurel wreath, plant now the cypress grove and water it with tears."[142] Mourning conferred status on the deceased, a point that could not be made more obvious than in the Staunton, Virginia eulogy that follows: "Amiable woman!" Reverend Samuel Stanhope Smith addressed Martha Washington, "sole partner of his dearest pleasures, who enjoyed most intimately, and who best knew, his worth, your overwhelming griefs, the desolation of your heart, under this stroke, testify the preciousness of what you have lost."[143] Notice that her tears are testimony to his worth. Translated into a

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[141]Kerber, 284, 231.
[142]John M. Mason, A.M., Pastor of the Associate Reformed Church in the City of New York, 22 February 1800, quoted in Hough, 2: 176.
[143]Reverend Samuel Stanhope Smith, eulogy, Trenton, New Jersey, 22 February 1800, quoted in Hough, 2: 200.

lesson for female citizens, Columbia taught women how to give

their men Washington's valor after death: mourn as if he were

the late President.

There was an underlying assumption that women were

better suited to mourn. Describing Martha Washington's

grief, Reverend Glendy called on "virtuous, *female*, refined

sensibility [to] picture the melting scene."[144] A few years

earlier, Judith Sargent Murray had connected this sensibility

to mothers in particular,

> Where are the powerful emotions of nature? . . . Is
>
> it to be found in the frosty indifference, and the
>
> sour severity of some fathers? No—but in the warm
>
> and affectionate bosom of a *mother*. . . . It is
>
> she, who with disheveled locks, pale and
>
> distracted, embraces with transport, the body of a
>
> dead child, pressing its cold lips to her's, as if
>
> she would reanimate, by her tears and her caresses,
>
> the insensible clay. These great expressions of
>
> nature—these heart-rending emotions, which fill us
>
> at once with wonder, compassion and terror, always
>
> have belonged, and always will belong, only to
>
> Women.[145]

By the 1830s, this assumption that women, and especially

mothers, had a corner on the emotional market was firmly

entrenched in the cult of domesticity. Among other tasks of

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[144]Glendy, 23. (Emphasis mine).
[145]Judith Sargent Murray, *The Gleaner* (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1992), 731.

compassion, caring for the dying and mourning for the dead were considered intrinsically feminine talents.

Motherhood was also an important arena for demonstrations of emotional sensibility. As the passage quoted above from Judith Sargent Murray shows, late-eighteenth-century motherhood required the ability to both rationally educate and emotionally respond to children. Columbia's tears were a demonstration that motherly love extended beyond death. It was a woman's civic duty to raise her children to be the next Washington. If that child died, what could she do to prove that she had fulfilled her patriotic responsibility? As long as the memory of the child was kept alive by her mourning, the woman was still a mother. In this way, mourning was the motherhood of the dead.

There is evidence to suggest that upper-class women took to heart the idealized role of the mother. Republican motherhood, and its descendant, the cult of domesticity, brought not only new prestige, but also new pressures on women as mothers. If the moral, intellectual, and physical development of the child was directly related to the quality of the mother's parenting, then how did a mother reconcile herself to a child's death? In their study of mothers' reactions to infant death, Nancy Schrom Dye and Daniel Blake Smith found that in the nineteenth century, mothers expressed more fear about this possibility than they had in the mid-eighteenth century. The rate of child mortality had not changed, but the social expectations heaped on mothers had.

These authors suggest that mothers internalized standards that led to increased anxiety, fear and guilt over the deaths of their children.[146]

It was also increasingly acceptable for women to be expressive about their feelings of grief. The cult of domesticity's worship of female emotional expression has its roots in the late eighteenth century. In her article on "The Gendered Meaning of Virtue in Revolutionary America," Ruth Bloch sees the eighteenth century as a time of realignment. Whereas women had been "long regarded as morally encumbered by their supposedly excessive emotionalism," that emotional sensitivity was now a sign of morality.[147]

Bloch sees evangelical Protestantism as one of the cultural forces behind this change. According to Colin Campbell, the emotional economy of American Protestantism grew out of English romanticism.[148] Romanticism celebrated emotion, especially expressions of love and sorrow, as indicative of a person's genteel sensibility, and therefore, moral worth. "Let me remind you," mused Edgar Allen Poe, "this certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty."[149] In an afterthought that deserves more attention, Campbell noted that "many of the activities identified as most compatible

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[146]Dye and Smith, 343-346.
[147]Bloch, 48, 50.
[148]Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*.
[149]Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle," *Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* ed. with introduction, Hervey Allen (New York: Random House, 1938), 898.

with romantic values . . . have all traditionally been regarded as 'women's work.'"[150] Campbell highlights mothering and the fine arts as women's work, to which I add mourning.

Protestantism contributed to the moral implications of demonstrating emotions with its ethic of pleasurable benevolence. Good feelings resulted from good deeds, yet the inverse was also true: benevolent intent was implied whenever emotional expression was manifested. Reverend David Griffith, Bishop Elect of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Virginia, died during the 1789 Protestant Episcopal church convention in Philadelphia. The occasion became a lesson in the pleasurable virtues associated with mourning. The Reverend Dr. William Smith posed the question, why is mourning enjoyable, even when compared to the sensual pleasure of feasting? His response is telling. "In these serious and entendered moments, *we are feelingly alive* to the charms of virtue and dictates of religion."[151] This quote echoes Poe's refrain on the beauty of sorrow.

In the two decades preceding Washington's death, Virginians were consuming literature and material goods that reflected the romantic aesthetic. Especially among women, there was simultaneously an upsurge of episcopal Protestant activity.[152] Since the American interpretation of feminine

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[150]Campbell, 224.

[151]Rev. Dr. William Smith D.D., Funeral sermon and obituary for Rev. David Griffith D.D., Bishop Elect of the Protestant Episcopal Church of VA: (copied from the Pennsylvania Gazette) 4 August 1789, John Brooke Mordecai papers 1789-1925, Collection of the Virginia Historical Society. (Emphasis mine).

[152]Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*,. Also, personal conversations with Professor David Holmes of the Religion Dept., and Professor

virtue was linked to emotional sensitivity, it follows that
the romantic and Protestant ethic of feeling was associated
more with women than men. Mourning icons fit into this
framework as objects that displayed feminine sensibility.
Meditations on death, and the resulting exquisite sorrow,
created the perfect opportunity to both experience and
display pious romantic virtue.

Seminary schools, where young women made embroidered and
watercolored mourning pictures, provided an appropriate
breeding ground for this gendered approach to mourning.
Schoolteachers considered moral education, including socially
correct gender formations, to be a part of their curriculum.
The mourning picture, both as an image, and as a task,
furthered this goal. On this topic, Anita Schorsch has
suggested that seminary teachers pointed to the mourning
figure as "an esoteric model of chaste, humble, sensitive
behavior."[153] In *The Subversive Stitch*, Rozsika Parker
proposes that embroidery itself, as an activity, served to
create and inculcate the values of femininity. Embroidery
was considered the most appropriate method for teaching
discipline because the patience, persistence and obedience
required to complete a complex piece were the very qualities
necessary for a girl's development into a proper woman.
Specifically addressing mourning pictures, Parker remarks
"the expectation that embroidery would manifest feminine

Emeritus Thad Tate of the American Studies Program, College of William
and Mary.
[153]Schorsch, "'A Key to the Kingdom,'" 63.

virtues determined the particular form of suffering which women selected to stitch. . . . Perhaps the satisfaction attained from stitching scenes of suffering was that they suffused male/female relationships with a warm sentiment, in the face of the chilly reality of a patriarchal marriage. Or perhaps the presentation of death and irrevocable parting evoked, if not the love it was their duty to feel, at least pity for the distant authoritarian male."[154] The hours required to complete an embroidered mourning picture provided time for contemplation of the virtues of mourning. Yet, within that space of time, young women were also developing the self-control, or resignation, as discussed earlier, expected of an adult woman.

While George Washington was memorialized in increasingly symbolic terms—as father of the country, as a god—Columbia's virtues were transferred to real American women. It is not difficult to understand why men would find George Washington an attractive model; after death he was deified. What was Columbia's charm for women? Motherhood was already in place as the responsibility of American women to prepare their sons to become good citizens. The companion to the rhetoric of republican motherhood is the virtue of American mourning. Romanticism, Protestantism, and the conceptual realignment of female emotion as a positive quality contributed to making the mourning mother a positive role model for women.

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[154]Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), 140.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I have presented the American mourning icon as a formation. The producers, consumers and the various material forms that the icon took contributed to its symbolic meanings. As part of seminary education, didactic fiction, political rhetoric, art-historical tradition, and the code of mourning behavior in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the mourning icon served an ideological function. It visually and functionally reproduced a system of symbolic compensation that offered women the virtues of mourning or death in exchange for losing or failing to achieve the status of motherhood.

The third chapter's interpretation of Columbia as an icon of American femininity may seem slightly at odds with my earlier insistence that the wedding-funeral was a source for the mourning icon. However, I strongly believe that such a widely reproduced image could not have sustained a single meaning for its contemporary viewers, and to posit this would be pure stubbornness on my part. Instead, by looking at the mourning icon as a formation in which there was a convergence of meanings, I hope I have demonstrated that the mourning icon was an important cultural carrier for the gender ideology of the time, an ideology that had several facets.

Real motherhood frequently fell short of the ideal. Premarital pregnancy, death from childbirth, and infant mortality were all common issues for women during the late

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eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. At the same time, mourning and death were increasingly described as enhancements to femininity. I have suggested here that in certain circumstances, glorified mourning and death served as an indemnity for the gender-based failure implied in lost motherhood. The mourning icon, as an image, and in its manifestations in miniatures and seminary-produced mourning pictures, visually and functionally embodied and contributed to this ideology. The mourning icon was used prescriptively, as a model for female behavior

APPENDIX I

Artifact List

The priorities for selection were 1) secure Virginia provenance, 2) information on approximately when they were made, and 3) access to a photograph or the image itself. This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the Virginia mourning miniatures that would meet my first two requirements... Some of this information was marked on the object. It was supplemented by family and state records. (Listed in chronological order)

Jewelry Samples: These mourning miniatures were chosen from the collections of the Virginia Historical Society, the Valentine Museum, and the archival records of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts.

1. Mourning miniature, "A.B./ OB: 19/Aug: 89 Here virtue finds a rest and in heaven a reward." Made in memory of Ann Gilliam Blunt of Southhampton County, VA. Collection of MESDA, 4065.

2. Mourning miniature, "Richard Eppes died 8th July 1792 Aged 56 years." Collection of Virginia Historical Society, MR975.1

3. Attributed to School of Samuel Folwell, mourning miniature, "In Memory of Eliza Potts OB 28 October 179(3?)." Private owner, information courtesy of MESDA.

4. Attributed to School of Samuel Folwell, mourning miniature made in memory of George and Elizabeth Plater, married 1788 Private owner, information courtesy of MESDA.

5. Mourning miniature, "Rebecca T. Lee OB Mar 5 1792 AET 17." Made in memory of Rebecca Tayloe Lee of Mt, Airy and Menokin, piece executed in 1794. Collection of Robert E. Lee Memorial Association.

6. Mourning miniature, "Archibald Dunlop/OB: /17 April 1793/AE 58." Collection of Valentine Museum, 54.12.1

7. Mourning miniature, "Abby Nelson/OB Dec. 22/1795/AE 26 yrs." Collection of Valentine Museum, 62.79.2.

8. Mourning miniature, "In Memory of Edwin Burwell ob 4 March 1798 AE 23" Collection of Virginia Historical Society, 969.15

9. Mourning miniature, belonged to Mrs. Robert Gamble (Catharine Grattan) ca. 1800 Collection of Valentine Museum, 60.41.23.

10. Mourning miniature made in memory of Lucy Taliaferro of Cleve, King George Co., Virginia. ca 1800 Private owner, information courtesy of MESDA.

11. Attributed to Thomas Sully, mourning miniature made in memory of Mrs. Martha Bickertson Shore, ca. 1803. Collection of Virginia Historical Society, MR937.d.

12. Attributed to School of Samuel Folwell, mourning miniature, "P.C. Doswell/ born apl./27 1793 &/ob nov. 5/ 1806." Collection of MESDA, S-9959

Mourning Pictures:

1. Nelly Custis, mourning picture made in memory of Fanny Bassett Washington Lear, died 1795. Backing newspaper dated 1798. Collection of The Mount Vernon Ladies Association of the Union.

2. Elizabeth Chinn Nutt, mourning picture, no dedication. Nutsville, Lancaster County, VA, 1810. Collection of Mary Ball Washington Museum and Library.

3. Maryann Widewelt, mourning picture, "Maryann Widewelt for her Guardian Mr. John Walker 1823 AD." Backing newspaper fragments are from Richmond, VA, July 20, 1827. Collection of Meadow Farm Museum.

4. Mary Calloway White, mourning sampler, no dedication. James Town, November 22, 1834. Collection of MESDA.

APPENDIX II

Virginia hair workers who sold mourning jewelry and/or
mourning miniatures, 1767-1825
(In Chronological Order)

1767 William Waddill, Williamsburg
The Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, 17 September 1767

1772 William Waddill with Geddys, Williamsburg
The Virginia Gazette, Williamsburg, 4 June 1772.

1785 William Waddill, Richmond
The Virginia Gazette, or the American Advertiser, Richmond,
23 April 1785

1786 M.J. Brown, Richmond
The Virginia Independent Chronicle, Richmond, 15 November
1786.

1786 Robert Fulton , Petersburg
Virginia Gazette, Petersburg, 14 December 1786.

1787 Phillip Bush, Jr., Winchester
Virginia Gazette and Winchester Advertiser, 11 July 1787.

1787 William and George Richardson, Richmond
The Virginia Gazette & Weekly Advertiser, Richmond, 27
September 1787.

1788 William Mercer, Richmond (apprenticed to Charles Wilson
Peale in Philadelphia, 1783-1786)
The Virginia Independent Chronicle, Richmond, 5 November
1788.

1788 William Mercer, Fredericksburg
Virginia Herald, Fredericksburg, 5 June 1788.

1790 James Geddy I and Sons, Petersburg
Virginia Gazette, and Petersburg Intelligencer, 18 March
1790.

1792 Lawrence Sully with William and George Richardson,
Richmond
The Virgina Gazette and General Advertiser, Richmond, 26
September 1792.

1793 Lawrence Sully, Norfolk
Virginia Chronicle & Norfolk & Portsmouth General Advertiser,
20 April 1793.

1794 Samuel Brooks, Norfolk
Virginia Chronicle & General Advertiser, Norfolk, 7 July
1794.

1795 Lawrence Sully, Norfolk
Herald & Portsmouth Advertiser, 6 June 1795.

1795 William Warrock and Samuel Brooks, Norfolk
Herald and Norfolk and Portsmouth Advertiser, 28 January
1795.
American Gazette, And Norfolk and Portsmouth Advertiser, 4
September 1795.

1796 Warrock and Brooks, Norfolk
American Gazette, Norfolk, 6 May 1796.

1797 John Roberts, Norfolk
Norfolk Herald and Public Advertiser, 28 October 1797.

1798 John Roberts, Norfolk
The Norfolk Herald, 15 May 1798.
Epitome of the Times, Norfolk, 17 May 1798.

1802 Francis Rabineau, Richmond
The Virginia Argus, Richmond, 17 July 1802.

1803 (William and George) "Richardsons," Richmond
Hustings Deeds No. 3, 10 April 1803.

1803 Enoch Sulllivan, Richmond (apprenticed to John Pittman
of Richmond in 1796)
The Virginia Argus, Richmond, 26 October 1803.

1810 John W. Somersall, Fredericksburg
Virginia Herald, Fredericksburg, 10 Oct. 1810.

1814 Enoch Sullivan, Richmond
The Daily Compiler, Richmond, 26 February 1814.

APPENDIX III

Virginia Teachers who offered instruction in mixed-media
forms, 1766-1850
(In Chronological Order)

1793 Mrs. Simson, Alexandria, (from Philadelphia and
Baltimore)
The Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser, 18 September
1792.
Baltimore Daily Repository, 20 September 1792.
Colonial Mirror and Alexandria Gazette, 24 July 1793.

1794 Mrs. Simson, Richmond
The Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser, 17 December
1794.

1795 Mrs. Simson, Fredericksburg
Virginia Herald, & Fredericksburg Advertiser, 6 May 1795.

1795 Jacob Marling, Fredericksburg, (from Philadelphia)
Virginia Herald, & Fredericksburg Advertiser, 6 May 1795.

1797 Frances W. Sturdivant, Petersburg
Virginia Gazette & Petersburg Intelligencer, 21 February
1797.

1805 Mrs. O'Reilly, Alexandria, (from Baltimore)
Baltimore Evening Post: Mercantile Daily Advertiser,
Maryland, 4 April 1805.
Washington Federailst, Georgetown, D.C., 15 May 1805.
Alexandria Daily Advertiser, 1 January 1805.   --

1808 Tom Elliott, Culpeper County
MESDA Research Files.

1809 Mrs. O'Reilly, Richmond
The Enquirer, Richmond, 7 February 1809.

1810 Julia F. Edmonds, Alexandria
Alexandria Daily Gazette, 6 March 1810.

1813 Mrs. Peerce, Charles Town, W. VA,
MESDA Research Files

1814 Mrs. O'Reilly, Petersburg
Petersburg Intelligencer, 4 February 1814.

1817 Mrs. DeGruchy, Richmond
Richmond Commercial Compiler, 7 June 1817.

1817 Euphania W. Ferguson, Richmond
Richmond Commercial Compiler, 22 September 1817
Daily Compiler, Richmond, 22 December 1817.

1818 Mrs. O'Reilly, Petersburg
Petersburg Republican, 7 August 1818.

1819 Euphania W. Ferguson, Richmond
Richmond Enquirer, 20 August 1819.

1820 Mrs. Russell, Norfolk
Norfolk Herald, 23 October 1820.
American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Advertiser, 24 October 1820.

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