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Throughout seventeenth-century England the widow often appeared a contradictory figure. The social realities of women who had lost their spouses commonly reenforced both the biblical image of the suffering widow and the word's etymological meaning, destitute and desolate.[1] While the Old and New Testaments assured early modern contemporaries that divine providence blesses the afflicted, as it did the widow of Zarephath, scriptural passages emphasizing the desolation also led them to conclude that "widowehood is a plague of God vpon the vngodly."[2] Municipal and local parish records further suggest isolation and deprivation: women were less likely to remarry than men, and widows depended more than other needy upon poor relief.[3] Yet the object of pity and charity was also commonly seen as a threat to male security and patriarchal society.[4] Along with their redefined social position and, in some cases, their economic gains from a former marriage, widows were in fact free from constraints that limited other woman. Some, though not all, seemed to enjoy an independence recognized by both their seventeenth-century contemporaries and modern scholars. For the financially secure woman, widowhood may well have been, as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford contend, "a time of maximum female autonomy."[5] Freed from the legal restraints of coverture, which gave the husband control of the property his wife brought to the marriage, the widow in seventeenth-century England was entitled during her lifetime to at least one third of the estate's real property as well as any designated property held in trust; and as an executrix

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her control of the estate further increased significantly.[6] The declining rate of remarriage documented in the century has led scholars to conclude that even less wealthy widows benefited from "female agency in a patriarchal culture."[7] The reasons an increasing number of women chose not to remarry are, however, uncertain; and the extent to which widowhood was liberating is debatable.[8] Among the seventeenth-century women's diaries, memoirs, and remembrances written after the death of a spouse, the account of Katherine Austen (1628–1683) in particular presents both a conventional and contradictory picture, one that confirms and challenges established impressions of the widow and her daily lot.

In a century during which upwards of half the married women would be widowed by the age of fifty, it is not surprising that many of the surviving remembrances concern this last of the three traditional stages of womanhood.[9] Austen's manuscript of the sixth and seventh years after her husband's death on 31 October 1658, however, describes at unusual length the afflictions of widowhood and the limitations of remarriage.[10] The first folio's designation of the manuscript as "Book M" and subsequent references to a parchment, a brown paper, and other lettered manuscripts suggest that Austen intended to combine the surviving folios into a work that presumably included her earlier widowed years. "Book M" nevertheless provides an especially valuable record of her experiences because of its liminal nature: the sixth and seventh years marked the end of a self-imposed period of mourning, a time to underscore the past and consider the future.[11]

As she confronts her difficulties, Austen fashions an engaging image shaped by her culture. Though her self-representation has not been extensively considered, the two published pieces on her manuscript appreciate "the insight into the mind of a woman grappling with her own personal crises during a turbulent time in English history" (Todd, "'I Do No Injury by Not Loving'" 207). The more ambitious of the studies, based on the manuscript's poems, further stresses the "multi-faceted, discontinuous self-figuration, through which she negotiates the incompatibilities between her socio-economic ambitions and gender" (Hammons 12). The nature of Austen's conflict, however, may be more deeply rooted in the traditional cultural values and social expectations than in her alleged desire to deflect "attention away from her economic and social ambitions."[12] The material pressures of daily life are, as Helen Wilcox recognizes, central in autobiographical writing of the period to "the interplay of gender, materiality and the textual 'life,'" an interplay in which the "spiritual" and the "earthly" often seem at odds (118,

116). While the interplay makes these works especially attractive to modern critical sensibilities, the cultural significance of religion should not be minimized, particularly in Austen's manuscript life, when "there are many signs that private godliness and public morality were labelled as feminine concerns, especially towards the end of the seventeenth century."[13] Fundamental to her sense of self are a religious faith and a commitment to her family that in the context of her work combine the material and the spiritual in ways that seem to embody quite traditional values. The image she presents of the widow and the position she takes against remarriage are in fact similar to those in the conduct books and religious commentaries of the period. Her self-representation affirms qualities that her century associated with the good, virtuous, or "true widow" and tacitly recalls the love, service, and obedience epitomized in the New Testament account of the widow's mite.[14] At the same time that Austen presents herself as the afflicted widow, she paradoxically demonstrates in equally conventional yet individualist terms that hers is a widow's might, a strength that comes from both God and her own indomitable spirit.

Though conscious from the outset that others might read the manuscript, Austen insists that the "personal occurrences" set forth in its folios are the basis of "a private exercise directed to my self. The singularity of these conceptions doth not aduantaige any" (4v). Near the end of the manuscript she characterizes its 114 folios as "this book of my meditations" (112v). Events from November 1664 to September 1666 occasion remembrances and ruminations, poems and prayers that often begin "Upon the . . . ." The exercises recall the well-established practice of occasional meditation, but as a "book" the manuscript is not entirely or even essentially meditative. Its initial folios contain descriptions of dreams, commentary about angels, and assurances of religious guidance gleaned from the writing or sermons of others and gathered together in a manner resembling a commonplace book. Later folios include letters to her three children, passages intended for other audiences, and lists of financial assets and liabilities. References to days and months within the two-year period add a degree of chronological continuity, but the manuscript is neither a diary nor a memoir. The folios of "Book M" that Austen left to "Who so euer shal look in these papers" (4v) are a personal record ultimately inseparable from its religious intent. For Austen, writing is an expression of devotion and a means of understanding to help her "view over the assurances and hopes I have had" (112v). In coming to terms with her life, Austen's image of herself is that of suffering widow, devoted mother, and servant of God. The patience and piety that characterize her desired self are not

always sufficient, however, to allay the struggles that give the manuscript its distinctive voice.

Her insistence that the six years of widowhood have been the "Most saddest Yeares" (60r) stresses affliction and exploitation at odds with her apparent financial worth. "The world may think I tread upon Roses," Austen confides near the beginning of the manuscript, "but they know not the sack cloth I have walkt on [*sic*]. Not the heauines and bitternes of my minde" (22r). The death of her husband Thomas at the age of thirty-six had not left the thirty-year-old widow and mother of three children in serious economic straits. Besides her own legacy from her mother, the manuscript later notes an estate that included a number of houses and holdings in addition to London property. Austen and her family were by seventeenth-century standards well-off, yet she constructs a quite different perception of herself as a widow and mother of the fatherless. Although she concedes that "Many Women have had great Afflictions," she adds that "Sometimes I think, mine out goes them all" (70r). A list of taxes and expenditures, unpaid rents from tenants, and uncollected loans long past due supports her contention, "I have pased six yeares of Divers mixtures full of accidents and encounters extrordinary for a single woman to pas" (99v). Elsewhere, Austen is the widow oppressed and betrayed by those who seek to ruin the family; increasingly she and her three children, Thomas, Robert, and Anne, appear victims of those who, like the unrighteous in Isaiah, take from the poor, prey upon widows, and rob orphans (82v).

Far from liberating her, the responsibilities of the estate threaten to overwhelm. A major source of anxiety and depression is the Highbury manor secured by her father-in-law from the crown and occupied until 1665 by the holder of a lease.[15] When a legal challenge in parliament thwarted the family's possession of the manor, Austen was caught in a protracted legal dispute that exacerbated her sense of affliction. An entry dated 28 January 1665 expresses deepening frustration and disappointment: "I thought my troubles grew to an end, Now my 6 years is near at conclusion, But low [*sic*] I find them rather augmented, one perplexity arrives close to another, without intermission to over come one, before I find another" (56v). In the months that follow, Austen protests bitterly the conspiracy of powerful and treacherous enemies who seek to ruin and devour; she implores God to hear her sighs as he had those of other oppressed, helpless widows and orphans (68r, 80r-v). Alone and weak, she is the devoted mother struggling to bring the manor within the family and preserve her son's inheritance. Though marriage had ill-prepared her for this new responsibility, she ignored traditional warnings cautioning the widow

against public involvement and often appeared at Westminster. Austen's presence at committee meetings where she had no voice was, if nothing else, a silent testimony of maternal concern as well as a reflection of a changing society in which the widow was now sometimes counseled to "looke to her affaires as cause and need requireth."[16]

Adding to the burdens of the estate and the isolation of widowhood is her sister-in-law's legal suit to obtain the London property Red Lion and a sum of money. Austen feels deeply betrayed. Though she resigns herself to God's will, she has difficulty accepting the deception of relatives intent upon "invading y^{e} enterist of an Orphan" and "robing the dead" (81v). Several days before the suit finally came to trial on 31 May 1665, Austen attempted to find the charity to forgive the sister-in-law, blaming her behavior on a father who had concealed his ambitious designs under a false friendship while encouraging his daughter to pursue her legal action. When her sister-in-law renewed the suit eight months after the court denied her claim, charity was less forthcoming. Austen characterizes as persecution the judicial and parliamentary attempts to diminish the estate; she decries a limitless "envy hatred and Couetiousnes": "Noe boundes these enormities hath. It canceles all obligations[,] respects, and gratitude. And comes now to Triumph and to perfect the ruine to an Orphant by its endeauour" (108r).

However extreme her plight may or may not be, rhetorically it underscores the pressing issue "whether itis [*sic*] not possible to be happy with out a second marriag" (40r). Biblical strictures about remarriage offered qualified guidance. Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians concedes that "if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord" (7.39); his first epistle to Timothy approves the marriage of younger widows who might then have children (5.14). Paul's reservations are apparent, nevertheless. "It is good for them if they abide even as I," the epistle to the Corinthians advises. "But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn" (7.8–9). Seventeenth-century commentaries on these passages agree upon no hardfast teaching concerning remarriage. John Trapp dismisses as error early church fathers' condemnation of second marriages as "no better then fornication," and William Gouge concludes that widows are no more restricted in the freedom to marry than those who have never married (Trapp 86; Googe 187). Others such as Richard Baxter, who believes that each widow must decide for herself whether remarriage is suitable, agree that "where there is no necessity, a Single Life is more for the Persons peace and quietness, and freedom from Hindrances in serving God, and therefore better

for them" (Baxter Gg1r). Richard Allestree is less circumspect: while he concedes the importance Paul gives to "due circumstances" and "sober motives," the many editions of *The Ladies Calling* assume "Marriage is so great an adventure, that once seems enough for the whole life," a conclusion John Dunton includes almost verbatim at the end of the century in *The Ladies Dictionary*.[17] Austen's own reluctance to remarry reflects reservations shared throughout the century by many on both sides of the issue.

Initially she dismisses further consideration of remarriage with an allusion to a statement made by St. Bernard about the honor of widowhood and then several folios later returns to the marriage question with a different definition of honor. The section entitled "Of Ho[nour]: Contraries," considering the essence of honor and its relationship to her present situation, concludes that the honor associated with title or position is contrary to her best interests. Austen premises her analysis upon the widely held assumption that an equality of social position, wealth, religion, and age should govern any marriage decision.[18] In accepting the commonplace that widows should prudently avoid marrying "for a large Title of Honour, without considering their happiness in it,"[19] she distinguishes between the limited honor of social stature and the "True Honour" of virtue. The opposition is not, however, absolute; Austen allows that honor depends "not so much" upon titles, which are vain "for the most part" (49v), and she does not dismiss outright positions secured by wealth. She fears the titles that would "Eate and devoure" her widowed estate. Should she marry again, a possibility she acknowledges, Austen admits that over wealth she would value someone "whose soule and heart may be fit for me" (50r). She qualifies her view once again, aware of the "disrepute" women may incur when they marry solely for love as well as the risk they take when they choose a man of "meane ffortune." Her conclusion that "Surely Mediocrity is the happiest condition we can obtaine" (50r), however clichéd, reflects her memory of her mother's troubled life, worn down by many responsibilities. This realism epitomizes Austen's attitude toward remarriage and, like her tendency to qualify her views, adds substance to the conventional wisdom of the period. Together they give meaning to her later heartfelt, albeit extreme, contention, "I have pased extrordinary troubles and greviances as w^{t} woman more and goe through with so litle outward dismay or did not seek a shelter by a second Marriag" (76r).

Apprehension and family welfare determine Austen's response to a relative's question, "why not marry to ease me of my burdens" (69v). Her answer that she cannot know what "thornes and incumberances" might be suffered

in another marriage restates the common advice given widows not to "make exchange of their happy estate for a continuate scene of misery" (Brathwait 111). The interests of her children also explain her reason for not remarrying. Even advocates of remarriage cautioned that widows with children should "seriously thinke of it before hand: and be the more circumspect in taking a second or third husband" (Gouge 582). On behalf of her two sons and daughter, Austen is determined simply to bear her legal burdens and, if the suits go against the family, share whatever she possesses with her children. Remarriage would, quite simply, limit her freedom "to make requital to them without studying designes of Entreaty and comisseration for them" (69v). The abiding interest in her children's welfare above her own desire for independence distinguishes Katherine Austen's prudent attitude toward both widowhood and remarriage. If she harbors any ambitions, they are bound to this fundamental concern with her family's welfare.

The maternal need to ensure her children's future is inseparable from a commitment to the past, especially to the memory of her husband, that surpasses traditional views of the widow's obligation to honor the memory of her husband through the conduct of her household and the raising of their children (Vives 168; Allestree 232–33). In contemplating a seventh year of widowhood Austen stresses that she is thankful she had resolved "to continue seaven yeares for y^{e} perticular esteame to my D^{r} ffriend. . . . And certainly if my sons estate be taken away, I shal begin to take a new Lease of seaven yeares more" (68v). Recalling their happiness and love before his death, Austen feels her husband's presence in his continued "desiers for my perfection"; she would also like to believe that death has increased the effect of his love on her (23r). Contemporary conduct guides sometimes encourage the widow's remembrances of her spouse as a form of conscience or restraint,[20] but she hopes to keep alive her husband's virtue in her actions (71v). Austen reminds her children, in any case, that she now represents their father (42r). As his surrogate she eschews the self-interest contemporaries feared in widows freed from the economic constraints of marriage.[21] Her commitment is unmistakable not only in the forceful vow to protect the inheritance of her eldest son but in the determination to uphold the family heritage. Should the courts rule against the estate, Austen vows, "my love, my affection, my zeale, my honour shal be expresed both to him, his D^{r} ffather, and worthy Grand father, who have a deep obligation ever imprinted in my memory, respects and endeavours" (68v). She tries to instill in her sons, Thomas and Robert, this same sense of obligation when she encourages them to express the debt of gratitude

they owe to their father and grandfathers by honoring their memory, imitating their virtues, and increasing the inherited estates. For her, and she hopes for them, the material and the familial are closely linked in the self-determination fundamental to her widowhood.

She herself is careful to resist the attentions of suitors. During the months the plague threatened London and forced Austen to flee to Essex, a physician named Alexander Callendar offered his assistance and later sought to win her affection.[22] Her initial response is a characteristic wariness; Austen has difficulty being simply grateful for his efforts to safeguard her health because she doubts his real motives. She views his interest in her well-being as another instance of the "snares and traines" set to entrap her and resists what she deems "winning flatering discourses." At stake, she candidly admits, are herself and her estate, neither of which she will give away in a "dishonourable ffolly. To sully and disparadge the ffaire prosperityes of my life" (90v). Determined not to jeopardize what she has nor to blame destiny for the misfortunes of "fond affection and deluded Judgement," Austen concludes that the best course lies in avoiding anything that might tempt her into "an vnder valueing alteration of life" (94v).

When she counters the physician's further overtures, her characteristic and at times materialistic sense of independence is apparent as the skepticism of her caution tends toward cynicism. At length entries responding initially in general and then specifically to an unidentified "you"—presumably the suitor—weigh the value of virtue over fortune, dismissing idealism as the sole basis for marriage. Wary of "fond affection and deluded Judgement," Austen values remarriage "When I may arrise to better" (94v). Her further argument that virtue can be appreciated equally well in friendship rebuffs her suitor's interest but not his company in part because all along she doubts the sincerity of his attentions. The analogy she develops between the courting of a rich widow and the king's wooing of a wealthy city draws from Realpolitik to justify her decision "not to give Credid to wordes" (95r). The comparison may well reflect her culture's caricature of the fortune hunters who preyed upon widows and its admonitions against the folly of choosing a husband who will leave "her as empty of money as he found her of wit."[23] Her reservations, however, go beyond: in her experience virtue alone is rarely loved, nor can she believe men really prefer being with women. This mistrust strengthens her obligation to her husband and their children. "ffor my part," Austen contends, "I doe noe Injury to none by not Loveing. But if I doe I may doe real Injuries where I am already engaidged. To my Deceased ffriends posterity" (95r-v). Turning aside the phy-

sician's declaration of devotion and appeal for pity, she likens herself to Penelope, the dedicated wife of Odysseus who forestalled her suitors. Succinct, unsentimental rejoinders dismiss Callendar's assertions that he would cherish her even if she were a beggar and that he would lapse into distraction without her. She simply refuses to entertain seriously his declarations. Austen never scorns, however, the attentions that she questions skeptically. When her admirer succumbed soon afterward to the plague, she regrets that his grave will not have a memorial suitable to this man of considerable accomplishment; nonetheless her loyalties lie elsewhere. Near the end of the manuscript a brief entry entitled "Aduising to Marry: and to keep w^{t} I could" asserts that "(If I doe)" no one can accuse her of being a self-serving hypocrite who only pretended to honor her husband's memory while securing her own finances and the basis for a "second bed" (110v). Once again the welfare of her three children is paramount in her vow to protect their interests.

Appropriately her final consideration of remarriage is followed in the manuscript by the further resolve to seek "the loue and fauour of God" (111r). A long-established belief that widows should take Christ as their new spouse offered the solace of God in return for the commitment to a virtuous life of piety and charity.[24] Commentary on the first Pauline epistle to Timothy traditionally observes that older widows and those with the "gift of continency" should devote themselves to God rather than remarry: "She that is a true widow and friendless," Thomas Becon glosses 1 Timothy 5.5, "putteth her trust in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers day and night" (520, 366). While for some the pious, selfless commitment of the biblical Anna, Judith, or Naomi is its own reward,[25] others appreciate the protection God offers those who have lost their husbands. The "good widow" Thomas Fuller characterizes in *The Holy State* puts "her especiall confidence in Gods providence" and "seeks to gain and keep his love unto her" (26). Austen similarly turns to God, but she does not embrace completely the role prescribed for widows in the legal tract *The Lawes Resolvtions of Womens Rights*: "Let her learne to cast her whole loue and deuotion on him, that is better able to loue and defend her than all the men in the world" (232). Unlike the biblical Anna, who devotes her life entirely to God, Austen is committed to the welfare of her family. Her devotion to God and her dependency upon his providential favor express as well a strong sense of self that is both spiritual and material.

Amidst the growing afflictions and burdens of widowhood, Austen seeks comfort in God's sheltering love. Though at one point verses of her poetry promise "Some worke of piety" and acknowledge she owes "A life of purity"

(101r), increasingly the manuscript reveals a love and devotion inseparable from a reliance upon divine providence. Especially near its beginning, the faith that good comes from evil and that providence never abandons the innocent shows a simple belief in moralistic tags. The suffering of widowhood in general is the "nursery of virtue" (36r); her own oppressions, she believes, weigh less heavily when they are borne as divine rebukes intended for the best. When she questions why her son Robert survived the ravages of smallpox that took the life of another, seemingly stronger child, the answer lies in the unknowable will of God, whose secrets she "dare" not be bold enough to "search . . . or Ask why" (46v). The tension between an unquestioned faith and the heartfelt human need for reassurance characterizes a meditation prompted by her anticipation of a meeting of the parliamentary committee deliberating the fate of the Highbury manor.

Material concerns heighten a spiritual dependency. News that her son Thomas is seriously ill and that "potent traines" threaten the family fortunes confirms the conspiracy Austen finds in a dream she had about a wedding and then reaffirms in the section simply titled "My Med[itation]." The dream becomes in her strained interpretation a troubling premonition of the scheduled committee meeting that reenforces fears of a confederacy against the family. The certainty that "great opposeres" have risen against them and will "swallow our estate" gives urgency to her dependency upon divine intercession. Her plea for help moves from a recognition of her weakened physical health and disturbed psychological well-being toward the hope that the angelic force manifest in scripture will "frustrate the Snares and traines laid by our vnjust oppressors" (61v). Should the conspirators succeed, the meditation holds out the steadfast belief that greater advantages may come from loss; "Sanctified aduersity is better then ffortunes where heaven denyes it." The seizing of their estate, Austen wants to believe, would surely cause the earth to protest and heaven to judge. Several lines of her own poetry affirm in the end this faith in the ultimate justice of heaven: "While troopes of Discomposures rise/ Gods fformer Love may fill my eyes" (62r). The simple verse appropriately befits the meditation's concluding reaffirmation of trust. While by no means perfunctory, its assurance that wicked and sinful deeds will be punished does not entirely displace the immediacy of the pressing legal fears and estate responsibilities, nor are the concerns for her children and her own welfare completely dispelled.

By the end of the manuscript, a single line derived from Psalm 68 and boldly written in large script on the final folio unequivocally declares the es-

sence of the selfless faith she seeks: "My strength will I ascribe vnto my God" (114r). As a devoted servant, Austen understands that the fulfillment of her calling is contingent upon her willingness to accept responsibilities; above all, she realizes that alone she can do nothing. Like other seventeenth-century women, not only those who were widows, her identity is closely associated with her religious belief, though hers is not the devotional life defined by the "practice of piety,"[26] nor is the manuscript simply a remembrance of afflictions and a testimony of "Gods carriage towards us in them."[27] Meditating upon the twentieth-eighth verse of Psalm 68, Austen takes comfort in God's support when multitudes of daily troubles become especially wearisome. Emphatically the meditation reaffirms that God is her refuge, "my strength and saluation, my defence so that I shall not fal" (55r). The biblical protection likened elsewhere in the manuscript to a sheltering shield and rock of ages offers her a "Joyful Succour" that lessens the fear of falling into dejection and holds out the hope of divine blessings. The meditation ends with renewed faith and love strengthened by the solace of another psalm: "That I may be held by his loue Meditate on y^{e} 62 salme of placing affiance in him and drawing it off from all false retreates and wrong succours" (55r). Austen never returns to this psalm, which praises God as the rock of defense and salvation; nor does she later go beyond the allusion "See Salme 6 & 7" in seeking spiritual comfort. Her poem following the notation "Read salme 27: of supportation" (57v) does, however, draw upon this psalm, and another entry on her trust in God notes "read 27 salme" (73r). The poem in particular develops the theme of dependency that follows the psalm's declaration, "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?" (27.1). Austen implores God to heed her cries for divine support and guidance. At other moments of distress she longs for an understanding of divine will and pleads not to be forsaken. When she ponders whether the words of Psalm 120 apply to her current legal problems—whether her material concerns are in any way comparable to the biblical troubles, she both wants and affirms God's love and security. "In my distres I cried to the Lord and he heard me. My God hath heard me in my many former distreses That were ponderous and waighty." And if new trouble arises, she trusts "my God will order it for the best how ever it succeed" (81v).

Close identification with the author of Psalms was not unusual in the seventeenth century. Traditionally the Psalms were praised as an epitome of the Bible, an anatomy of the soul, and "the Storehouse and Treasurie of a Christian."[28] They were means of self-examination that moved readers closer to God and enabled them to voice their fears and weaknesses. "Whosoeuer

take this booke in his hande" might, indeed, be as affected as "the very man that read them, or first spake them," believing "they were properlye his owne onelye wordes, first by him conceyued and pronounced" (Parker C1v). For women writing about their lives the Psalms were especially a means of expressing their personal voices, enabling them to articulate a range of emotions in the words of the psalmist.[29] Among them Austen is noteworthy in her identification with the Psalms.[30] Explicitly she associates her meditative mode with the biblical book commonly attributed to David; implicitly her language recalls Psalm 34: "King David was the great example of trouble and confidence in that trouble[;] to his meditations I resort to, and he that was his retreate shal be mine. As now I can say [with] him many are the troubles of y^{e} righteous" (107r). A 12 July 1665 meditation occasioned by the devastating London plague begins with the second and seventh verses of Psalm 91 and notes at the conclusion that David wrote the psalm when pestilence carried away 70,000 people in three days (88v). Another cry to the Lord the same month ends with lines from four verses of Psalm 76 rearranged and altered to add force to the plea for deliverance. The psalm becomes more immediate as Austen changes the psalmist's confident belief that God "shalt . . . restrain" to the anguished plea "o God doe thou restraine" (89v). Near the end of six years of widowhood, the 28 January 1665 meditation on "Troubles" implores God to "Remember thy servant, and all her afflictions" as he had "David And all His" (56v). Perplexed and helpless, she longs for his mercy. The promise of divine providence and the hope of spiritual solace lie in the prayer from Psalm 51 that concludes the meditation: "Make me to heare Joy and gladnes, that the bones w^{ch} thou hast broken may rejoyce" (57r). When the burdens seem too heavy she also recollects the heroic exploits in the books of Samuel. From the fearful threats of her enemies, memories of God's former favor lead her to the hope inspired by David's triumph over Goliath and rise to leadership.

This hope depends upon a seemingly passive self-assertion, for Austen values David's valor less than his patience as she struggles at times to accept her widow's lot with resignation. Her distinctive voice is unmistakable despite the resolve. Wearied and dejected, she takes comfort in his ability to endure tribulation: "Stil learne of David: He was as valiant as euer drew sword. Yet in patient bearing and forbearing, he went beyond all men before him" (55r). Her later declaration, "Trust in the lord & waight patiently is y^{e} salmest direction" (88r), summarizes much of the biblical commentary on the Psalms' lessons in patience;[31] the Old Testament book was for her contemporaries a source of "exceeding sweet comforts and consolations, and strengthnings in

Faith, in Patience and in all godliness."[32] The attempts in parliament to deprive the family of the Highbury estate test her resolution, "in patienc I shall endeavour to posses my Soule" (65r); her acceptance of affliction depends upon the belief that God "dost afford ffaith and patience" (78v). Worried that she will lose her estate and fearful of the thorn-choked path she sees before her, Austen's cry for spiritual strength implores God to "instruct" her in the courage, patience, and submission he commands (75v). She asks on other occasions for understanding, prudence, and discretion as well as patience to endure whatever misfortunes await her. The submission she desires, like that of her society's virtuous widow, supplants any need to avenge her wrongs. Hoping in the divine purpose and ultimate good of her suffering, she prays, "O God make me a passive sufferrer farr rather then an active doer of injury" (57v). The patient suffering Austen hopes with God's help to endure gives new meaning, moreover, to her society's other image of the independent widow. The self-possession, strength, and will of patient fortitude characterize a spiritual autonomy both more liberating and more demanding than mere material independence.

Austen's vow to celebrate with David the innumerable divine mercies and blessings of her deliverance (40r) in its assertiveness further redefines the simple Pauline recourse of good widows advised in the seventeenth century to serve God and gain his love through a pious life of prayer and charity. [33] She would, in the words of a seventeenth-century commentary on the Psalms, "perform that great work of life everlasting, which is to glorifie God with an heart ravished unto him" (Diodati Rr2v). Citing Psalm 147 on the day of her thirty-seventh birthday and in the seventh year of widowhood, she longs to sing to the Lord and "every day resolue with the salmist to bles thee (o God): And every year for thy patiente forbearance of me, for thy bounty, for thy tender providence over me, Therefore wil I praise thy name for ever and ever" (77r). On other occasions the gratitude seems conditioned upon divine aid; once God has given her the patience to withstand her pressing difficulties, then she will offer in return her grateful thanksgiving (57r, 101r). This plea for God's help is, once again, an acknowledgement of her dependency upon his support. She yearns to have God fit her heart "and set in tune to chaunt thy actes of thy favour" (75r), reflecting a commitment expressed early in the manuscript and later reaffirmed in similar language. Initially, a dream described only as a "Monition" reenforces the confidence that despite many hardships "I shal not dye but live and declare the workes of the Lord" (21r).[34] In later asking God to lengthen the days of her life so that she may devote

every additional minute to praising the wonders he has also shown David, Austen singles out others who share her fate and hopes they too may find refuge and a shield. In her own limited way she would transcend the tribulations of a widow to become another psalmist: "O that I may live to tell the singular providences of God to me That all Widdowes and orphanes all ffatherles and ffriendles may put their trust in God, May set their hope in him, who hath been my ready defence in the yeares of my distreses" (62v).

But Austen realizes that her words alone are insufficient (102r, 63r, 67r) and that her life rather than her language is for her the best means of glorifying God. Near the end of the manuscript, considering whether she should pursue a life of private contemplation or one of public activity, she asks him to direct her choice. Yet hers is not the self-effacement of abject dependency. Despite her need to cast herself as an object of commiseration, if not pity, she is also both in her own ways and in terms of God an independent woman who paradoxically finds her freedom ultimately in submission. Whatever the future direction her life, Austen's desire is to "become an Instrument to Serue my God" (105v). At the conclusion of the manuscript, the final words of the poem preceding the last sentence ascribing all her strength to God look forward to this heavenly fulfillment. There the innumerable mercies that elude her thoughts will be illuminated; refined in spirit she will fully understand at last divine love "And to Etternity singe notes serene" (113v).

Austen has no illusions that until she arrives at this sublime state—"that ever lasting haven of peace" (87r)—her life will be anything but tempestuous. Throughout the manuscript a metaphor of sailing derived perhaps from Psalm 107 defines her journey. Her voyage is across the "sea of griefe" and the "waters of peril" whose raging billows are driven by the storms of oppression and calamity (38r, 62v-63r, 74r). When in the final pages of the manuscript Austen emphasizes the transience of her happiness, she acknowledges that she is still at sea, "such is the vnsurenes of every ground in this world to Anchor on" (112v). Despite fear of the perils that lie ahead, she never abandons the hope and faith that ballast her in the uncertain seas. Divine providence, she is certain, calmed the stormy oppression that earlier buffeted her life; it harbored her as well from the tempests that threatened to engulf her (63r, 109r). Battered by other tempests, Austen petitions for guidance across these dangerous waters and prays for patient fortitude to ride out the mounting waves. In her metaphoric journey she strives for the inner calm of the children of God, the "Divine peace" that "will allay the tempests and inquietudes of this life. It will give Anchor in the violences of vnjust actions of men" (70v).

The travails she records and the peace she envisions are integral to a testimony that develops two opposing cultural views of the seventeenth-century widow. Austen's account of her widowhood reveals the traditional image of deprivation and the alternate opportunity of newfound independence. The autonomy of widowhood, even for the well off, brings with its responsibilities the afflictions with which Austen struggles. These afflictions, however, occasion the tenacious spirit that resists the legal threats to her personal and familial well-being. Standing silently at committee meetings or complaining bitterly about her sister-in-law's suit, she is the devoted wife and mother whose primary concern here and in her forthright considerations of remarriage is the obligation to others. Austen, the virtuous widow, further defines herself in terms of the religious faith so evident in "Book M." Certain that angelic forces safeguard the children of God, she takes comfort in the belief that the thorns along her way may turn into roses and that meanwhile God will protect her from their scratches, but she further emphasizes that the divine aid will not be extended unless she reaches out "my helping hand" (40r) and that the harmful thorns are designed to make her cautious. In her avowed service to both God and family, Austen maintains a distinctively pragmatic, even shrewd, awareness of the widow's lot. The spiritual and the material, the idealistic and the realistic are often inseparable in the prayers for the protection of the family estate and the pleas for guidance. Like the psalmist David, she cries out beleaguered to the Lord in the midst of her troubles, seeking his help and praising his mercy. The patience she hopes for is not the simple acceptance traditionally recommended to women but includes the prudent wisdom and judgment as well as an honest self-awareness that build fortitude. On her own terms yet paradoxically in relation to others, Katherine Austen achieves an independence that redefines the belief that widowhood in the early modern period might indeed be "a time of maximum female autonomy." Her single remaining manuscript preserves a self-image bound inextricably to the cultural forces and social expectations that determined its writing, a search for understanding and strength that remains a striking testimony of a woman immersed in the consolation and conventions of her seventeenth-century world.

NOTES

1. "For the name of a wydowe in Greke and Latine, is as moche to say, as desolate and destitute" (Vives 173); see also Brathwait 110. Richard Allestree observes in *The Ladies Calling*, "Orphans and Widows are in Scripture link'd together as objects of Gods and good mens pity, and of ill mens oppression" (237). Among relevant biblical

passages are Exodus 22.21–24, Deuteronomy 10.18, Psalms 68.5 and 146.9, Malachi 3.5, and James 1.27; see also Thomas Bentley 75–80.

2. Bentley 77, 75; the widow of Zarephath appears in 1 Kings 17.10–24.

3. On remarriage see, for example, Vivien Brodsky 122–23 and Amy Froide 236–69. Froide says 14.9 percent of adult females in early modern England were widows (237); Brodsky's essay considers marriage patterns in London. Estimates of all remarriages range from ten to twenty-five percent (Holderness 429; Stone 56). Froide (252) and Mendelson and Crawford (180) recognize recipients of poor relief.

4. Charles Carlton's essay considers stereotypes of the aggressive widow as well as some of the reasons for this typing; as does Jon Lance Bacon's. Others who also discuss images of the widow and their various threats, ranging from sexual jealousy and fear of widows' economic and sexual freedom to reminders of mortality, include Lu Emily Pearson; Barbara J. Todd, "The Remarrying Widow"; Margaret Lael Mikesell; Esther S. Cope; Dympna Callaghan. Seventeenth-century writers who stress the sexual freedom often contend that once the "permissions of the marriage-bed" have opened the "fontinel" of desire widows are less able "to forbeare carnall act," succumbing in extreme views to a passion "as vnsatiate as the sea" (Taylor 3: 62; Swetnam 31; Niccholes 25).

5. Mendelson and Crawford 180. Widows were, in Merry E. Wiesner's apt phrase, "economically independent and . . . sexually experienced" (75). Besides the works cited above in note four, others recognizing the liberated state of the widow include Crawford and Gowing 4; Margaret J. M. Ezell 18–19; Froide 238–39.

6. Amy Louise Erickson 25–26, 162. See also Susan Staves, *Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660–1833*.

7. Todd, "Demographic Determinism and Female Agency" 422. Todd's essay responds to Jeremy Boulton's "London Widowhood Revisited." The declining rate of remarriage is documented by E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield 28–29, 190–91, 258–59.

8. The editors of *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* conclude, "The contributors in this volume, however, are sceptical that widowhood was necessarily a liberating phase in women's lives" (Cavallo and Warner 14). Mendelson and Crawford also recognize that "independence and autonomy were enjoyed by only a few" (184). Jeremy Boulton's discussion of the declining rate of remarriage queries whether "women chose to remain independent or because they had little real choice" (341).

9. Lawrence Stone suggests that within the "average family of the seventeenth century" one of the spouses would die by the age of fifty (60); see also Peter Laslett 199. James E. Smith (430) and Alan Macfarlane (231) have somewhat lower percentages. Among the extensive list of women authors Sara Mendelson considers in "Stuart Women's Diaries," eleven of the twenty-one who married wrote some part of their surviving works while they were widows (198). Austen's manuscript seems alone among them devoted entirely to widowhood; her work merits comparison, in any case, to that of Alice Thornton.

10. British Library Add. MS 4454, "Book M." Passages from this manuscript are quoted with the permission of the British Library Department of Western Manuscripts. Selections from the manuscript have been transcribed by Todd, who provides

the only biographical information about Katherine Austen and her family ("'I Do No Injury by Not Loving'").

11. While contemporaries cautioned against remarrying too soon and noted "a competent time in her widows estate" (Fuller 25), no specific period of mourning was followed. Jeremy Taylor's advice not to "marry within the year of mourning" (3: 62) was quite standard.

12. Hammons 8, whose reading of the verse in the manuscript weighs heavily several brief observations by Todd in "'I Do No Injury by Not Loving'" (see Hammons 20–21n5).

13. Crawford and Mendelson 226. Other recent Renaissance scholars who have also emphasized the cultural importance of religion, often particularly in terms of understanding the experiences of women, are noted by Margaret P. Hannay 127n3.

14. Fuller's essay in *The Holy State* is entitled "The good Widow," and John Webster's is "A vertuous Widdow." The "true widow" is from *The Catechism of Thoms Becon* 520. Typical among commentaries on the widow's offering in Mark 12.42–44 is Matthew Poole's *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* Q4r.

15. Todd, "'I Do No Injury by Not Loving'" 229.

16. T. E. [Thomas Edgar(?)] 233. In offering legal guidance, Edgar counsels widows to lessen their sorrow through a "carefulnesse and moderate sedulitie, in businesse of profit or disprofit" (233). More traditionally, Vives advises the widow to go seldom abroad, "For in courtes and in resorte of men, and gatheryng of people, a wydowe shulde nat medle" (174).

17. Allestree 258, 245—the first of the six editions was published in 1673; Dunton 484.

18. Gouge 188–92; Allestree typically notes in *The Ladies Calling* that marriage should be "in respect of quality and fortune" as well as religion and similar age (247–50). Women, however, could marry men who were somewhat older.

19. Dunton 485, who is following Allestree 247–48. See also, for example, Webster 4: 38.

20. Vives recommends the widow "take hym for her keper and spy, nat only of her dedes, but also of her conscience" (168), a point Webster also stresses (4: 38).

21. The good widow in Thomas Fuller's *The Holy State* "will not abridge her children of that which justly belongs unto them" (26). Allestree in particular criticizes widows who "do sometimes encroach upon their sons peculiar": "the management of the minor's estate is reckon'd on as part of the Widows fortune. But I confess I see not what there is in the title of a mother, that can legitimate her defrauding her child" (237).

22. Todd identifies him in "'I Do No Injury by Not Loving'" 210.

23. Allestree 253. Carlton notes the stock stage characters (118–19); for the range of warnings across the period see, for example, Becon 366; Edgar 331–32; Allestree 251–53. In "Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England," Elizabeth Foyster's summary of recent scholarship on remarriage (108–13) questions the extent to which widows actually succumbed to the attentions of opportunistic men.

24. Jerome, "To Furia on the Duty of Remaining a Widow" 233—the essay also appeared in the 1630 translation by Henry Hawkins, *Certaine Selected Epistles of S. Hierome* (126–40)—and Vives, who states "the widowe hath taken Christe to her hus-

bande immortall" (170). Seventeenth-century writers who commonly recommend a life of piety and charity include Edgar 232; Fuller 26; Allestree 231.

25. Anna in Luke 2.36–8, Judith in the Apocrypha, and Naomi in Ruth are variously cited by Jerome 259; Becon 365, 520, 521; Bentley 74; Richard Bernard, *Ruths Recompence: or a Commentarie vpon the Booke of Rvth*.

26. Crawford considers the feminine "practice of piety" in *Women and Religion in England, 1500–1720*, esp. chapter four.

27. John Beadle's *The Journal or Diary of a Thankful Christian* counsels, "It is good to set down every affliction we have met with in our time, and to observe Gods carriage towards us in them, with the benefit we receive from them" (55). Raymond A. Anselment discusses the relevance of this counsel in "The Deliverances of Alice Thornton."

28. John Diodati Rr2v; Jean Calvin *.v2v; Samuel Clarke Qqqr; Henry Hammond b2r; *The Dutch Annotations Upon the whole Bible* Iiii2v.

29. Hannay believes that "in a culture that exalted silence as a feminine virtue" the Psalms "allowed women" to voice their emotions, "to speak their fears and even to express their anger" (118, 117).

30. Of the seventeenth-century women Hannay, for example, lists—Elizabeth Richardson, Anne Clifford, Alice Thornton, and An Collins—not even Alice Thornton rivals Austen's reliance upon the Psalms and her identification with the psalmist. Anselment discusses Thornton's relationship to the psalmist in "Seventeenth-Century Manuscript Sources of Alice Thornton's Life," in *SEL* 45 (2005): 135–55.

31. See, for example, the index entry "Patience maketh men happye" in Calvin, *The Psalmes of Dauid* L111.iiv.

32. *The Dutch Annotations Upon the whole Bible* Iiii2v.

33. Thus Thomas Fuller's chapter on "The good Widow" states "she seeks to gain and keep his love unto her, by her constant prayer and religious life" (26). Paul's epistles to the Corinthians and to Timothy are fundamental to their counsel; the example of Anna in the gospel of Luke is a model.

34. Austen later insists that God "hath countermanded I should not dye but live and declare the workes of the Lord" (75r).

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