Three Poems by Anne Glover Rhodes: An Edition

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Introduction

In the sixty-five years since the publication of Herbert Grierson and Geoffrey Bullough’s *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* (1934), which includes two women (Aphra Behn and Katherine Philips), the number of important early modern women poets has increased considerably. Alastair Fowler’s *New Oxford Book* (1991) recorded nineteen. Germaine Greer and her collaborators included forty-five women poets in their anthology *Kissing the Rod* (1988); Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson collected one hundred and eighty-seven in *Early Modern Women Poets (1520–1700)* (2001). Of these anthologies of verse, only the last explores extensively the strong connection between women’s writing and death. Although the epitaphs they include have long been available in print, there remains a huge body of funereal writing by women engraved in churches that has never been published. The poems of Anne Glover Rhodes suggest that funeral sermons may be another untapped source for women’s poetry.

The only source for Rhodes’s poetry is the funeral sermon, *The Wise and Faithful Steward,* preached over her and her husband and printed in 1657. In it Peter Samwaies combines his sermon with a brief memoir, based on material supplied by the couple’s two surviving sons, one of them (aged seventeen at the time of his parents’ death) the dramatist Richard Rhodes. Samwaies’s principal purpose is to demonstrate two different Christian deaths: Benjamin Rhodes in the full assurance of faith, his wife
tormented by doubts about her sins but at last peacefully reconciled to her savior. This account is a version of the contemporary Protestant cliché of masculine stoicism versus feminine emotionalism. Interspersed in his sermon, Samwaies includes tantalizing details about her literary life and the texts of three of her poems.

Samwaies (the same Peter Samwaies who features in the Autobiography of Alice Thornton and who may have been particularly sympathetic to accomplished women) crafts Anne Glover Rhodes as the epitome of the good woman writer. She wrote only on religious or domestic topics, and the domestic topics she chose are treated religiously. The lively dramatization of the Fall which Samwaies selects for inclusion in his sermon as an example of Rhodes’s talent as a writer foregrounds Eve’s sin. Rhodes’s acceptance of Eve’s primary culpability reinforces Samwaies’s presentation of her as a virtuous, gifted woman who exercises her creative gifts without presumption or subversion.

Like her husband, whom she married on January 25, 1638, Mrs. Rhodes was in the service of the Earl and Countess of Elgin (Diana Cecil, formerly Countess of Oxford). Mrs. Rhodes was probably a waiting-gentlewoman; Samwaies describes the Rhodes as two of the Earl’s “principal servants.” The Countess died in 1654, and Benjamin Rhodes asked to be buried at the entrance of her remarkable funerary monument at Maulden, Bedfordshire. He was a staunch Protestant, involved in the hounding of a local clergyman suspected of Romanist sympathies and was anxious to oppose “superstition” in the location of his grave:

... he propounded the place of his burial to be in the North Isle of this Church of Malden, at the entrance into this newly erected Sepulcher for the right Honorable and religious Lady, the Countess of Oxford and Elgin his Mistress, where he said, that both himself and his wife if she died (presaging her sickness also to be mortal) might conveniently be laid together, that such as should come to view her Monument, might tread upon her servants in their passage to it: but he added, that if there should be any difficulty in fitting the place for them, he was not scrupulous; and requested to be interred in the open Churchyard,
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Anne Glover Rhodes, who, on the evidence of her poetry, shared her husband’s Protestantism, came from the Glover family of Hertfordshire and was well educated: she “was a woman of excellent parts...I shall say nothing of her skill in the French tongue, or Faculty in English Poetry, though she exercised it in Translating the holy Psalms, and other portions of holy Scripture.” The “translation” of the Psalms, associated with Rhodes’s skill in English poetry, presumably indicates an English versification of the Book of Psalms, rather than a translation into English from another language, since Samwaies makes no mention of Mrs. Rhodes’s having any knowledge of Latin or Hebrew, although it could indicate that Rhodes made use of a French versification, such as the Marot-Beza version known to have been used by the Sidneys.

Samwaies reinforces the image of the Rhodes as the ideal Christian couple with examples of pious and hortatory letters written by both parents to their sons, letters which the boys had evidently preserved:

It is well that you keep their Letters in your Cabinets, (I had not otherwise had so clear a knowledge of their pious and tender affections toward you) but it will be far better if you preserve them in your hearts.

As will be demonstrated from what follows in this article, Anne Rhodes is an accomplished poet. Her versatility is clear from the following transcribed poems. In the elegy, she plays with the acrostic (a common choice in memorial poetry during this period), representing her incomplete child as nevertheless complete in salvation. Her dialogue is lively, her poem to her husband affecting. Her use of religious subject matter and her versatile use of different forms make her an interesting addition to the growing list of early modern women poets.
Poems

1. A Dialogue of the Fall of Man

Samwaies introduces this poem\textsuperscript{16} with the comment,

She, besides the Translation of the whole Book of the Psalms, left many other Essays of her Poetical genius, which she exercised in divine matters only, as I guess by such papers of hers that I have seen since her death. You may see her felicity that way in what she wrote of man’s Fall, which being briefly described by her, is as followeth.\textsuperscript{17}

The dialogue-form suggests the possibility that this was intended to be set to music and performed by three singers, or, at the least, that the last and possibly the first sections were intended to be sung, bracketing, as they do, the central dialogue.\textsuperscript{18} The involvement of aristocratic women in playwriting is well known. Mary Sidney Herbert’s \textit{Antonius} and Elizabeth Tanfield Cary’s \textit{The Tragedie of Mariam} are examples, but their works do not seem to have been intended for performance.\textsuperscript{19} More relevant to Rhodes’s \textit{Dialogue} are works by women which were intended for performance rather than publication. These were particularly linked to the entertainment tradition, whether in the context of court spectacle or celebrations within a noble family. (Mary Sidney Herbert’s “A dialogue between two shepherds, \textit{Thenot} and \textit{Piers}, in praise of \textit{Astrea}” [1599] is an early example.) The Countess of Oxford and Elgin, Rhodes’s employer, lived in Houghton House, the mansion at Ampthill bought in 1624 by the Countess’s second husband, Thomas Bruce, Earl of Elgin, and probably designed by John Thorpe and Inigo Jones for Mary Sidney Herbert (who died in 1621).\textsuperscript{20} The Countess of Oxford and Elgin had herself performed in court masques and plays, including \textit{Tempe Restored} (1632), “apparently the first time that women singers appeared on the English stage.”\textsuperscript{21} Christian Bruce Cavendish, sister to the Countess’s husband, was the wife of the second Earl of Devonshire, who was the first cousin once removed of Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, authors of masques and the play, \textit{The Concealed Fancies}.\textsuperscript{22} Christian Bruce lived with her brother and sister-in-law at Houghton from 1647 to 1650. Despite Samwaies’s description of
Rhodes’s “Dialogue” as a religious exercise, it may have more in common with the private drama written by such women.23

A DIALOGUE

In that sad day, when by our Parents’ fall,
Themselves, and we in them did forfeit all
To great Jehovah’s wrath, they fearful sought
To hide themselves, but to Arraignment brought
By God’s all-seeing eye, half dead with fear,
This dreadful voice they in the Evening hear,

God. Adam, where art thou? Adam. In the Garden, now
I heard thy voice, and horror seiz’d my brow,
Cause I was naked, so my self I hid.
God. Who told thee so? Hast eat the fruit forbid?
Adam. The woman, whom thou gav’st my help to be,
Brought, and I ate of that forbidden Tree.
God. O what is this that thou hast done?
Eve. Alas,
Lord by the Serpent I beguiled was.
God. For this offence accursed shall he be;

Nor, Adam, thou, nor your posterity
Should scape eternal death, but for his sake
Who on his guiltless head your guilt shall take:
Whose bruised heel shall break the Serpent’s head,
And under’s feet, sin, death and hell shall tread.

This gracious promise us relieves,
Our second Adam us reprieves.
To him, to God, to th’holy Ghost
We (with the glorious Heavenly Host)
Desire eternal praise to sing,
For our Redemption from death’s sting.
2. An Elegy on my First Child, Still-Born.

Samwaies links this poem\textsuperscript{24} to the third one:

To these I shall add only that Elegy which she made of her own child, still-born, and the Verses that she presented with them to her Husband on her Marriage day. And the rather do I select these from many others, because they do not only respect the child's death, but glance at their own mortality.\textsuperscript{25}

Rhodes's poetry indicates a staunchly Protestant outlook. She will not plead the “innocence” of her child in claiming its salvation, but “faith” and God’s “Covenant.” Her claim of salvation for her still-born daughter is particularly striking and allies her with other seventeenth-century parents writing about bereavement, such as her contemporaries Mary Carey Payler and Thomas Crockford.\textsuperscript{26} Rhodes is convinced that her daughter is in Heaven, a view that Samwaies presumably endorsed since he chose to adduce this poem as evidence of her genius. Like other bereaved parents, Rhodes cannot bring herself to believe that her child, still-born though she was, had no saved and immortal soul. Patricia Phillippy, while claiming that such assurances were “wholly aligned with the Anglican belief . . . that ‘grace is not absolutely tied unto the [sacrament] of baptism,’” does find that this belief may be expressed in explicit opposition to Catholicism.\textsuperscript{27} This would certainly be consistent with Anne Rhodes’s Calvinist sympathies, although other bereaved parents of still-born children resort to Marian visual imagery to articulate their loss.\textsuperscript{28}

Rhodes’s poem on her daughter runs counter to several contemporary tropes in dealing with the loss of children. She does not incorporate the idea that the child was a loan from God, to be returned when demanded, rather than a gift to be held outright\textsuperscript{29} nor the idea that the child was taken as a punishment for her own sins — an idea that Mary Carey Payler uses, although she subverts it.\textsuperscript{30} Nor does she choose a plain style for conveying her loss; the incomplete acrostic is ingenious and provides a sophisticated means of questioning the idea that the unbaptized child cannot be saved. Rhodes defends the apparent imperfection of her acrostic and uses it as a means of introducing the idea that the grace of God can transcend earthly
imperfections. The child has no christian name, and the acrostic which is only on her surname acknowledges this, but the poem’s articulation of her birth as a testimony of the heaven-given love of her parents, the way in which her body is treated as a religious relic, placed in a shrine, and the fact that the parents believe that she is now in heaven, counter any suggestion either that having not lived she had no soul to save or that the unbaptized child cannot go to heaven.

The term “child” is interesting: it seems to be used as a synonym for daughter, and is an example of a usage also found in The Winter’s Tale: “a boy or a child, I wonder?” The poem refers to her first daughter, rather than the first child she bore. Her son Richard Rhodes was born in 1640, within two years of her marriage, and the companion-piece to the elegy, the epithalamium, written in 1650 after twelve years of marriage, suggests that the still-birth of the daughter was recent.

An Elegy on my first child,  
still-born

R elics lie here inshrin’d of that chaste love  
H eaven’s Providence united in us two:  
O ur hopes persuade us she is plac’d above;  
D eplore our loss too much we dare not do.  
E re she posses’d a grave she found her tomb,  
S he was not, for God took her from the womb.

Who these Acrosticks read, may judge them lame,  
This infant being describ’d with half her name:  
But view it as a relique not entire,  
Before her Christendom she did expire.  
But God is witness to his Covenant,  
And she without the Seal might have the Grant.  
She wanted Baptism, but with Innocence  
(Which yet we plead not) she departed hence:  
No, ’tis the faith of faithful Abraham’s seed,  
Through which, Lord, thou salvation hast decreed;
And with that faith, I trust, thou didst inspire,
And add this little Cherub to thy Quire:
That though thou gav’st her only dead to me,
She died but to the world, and lives to thee.

3. To My Husband, Presented upon My Marriage Day the Twelfth Year, with the Former Elegy.

Anne Rhodes’s poem to her husband is remarkable for the depth of its affection; he may love longer, but she will still love more. It has touches which suggest that she was familiar with the works of Ben Jonson, John Donne, and possibly Henry King, particularly in the last section, where the image of the first to die as a soldier and the word “calcin’d” echo King’s *An Exequey.*

Other seventeenth-century women wrote poems to their husbands concerning death and separation: Lady Dyer’s address to her husband domesticates her grief by figuring his early death as an early bedtime, and her desire to be reunited with him as her nightly preparations for retirement; he is to “make room” in bed for her. In “A Letter to her Husband, absent upon Publick employment” Anne Bradstreet transforms clichés about marriage (e.g., the husband is the “head” in marriage and husband and wife are “one flesh”) and the conventional images of the Sun-god and the Earth-mother so that she and her husband become archetypes of male and female, husband and wife. Rhodes also uses another *topos,* the unhappy marriage, within which the partners are in a state of perpetual conflict, and turns it into an affirmation of the happiness of her own marriage. The quarrel between Rhodes and her husband is who loves most, and it will only be resolved in death, when the dead partner will have loved most, but the survivor longer. Rhodes in fact died within twenty-four hours of her husband.

*To my Husband, presented
upon my Marriage-day
the twelfth year,
with the former
Elegy.*
My Dear, I do confess this day by me
Should rather with an Epithalamie
Be celebrated, than with Funeral tears,
Enjoying thee, and bliss, so many years.
But these considerations may refine
Our love from Earth, and make it more divine.
This little part of us immortal made,
Is a memento, mortal love must fade.
And that will teach us so to moderate
Affections, that when death shall one translate,
With calmness the survivor may let part,
The love of Heaven lying nearest to the heart;
And next to that we may each other make
The Center of our joys, and freely take
Delight in either, vying in kind strife,
Who loves in most perfection, man or wife.
And in this quarrel, I will never yield,
Till death thy Champion be, and win the field.
And then I’ll give thee leave thyself to boast
The longer lover, though I loved most.
And when we meet again, our dross refin’d,
Our earthly part rarified, and calcin’d,
We shall to perfect love united to be, [sic]
And in this union love eternally.

Notes


2. Several seventeenth-century funeral sermons have been published in the series Funeral Sermons for Women, 1601–1630, ed. Bettie Anne Doebler and Retha M.
Warnicke (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1999–2006), but Anne Glover Rhodes is subordinate to her husband in their joint sermon. This suggests that all funeral sermons of the period, and not simply those devoted to women, should be checked for evidence of women’s writing.

3. Peter Samwaies, The Wise and Faithful Steward, or, A Narration of the Exemplary Death of Mr. Benjamin Rhodes, Steward to the Right Honorable Thomas, Earl of Elgin, etc. Briefly Touch’d in a Funeral Sermon, and since enlarged. Together with some Remarkable Passages concerning Mrs Anne Rhodes his wife, who dying a few hours after him, was buried together in the same grave with him in Maulden Church in Bedfordshire, Aug. 4, 1657 (London: William Godbid, 1657).


6. In accord with contemporary custom Diana Cecil continued to be known as the Countess of Oxford during her second marriage, because this was the senior title.

7. Samwaies, Wise and Faithfull Steward, sigA3v. All quotations and the transcriptions of the poems are modernized in spelling.


11. Ibid., 37.


15. Acrostics as memorial poems may be found in, for instance, Ben Jonson’s ‘On Margaret Ratcliffe’ (Ben Jonson, The Complete Poems, rev. ed., ed. George Parfitt [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1996], 46–47) and the inscriptions on the monuments in St. Mary and St. Benedict, Buckland Brewer, Devon, England, to Philip Vening,
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d.1658; All Saints, Ashbocking, Suffolk, England, to Thomas Horseman, d. 1619, and St. Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich, Suffolk, England, to William Smart, d.1599.


17. Ibid., 63.

18. Professor James Winn has commented to me that the tetrameter of the conclusion is a more common meter for songs and hymns than the opening pentameter and that the rhyme of “Heavenly Host” and “Holy Ghost” would have reminded listeners of the doxology. However, the absence of any indication that music was called for makes it impossible to pronounce on the likelihood of the piece’s having been sung.


25. Ibid., 65.

26. Carey Payler and Crockford both provided funerary monuments for their children: Crockford at Fisherton Delamere, Wiltshire, for both his still-born son and his baptized daughter; Carey Payler in St. Peter ad Vincula, the Tower of London, for her infants who were born alive, Samuel, Maria and Robert, whose death is the subject of one of her poems. For a discussion of Mary Carey Payler’s poem “Upon ye Sight of my abortive Birth ye 31th: of December 1657” (printed in Greer, et.al., *Kissing the Rod*, 158–62), and Thomas Crockford’s memorial to his children, see Jean Wilson, “‘Dead Fruit’: The


28. Wilson, “‘Dead Fruit,’” 91.

29. See, for instance, the inscription on the shroud-brass of Anne Tyrell (d. 1638) at Stowmarket, Suffolk:

   Ann Tyrell/ died 1638 aged 8/ years & 6 months
   Dear virgin child farewell thy mother’s tears
   Cannot advance thy memory, w.ch bears
   A crown above the stars: yet I must mourn,
   And shew the world my off’rings at thine urn.
   And yet, not merely as a mother, make
   This sad oblation for a child’s dear sake:
   For (readers) know, she was more, than a child,
   In infant=age she was as grave as mild,
   All, that, in children, duty call’d might be,
   In her, was friendship and true piety.
   By reason and religion she at seven,
   Prepar’d her self & found her way to heaven.
   High heaven thou hast her & didst take her hence
   The perfect pattern of obedience,
   At those few years, as only lent to show,
   What duty young ones to their parents owe
   And (by her early gravity, appearing
   Full ripe for God, by serving & by fearing)
   To teach the old, to fix on him their trust,
   Before their bodies shall return to dust.

   Anne Tyrell’s mother, identified as the author of this poem, was Anne Keble Tyrell, daughter of a local gentry family. See [http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/page148b.html](http://www.mbs-brasses.co.uk/page148b.html).

30. Wilson, “‘Dead Fruit,’” 89–90.


32. The echoes of Jonson and Donne are heard in the exaltation of divine over corporeal love, found in poems such as Jonson’s “Epode” (*The Complete Poems*, 107–10) and Donne’s “A Valediction; forbidding mourning” and “The Extasie” (*Poems*, ed. Herbert Grierson [London: Oxford University Press, 1933] 44–48.) The echoes of King are heard in “An Exequy,” his memorial poem to his dead wife: “a fierce fever must calcine/ The body of this world” (lines 53–55); “Thou, like the van, first
tookst the field,/ And gotten hast the victory/ In thus adventuring to die” (Henry King, *An Exequy to His Matchless Never to be Forgotten Friend*, lines 106–8). King’s poems were not printed until 1657, although *An Exequy* must date from 1624, when his wife died. This suggests that Rhodes had access to King’s poems in manuscript, in which form they were widely circulated. As a royalist, King spent the late 1640s and 1650s living with family members in the area of Watford and Slough, about twenty miles from Houghton House. The presence of the poems of Ben Jonson and John Donne in the libraries of upper-class women of the period is shown by their presence in the autobiographical Great Triptych of Lady Anne Clifford (c.1650). See Richard T. Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997), 190–91 and Heidi Brayman Hackel, “‘Turning to her ‘Best Companions’: Lady Anne Clifford as Reader, Annotator and Book Collector,” in *Lady Anne Clifford: Culture, Patronage and Gender in 17th-Century Britain*, ed. Karen Hearn and Lynn Hulse (York: Yorkshire Archaeological Society Occasional Paper No.7, 2009), 99–108.


34. See Wilson, “I dote on death,” 56. The poem is printed in Greer, Hastings, Medoff, and Sansone, eds., *Kissing the Rod*, 137–38.
