

A Countess Transformed  
How Lady Susan Vere Became Lady Anne Clifford

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Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Wilton House has been the ancient country manor home of the Earls of Pembroke, and among its treasures is a large painting centered on the wall of the majestic Double Cubed Room. In fact, the Double Cubed Room was explicitly designed by the eminent 17<sup>th</sup> century architect Inigo Jones to properly display this very painting, which spans seventeen feet across and is eleven feet high. Considered “a perfect school unto itself”<sup>1</sup> as an example of the work of Sir Anthony Van Dyck, it contains ten figures, all life size with the exception of the Earl himself who is slightly larger in scale than the rest of his family, a subtle tribute to his dominance of the family group.<sup>2</sup> However, it is not the unique place of this painting in art history or the brilliance of the painter that is called into question, but the identity of the woman in black sitting to the left of the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Pembroke. The official 20<sup>th</sup> century catalogue of the Pembroke family’s art collection flatly identifies the woman as the Earl’s second wife, Anne Clifford.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this paper is to determine if this attribution can stand up to scrutiny when the portrait is placed in its historical and cultural context.

The official reason for the identification of Lady Anne Clifford is the fact that Philip, the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Pembroke, was married to her when the portrait was painted. It is also an historical fact that Philip was married to his first wife, Lady Susan Vere, when the First Folio of William Shakespeare was published in 1623, and of course it is well known that Philip and his older brother William are the “incomparable paire of brethren” to whom it was dedicated.<sup>4</sup> It should be noted here that the familial relationship between the dedicatees of the First Folio and Edward de Vere – a result of this marriage – appears to be troubling to orthodoxy, as Philip’s father-in-law is widely regarded as the leading alternative candidate among those who doubt the traditional attribution of Shakespeare’s works.

The six arguments presented here will show that that the woman seated at the left of the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl is not his second wife Lady Anne Clifford -- as proffered by the Wilton House catalogue -- but his first wife, Lady Susan Vere. If these arguments with their respective evidentiary support are convincing, then one might tender the suggestion that the substitution of Countess Anne for Countess Susan as the Earl’s Lady in the Van Dyck may have something to do with the authorship issue.<sup>5</sup> Thus it is important to

determine the identity of the sitter, and in order to do this, we must first take into account the circumstances of Philip's two marriages.

In 1604, the court of King James was bustling with the news of the marriage of the handsome young Philip Herbert and Lady Susan Vere, the third daughter of the 17<sup>th</sup> Earl of Oxford.<sup>6</sup> It was considered a love match, a surprising occurrence in a time when marriages were arranged for dynastic aggrandizement. Even more remarkable is the largesse that King James bestowed on the union. He was, in effect, the wedding planner, financing the event which went on for days at enormous cost, and supplying the new couple with gifts of money and property, even fulfilling the patriarchal duty of providing Susan Vere with her marriage portion. The King walked the bride down the aisle, accompanied by his royal family. In a statement not often reiterated by historians, King James is reported to have said that had he not already been a married man, he would have married Susan Vere himself rather than giving her to his favorite Philip Herbert.<sup>7</sup> It is further reported that the King showed up at their bedside bright and early the next morning to get a first hand account of their wedding night. They did manage to have ten children, presumably without the supervision of the King, and their marriage of approximately 25 years ended when Susan died from smallpox in 1629.

Philip inherited the Pembroke title at his older brother's death early in 1630. Philip remarried later that year. His choice was Lady Anne Clifford, the widowed Countess of Dorset, and this was somewhat unexpected as, in the words of a Herbert family biographer, her "attractions could not have been conspicuous."<sup>8</sup> Described as a loveless marriage from the beginning, one might ask why the eligible bachelor took on the inimitable widow, a stubborn woman whose negotiating skills had been well honed in decades of legal battles with her Clifford cousins. In fact, she had put up a fight of such magnitude in her efforts to reclaim the Clifford properties that King James himself stepped in to referee the bloodbath. When his royal judgment went against her, she refused to accept it, withstanding enormous pressure from her first husband and just about everybody attached to the royal court. We can gauge her strength of character in one of her letters, in which she wrote that she would not comply with the King's Award "no matter what misery it cost me." The King's decision was ultimately put in place by coercion.<sup>9</sup>

It is not surprising that she brought this steely determination to her marriage with Philip, and even less surprising that the marriage was a disaster, certainly from Philip's point of view. The marriage ended after four years when Philip cast her out of his lodgings in Whitehall Palace in December of 1634,<sup>10</sup> leaving himself "virtually widowed a second time."<sup>11</sup>

Some historians suggest that Van Dyck began the Pembroke family painting in 1634, and although this may be an inadvertent error, it must be clearly stated that this date is not possible: Sir Anthony Van Dyck was out of the country from October of 1633 until March of 1635.<sup>12</sup> Van Dyck could not have begun work on this painting until the summer of 1635, exactly the time when the negotiations for the final separation between Philip and Anne were completed.<sup>13</sup> Given Philip's temper and Anne's obstinacy, it is a safe bet that the discussions between their representatives were not pleasant.

But there is more to the story. When Philip (hereafter called Pembroke) booted Lady Anne out of his palace lodgings, he in effect banished her from the court of King Charles as well. With this "catastrophic collapse of her status and her cause," Lady Anne became a veritable *persona non grata* at the Caroline Court.<sup>14</sup> Worst of all, even her biographers agree that this enormous breach was her fault. Both the Herbert and Clifford family historians concur that Pembroke sought Lady Anne's younger daughter Isabella Sackville as a match for one of his younger sons when he married her.<sup>15</sup> Pembroke thought he and Lady Anne had an agreement for the union of their families in the next generation, and by 1634 it was time to formalize the Herbert/Sackville betrothal. This Lady Anne refused to do. Pure and simple, she wanted Isabella to marry an Earl. A younger son, even a scion of the prestigious Herbert family, just wasn't good enough.

On that fateful December day at Whitehall Palace, Pembroke had apparently called her hand and found that she could not be prevailed upon to finalize the engagement of her Isabella and his son. Pembroke's fury toward his second wife is understandable in light of the fact that she reneged on their deal. Not only was it a breach of good faith but a humiliating rejection of his family.<sup>16</sup> It should be out of the question that he would choose to immortalize Anne Clifford in his family celebration portrait. I should rest my case right here.

But there is more to discover in this multi-faceted investigation. One can hardly miss the beautiful young woman in the luminous silver dress at the very center of the painting. She is Lady Mary Villiers, and it might come as a surprise the extent to which the portrait is all about her.

Mary Villiers was the daughter of George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham, whose rise to the top ranks of the English nobility is well known. He was the great favorite of both King James and King Charles, and after his assassination in 1628, Mary, his first firstborn child, was taken into the royal household. She was raised thereafter as the "spoilt pet of the court" where her nickname was Butterfly.<sup>17</sup> Her marriage contract to the Pembroke heir had been signed in 1626 when she was four years old and Charles

Herbert was seven. Of great significance was her staggering dowry of 25,000 pounds, which was to go into the coffers of the Pembroke family once the marriage was solemnized.<sup>18</sup>

Another element in the story is the munificence that King Charles bestowed on the Flemish master painter Anthony Van Dyck. Van Dyck was knighted in 1632, and, upon his return to England in the spring of 1635, the King himself paid the rent on Van Dyck's resplendent waterfront studio at Blackfriars, and even built a causeway for a more convenient access to it by boat.<sup>19</sup> Replete with musicians and sumptuous banquets, Van Dyck's studio rapidly became the principal gathering place for the Carolinian Court. An observer wrote that the Van Dyck workshop "was frequented by the highest nobles, for example the King, who came daily to see him and took great delight in watching him paint and lingering with him."<sup>20</sup>

It is easy to connect the dots: King Charles visited Van Dyck's studio regularly and could hardly have missed the Titianesque painting of the Pembroke Family taking shape right before his very eyes -- even more compelling as *Butterfly*, the favorite of the Royal Court, occupied center stage in the family group. After the banishment of Lady Anne Clifford, it is bizarre to suggest that Pembroke would take this opportunity to rehabilitate her before the court as a member of *his* family in *his* dynastic portrait. By contrast, the record shows that Pembroke's first wife, Lady Susan Vere, had been well thought of in court circles.

There is a sad postscript regarding the young couple who are celebrated in the painting. Following the custom of separating newlyweds due to the youth of the bride, young Lord Herbert was sent to Italy.<sup>21</sup> He died of smallpox soon after his arrival in Florence, leaving Pembroke to suffer the loss of his son as well as the loss of the prestigious and lucrative Villiers marriage.

Next we turn to the historiography of the identification of the Countess in the portrait. Somewhere along the way someone has wrong-footed himself because it seems that throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was understood that Susan Vere was the woman in the Van Dyck portrait. A good point of departure is the recent commentary by David Howarth, a specialist in seventeenth-century culture and art history. In his recent book *Images of Rule*, Howarth has this to say about the woman in Van Dyck's portrait:

To Pembroke's left a woman sits huddled in black. It has come to be assumed that her tense, sullen isolation indicates Pembroke's second wife, Lady Anne Clifford, with whom Pembroke had contracted a loveless marriage. However, this woman ...is shrouded in black, hands folded on stomach as was conventional in recumbent effigies of the dead,

and it was presumably these features which made [Freeman] O'Donoghue in his catalogue of the British portrait prints in the British Museum, suggest that this disconsolate creature is in fact a posthumous likeness of Pembroke's first wife, Lady Susan Vere. *This is surely right.*<sup>22</sup>

It is nice to have an expert of Howarth's stature dispute the attribution of Lady Anne Clifford; thus his statement, coming at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bears repeating: the Countess in the painting "is in fact a posthumous likeness of Pembroke's first wife, Lady Susan Vere." Yet there is an additional reason besides the sitter's somber appearance for the Susan Vere identification in the British Museum catalogue. Susan is the sitter of record in the engraving of the painting made in 1740, approximately a hundred years after Van Dyck painted the work. This is, of course, the engraving that O'Donoghue lists in his catalogue.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, it seems that O'Donoghue was following the historical information. Indeed, the artist, Bernard Baron, made two engravings of the painting in 1740. In both engravings, now archived in the National Galleries of Scotland, the principal sitters are identified as "Philip Herbert...with his wife Susan Vere."<sup>24</sup>

Along with the two Baron engravings, there are four 18<sup>th</sup> century catalogues that contain inventories of the paintings and art at Wilton House. The earliest catalogue, published in 1731 by Gambarini of Lucca, refers to the Earl's "Lady, Daughter to the Earl of Oxford."<sup>25</sup> In subsequent catalogues put together by Richard Cowdry and James Kennedy, the name of the "Lady's" father is eliminated, but the description implies that the Earl's lady is Susan Vere:

This consists of ten whole Lengths, the two principal Figures (and they are sitting) are Philip Earl of Pembroke and his Lady; on the Right-Hand stand their five sons Charles Lord Herbert, Philip, (afterwards Lord Herbert) William, James, and John; on the Left their Daughter Anna Sophia, and her Husband Robert Earl of Carnarvon; before them Lady Mary, Daughter of George Duke of Buckingham, and wife to Charles, Lord Herbert; and above in the Clouds are two Sons and a Daughter who died young.<sup>26 27</sup>

It can hardly be questioned that the children in the portrait, referred to as "their five sons" and "their Daughter," are Susan Vere's children. There were no children from Pembroke's marriage to Anne Clifford. However, Susan's name is only *implied* -- thanks to the fact that the children are hers -- and this does seem to be a bit of an oversight. After all, Countess Susan was the daughter of an Earl and the granddaughter of Lord Burghley, whose stellar position in English history needs no elaboration here. After all, Lady Mary Villiers is referenced in these catalogues as the "Daughter of George

Duke of Buckingham.” Thus, it should not be too much to ask that “his Lady” be recognized both by name and aristocratic lineage. Actually, Susan gets her name back in the last of the 18<sup>th</sup> century catalogues in which she is acknowledged as “Susan, daughter of Edward, Earl of Oxford.”<sup>28</sup>

Along with the identification of the Baron engravings of 1740 and the identifications in the 18<sup>th</sup> century catalogues, there is an eyewitness account of a traveler who visited Wilton House in 1738:

And now I am gone so far I am come to the grand point, the account of the great picture, my heart begins to fail me...and a bold undertaking it is for me, to give you any account of the noble picture...” He continues in this vein for a while, then finally gets around to describing Earl Philip and his Countess: “ On my Lord’s left hand sits my Lady in a great chair, all in black, with her hands before her in a great tranquility: she was Susan, daughter to Edward, Earl of Oxford.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1801, the antiquarian John Britton wrote an extended account of the Van Dyck portrait in his *Beauties of Wiltshire*, mostly dealing with the unfortunate cleaning processes to which the painting had been subjected earlier in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Of interest here is that, at this time, Philip is still sitting next to “Susan his wife.”<sup>30</sup>

These sources are submitted as evidence that it was understood throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century that the Earl’s “Lady” was Susan Vere. It seems that the change of the sitter’s identity from the first wife to the second is a later phenomenon. The next step is to narrow down the time frame in which this adjustment was made.

Notices of the painting are few and far between in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first to follow Britton was William Hazlitt in his *Picture Galleries of England*. Writing in 1824, Hazlitt notes that “There are the old Lord and Lady Pembroke.” The Old Lady Pembroke – as he calls her -- is without a name at all, but she is not quite yet Lady Anne Clifford. Continuing in his customary gruff tone, Hazlitt describes the Earl’s Countess as “his help-mate looking a little fat and sulky by his side...”<sup>31</sup>

On behalf of the Royal Gallery in Berlin, Director Gustav Waagen came out in 1838 with a massive multi-volume tome: *Art and Artists in England*. Van Dyck’s painting is now of “The Earl and His Countess.” Again, the name of the Countess has gone by the wayside, but in a tiny slip twixt cup and lip, Waagen notes that “her daughter,” Anna Sophia, is to “her left.”<sup>32</sup>

After Waagen, there are only occasional references to the portrait, and these recall Horace Walpole’s *Anecdotes of Painting in England*. Published in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Walpole is the source of the oft quoted (and previously mentioned) praise that Van Dyck’s portrait of the Pembroke

family “would serve alone as a school of this master.” However, Walpole had scrupulously avoided mentioning any of the sitters by name, and commentary based on his observations is silent on this point.<sup>33</sup>

With the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can turn our attention to the distinguished authority and art connoisseur, Sir Lionel Cust. He was the curator of The National Portrait Gallery, editor of the Burlington Magazine, and a member of The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.<sup>34</sup> In 1900 he published a definitive volume on the work of Sir Anthony Van Dyck in which he has this to say about what he calls this “work of great importance.”

The principal painting there is the immense composition representing the fourth Earl of Pembroke with his second wife, Anne Clifford, and his family, including his son Philip, Lord Herbert, afterwards fifth Earl of Pembroke, his son’s wife Penelope Naunton, and also his daughter Anne Sophia, with her husband Robert Dormer, Earl of Carnarvon.<sup>35</sup>

It seems that Cust’s identification is the line of demarcation for the official attribution of Lady Anne Clifford as the Earl’s lady in black. This identification has been adhered to throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century – with the two exceptions previously noted. Aside from the introduction of Lady Anne Clifford onto the canvas, Cust made an imponderable mistake when he substituted Penelope Naunton for Lady Mary Villiers! Where did Penelope Naunton come from? Any quick check in any book about the peerage will reveal that Penelope, the wealthy heiress of Ralph Naunton, married Viscount Paul Bayning in 1634 and was widowed in 1638, thereby freeing up her person and her pocketbook for the Pembroke earldom. When she married Lord Philip Herbert in 1639, the paint on Van Dyck’s canvas was quite dry.<sup>36</sup>

More than a century after the publication of the four 18<sup>th</sup> century catalogues, a new catalogue of the Wilton House treasures was published in 1907. The author, Nevile R. Wilkinson, had been a Captain of Her Majesty’s Coldstream Regiment of Foot Guards, but perhaps his qualifications for the task were enhanced by the fact that he was married to a daughter of the Earl of Pembroke.<sup>37</sup> In his grand two volume folio -- referred to by later writers as the “Great Catalogue” -- Captain Wilkinson reinforces the Lady Anne Clifford attribution. In the chapter about the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl and his family, Wilkinson devotes four pages to the virtues of Lady Anne while Susan Vere’s name is called up only once, specifically as the mother of just one of the Earl’s children. For all practical purposes, Susan has disappeared into the woodwork as a nearly anonymous first wife.

Following shortly upon the heels of Captain Wilkinson, the 20<sup>th</sup> century proliferation of the identification of Lady Anne was advanced by her first biographer, Dr. George C. Williamson. Williamson was widely published with an enviable resume to his credit, and it is certainly his endorsement that sealed the identification of Lady Anne Clifford in the Van Dyck.<sup>38</sup> In his limited edition biography of Lady Anne published in 1922, he goes to great lengths to describe his subject's "grave countenance" in Van Dyck's painting.<sup>39</sup>

Then he reveals that he has examined *another* much smaller portrait of Lady Anne Clifford at Wilton House. Hoping that two wrongs will make a right, Williamson has this to say about the heretofore unknown small portrait:

It had been forgotten for many years, and was not included in the great catalogue of the Wilton pictures, [i.e. Captain Wilkinson's two volumes] but was found in an upstairs room...It bears a long inscription saying that it represents Lady Anne, and the likeness to that in the great Van Dyck is **quite unmistakable**, although the portrait depicts her more cheerful in appearance...She has suspended from the front of the corsage a miniature of Lord Pembroke. As she is in a black dress, it is possible that this portrait may have been painted immediately after Lord Pembroke's decease.<sup>40</sup>

The suggestion that the small portrait was painted after Pembroke's death is simply rubbish. Pembroke died in 1650. Lady Anne was born in 1590. The sitter in the small painting is hardly a sixty-year-old woman. Dr. Williamson, of all people, should be able to do better than this. That this painting was not included in any of the Wilton House catalogues is most intriguing: *what else* has not been included in these historic catalogues? A unique feature of the portrait is the miniature of Pembroke worn at the neck of the sitter. As Williamson himself was an expert on miniature painting, he should have been able to recognize a likeness of Pembroke when he saw it. A miniature brooch was more likely to be worn by a wife; hence, the wearer's identity can be surmised by the simple process of elimination. With this in mind, the presumption should be entertained that the balding woman with the aquiline features is Susan Vere.<sup>41</sup>

Of course it would be helpful to our program to have a portrait to work from that was a securely established likeness of Susan Vere. In an ancient catalogue of 1842 titled *A Hand-Book to Public Galleries of Art In and Near London*, there is a listing of a "Portrait of a Lady in Rich Dress" located at the Dulwich Picture Gallery.<sup>42</sup> It is identified as a portrait of "Susan Vere, first wife of Philip Earl of Pembroke." Better yet, it is listed as a painting by Van Dyck. It would be just what the doctor ordered for the purposes of



comparison, even though the compiler observed that “this picture has suffered terribly.”<sup>43</sup> However, since this early attribution, the identity of the painter has been changed from Van Dyck to Cornelius Johnson the Elder, and the identity of the sitter is officially classified as unknown. It is now called “A Lady in Blue.” This portrait is still in the collection of the Dulwich Picture Gallery and images are available upon request.

In comparing the Dulwich portrait and the photo in Williamson’s book of the small “Lady Anne” painting, the features are similar enough to be the same person, painted by a great artist and a mediocre one respectively. Obviously, the loveliness of the painting formerly attributed to Van Dyck far surpasses the small painting, which Williamson attributed to William Dobson, a Van Dyck follower.<sup>44</sup> That both figures are balding is striking, and this is an element far removed from Lady Anne Clifford whose abundant dark hair was one of her better features.

In comparing the Blue Lady to the figures of the Earl and his Lady in the great picture, what is striking is the similarity of the Earl’s and the Blue Lady’s sideward glance – a pose characteristic of Van Dyck which lesser painters tried to emulate. In addition to the graceful movement, the Lady in Blue has the sensitive expression of a Van Dyck, something else beyond the grasp of the lesser contemporaneous painters whose portraits were more in line with the dull, static Jacobean effigies.<sup>45</sup>

Sadly, unless the Blue Lady portrait ultimately regains its identification as Susan Vere, there are no established portraits of her extant. However, we do have a good many paintings of Lady Anne Clifford. Quite a different face is apparent when the physiognomy of Lady Anne is compared with the sitter in the Pembroke family portrait. At approximately age 28, Lady Anne sat for William Larkin and the next year for Paul van Somer, both distinguished artists of the era. There are two representations of her by Sir Peter Lely in the mid to late 1640s, and these likenesses correspond almost exactly to her portrait in the right panel of her great triptych painted in the mid 1640s, about a decade after Van Dyck painted the Pembroke family. In commenting on these portraits, a recent biographer remarked how much Lady Anne had aged in only ten years “since Van Dyck painted her.”<sup>46</sup> The likeness that dates from 1629, right before the Pembroke marriage, is the closest in real time to Van Dyck’s portrait. That these renditions of Lady Anne bear no resemblance to the Earl’s Countess is compelling evidence that she is not the sitter in the Van Dyck, for it should not be even a remote possibility that Van Dyck could fail to capture such elementary elements as Lady Anne’s dark hair and her distinctive features with the dimple in her chin.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of the disparity of the resemblance between the sitter in the Van Dyck and the many portraits of Lady Anne, her identification continues to be perpetuated by her biographers who put their imaginations to work to account for the sitter's remote, disconnected appearance. Martin Holmes describes her "detachment" and Richard Spence refers to her as "looking withdrawn," hoping this will explain away the Countess' vacant "oblivious gaze."<sup>48</sup> They both leave unexplained why the Countess is clothed in basic, somber black, admittedly "almost humbly in comparison" to her husband with his Garter regalia and the colorfully attired young people.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, the costuming itself is an indication that the presence of the Countess is a fiction, an example of what one authority calls "the typical Jacobean taste for ingenuity in paradox."<sup>50</sup> In a recent study, Emile Gordenker discusses how Van Dyck used clothing to fictionalize his sitters.<sup>51</sup> That the lady in black is not in the rich dress of a Countess – while all the other figures are elaborately attired -- is significant in the context of Van Dyck's portraiture in which he used simple, flowing costuming to remove his subjects from real time and put them "between the actual world and the realm of mythology."<sup>52</sup> Of course the three cherubs floating at the top corner are obvious allegorical iconography that further enhances the fictionalization of the family group.<sup>53</sup>

Looking even more closely at Van Dyck's Countess, the folded, overlapped arms are another clue that the sitter is Pembroke's deceased wife. Van Dyck uses this pose in only one other portrait that I can find: that of Cecilia Crofts. According to Malcolm Rogers, "Her arms are folded in a cradling gesture over her womb, perhaps indicating that she was pregnant when the portrait was painted."<sup>54</sup> It seems that the folded hands and cradled arms are associated with motherhood and are an appropriate motif for the matriarch of a dynasty.<sup>55</sup>

Using the cradled arms for one more comparison, the arms in the Crofts portrait are more rounded than those of Pembroke's Countess, and her fingers are more delicate and loosely held. Though the pose is essentially the same, the arms and hands of Cecilia Crofts are far more graceful and natural than Pembroke's lady in black. Again, the skill of the master painter is apparent in the subtle artistry. Cecilia Crofts is graceful; Pembroke's Lady is rigid.

If a visitor were standing before this painting in the Double Cube Room at Wilton House – and could see it clearly without being blinded by the magnificence of the room and the treasures it houses – he might notice one more thing: that the Countess is "*noticeably thinly painted*" in comparison to the rest of the figures.<sup>56</sup> The austere Countess is a foremost example of Van

Dyck's "miraculous rendering of surface textures."<sup>57</sup> *She* is ethereal. Surreal. A gossamer figure captured in the thin paint. She is not quite there, even on the canvas, in the same way that the other family members are.

And what a contrast she is with the rest of the family in motion all about her. It could be a scene from a well-choreographed ballet. Daughter Anna Sophia is the only one who has actually found her place on the stage as she reaches for her husband's hand. He is moving up to the next step, as is Lady Mary Villiers, who turns to glance back at the viewer. The Earl is turning and gesturing to his right, introducing his heir, it is thought, to his bride.<sup>58</sup> The two older boys are turning towards him, flaunting their attire, and the three younger boys are directing their attention upwards, as if the cherubs floating above were a distraction. Amidst all the commotion, the thinly painted figure with the squared off arms gazes vacantly away, and her stillness is palpable.

After all that's been said, it is not too much to ask that common sense be brought into the equation. Clearly, the purpose of the painting was to celebrate the Pembroke family dynasty. It is reasonable that Countess Susan would be given the respect she is due at her husband's side, as the dynastic survival of the Herbert family has been assured by the children of their marriage. David Howarth notes: "It was entirely appropriate that Van Dyck should have included the mother of Pembroke's children. The spirit of the Earl's first wife thus compliments the presence of Lady Mary Villiers, by whom Pembroke expected to be provided with grandchildren."<sup>59</sup>

Thus, there are many reasons for the Susan Vere identification: (1) the breakup of the marriage between Pembroke and his second wife; (2) the 18<sup>th</sup> century historical identifications; (3) the sitter's lack of resemblance to Lady Anne's established portraits; (4) the rigid, funereal pose of the sitter with the fictionalized attire and symbolism of matriarchy, all rendered in the thin paint by Van Dyke; and (5) just plain common sense.

As previously stated, twentieth century scholars use the marriage of Pembroke and Lady Anne Clifford as the reason for their identification of her in Van Dyck's painting; and, indeed, the Earl's second marriage would stay on the books until one or the other of them died in spite of their *de facto* divorce.<sup>60</sup> This circumstance notwithstanding, it seems that the "time is out of joint," and this departure from real time, called chronological dissonance, should be addressed. Therefore, one question is still on the table: Were posthumous likenesses used in other paintings of the era?

Numerous examples of chronological latitude can be found. The well known painting of Sir Thomas More and his family was commissioned by More's grandson in 1593. In this multi-generational composite, the living

Thomas More II is elderly and appears to be about the same age as his great-grandfather at the other side of the painting. His own father is a young man, and his famous grandfather, who was executed by Henry VIII in 1535, appears as he did in the fullness of life.<sup>61</sup>

Another example of chronological incongruity, as well as an example of the custom of commemorating lifetime landmarks in works of art, can be found in the charming family gathering of Henry VIII. In this painting the King celebrates his decision to put his two daughters back in the line of succession in 1544.<sup>62</sup> Henry's son Prince Edward, the Tudor heir, is standing at his father's right knee. The Queen chosen for the place of honor at the King's left is his third wife, Jane Seymour, who died giving birth to the Prince six years earlier. Of course in real time Henry was happily married (more or less) to his sixth wife, Queen Catherine Parr.

As Henry VIII's family portrait is a precedent for the Van Dyck portrait, it must be asked if art historians are sure – *absolutely certain* -- that it is the deceased Queen Jane who is at Henry's side and not the contemporaneous Queen Catherine. The identification is indeed nailed down. The image of Jane Seymour was copied, almost exactly, from an earlier painting by Hans Holbein dating from 1537. The queen's gabled hood and whelk-shell headdress are an unmistakable mark of Queen Jane. In *Tudor Costume and Fashion*, Herbert Norris explains that Henry's later Queens chose the more fashionable French hood and headdress.<sup>63</sup> It is with certainty that the Queen at King Henry's side is identified as his deceased wife.<sup>64</sup>

Van Dyck himself was called upon to portray deceased loved ones on canvas. Sir Kenelm Digby commissioned two paintings of his wife Venetia Stanley after her death. The first was painted two days after her unexpected demise when Van Dyck responded quickly to Digby's request to paint her before her body was removed for burial. This memorial keepsake was said to have been a great comfort to Sir Kenelm.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, in a subsequent effort to vindicate her reputation, he also commissioned from Van Dyck an elaborate allegory of her as Prudence, something she had hardly been in her younger days as the notorious courtesan of the Carolinian Court. As he did with the Pembroke Family portrait, Van Dyck put an allegorical scenario to good use to fictionalize his subject, and "Prudence" is crowned by cherubs -- her "virtue rewarded after death."<sup>66</sup>

The tomb of the Duke of Buckingham furnishes another example of chronological irregularity. Located in the Henry VII Chapel in Westminster Abbey, the dress and appearance of the Duke's children have been used to determine when the monument was completed.<sup>67</sup> Of special interest is Lady Mary Villiers, the "Butterfly" of the Carolinian Court. She appears on the

tomb as a child along with her brothers. Two years later, she will be a young woman on Van Dyck's canvas. Included in this funerary scene is a boy reclining with his right arm supported on a skull. This is Charles, the Duke's deceased son. His presence along with the three living children reveals how well accepted was the convention of including deceased family members in the living family group.

## CONCLUSION

It is apparent that things did not go well for Philip Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery. His marriage to Lady Anne Clifford cost him dearly. He never saw a shilling from her estates, and did not even manage to reel in her younger daughter as a match for his younger son -- something that would have been a real coup for the Herbert family.<sup>68</sup> When the difficulties of their marriage are considered, it is startling that the memory of Lady Anne Clifford, and not Lady Susan Vere, is raised up by later generations of his family.

Indeed, it begs the question: Is the transformation of Lady Anne Clifford into the Earl's Countess in the Van Dyck painting connected to the Shakespeare Authorship Question? Researchers Bernice and Alan Cohen think so, and provide additional information about the Van Dyck portrait in an article published in the De Vere Society Newsletter.<sup>69</sup> As noted by the Cohens, it explains some things when Countess Susan Vere is factored into the equation. With her literary interests, it might be thought that it was her influence that motivated her husband and his brother to support Ben Jonson's efforts in the publishing of Shakespeare's First Folio. Furthermore, it would explain how Jonson had access to the unpublished Shakespeare manuscripts, as Susan Vere could have inherited the manuscripts from her father and passed them along to Jonson.

This study concludes with the comment by the 19<sup>th</sup> century editor Dr. Grosart regarding Susan's father, Edward de Vere: "An unlifted shadow lies across his memory."<sup>70</sup> The gradual disappearance of Countess Susan into the mists of history sends a signal that, for some reason, this shadow has fallen on his third daughter as well. After what appears to be a concerted effort on the part of the Pembroke descendents -- her descendents -- to remove her from the chronicles of their family, only one little problem has remained through the centuries: Countess Susan Vere cannot be erased from the Van Dyck masterpiece on the wall of Wilton House.

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<sup>1</sup> Richardson, *Aedes Pembrochiana* A New Account and Description of the Antiquities and Curiosities in Wilton-House (London: R. Baldwin, 1774), 74.

<sup>2</sup> Alfred Moir, *Anthony Van Dyck* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1994), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney, 16<sup>th</sup> Earl of Pembroke. *A Catalogue of the Paintings and Drawings at Wilton House* (London: Phaidon Press LTD, 1968), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Margaret P. Hannay, *Phillip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 159-62. In 1597, Lord and Lady Pembroke sought the marriage of their older son William and Oxford's second daughter, Lady Bridget Vere. Oxford gave his consent to the match that "dothe greatly content me, for Bridget's sake, whome always I have wished a good husband..." The marriage negotiations fell apart due to political reasons.

<sup>5</sup> The presence of Susan Vere in the equation opens the door to issues which have been heretofore left largely unexplored. First of all, there is the question of the Herbert brothers' motivation for lending their names and political clout to the publication of the First Folio, something that Charlton Hinman describes as a "decidedly chancy venture." (*The Norton Facsimile*, pages x and xi). It may be thought that their motivation was the preservation of the masterpieces of a family patriarch, an interest not shown by the descendants of the traditional "Stratfordian Shakespeare." Unexplained too by the traditional story is the source of the "considerable outlay of capital" that Hinman thinks was needed to get the Folio through the publishing process. Again, the Herbert "Brethren" are a likely source if for no better reason than that they are the only possible source of the "outlay" of venture capital needed to get the job done. But then again their motivation is puzzling and may be explained by the Herbert/Vere marriage. Another question is the extent of Ben Jonson's participation in the First Folio. Although orthodoxy reluctantly accepts him as the editor – once again because he is the only person in sight with the credentials for the job – great credit has been traditionally given to the actors Heminge and Condell. A closer examination of the long-standing relationship between Ben Jonson and the Pembroke family (including Countess Susan) diminishes the importance that has been attributed to Heminge and Condell and puts Ben Jonson in a different light.

<sup>6</sup> Lucy Aikin, *Memoirs of the Court of King James the First* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees Orme, Brown, 1822), 205. Sir Ralph Winwood's report of the nuptials includes additional details of the wedding celebration at court and information about the King's gift of 500 pounds land for the bride's jointure.

<sup>7</sup> Aikin. 205-06.

<sup>8</sup> Tresham Lever, *The Herberts of Wilton* (London: John Murray, 1967), 98. Shortly after the death of her first husband, the Countess contracted smallpox "which disease did so martyr my face."

<sup>9</sup> Richard T. Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery (1590-1676)* (Great Britain: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1997), 40-58. Spence discusses in great detail Lady Anne Clifford's legal struggles to win back the Clifford properties from which she had been disinherited by her father's will.

<sup>10</sup> Spence, 99.

<sup>11</sup> Spence, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Susan J. Barnes, Nora De Poorter, Oliver Millar, Horst Vey, *Van Dyck, A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 8-9, 573. The 1968 Wilton House catalogue states that it was "painted in London, 1634-35." Confusion still exists on the dates of Van Dyck's sojourn in Brussels (59-60). There is an occasional suggestion that the painting dates to a time prior to Van Dyck's departure for Brussels in the fall of 1633. These are gainsaid by the appearance of Mary Villiers who was born in March of 1622. The figure of Mary Villiers in Van Dyck's large painting is certainly not an 11 year old child. Moreover, Robert Dormer, the Earl's son-in-law, had been out of the country on an extended trip, returning in June of 1635 to take his place to the left of his wife.

<sup>13</sup> The formal settlement of separation was signed on June 5, 1635.

<sup>14</sup> Spence, 101.

<sup>15</sup> Nevile R. Wilkinson, *Wilton House Pictures* (London: Cheswick Press, 1907), 290. Adam Nicholson, *Earls of Paradise* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2008), 222. Martin Holmes, *Proud Northern Lady*. (London: Phillimore & Co., LTD, 1975), 132. Spence, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Wilkinson, 290. Spence, 111.

<sup>17</sup> Wilkinson, 297.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholson, 222. Differences of opinion on dates and facts of the Herbert/Villiers marriage vex the researcher every step of the way. Even the exact amount of the dowry is in question. Nicholson seems uncertain and gives the amount as 20,000 and 25,000 pounds in different places in his book. Lever agrees

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with the 25,000 pounds. (105) Howarth comes in on the low side with 10,000 pounds. (227). Writing in 1907, Wilkinson puts the figure at 20,000 pounds. (297)

<sup>19</sup> Van Dyck made many trips between England and the Continent. A detailed account of his travels and activities is provided in the Chronology at the beginning of the Complete Catalogue cited above. (8-9).

<sup>20</sup> Emilie Gordenker, *Anthony Van Dyck and the Representations of Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture*. (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2002), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Lever, 105. Nicolson, 230-31.

<sup>22</sup> David Howarth, *Images of Rule. Art and Politics in the English Renaissance, 1485-1649* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 226-27.

<sup>23</sup> Freeman O'Donoghue, *Catalogue of Engraved British Portraits in The British Museum*, vol. V (London: Longmans, 1922), 49. This is cited by Howarth (304).

<sup>24</sup> Both engravings are in the permanent collection of the NGS, ID # EPL 34.1 and UP P 47. The former is available for reproduction in black and white photography, and the staff responds promptly to requests.

<sup>25</sup> Gambarini of Lucca, *A Description of the Earl of Pembroke's Pictures* (Westminster: A. Campbell, 1731), 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Cowdry, *A Description of the Pictures, Statues, Busto's, Basso-Relievos, and other curiosities at the Earl of Pembroke's House at Wilton* (London: J. Robinson, 1751), 58.

<sup>27</sup> James Kennedy, *A New Discription of Pictures* (London: Benjamin Collins, 1758), 53.

<sup>28</sup> Richardson. *Aedes Pembrochiana*. (Great Britain: Salisbury Press, 1795). 74. The Twelfth Edition is available through Google Digitized Books.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkinson. 302-03.

<sup>30</sup> John Brittan, *Beauties of Wiltshire, Vol 1* (London: J. D. Dewick, 1801), 180.

<sup>31</sup> William Hazlitt, *Picture Galleries of England* (London: C. Templeman, 1836), 106-07. Citation from Google Digitized Books, University of Wisconsin collection.

<sup>32</sup> Gustav Waagen, *Treasures of Art in Great Britain, Vol. III* (London: John Murray, 1838). Reprint, Elbiron Classics. 153. Several editions of this book are available through Google Digitized Books, but the pages describing the paintings at Wilton House appear in only one of the books online.

<sup>33</sup> Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England, Vol. II* (London: J. Dodsley, 1786).

<sup>34</sup> Lionel Cust, *King Edward VII and his court: some reminiscences by Sir Lionel Cust, K.C.V.G.* (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1930), xix.

<sup>35</sup> Lionel Cust, *Van Dyck* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), 119.

<sup>36</sup> Lever, 106.

<sup>37</sup> Sidney, 9.

<sup>40</sup> Dr. Williamson was one of the general editors of Bryan's *Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*, still an important reference on library shelves. His *Curious Survivals: Habits and Customs of the Past That Still Live in the Present* as well as books on Pietro Vannucci, George Morland, and *The Anonimo: Notes on Pictures and Works of Art in Italy* are among his recently republished work. His versatility is apparent in the wide range of subjects on which he wrote, to name a few: *The Book of Amber, The Money of the Bible, Everybody's Book on Collecting, Guildford in Olden Times, The Imperial Russian Dinner Service*, and a *Reader's Guide to T.S. Eliot*.

<sup>39</sup> George C. Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford* (Great Britain: Kendal, Titus, Wilson & Son, 1922), 349.

<sup>40</sup> Williamson, 349-50.

<sup>41</sup> This portrait is Item #95 in the 1968 Wilton House Catalogue. The inscription states that the sitter is Lady Anne Clifford. No image is provided in the catalogue, but the description fits the plate in Williamson's 1922 book, particularly as it is considered "neither good nor flattering." The miniature at her neck is now thought to be of her first husband, the Earl of Dorset. The catalogue notes that "Old re-paints were removed in 1950" (37-38).

<sup>42</sup> Mrs. Jameson, *Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and near London* (London: John Murray, 1842), 464. Kessinger Publishing, 2004. Mrs. Jameson lists this portrait as Item #134. It is now catalogued as Item #DPG89. (Personal correspondence with the Dulwich Picture Gallery).

<sup>43</sup> Jameson, 464.

<sup>44</sup> The 1968 Wilton House catalogue does not suggest who the artist of Item #95 may have been.

<sup>45</sup> Nigel Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 234. The resemblance of paintings of the time with funeral effigies is not

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accidental. Llewellyn notes that “to follow a painted portrait in the making of an effigy was standard practice throughout the post-Reformation period, especially when top people were being commemorated.”

<sup>46</sup> Spence, 111. The images of the young Lady Anne are found in Spence’s biography, pp. 74-77. The portrait dated c. 1629 is on p. 93, and the elderly Lady Anne on pp. 112-13.

<sup>47</sup> In the Complete Catalogue edited by Barnes, et al, there is no listing of a Van Dyck portrait of Lady Anne Clifford alone. If this book is as comprehensive as it appears, then Van Dyck did not paint Lady Anne (assuming that the identification of her in the Pembroke Family group is erroneous). As Van Dyck’s subjects were courtiers, families and friends in the inner circle of the Royal Court, it is unsurprising that she was not granted the privilege of “sitting” for him after her estrangement from Pembroke. Also, since many portraits of Lady Anne survive, it is odd that a Van Dyck would have “gone missing” if indeed one had been painted by this master.

<sup>48</sup> Holmes, 128. Spence, 102.

<sup>49</sup> Spence, 102.

<sup>50</sup> Ronald W. Lightbrown, “Issac Besnier, Sculptor to Charles I, and His Work for Court Patrons.” *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Court*, ed. Howarth, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1993). 148.

<sup>51</sup> Gordenker, 62.

<sup>52</sup> Gordenker, 52.

<sup>53</sup> Gordenker, 53.

<sup>54</sup> Malcolm Rogers, “‘Golden Houses for Shadows’: Some Portraits of Thomas Killigrew and His Family.” *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Court*, ed. Howarth, 222-23.

<sup>55</sup> Oliver Millar, *The Age of Charles I*. (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1972), 240. Martha von Monmouth is painted by Van Dyck with similarly folded hands, considered symbolic of her pregnancy. Barnes, 558-59. Millar notes that Van Dyck painted Queen Henrietta Maria with similarly folded hands when she was pregnant, though the arms were not overlapped as they are in the Crofts and Pembroke paintings.

<sup>56</sup> Barnes, 573.

<sup>57</sup> Richard Ollard, “Clarendon and the Art of Prose Portraiture in the Age of Charles II.” *Art and Patronage in the Caroline Court, Essays in Honour of Sir Oliver Millar*, ed. Howarth, 197.

<sup>58</sup> Moir, 114.

<sup>59</sup> Howarth, 227. The obsession of the upper classes with dynastic considerations should be compelling motivation for Pembroke to put his first wife by his side in his grand dynastic portrait, even if his second marriage had been satisfactory, which it certainly was not.

<sup>60</sup> David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 86. The infamous divorce trial of Lady Frances Howard and the Earl of Essex is an object lesson in the difficulties presented in obtaining a divorce, even among the upper aristocracy. As Roderick Phillips observes: “England was unique in the sixteenth century as the only country where an established or dominant reformed church did not break with the Roman Catholic doctrine of marital indissolubility.”

<sup>61</sup> Karen Hearn, ed., *Dynasties Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530-1630*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1996), 128-29.

<sup>62</sup> David Starkey, *Elizabeth: Apprenticeship* (Great Britain: Vintage, 2001). 30-31. It is noteworthy that the two Tudor princesses appear to be the same age, though Mary was sixteen years older than Elizabeth.

<sup>63</sup> Herbert Norris, *Tudor Costume and Fashion* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 1997). 287-88.

<sup>64</sup> Alfred Moir concurs with both the identifications and the influence of the Holbein mural as a model for Van Dyck’s Pembroke Family, noting that “Holbein’s mural of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour was destroyed by fire in 1698, but in the 1630s it was at Whitehall where Pembroke had his London accommodations” (114).

<sup>65</sup> Ann Sumner and Polly Amos. “Kenelm Digby and Venetia Stanley: The Love Story of the Seventeenth Century.” *Death, Passion, and Politics Van Dyck’s Portraits of Venetia Stanley and George Digby* (Great Britain: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 1996), 30-31

<sup>66</sup> Graham Parry, “Van Dyck and the Caroline Court Poets.” *Van Dyck 350*. Eds. Susan J. Barnes and Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., (Washington, Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1994), 259.

<sup>67</sup> Lightbrown, 150-52. The size of the younger son, born in April of 1629, is an important factor in dating the monument, as is the appearance of Lady Mary, the oldest child.

<sup>68</sup> Spence, 111.



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<sup>69</sup> Bernice and Alan Cohen. "The Riddle of the Countess of Pembroke." *The De Vere Society Newsletter*, June, 2009, 24-28. The Cohens note a guidebook written in 1823 by J. P. Neale and T. Moule in which the painting is stated to represent "Philip, Earl of Pembroke, and Susan his countess, daughter of Edward, Earl of Oxford." (26).

<sup>70</sup> J. Thomas Looney, *Shakespeare Identified*, ed. Ruth Loyd Miller (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1975), 124.

