

Viscount and Viscountess Falkland



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Henry and Elizabeth Cary, Viscount and Viscountess Falkland, were married in 1602, just before Henry's portrait was painted. Elizabeth's portrait was made some years later by a different artist, probably as a companion piece to that of her husband. Both are typical early 17th-century English portraits, with their stiff poses, flattened space, and emphasis on costume.

The first six years of the Carys' marriage were marked by separation, with Henry in active service, in military campaigns, or at court. After being reunited with her husband, Elizabeth bore her first child in 1609, with 10 more to come in fairly rapid succession. Following Henry's promotion to Viscount Falkland in 1620, he was posted to Dublin as Lord Deputy in 1622, and Lady Falkland joined him there in the same year. During her time in Ireland, she was increasingly drawn to Catholicism and sought to reconcile this newfound faith with loyalty to her Anglican husband, without success.

Elizabeth's father was Sir Lawrence Tanfield, the former Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer to King James I. Still incensed by his only child's earlier lavish funding of her husband's career in Ireland, he disinherited her at his death in 1625, leaving his estate to her eldest son, Lucius. Now facing financial ruin, Elizabeth returned to England in haste—having only recently given birth to her last child—and paid a visit to her mother at Burford Priory, Oxfordshire, on her mission to garner maternal support.

During Elizabeth's time in Burford, her mother began planning a grand memorial for her deceased husband, which proved very controversial. Prevented from placing the tomb in Westminster Abbey, she was thwarted at the local Burford church as well. Her husband was extremely unpopular because of his interference in local affairs, his greed, and his corrupt practices in office. Undeterred, she forged ahead without permission, burying her husband at midnight and having the monument constructed around the corpse over the following three years.



St. John the Baptist, Burford.
Photograph courtesy of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.

Tanfield monument, St. John the Baptist, Burford, after 1625.
Photograph courtesy of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.

On an enormous tomb lie the stately figures of Elizabeth and Lawrence Tanfield, with a kneeling grandson, Lucius Cary, at their feet. At their heads, an effigy of Elizabeth Cary kneels in prayer, an ideal daughter, devout and matronly.



Tanfield monument, effigy of Lucius Cary. Photograph courtesy of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.

Tanfield monument, effigy of Elizabeth Cary. Photograph courtesy of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation.

Toward the end of 1625, unreconciled with her mother and no prospect of support in sight, Elizabeth left Burford for London. She went to mass with the Catholic Queen, Henrietta Maria of France, spouse of the newly crowned King Charles I of England. In the next year, she publicly converted to the Roman Catholic faith, costing her the King's support and causing a final rift in her marriage.

Elizabeth's mother viewed her conversion as further disrespect and disobedience of her parents, and she steadfastly refused her daughter assistance. Lady Tanfield died in 1629—and with her any hope that Elizabeth might eventually accede to an inheritance.

Through all this upheaval, Elizabeth's connection to her children remained, though her husband objected to her seeing them, and they were placed in Lucius's care for a Protestant education. At Falkland's recall from Ireland in 1629, relations between the couple may have become somewhat more cordial, although the two were never reconciled as husband and wife, continuing to live separately. In the aftermath of a leg injury, Henry Cary suffered gangrene and died in 1633 with Elizabeth at his bedside.

Distinguishing Elizabeth's later years was her concerted attempt to convert her children to Catholicism and, to this end, she enrolled four of her daughters at the English Benedictine convent at Cambrai, France, and two of her sons at French seminaries. Elizabeth Cary died penniless in 1639, receiving the honor to be buried in Queen Henrietta Maria's chapel at Somerset House, London.

Elizabeth Cary's Literary Legacy

Elizabeth Cary has an importance all her own as a writer. Educated at home and urged on by her own intellectual curiosity, she excelled in foreign languages, both ancient and modern. This precocious talent was to serve her well in her literary career, and was first revealed in her earliest extant work, predating her marriage: a manuscript translation from the French of *The Mirror of the Worlde* (c. 1597), an abstract of Abraham Ortelius's atlas *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (first published in 1570), a copy of which is on display here.

Between 1603 and 1606, Elizabeth Cary wrote *The Tragedy of Mariam, Faire Queene of Jewry* (published in 1613), believed to be the first original play in English authored by a woman, for which Cary has been celebrated in the modern era. This "closet" drama, designed for reading within noble households, hence not for performance, is based on the story of Herod the Great and depicts his troubled relationship with Mariam, a Jewish woman of royal ancestry, which Cary took from Flavius Josephus's writings on Jewish history from the first century CE.

Other extant materials by Elizabeth Cary include *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, King of England, and Lord of Ireland*, written in 1626 (published in 1680), and a 1630 translation of Cardinal Jacques Davy du Perron's *Reply* to King James I, a key religious polemical treatise of that time. Additionally, 16 letters survive, relating to her separation from the family and her impoverished circumstances.

Elizabeth Cary was an accomplished and well-known historian, translator, poet, and playwright who was deeply engaged with the major issues of Stuart England. With her small surviving oeuvre, today she is considered both an eccentric Roman Catholic convert as well as an intriguing and remarkable Renaissance writer.



Marcus Geeraerts the Younger

Flemish, active England, 1561–1635

Henry Cary, 1st Viscount Falkland (c. 1575–1633), 1603

Oil on canvas

Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, 1985.19

While only a knight when this portrait was painted in 1603, here the future Viscount Falkland presents himself as already a member of the higher nobility, in full court dress: an ensemble of brilliant ivory satin, embroidered with silver and gold thread, complemented by the sword at his side. This portrait is perhaps most notable for inspiring a famous scene in Horace Walpole's gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), in which a portrait comes to life.



Paul van Somer

Flemish, 1576–1621

Elizabeth Cary, 1st Viscountess Falkland (1585/6–1639), c. 1620

Oil on canvas

Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, 1985.20

According to English contemporary fashion, Elizabeth Cary is depicted here as visibly pregnant. Her fanciful masque attire combines a striking silver dress embroidered in gold, a black overgown, an elaborate ruff, and a magnificent headpiece of lace, red ribbon rosettes, and a wig of blond hair. The pattern of her dress and even her elaborate coiffure echo the sunburst motif on her husband's glove in his portrait also on exhibit here. Based on this costume, Elizabeth's portrait has been dated about 1620, the year of her husband's elevation to Viscount by King James I.



Abraham Ortelius

Netherlandish, 1527–1598

Published by **Jan Baptist Vrients**

Netherlandish, 1552–1612

Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1603

Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston, 2017.7

In 1570 the Flemish cartographer and geographer Abraham Ortelius published the first modern atlas, *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*. In the next four decades, over thirty editions of this portable collection of maps and geographical descriptions appeared in several languages, along with a similar number of abstracts that included the descriptions only. Around this time, The 11- or 12-year-old Elizabeth Tanfield—later known as Elizabeth Cary, Viscountess Falkland—made her translation from the French of *The Mirror of the Worlde* (c. 1597), an abstract of Ortelius's atlas that had not previously appeared in English. Her fragile manuscript, written in Cary's own hand, was placed on deposit at the Bodleian Library in 1991 by the vicar and wardens of St. John the Baptist Church, Burford, Oxfordshire, to whom it was donated by the 17th Viscount Dillon of Ditchley in 1925.

The Lowe Countries

This table containeth but 17 provinces w^{ch} the Emperour Charles of
good memorie gave to his sonne King Philippe of Spaine namely
the Dutchie of BRABANTE, GUILDERLAND LIMBOURG
and LUXEMBOURG The Earldome of FLANDERS AR
TOSS, HENRIVE, HOLLANDE, ZELANDE, NAPLES &
ZUTPHEN The Marquisate of the holy Empire the Lordshippes
of FRISELANDE, FFLANDERS, WROCK, OVERISSE and
GROSSBRIDGE, which Countreies are all well inhabited in such sorte
that Leves Guicardine in his pericular description of the low Coun-
tries that there are 208 and 8 walled towne compassed with ditches
and more then 6300 villages w^{ch} have churches and Parishes, besides
Castles and great lords houses of which there is an infinite mul-
titude. Strangers as Spaniards, Italians & French men call the
countreie of one common name Flaunders, and the Inhabitants
Flemmings: in which they commit a greate error, taking a part for
the whole, for Flaunders is but a parte of all this Countreie. Even
as one meaning Spaine should name Castilia or Andalusia, or if
one speakinge of all Italy should name Tuscanie or Lombardie
likewise if one readme of Normandy or Gascony should thinke he
heard of all the Realme of France. This error Artelius, a wyse
man and very curiouse in such searches, saith hath bene bredde by
the traffick of the low countreies, which is done at Bruges, and noe
where els in all this Countreie, soe that this towne only causeth the
frequentation of strange nations, and this towne being seated
in Flaunders, all comes from Flaunders, all goes to Flaunders, &
hearing no other name but Flaunders, they thought the name of
all the Countreie to be soe.

"The Lowe Countries," from *The Mirror of the Worlde*, 18v. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. d. 817 by permission of the Vicar and Wardens of St. John the Baptist Church, Burford, Oxfordshire.