# Artemisia Gentileschi: her Bloody Portrayal of Betrayal and Overall Status


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# Artemisia Gentileschi: her Bloody Portrayal of Betrayal and Overall Status

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**Abstract**

Artemisia Gentileschi is recognized as an important painter working in the style of Caravaggio from the Baroque period. Her 20th century rediscovery has resulted in a large body of scholarship and a number of important international exhibitions. A critical component of Artemisia's scholarship takes feminist perspectives, though such perspectives have been challenged from issues such as iconography and connoisseurship. This thesis reaffirms the necessity of a feminist perspective in analyzing Artemisia's work, particularly through a close examination to her Florentine *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620). After an analysis of the recent historiography of the artist, the thesis analyzes Artemisia's subject matter, her many heroines that have been seen as representing a developed sense of feminist consciousness and intuition. Based on the artist's intuitive portrayals, it is important to reiterate the role that certain biographical aspects of the artist's life, training and patronage, had upon her work. Chapter 3 consists of an in-depth comparison of Artemisia's *Judith* to that by Caravaggio, studying specific naturalistic elements, and especially the representation of blood, to demonstrate Artemisia's stylistic innovations, drawn from her particular gender position as well as from her contact with prominent intellectuals. From this analysis, it becomes clear that Artemisia Gentileschi should be regarded independently of her father's work and that of other *Caravaggisti* painters, and that her feminist contribution to the history of painting be reaffirmed.

## Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my family, friends and everyone who supported me throughout these years. To my family, for always pushing me forward with the loving support. To my friends, for making me the person I am today. In particular, Osteria di Lina (you know who you are), who has helped me grow, care and love.

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**Table of Contents**

## List of Figures

# Introduction: An Analysis of Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* of 1620

Artemisia Gentileschi's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 1), completed in 1620, portrays three figures, two female and one male. The focus is on the action taking place between the three figures, who are placed against a dark background. The two female figures are killing the male figure as one of them is cutting his throat with a sword while the other tries to keep him from moving. A sharp exterior light source coming from the lower left intensifies the drama of the scene.

The female figure holding the sword, identified as Judith on the right side of the painting, seems to be pulling away from the male figure, the Assyrian general Holofernes, even though she is cutting his throat. Her arms and face express a certain vengeance and anger towards Holofernes, although the rest of her body seems to be as far away as possible from him. Because of the sharp delineation of light and dark, part of Judith's face is not visible. The part of her face in light reveals sealed lips, rose-colored cheeks and a focused gaze towards the male figure. Apart from her rose-colored cheeks, the rest of her skin is portrayed in pale tones.

The other female figure, Judith's maidservant Abra, is pressing her weight onto Holofernes, while he is trying to pull her away with his right hand. She is pressing with both hands against the male figure's left hand. In terms of position, she seems more determined than the other female figure, as her entire body is engaging with the action that is taking place. Her face is looking downward the male figure, with the intention of not letting him get away. The drapery and women's garments are also important elements in the painting, with their strong volume and color. The clothing of both female figures is covering their entire body, except for arms, chest and face.

Abra wears a light-colored turban and blue dress. Judith's gold dress reveals her décolleté, while Abra's chest is covered by Holofernes's hand as he attempts to grab her. As the sword cuts through Holofernes's neck, his face demonstrates a blank expression, having already lost his senses.

Holofernes, who had been sleeping before the two women entered his room, lies on a bed covered with white sheets and rich red, velvet cover. He appears to be nude, as his upper body parts are exposed while most of his lower body is underneath the sheets. His legs are uncovered and spreading out of the sheets as he is struggling with the action taking place. At the edge of the bed, underneath Holofernes's head, his blood soaks the sheets and runs down the edges of the bed. Blood also spurts out of the Assyrian general's neck in several thin streams, droplets sprayed across the lower canvas. It is one of the most strikingly realistic renderings of blood in the history of painting.

The way in which blood is represented and the active position of the two female protagonists has lead me to contemplate what it meant for a woman artist painting in this period to represent such a violent scene with this kind of naturalistic detail. The work has been the object of a number of studies over the last 40 years, from feminist and other perspectives. None of these studies, however, consider how the naturalistic approach to the work may have been informed by her gendered position, and not simply by the stylistic milieu of the *Caravaggisti*.

The topic of this thesis was inspired by the *Artemisia Gentileschi e Il Suo Tempo* exhibition held in Rome from November 30th, 2016 until May 5th, 2017 at the Museo di Roma. The exhibition covered her entire artistic career, including her work in Florence, London and Naples. The exhibit also displayed a number of paintings by her male contemporaries for comparison, such as works by her father Orazio Gentileschi and others in his circle. The perceived need to display her male contemporaries is problematic, demonstrating a continuing anxiety about presenting a

monographic exhibit about this critical Baroque artist because of her gender.

The inclusion of these other painters in the exhibit inspires me to question what an exhibit might have looked like if it had focused only upon her work. It reinforces the important role that gendered critique has in examining painting of the period. In this thesis, I choose to celebrate Artemisia Gentileschi as an artist who consciously engaged the challenges of painting as a woman in the early to mid-17th century, both in terms of how she was perceived by her peers and patrons and in the representation of her subjects. I will examine stylistic innovations in Artemisia Gentileschi's work and their possible origins through a close examination of her 1620 Florentine version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. Chapter 1 will review scholarship on Artemisia, exploring the various interpretations by scholars Mary Garrard, Ann Sutherland Harris and Raymond Ward Bissell. Gentileschi will be discussed in terms of her gender, personal experiences, and overall style.

Chapter 2 will focus on Artemisia's 1620 version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. It will provide general information about the painting, including narrative and analysis, and comparisons to her other works. It will also analyze other possible ways of connecting the artist's gendered position to her portrayal of the female figures and the visceral effects of a violent act seen in blood. It will also discuss other versions of the biblical narrative explored by other artists in relation to Artemisia's style.

Chapter 3 will compare Artemisia Gentileschi's painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* to Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, given that the latter work was largely responsible for the iconographical shift in the representation of this subject and because of the stylistic influence upon Artemisia. It will explore the stylistic innovations in Artemisia's version, especially in the naturalistic representation of blood, representing a marked gendered difference between the works

of the two artists.

# Chapter One: Biography and Bibliography Overview

Artemisia Gentileschi is one of the best-known painters of the Italian Baroque. First studies on the artist date to the 17th century. Originally, her career was not treated extensively by authors and biographers of her time, whom were dedicating their studies to male artists such as Caravaggio or Peter Paul Rubens. As a woman artist, she deserved to be discussed as her career lead her to work with many important figures in locations such as Rome, Florence, and London.[1] However, a few biographers from the 17th and 18th century mentioned Artemisia Gentileschi within their works.

17th century art historian Giovanni Baglione, for example, mentions Artemisia in a chapter dedicated to her father Orazio, underlining her artistic skills as Baglione states that she is successfully living in Naples and receiving grand commissions.[2] Filippo Baldinucci, another 17th century art historian, also dedicated attention to the female artist. Unlike Giovanni Baglione, Filippo Baldinucci was more considerate towards Artemisia's work as he dedicated more attention to her than to her father.[3] Baldinucci mentions her early works in Florence, her marriage to Pierantonio Schiattesi and underlines her artistic talent as he introduces a few paintings, in particular *The Rape of Proserpina* and one of her Judiths.[4] We do not know which painting of the Judith series Baldinucci is referring to, however regarding the painting, he describes Judith as she

[1] Richard E. Spear, "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2000): 568.
[2] Giovanni Baglione, *Le Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti. Dal Pontificato di Gregorio XIII del 1572 in fino a' tempi di papa Urbano Ottauo nel 1642* (In Roma: nella stamperia d'Andrea Fei: 1642): 360.
[3] Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* (In Torino: Nella Stamperia Reale, 1768): 708.
[4] Baldinucci, 713-714.

is in the act of killing and cutting off Holofernes's head from his body; therefore, it might have been in reference to the 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes*.[5]

Since little scholarship written on Artemisia Gentileschi from the 19th century has survived, other scholarship on Artemisia Gentileschi is seen through the 20th century historiography. As history was written by men, it is more possible to find a mentioning of Artemisia within texts written by male scholars on either Caravaggio or her father Orazio Gentileschi. For example, Roberto Longhi, who wrote one of the first modern monographs on Caravaggio, brought attention to both Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi because of their role in continuing *Caravaggesque* tenebrism.

Although Longhi was one of the first 20th century scholars to find interest in Artemisia Gentileschi, his critical viewpoints on her background were not entirely agreeable. Ironically, even though Longhi was one of the first few to resurrect Artemisia Gentileschi from oblivion, he was mistaken in terms of attribution to Artemisia's works.[6] Laura Benedetti has discussed Longhi's sexist evaluation of Artemisia, which focused on her exceptionality as a female painter, suggesting that Longhi felt most women were incapable of such achievement.[7] Longhi was rather disturbed by Artemisia's 1620 Florentine *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, as he believed that a woman artist could not portray such violence in one painting.[8] Mary Garrard points out that Longhi was disturbed by Artemisia's painting because of the decisive fate Judith has over Holofernes and there is nothing more scary and dangerous than a woman having control over a man's fate.[9] Longhi held Artemisia as being inferior to her father Orazio and other male *Caravaggisti* describing her overall style as

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[5] Baldinucci, 714.
[6] Spear "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 568.
[7] Laura Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia: Twentieth-Century Images of a Woman Artist," *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 1 (1999): 42.
[8] Spear, "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 569.
[9] Ibid.

lazy, while mocking her painting of *Judith Slaying Holofernes.* Longhi downplayed the trial for her rape by Agostino Tassi, suggesting that he was innocent as Gentileschi was considered promiscuous.[10]

As evidenced in these earlier studies, the 21st century introduction of future feminist approaches to art historical scholarship transformed the interpretation of Artemisia Gentileschi's work. Artemisia Gentileschi was one of the few practicing women artists in the period and her work reflected upon the issue of gender and the status of women in a bold manner. While many of her female contemporaries worked in still life and portraiture, Artemisia represented biblical and mythological subject matter, often with women as their protagonists.

Knowledge of Gentileschi's work was encouraged by feminist scholarship of the early 1970s. In that period, a number of exhibitions took place in the United States that celebrated women artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi and their work.[11] One groundbreaking exhibition in particular was *Women Artists: 1550-1950* which was curated by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin.[12] Among other female artists, the exhibition displayed six paintings from Artemisia's work, including the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders*.[13] Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* was the subject of special analysis by art historian Mary Garrard, who attempted to resolve the issues related to attribution of the painting by demonstrating that the unorthodox representation of the subject belonged to Artemisia's art and life.[14] Subsequently, Garrard made Artemisia Gentileschi the focus of most of her scholarship, through feminist and biographical perspectives.[15]

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[10] Benedetti. "Reconstructing Artemisia: Twentieth-Century Images of a Woman Artist," 43-44.
[11] Joanna Gardner-Huggett, "Artemisia Challenges the Elders: How a Women Artists' Cooperative Created a Community for Feminism and Art Made by Women," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33, no. 2 (2012): 55.
[12] Joan Marter and Margaret Barlow, "PARALLEL PERSPECTIVES," *Woman's Art Journal* 34, no. 1 (2013): 2.
[13] Mary Garrard, "Artemisia and Susanna," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 147.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid. In her seminal essay, Garrard argues the historically known tradition of the male-dominated canon.

Garrard's monograph *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, published in 1989, remains a seminal text on Artemisia Gentileschi. The artist's biography described in Garrard's book is an important contribution to the history of women artists.[16] Mary Garrard brought Artemisia to life like few other scholars have done for other artists, as she enhanced her feminist visions into the artist's life and work.[17] Harris divides the monograph into three parts: Gentileschi's career from birth to death, historical feminism, which is given by the representation of the artist's earlier images of heroic women, and a closer analysis of heroic womanhood, a theme to which Gentileschi returned to.[18] Garrard reviewed and revised some of her positions taken in the 1989 monograph in her second book *Artemisia Gentileschi around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of an Artistic Identity*. Garrard seems to address her critics by providing scientific analysis of several of Artemisia's works, while discussing the gender-specific, social, psychological elements to Artemisia herself. In particular, Garrard returns to issues of attribution into two paintings, *Mary Magdalen* and *Susanna and the Elders*.

Apart from Garrard's studies, Artemisia Gentileschi created a drastic separation between feminism and formalism. Formal interpretation within the art world suggests that a work of art must be evaluated and analyzed by the pure visual aspect of the work itself, while setting aside contextual issues.[19] However, Erwin Panofsky believed that the formal qualities of a work cannot be separated from content or other aspects such as culture, religion or philosophy.[20] Mary Garrard followed Panofsky's method by analyzing Artemisia's paintings in relation to gender, context and iconography. For example, Garrard's study on Artemisia Gentileschi's 1610 *Susanna and the*

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[16] Ann Sutherland Harris, "Fresh Paint," *The Women's Review of Books* 6, no. 12 (1989): 8.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Harris, "Fresh Paint," 8-9.
[19] Anne d'Alleva, "Formalism in Art History," in *Methods and Theories in Art History*, (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2005), 17.
[20] Anne d'Alleva, "Iconography and Iconology," in *Methods and Theories of Art History*, 22.

*Elders* focuses on gender-related issues. Susanna's body language may suggest Artemisia's sensitivity towards women within a patriarchal society. Moreover, Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings express a kind of awareness of the issues of her time. It is visible through the depiction of her female figures, as they differ from conventional stereotyped imagery regarding women.[21] Artemisia Gentileschi tended to celebrate the imagery of women, possibly from biblical, mythological or historical genres.

Following the rape occurred in 1612, Orazio Gentileschi filed a lawsuit against Tassi, which quickly became of public knowledge and, thus, a public scandal.[22] During the trials, Artemisia explicitly testified against Tassi, stating that she had been sexually assaulted. She declared that Tassi was consistently present within her household through strategic help from the tenant and nanny, Tuzia, and his friend Cosimo Quorli.[23] In order to verify whether Artemisia was telling the truth, she was put under the *sibille* torture, which consisted of metal rings around the fingers and tightened by strings.[24] Eventually, the case was dismissed and Tassi was released from prison only after eight months.[25]

In the wake of Garrard's studies, there has been considerable scholarly debate upon the role of feminist critique in our understanding of Artemisia's work. In his book review "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction", Richard Spear stated that Mary Garrard neglected traditional connoisseurship in favor of gendered position as a basis for attribution.[26] Nevertheless, Spear recognizes that Garrard's studies are a fundamental base for subsequent research on the woman artist as he recognizes the male-dominated society.[27] Spear understood that before

[21] Garrard, *Artemisia Gnetileschi: the image of the female hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 171.
[22] Ibid, 20.
[23] Ibid, 21.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid, 22.
[26] Spear "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 569.
[27] Ibid.

Garrard's first monograph, art historical studies on Artemisia Gentileschi had been entirely conventional, which focused on chronological and attributional problems from traditional perspectives, that ignored the issue of gender.[28]

Griselda Pollock analyzed Garrard's work from a post-structuralist perspective.[29] While Pollock appreciated Garrard's deep study on the Baroque artist, she rejected Garrard's approach of applying Artemisia's biography to an interpretation of the paintings. For Pollock, Garrard's insistence on acknowledging and defining Artemisia's painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* in terms of the artist's personal experiences as a victim of sexual assault, reduced the artist's work to a result of therapeutic repressed expressions stimulated by personal fear, anger or desire for vengeance.[30] Pollock instead looks more broadly at the cultural context in which images of Judith and Holofernes were produced, noting that themes of sex and violence were popular among artists and patrons as the image of sex and violence was appealing during her period.[31] Pollock's main argument addresses how Artemisia Gentileschi painted for the art market, following certain tastes during her period, while not representing self-expression in relation to her biography.

Recent scholarship from Jesse Locker has focused on researching Gentileschi's later work and career since it did not receive as much attention as her early biography. Jesse Locker uncovered several written poems about Artemisia by Neapolitan and Venetian authors, bringing a new understanding to Gentileschi's paintings and their reception. The poems found in a 19th-century Naples journal suggest that Artemisia was well-recognized and had close friendship with important figures such as writers, playwrights, poets and other intellectuals.

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[28] Ibid.
[29] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999): 112.
[30] Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories*, 107.
[31] Pollock, review of *Artemisia Gentileschi: the image of the female hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 500.

Locker demonstrates that Artemisia Gentileschi was rather knowledgeable and cultured by discussing the importance of cultural dialogue within her paintings during the 17th century.[32] The overall book is based on an 18th century biography of the artist made in the region of Tuscany. The core argument of the author comes out within the chapters about Artemisia Gentileschi's period in Venice and Naples. Locker provides the readers with sources that verify Gentileschi's popularity during her lifetime and how she was filled with admirers. Within the book, through the artist's paintings, fame, and self-image, the author provides an image of Artemisia Gentileschi who is highly regarded during her lifetime, while being intellectually ambitious and determined, professionally sharp, ironic and lyrically self-aware.

Elizabeth Cohen challenged Garrard's interpretation of trauma based upon a historical understanding of what rape meant in the 17th century. She discusses Artemisia's trials in depth in her article "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History" with the purpose of re-contextualizing how the act of rape was understood in the early 17th century from a strictly historical perspective, in order to counter what she views as the incorrect application of contemporary views of rape upon an interpretation of Artemisia. Cohen analyzes the testimonies from the trials during the 1600s as evidence of the role of horror and the problem of a woman belonging to her father.

The author argues how many came for Artemisia Gentileschi's trial, and most of them testified in regard to the horror of the event. For instance, Tuzia, Gentileschi's neighbor and guardian, testified and referred to the event with such severity in order to preserve her right social position as a member of Artemisia Gentileschi's father's circle.[33] However, Tuzia was accused by

[32] Jesse Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: the language of painting* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2015).
[33] Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no. 1 (2000): 61.

Orazio Gentileschi for conspiring with Tassi in order to deflower Artemisia.[34] With these biased testimonies, the author argues how in Rome during the 17th century people were more concerned with social relations and reputations rather than the individual self. Pre-modern societies relied on alliances, reputations and relationships while identifying themselves with regard to their families, guilds and so forth. Cohen introduces Artemisia herself during the trial. The artist admitted she tried to injure Tassi with a knife right before he sexually assaulted her, however during the trials she never admitted she wanted revenge over Tassi even though she wanted to regain her family's honor.[35]

Returning to the issues of analysis in Artemisia's works, not all recent studies of the artist approach her work from an analysis of gender. In his work on Artemisia, R. Ward Bissell ends to discount the role of gender.[36] Unlike Garrard, Bissell relies upon analysis based on connoisseurship. Bissell believed there is not enough proof to demonstrate that the circumstances of Artemisia's early life have had impact on her work.[37] Bissell confirmed that the authorship of 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* painting can be definitively attributed to Artemisia.[38] Although the painting was signed with "Artemisia Gentileschi" in the bottom left corner, scholars such as Roberto Longhi assigned the painting to Artemisia's father, Orazio Gentileschi, supposedly because Longhi read the 1610 date and the high quality of the work as quite difficult to be aligned with Artemisia's work and birthdate in 1597.[39] German author Hermann Voss instead, while questioning the date on the painting to be 1619, credited the painting to Artemisia based on stylistic

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[34] Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," 49.
[35] Cohen, 70-71.
[36] Ward R. Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999): XXI.
[37] Spear, "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 570.
[38] Ward R. Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi - A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968): 157.
[39] Ibid.

approaches.[40] Bissell, while agreeing with Herman Voss, attributed the *Susanna and the Elders* painting to Artemisia based on similarities with other paintings executed from the woman artist.[41]

One of these paintings was *Lucretia*, which represents various female features that resemble to Susanna in *Susanna and the Elders*. Keith Christiansen believed that Artemisia's *Susanna and the Elders* was merely a representation of her talent in relation to her father's style.[42] The work was once held to be of Orazio's hand. Christiansen interpreted Artemisia's *Susanna and the Elders* as a representation of what she learned from her father's mastery.[43] It took nearly a century before *Susanna and the Elders* was officially attributed to Artemisia as her first major painting. Male art historians refused to acknowledge the fact that Artemisia's signature on the painting was enough to grant attribution; if it would have been a male artist's signature instead, there would have been no doubts regarding authorship.

The use of the artist's biography as a primary means of understanding her work can also work against feminist interpretations. Keith Christiansen's entry *The Art of Orazio Gentileschi* in the 2001 catalogue is an example of such interpretations.[44] The exhibition catalogue consists of various essays written by Christiansen, Mann and also other scholars such as Elizabeth Cropper who contributed to the work. The book describes the life and art of Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi and discusses issues such as feminism and further critical understanding of Artemisia's career.[45] Keith Christiansen focused on Orazio Gentileschi, while Mann and Cropper dedicated their attention to Artemisia. The book Christiansen and Mann wrote on the Gentileschi exhibition

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Keith Christiansen, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition" *Metropolitan Museum* Journal 39 (2004): 102.
[43] Christiansen, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition," 103.
[44] Keith Christiansen and Judith Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New York; New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2001): VII.
[45] Christiansen, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, VII.

was criticized by Mary Garrard for representing Artemisia under a masculinist perspective.[46] In Garrard's exhibition and book review "Artemisia's Critics, Painting with Crude Strokes" she claims that Christiansen's masculinist perspective on Artemisia Gentileschi is revealed in his assertion that the artist's success was achieved through her victimhood.[47]

According to Garrard, Keith Christiansen believed Artemisia's career has been exaggerated from feminist scholars who regarded her biography, and specially victimhood, into her art.[48] Within her review, Garrard also mentions an interview for a newspaper that took place in 2002 along with Keith Christiansen and his stance on attribution.[49] The interview treated the issue of attribution between Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi with regard to artworks such as the 1612 *Danaë* and the 1621-1622 *Cleopatra*.[50] Within the interview, Christiansen stated that the *Cleopatra* painting should be attributed to Orazio Gentilechi, due to the painting's refinement and elegance which had to belong to the father's stylistic traits.[51] By contrast, Christiansen maintained that the *Danaë* belonged to Artemisia for its "small" aspects that related to her "whole mindset", and the fact that there is no refinement.[52] In other words, Christiansen believed to find refinement in Orazio's work and a small mindset in Artemisia's. Garrard criticized Christiansen's stance on Artemisia's "small mindset" and introduced other examples of other articles from the New York Times that appeared to be in opposition to a feminist approach.[53]

Garrard states that thanks to the combination of feminism and scholarship, scholars were

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[46] Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia's Critics, Painting with Crude Strokes," *Woman's Art Journal* 24, no. 2 (2003): 56.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Carol Vogel, "INSIDE ART" *New York Times*, Feb. 22, 2002.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Garrard, "Artemisia's Critics, Painting with Crude Strokes," 56.

[53] Ibid.

able to save Artemisia Gentileschi's reputation from oblivion and extinction.[54] By combination of scholarship and feminism, Garrard refers to events such as the 1976 *Women Artists: 1550-1950* exhibition, produced by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin.[55] Thanks to Harris and Nochlin, Artemisia Gentileschi became a broadly known artist in the United States.

The fact that Artemisia was able to overcome the rape and the subsequent trial while managing to continue working on her art, is what makes her successful career more captivating and out of the ordinary. In relation to the Metropolitan exhibition, even though the trial provides information on the artists' biographies, their social relationships and information about their studios, Garrard argues how the organizers of the exhibition were rather fixating on the victimhood of the artist's rape experience while they should have focused on how Artemisia turned that experience into art.

Artemisia's *Judith and Holofernes* is the linchpin for discussions of the artist's personal reaction to her rape as represented in her works. She completed no less than five paintings on the subject, three of which are considered her finest works. Several scholars have argued that Artemisia Gentileschi depicted herself within the figure of Judith as she imagines her revenge against Agostino Tassi while Judith beheads Holofernes with a sword. Garrard maintains that Artemisia Gentileschi's ability to represent specific female experience into art is what made her exceptional.[56] She was one of the first women in art history to have had a voice that was heard.[57]

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

[57] It should be noted though that there were other outstanding women artist during Artemisia's time. Elisabetta Sirani, for example, might not have had a dramatic life as much as Artemisia, however, still remains an important figure of the Baroque period. Due to the lack of documentation, one doesn't know whether some women artists were aware of each other's work or aware of each other at all. There isn't much documentation that discusses possible friendships Artemisia had with other women artists. Ann Sutherland Harris explores the argument regarding relationships between early Baroque women artists. In her article "Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabetta Sirani: Rivals or Strangers?" she discusses the struggle for female artists in having a relationship since they were not

As I have discussed, it is of critical importance for scholars to take on feminist approaches on Artemisia Gentileschi in order to understand her work. Scholars have had different viewpoints regarding the artist, as there seem to be different outlooks: the overall scholarship in Baroque art and feminist scholarship. Scholars from the early 20th century focused on analyzing her work through connoisseurship and formalism. Eventually, scholars from the late 20th century began to develop feminist methodologies which widely influenced the history of art. Artemisia Gentileschi's art and career is one of the primal examples of bringing attention to such feminist theories, as scholars began to focus on her biography and gender, and later combining them with her work. Gentileschi's 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is one of her most debated paintings in terms of methodological approaches during 20th century scholarship.

allowed to travel freely without a chaperone; thus, it was hard for women to explore firsthand the work of other female peers. Harris explores the possible relationship between Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabetta Sirani through Lavinia Fontana, a known late Renaissance painter who is claimed to have known both women. Sirani and Gentileschi might not have known each other at all since their styles differ drastically. Compared to Artemisia, Sirani's art does not seem as bold; her female figures are more aesthetically and conventionally pleasing. Italian artists competed against each other in order to create their own reputation; this cultural approach might be addressed to Sirani and Gentileschi even though there cannot be any certainty because of the lack of documentation. Nevertheless, even though is unknown whether Artemisia Gentileschi might have had friendships or been in contact with other female artists of her time, one can say that her work stood out from many angles and promoted female alliance and friendship. This is why Artemisia Gentileschi has risen over the past decades as scholars have begun, and continue nowadays, to have a grand interest in the artist.

# Chapter Two: Heroines and the Versions of Judith and Holofernes

Artemisia Gentileschi is widely known for her portrayals of strong heroines engaged in virtuous but violent actions against male aggressors. The narrative within her paintings play an important role, as the artist's own personal encounters of sexual violence influenced her choice of subject matter and the later representation of the female figures.[58] Instead of portraying female figures as erotic and passive objects, she introduced dynamic and physically confident women.[59] Many paintings, drawings and prints expressed the questions regarding women's social positions by representing mythological and biblical heroines such as Judith.[60] Artemisia's paintings of these subjects provoke questions regarding the possibility for a new social status for women in 17th century Europe.[61]

The female representation within Artemisia's paintings portray powerful independence which was not usually seen in works by women artists. Artemisia's nudes, including *Cleopatra* (Fig. 9) and *Susanna* (Fig. 6), tend to alter the reading of the female character as sexual seducer, seen instead frequently in works of the subjects by male artists such as Guido Reni and her own father Orazio Gentileschi. Nevertheless, her patrons might have been still erotically pleased and stimulated by Artemisia as a woman painter.[62]

Mary Garrard attributed the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* to Artemisia precisely because of the artist's difference in representing the conditions of the female figure in the narrative. Artemisia's portrayal of an oppressed Susanna is much more emotional and expressive compared

[58] Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi "The Gentileschi "Danaë": A Narrative of Rape," *Woman's Art Journal* 19, no. 2 (1998): 13.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: the image of the female hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 144.
[61] Ibid, 143.
[62] Ibid, 172.

to other versions made by male Baroque artists such as Rubens or Rembrandt. Both Rubens and Rembrandt's versions of the painting (Figs. 8 and 7) portray an innocent, pure and passive female figure. In terms of composition and context, both Rembrandt and Rubens portrayed their Susanna as she is being exposed and undressed by the male figures. Artemisia, on the contrary, portrayed her Susanna already undressed with two elderly men observing her from behind. More importantly, the portrayal of Susanna by Rubens and Rembrandt is objectified, observed as if she was not a living person but a rather statue to analyze. Artemisia's Susanna is well aware of her surroundings and reacts physically against being observed by the two elderly men.

Such a reading of the work and the artist aligned in a feminist project may be complicated by Artemisia's treatment of sensual nudes, such as her *Cleopatra* from 1621-22 (Fig. 9).[63] Here, Cleopatra is represented as a reclining nude, holding a serpent in her right hand as she prepares to commit suicide.[64] This subject, too, was a popular one among Baroque painters like Guido Reni.

Artemisia's representations of women such as Cleopatra stand in sharp contrast to more aesthetically pleasing versions done by male artists. Artemisia's *Cleopatra* expresses uncomfortable agony in comparison to Reni's 1628 *Cleopatra with the Asp* (Figs 9 and 10). Reni's *Cleopatra* is more delicate, with a sense of purity and an absent gaze. She is staring upwards into space as she is holding a snake with her right hand. Artemisia, on the contrary, portrayed her *Cleopatra* in a rather uncomfortable position, with her left arm lifted up as she is trying to lie down. However, the portrayal of her semi-closed eyes is one of the aspects that ironically render Cleopatra more aware than Reni's portrayal of lost gaze into space.

The possession of the gaze on the part of the viewer of the painting and the illusionistic gaze of the characters represented, is often problematized in Artemisia's work. In the 1620 *Judith*

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[63] Ibid, 278.
[64] Ibid.

*Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 1), Judith's and Abra's gazes are facing downward, focused on beheading Holofernes. Artemisia might not have wanted to include any sort of sexually provocative trait to her female figures. Indeed, her female figures usually did not embrace the ideal feminine beauty that was included in most paintings executed by both male and female painters.

Artemisia developed what we may call today a feminist consciousness through her paintings, specially through her Uffizi *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig 1).[65] We may see this consciousness develop by examining the differences in her approach to the subject of Judith between 1612 and 1620. In her 1612 painting *Judith and her Maidservant* (Figure 4), located in Palazzo Pitti in Florence, both Judith and Abra look behind themselves as they reacted to a sound coming from the right side off-canvas, while Abra holds Holofernes's head in a basket. Here, the artist decides to emphasize the sense of risk in the beheading narrative, as opposed to other artists who decided to depict the moment in triumph. Judith is seen as cautious rather than fearful, holding the sword in her right hand, ready to defend herself and Abra from the possible danger arriving.

Around 1623-1625, Artemisia executed a second version of the cautious moment in a work belonging to the Detroit Institute of Arts (Fig. 5). Here, Artemisia mastered her *Caravaggesque* theatrical lighting, while perfecting the intense realism of the risky scene. She enhanced the risk and danger executed in the previous version by intensifying the light source as a single candle which creates sharp shadows. The intensity is enhanced by capturing the moment seconds after the violent act. Holofernes's head is still on the ground, as Abra kneels down to place it in a basket. The earlier *Judith and her Maidservant* (Fig. 4) version is capturing the scene minutes before, as they had the time to pick up Holofernes's head and put it in a basket.

[65] Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," 53.

The artist produced her first version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* in 1610 (Naples in the Museo di Capodimonte; Fig. 3). In terms of composition, the Florentine and Neapolitan versions of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* are almost identical; however, the subsequent Florentine version (Fig. 1) includes a sophistication which is not evident within the Neapolitan version. In fact, the latter possesses a color palette of primary colors: red is used for Abra's garment and the blue is used for Judith's. In the Florentine painting, the primary colors have a lighter tonality and become more delicate. In both paintings, the light source comes from the bottom left, which provides dramatic language of chiaroscuro. The Neapolitan *Judith* provides a rigid light source which brings clarity to the atrocious act against a dark, almost black, background. In the Florentine *Judith*, on the other hand, light pervades throughout the painting more evenly, which gives an exaggerated aspect to the characters and, through the red curtain of the background, underlines the theatrical atmosphere of the scene.

It is worth considering at this point the issue of patronage with regard to the choice of subject and the mode of representation of the later version, specifically because it offers innovations in comparison to that of 1610. Several scholars have suggested that the 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* may have been commissioned as a gift for the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Cosimo II de' Medici.[66] Artemisia might have adopted a certain style for her painting in order to please the Medici family, who dominated art patronage in Florence during Artemisia's residency.[67] In fact, the Medici family tended to appreciate more those artworks that included luxurious objects within a theatrical atmosphere.[68] In Florence, Artemisia was an appreciated painter, as she was in close

[66] Eve Straussman-Pflanzer, *Violence & Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith slaying Holofernes* (Chicago, Illinois: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2013): 27.
[67] Straussman-Pflanzer, *Violence & Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith slaying Holofernes*, 11.
[68] Ibid.

contact with the big representatives of the city.[69] Once she became the first female artist accepted to the Accademia del Disegno, she cultivated many friendships with important figures such as Galileo Galilei, who was an amateur artist, a court mathematician and a philosopher to Cosimo II.[70] His possible influence on her representation of blood in this work will be discussed in the next chapter.

Letters written in 1620 to Cosimo II by Artemisia suggest that the *Judith* painting (Fig. 1) of the same year could have been commissioned by the Grand Duke. In one of them, Artemisia discusses the payment of a work for which she received 50 *scudi*, possibly the *Judith* but perhaps a work of another genre.[71] Another letter to Galileo Galilei makes specific reference to a painting of *Judith*, likely that in the Uffizi gallery.[72] Among other information regarding the painting, the letter stated the following:

> And I do this all the more spontaneously because another situation has developed similar to the one concerning the painting of that Judith which I gave to His Serene Highness the Grand Duke of glorious memory, which would have been lost to memory if it had not been revived by Your Lordship's assistance.[73]

Because of this specific reference of a work treating *Judith* and to the painting's high quality and attention to detail, Cosimo II remains the most logical and most possible known patron of the artwork. However, it is not clear whether the painting was commissioned by him, given as a gift, or even commissioned by another member of the Medici court.[74]

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[69] Anna Maria Crinò, "More Letters from Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi," *The Burlington Magazine* 102, no. 687 (1960): 265.
[70] David Topper and Cynthia Gillis, "Trajectories of Blood: Artemisia Gentileschi and Galileo's Parabolic Path." *Woman's Art Journal* 17, no. 1 (1996): 10.
[71] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: the image of the female hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 377.
[72] Straussman-Pflanzer, *Violence & Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith slaying Holofernes*, 27.
[73] Garrard, *Artemisia Gnetileschi: the image of the female hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 383.
[74] Straussman-Pflanzer, *Violence & Virtue: Artemisia Gentileschi's Judith slaying Holofernes*, 28.

Given the remarkable representation of women in her paintings, it is curious that she did not attract much patronage from aristocratic women. For example, Duchess Maria Maddalena of Austria along with husband Grand Duke Cosimo II, commissioned Artemisia for paintings; however, the commission usually came from the Grand Duke himself while the Duchess remained unengaged.[75] According to Straussmann-Pflanzer, even though she enjoyed the biblical heroic narrative of Judith, the Grand Duchess was more interested in artists who executed frescoes and followed the traditional Florentine *disegno*.[76] By contrast, Cosimo II appears to have been quite enthusiastic about Artemisia's career, even sponsoring her acceptance in the Florentine Accademia del Disegno.[77] Thus, unlike many female artists, Artemisia focused on cultivating relationships and friendships with men and the male figures of the court.[78]

The Florentine version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* reflects her fame as an artist, taking up the composition of a successful earlier work, but offering scintillating new naturalistic detail, dominated by the portrayal of blood. The blood squirts out of Holofernes's neck in euphoric arcs, some of which are portrayed streamlined while others seem to appear as small beads of blood strung on a chain, sinking the sheets of the bed and other fabrics. Some drops of blood stain the yellow garment Judith is wearing. The red color palette of the blood is accentuated through the bold red bedcover and the inner sleeves of both Judith and Abra's garments, although Abra's inner sleeves are lighter in terms of tonality. In the Neapolitan painting, in contrast, the blood is kept and represented to a minimum amount and finds itself under Holofernes's body on the bedsheets. Thus, the Florentine subsequent version accomplishes new inventive heights through its visual

[75] Bissell, 21.
[76] Straussman-Pflanzer, 29.
[77] Bissell, 21.
[78] Ibid.

contrast of refinement and violence, leaving the Neapolitan version appear more disciplined and gentle.

Artemisia's 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 1) offers a kind of dynamism that was rarely seen in the work of women artists. It is considered one of the most compelling and vivid depictions of the biblical subject in art history.[79] The artist depicted the decisive moment of decapitation happening in the biblical scene. In general, both men and women who viewed the painting felt disturbed by Artemisia's violent portrayal, specially for the quantity of blood.[80] As Judith slices Holofernes's neck, blood sprays from his neck onto the sheets creating a sinking red pool under his body. The furrowed eyebrows and tense forearms of both Judith and Abra underline the physical effort that is involved in beheading, which serves as an equivalent to the delicacy of Judith's garments and precious jewelry. Judith has her arms outstretched in order to avoid stain on her luxurious garments. However, the blood has already reached her chest and stained her yellow clothing, which might refer to Holofernes's fate as well to Artemisia's own troubled past.

The scene Artemisia Gentileschi ended up depicting in her 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 1) refers to an unresolved and arguable tension between decorum and violence within the artist's life.[81] Artemisia did not choose the moment before or after the decapitation, as done by her predecessor Lavinia Fontana, but rather the brutal and bloody moment of the action itself.[82] Unlike most female artists, Lavinia Fontana was one of the few who occasionally depicted biblical genres in her paintings. However, unlike Artemisia Gentileschi, Lavinia Fontana depicted the biblical scene after the bloody deed was done.

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[79] Straussman-Pflanzer, 7.
[80] Ibid, 12.
[81] Ibid, 11.
[82] Ibid, 12.

Lavinia Fontana's 1600 *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Fig. 11) presents Judith in an extravagant expensive dress, which make her appear as if she was part of the royal world, while holding Holofernes's head in her left hand. Her gestures and body language as well express such grace that can be linked to royalty. Both the head and the sword held in each hand of Judith's, play the role of an accessory to Judith's regal image. Judith is gazing towards the viewer, as if she was posing for a portrait. Abra is placed in the background as a compositional element to the painting, holding the basket where eventually Holofernes's head will be placed. The overall painting does not evoke violence or horror, but rather elegance and luxury. From viewing the artist's depiction of the biblical scene, one can assume that Fontana's perception of Judith was not one of Artemisia's inspirations for her painting.

The Judith narrative was also popular in Northern European art, as Judith became the representation of power for women.[83] One of these Northern artists was Lucas Cranach the Elder, who depicted *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* (Fig. 12) in 1545 among other representations on other mediums.[84] In his 1545 painting, Cranach portrayed Judith at three-quarters length, holding a sword in her right hand, while the head of Holofernes is grabbed by her left against a white marble surface. Judith's stoic and yet emotive facial features combined with her triumphant gesture, lead the painting to become haunted expressivity.

In Southern Europe, Italy in particular, many representations of the biblical heroine were executed in different art periods by artists such as Donatello, Botticelli and Mantegna. These various artworks often carried hidden political messages and unspoken truths regarding violence during the period in which they were depicted.[85] Nevertheless, most artists seemed to focus on

[83] Ibid, 14.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid, 17.

moments after the violent decapitation instead of portraying the act itself. Botticelli, for example, depicted *The Return of Judith to Bethulia* in 1470 (Fig. 13), where his Judith is gracefully strolling in the outdoors as her garments are floating through the natural breeze. Abra, in the meantime, is behind Judith and is effortlessly carrying Holofernes's head in a basket on top of her own. In contrast to Artemisia's horrific bloodbath, Botticelli's feel of the story evokes a pleasant stroll through nature.

Interestingly enough, male artists began to represent a more violent version of Judith after Artemisia depicted her 1620 Florentine *Judith Slaying Holofernes*.[86] Such artists included German painter Johann Liss who depicted *Judith in the Tent of Holofernes* in 1622 (Fig. 14) and French artist Valentin de Boulogne, who depicted *Judith Beheading Holofernes* in 1626 (Fig. 15). In terms of representation, these later paintings of Judith relate more closely to Artemisia's Florentine artwork due to the degree of violence portrayed. Because they were depicted shortly after Artemisia's painting, these later depictions are believed to be an homage to Artemisia's violent representations of the biblical narrative.[87] These homages drastically contrasted with the feedback from the public who viewed Artemisia's 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes*.

Looking at other representations done by either male or female artists, Artemisia Gentileschi executed one of the most violent version of Judith and Holofernes. Working in a male-dominated society, specially in a male-dominated profession, Artemisia used a biblical scene in order to represent a woman wearing contemporary and yet theatrical apparel while savagely slaying a man's head. Since the violent scene was portrayed by a woman artist, it provoked a disturbing factor in the viewers who saw the painting. Such biographers from the 17th century as

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

Filippo Baldinucci stated that the painting was "inspiring no little amount of terror".[88] Thus, it developed considerable and noticeable debate over Artemisia's own persona or her intentions towards the male-dominated art world.[89]

Artemisia's visual language appears so intuitive that it is hard not to be drawn by her own biographical experiences. Moreover, it is unlikely that the public would view the artist as favorably as they do if it weren't for the main focus on abused and vengeful women as being her inspiration.[90] The blood staining the sheets underneath the figure of Holofernes is an example of remarkable artistry, as the depiction itself comes from something more than a girl's mere interest in the Bible and overall mythology.[91] Throughout her career, Artemisia took some bold and risky decisions in order to reach the widespread fame she achieved. What is needed now is a diligent approach to the artist's body of work which will eventually help in future investigations in reference to her intended artistic outputs.

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[88] Ibid, 12.
[89] Ibid.
[90] John Loughery, "Sexual Violence: Baroque to Surrealist," *The Hudson Review* 55, no. 2 (2002): 296.
[91] Ibid.

# Chapter Three: Violence and Blood: A Comparison of Caravaggio's and Artemisia's Judith and Holofernes

Artemisia Gentileschi's style is closely associated with Caravaggio's naturalism and tenebrism, as is that of her father who trained her. Richard Spear divided Caravaggio's followers into three groups: the ones that profoundly absorbed Caravaggio's lessons and kept devoting him throughout their career; the ones that followed Caravaggio for a certain amount of time before embarking on a new path and changing styles; and the ones that followed Caravaggio's work to a certain extent, while retaining certain personal stylistic elements.[92] Artemisia Gentileschi belonged to the second group, as she initially followed Caravaggio's work but eventually moved onto her own style.[93] Nevertheless, because of Caravaggio's influence, she employed heavy chiaroscuro and dramatic tenebrism on her artworks, handling her subjects in a realist manner.

Both of Artemisia's versions of *Judith Slaying Holofernes* owe much to Caravaggio's radical reinterpretation of the subject as an active beheading, as well as to the stylistic approach taken. It is in a direct comparison of the two works by Caravaggio and Artemisia in which we see the importance of gendered difference to approaching the subject. In this chapter, I will compare Caravaggio's *Judith* and the 1620 version by Artemisia in order to demonstrate the importance of gendered experience in approaching the work from a naturalistic perspective.

Caravaggio's version of *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Fig. 2), painted in 1599 for the banker Ottavio Costa, clearly informed both of Artemisia's versions of the subject, in terms of

[92] Robert Enggass, "Book Review," *The Art Bulletin* 55, no. 3 (1973): 460.
[93] Deborah Marrow "A "Massacre of the Innocents" and the Neapolitan Baroque." *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 74, no. 320 (1978): 3.

iconography as well as stylistic approach. Caravaggio depicted the biblical scene in a horizontal format, where the figures and the red curtain in the background are panoramically and equally distributed throughout the painting. In terms of composition, there are various similarities with the arrangement of the figures and the overall representation of the scene. Caravaggio depicted the scene in which Judith is in the process of decapitation, which is considered an iconographical innovation. In both Artemisia's and Caravaggio's panting, Holofernes is situated on the left, while Abra and Judith on the right. Although Artemisia depicted the scene on a vertical format, both paintings are dark and rather bloody. Caravaggio's horizontal format creates a more spectacle-like view, as the audience does not feel as if they were interacting in the scene. Artemisia's vertical frame, on the contrary, draws the viewer into the painting, as the perspective from the bottom creates a form of inclusion.

Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* presents a strong light source coming from the left, while including a dark and mysterious background. The overall theatricality of the painting is given by the red curtain situated in the background above Holofernes's beheading, as well as by the intense mastery of expressive chiaroscuro Caravaggio applied to the painting. That chiaroscuro expressiveness is given from the faces and bodies of the figures, specially from Holofernes's body and Judith's facial features. The painting expresses various states of mind from the figures, by portraying Holofernes's shock, Abra's satisfaction and Judith's determination. Holofernes's tight muscles are enhanced by strong light and shade, as he realizes he does not have time to escape. Judith's young skin and overall virtue are enhanced by the light source. Her facial expression reflects a reluctance to commit this murder, as her brows are frowning and her eyes look disgusted. Even though she might seem prepared as she rolled up her sleeves, her body posture seems to want to be as far away from the violence as possible. Judith is placed on the right side along with Abra,

her elderly maidservant. The action of the beheading is situated in the center of the frame, where the viewer can see Holofernes being caught by surprise from the two female figures. Holofernes is depicted semi-nude under the sheets of his bed as it appears he was sleeping. Judith is depicted wearing simple white and brown garments. The white transparent chemise worn by Judith is enhancing her erect nipples. Her overall appearance refers to youth and purity, which is enhanced by the color of her soft and light-colored skin as well as the strong contrast to Abra, who is placed on Judith's left side. Abra is depicted old, with wrinkles, large ears, gray hair and with a leathery, dark skin which matches the color of the bag she is holding. She is eagerly watching the violent action and holding the bag that will eventually contain the head of Holofernes.

The representation of blood is an important component in Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes,* but the way in which it is rendered stands in contrast to the high naturalism of other elements of the painting. Instead of a grisly jagged mass of flesh, the blood sprays from the neck of Holofernes in three thick streams under Judith's blade. The garments of the figures are not stained by the bloody act. The color tone is light, almost a pinkish shade of red, which recalls the red curtain in the background. The cut on Holofernes's head reveals almost a hollow core, as if Holofernes were a clay maquette for a sculpture. The direction of Caravaggio's blood is straight and downwards. Unlike Artemisia's parabolic spurts of blood, Caravaggio's arterial representation of blood is much more rectilinear.

It has been noted that Caravaggio may have witnessed various violent events, including the beheading of Beatrice Cenci at Ponte S. Angelo in 1599, the same year in which the Judith was painted.[94] If this is true, Caravaggio did not seem to incorporate what he saw into his painting. In fact, what stands out the most in the painting is the sword cutting through Holofernes's neck and

[94] John Loughery, "Sexual Violence: Baroque to Surrealist," 295.

the facial expressions of horror and shock on his face. The blood plays a secondary character to the violent scene. This might lead the viewer to think that Caravaggio wasn't too concerned about the portrayal of blood, as he wanted to dedicate most of his mastery on his dramatically lit figures and their facial expressions.

Both paintings present strong and emotional facial features as well as dramatic body language, which are known characteristics from the Baroque period. However, Artemisia Gentileschi's representation of the 1620 painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Fig. 1) focuses on other aspects. Artemisia portrayed a strong and determined woman, who is not afraid of beheading a man, while Caravaggio depicted a delicate woman with a sense of fear and disgust towards the act of violence. Due to the staging, the naturalistic representation of the figures and the incisions placed in strategic locations, Keith Christiansen has argued that Caravaggio used live models in his studio for the execution of the painting, as he depicted what he saw.[95] Compared to Artemisia's other versions of the biblical narrative such as *Judith and her Maidservant* (Fig 5) or her Neapolitan version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, Caravaggio's *Judith* still differs drastically. Although Artemisia chose do depict different moments, some of which depict moments after the beheading and others represent the moment where it happens, her Judiths still maintain the same traits: they are not depicted as soft and delicate, as they are more tough and committed.

The representation of Abra also drastically differs between the two paintings. Caravaggio depicted an old and wrinkly Abra, whose aesthetics underline Judith's young and soft beauty. Artemisia Gentileschi, in contrast, depicted Abra as equal to Judith's physical appearance. The

[95] Shannon N. Pritchard, "A Print Source for Caravaggio's 'Judith Beheading Holofernes'," *Sources: Notes in the History of Art* 34, no. 4 (2015): 23.

only difference between the two female figures in Artemisia's painting refers to Judith's garments which are more luxurious than Abra's, given by the fact that Abra is merely the maidservant.

However, both Caravaggio's 1599 *Judith Beheading Holofernes* and Artemisia Gentileschi's 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* depicted Judith as if she is keeping a certain distance from the beheading and Holofernes. The distance represented within the two paintings have different meanings, which are proven by the different body languages and facial features of the two Judiths. Although Artemisia's Judith is keeping herself distanced from the bloody deed, she is still not shying away from it; Judith might be distancing herself from the blood as she would not want to get caught afterwards with stains on her garments. Another possibility might refer to the fact that Artemisia's Judith is wearing luxurious clothing and therefore she is distancing herself from the act as she tries to keep her extravagant yellow dress clean.[96] Thus, along with the explicitly expressive facial features, Caravaggio's Judith is backing away merely because she does not seem entirely comfortable with violence.

The important difference between the two paintings refers to how Judith approaches the bloody violence under the eyes of Caravaggio and Artemisia Gentileschi. According to Artemisia, Judith is a woman who does what needs to be done in order to save her people while presenting a strong and confident output and taking the absolute control. Caravaggio, in contrast, envisioned Judith as a young woman who is fearful and disgusted by the deed.

The difference within the representation of blood within the two paintings is a fundamental aspect. Caravaggio's blood color tone is much lighter in shade compared to Artemisia's, who used

[96] Well-known art historian Roberto Longhi was disgusted by her representation of violence and by the fact that it was painted by a woman. According to Longhi, women artists were not capable of depicting such violence in art. He subsequently made fun of Artemisia's painting and underlined the artist's femininity as he stated that "Judith's only concern is to move away so that the blood won't stain her silky, yellow, brand new outfit". Ironically, Caravaggio's *Judith* seems to express more femininity after all.

a dark crimson, more closely naturalistic in tone. It may well be that in this instance, Artemisia's gender provided her with a distinct advantage in understanding the quality of blood and its naturalistic representation, if we presume that it was important to both artists. Dealing with blood during menstrual cycles and after childbirth, most women regardless of social status would have intimate familiarity with its physical properties, such as the way blood may spread and soak into cloth.

Caravaggio's treatment of blood in subsequent paintings of his, remains strangely abstract and non-naturalistic in contrast to other areas of the painting. *The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* (Fig. 16), a known painting Caravaggio executed after the Judith narrative in ca. 1608, depicts the scene of the beheading in an incomplete manner: the executioner's body language is still, leaving the viewers suspended between the knife and sword that are depicted in the painting.[97] In particular, the blood remarkably resembles to the blood depicted in *Judith Beheading Holofernes*; the tonality of the blood color seems to be the same and it seems to be following a linear path instead of splashing out along with drops such as in Artemisia Gentileschi's painting.

The one difference and development can be seen in the way the blood reaches the floor, creating a small bloody pond and, more importantly, the artist used that blood also to leave his signature.[98] Once Caravaggio signed his name in the bloody pond, he created one of the most brilliant inventions in Seicento art.[99] He gave the blood a new function by using it as a type of ink. His signature also represents a powerful artistic trait, as he invented a new way in establishing his presence within his paintings.[100] In order to become a Knight of Justice, one was required to

[97] David M. Stone, "Signature Killer: Caravaggio and the Poetics of Blood," *The Art Bulletin* 94, no. 4 (2012): 573.
[98] Stone, 581.
[99] Ibid, 572.
[100] Ibid, 576.

demonstrate noble ancestry.[101] As Caravaggio was not part of the nobility, but still wanted to become a knight, he had to prove his qualification in other ways.[102] As John the Baptist is losing a great quantity of blood in Caravaggio's painting, the artist used the pool of blood in order to write his name and demonstrate that he could still be eligible for such dutiful and committed service.[103] That way, he combined his non-noble existence within the blood of a saint patron.

As I have discussed, Artemisia dedicated much detail to her portrayal of blood within her 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. In terms of violence, the viewers can artistically see how Artemisia went further in composition compared to Caravaggio. More importantly, viewers can visibly see artistic growth in her portrayal of blood through her gradual paintings of Judith. Within her first paintings such as *Judith with her Maidservant* or *Judith with Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes*, blood does not have a role of its own; in fact, it is hardly visible. In her Neapolitan version of *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, she explored the blood more intensely until reaching her final bloody representation in her Florentine 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. Artemisia gives the blood a role of its own while enhancing the consequence of violence which leads to a bloodbath.

The blood within Artemisia's Florentine *Judith Slaying Holofernes* is spread throughout the sheets, while some drops reach Judith and Abra's garments. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the blood forms certain arcs. These bloody arcs may have been the result of Artemisia's discussions of parabolic arcs with Galileo.[104] Galileo Galilei was rather familiar with the arts and became rather friendly with Artemisia once she moved to Florence.[105] In their article "Trajectories

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[101] Ibid, 578.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid, 579.
[104] Topper, "Trajectories of Blood: Artemisia Gentileschi and Galileo Galilei's Parabolic Path," 11.
[105] Ibid.

of Blood", David Topper and Cynthia Gillis discuss how the splattering blood in Artemisia's painting may reflect Galileo Galilei's parabolic law of projectiles, although the mathematician explored his law in reference to cannonballs.[106] Nevertheless, Galileo's parabolic law refers to a projectile, following a symmetrical arc shaped as a curve from Euclidean geometry.[107] As the scientific study was focused on cannonballs, Galileo Galilei made his discovery through a cannonball's flight.[108] Initially, in Galileo's time, the cannonball's flight was thought to be a straight line; eventually Galileo reached to the conclusion that the cannonball formed a short arc right before falling on the ground.[109]

As the streams of blood were supposedly painted freehand, the symmetrical form of Artemisia's rendering of her blood streams do not seem accidental and therefore suggest a correlation. The drawings from Galileo Galilei's diagram of parabolic path of projectiles resemble so strongly to Artemisia's bloody arcs that it seems as if the mathematician shared his scientific discoveries with the artist, who later in turn, used it to depict her portrayal of blood.[110] Since Artemisia's Neapolitan *Judith* was executed before she and Galileo met, as the artist was still living in Rome and the Florentine version was painted after they met in Florence, one can come to the conclusion that Galileo's studies on projectile motion was possibly the source for Artemisia's splattering blood inspiration for her Florentine masterpiece.[111] Nevertheless, Artemisia incorporated her skill with her scientific knowledge.

Being a woman in an artistic society that was dominated by men, Artemisia Gentileschi was able to be acknowledged for her talent by male figures such as her father and her friend

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[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid, 12.
[111] Ibid, 11.

Joachim von Sandrart.[112] Her father, for instance, was quite proud of her work, as he described her talent at a level that went beyond most masters of art that were male. Since art was related to intellectual capability during the 17th century, she was not only complimented by her artistic skills but also for her intellectuality.[113] Artemisia's friend, Joachim von Sandrart, described her work as being "rational", which was a remarkable compliment for a woman at the time.[114] Thus, Artemisia Gentileschi receiving such praise can be linked to the fact that she placed those terms of knowledge in her art in an unusual way.[115] Regardless, Artemisia's talent and skill backfired on the educational development for men happening in the 17th century, as women were not expected to have high intellectual capabilities because of their restrictions.[116]

From this chapter, one learns that there is a wide difference in gender portrayal. Although both Caravaggio and Artemisia depicted the same biblical scene, their gendered viewpoints on the subject lead them to interpret the narrative in strikingly different manners. Artemisia's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* and Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* represent two different heroines and two different types of blood portrayal. Along with intellectual influences, Artemisia brought her biblical heroine and overall bloody action to such a violent extent, that is hardly visible in any portrayal of Judith, including Caravaggio's. Artemisia expressed such passion within her work, and from the selected genres and narratives, it appears to many that the more injustice there was in the literary source the more passionately Gentileschi approached her canvas.[117] Such genres can be referred to the narrative of Judith.

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[112] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: the image of the female hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 174.
[113] Ibid.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid, 175.
[117] Loughery, "Sexual Violence: Baroque to Surrealist," 295.

# Conclusion

In this thesis, I have underscored the importance of Artemisia Gentileschi as an artist of the early modern era, both for her individual contributions to painting and for her feminist consciousness that is often neglected or undermined in art historical scholarship. Scholars Mary Garrard, Keith Christiansen and Griselda Pollock have debated how to approach Artemisia's work. Garrard's feminist perspective, studying the artist's work in relation to her biography, is of critical importance in understanding the relationship between the conditions of her work and her rendering of popular subject matter in the Baroque period.

When depicting female heroines that include elements of her own lived experience, Artemisia Gentileschi demonstrates her stylistic growth over time. A continuous theme among her Judith images is the artist turning the tables on patriarchal forces that had limited her or caused her harm in her own life, depicting instead powerful women conspiring together for vengeance. Artemisia's 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, however, represents a mature approach to a subject she had represented in different ways earlier in her career, particularly in its naturalistic detail. The blood changes from being almost inexistent in her 1612 *Judith and her Maidservant* to forming its own character in her 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes*. This new approach was possible because of her advantaged gender position when representing blood, as well as intellectual influences that informed her treatment of specific details.

The powerful combination of artistic skill, familiarity with the properties of blood, and her personal perspective as a woman produced a work that was clearly influential upon other artists. Unlike the depiction of the artist in the *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* exhibition catalog written by Christiansen and Mann, fixing Artemisia's art firmly in relation to her father, this thesis

demonstrates that Artemisia was indeed able to add unique elements to the representation of female protagonists. Certainly, her style and approach to composition was influenced by male artists, especially Caravaggio; however, Artemisia surpassed the social barriers which were continually faced by female artists and forged a new realm of representation, especially for other women artists.

If we distance Artemisia's work from her specific gendered position, and in particular life-shaping events such as her rape, we lose fundamental insight into her approach to the subjects and style that differentiate her from her peers. Artemisia Gentileschi was able to turn traumatic life experiences into art. Future studies and exhibitions of her work should provide her the proper space and focus outside constant comparisons to male artists.

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**IMAGES**

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

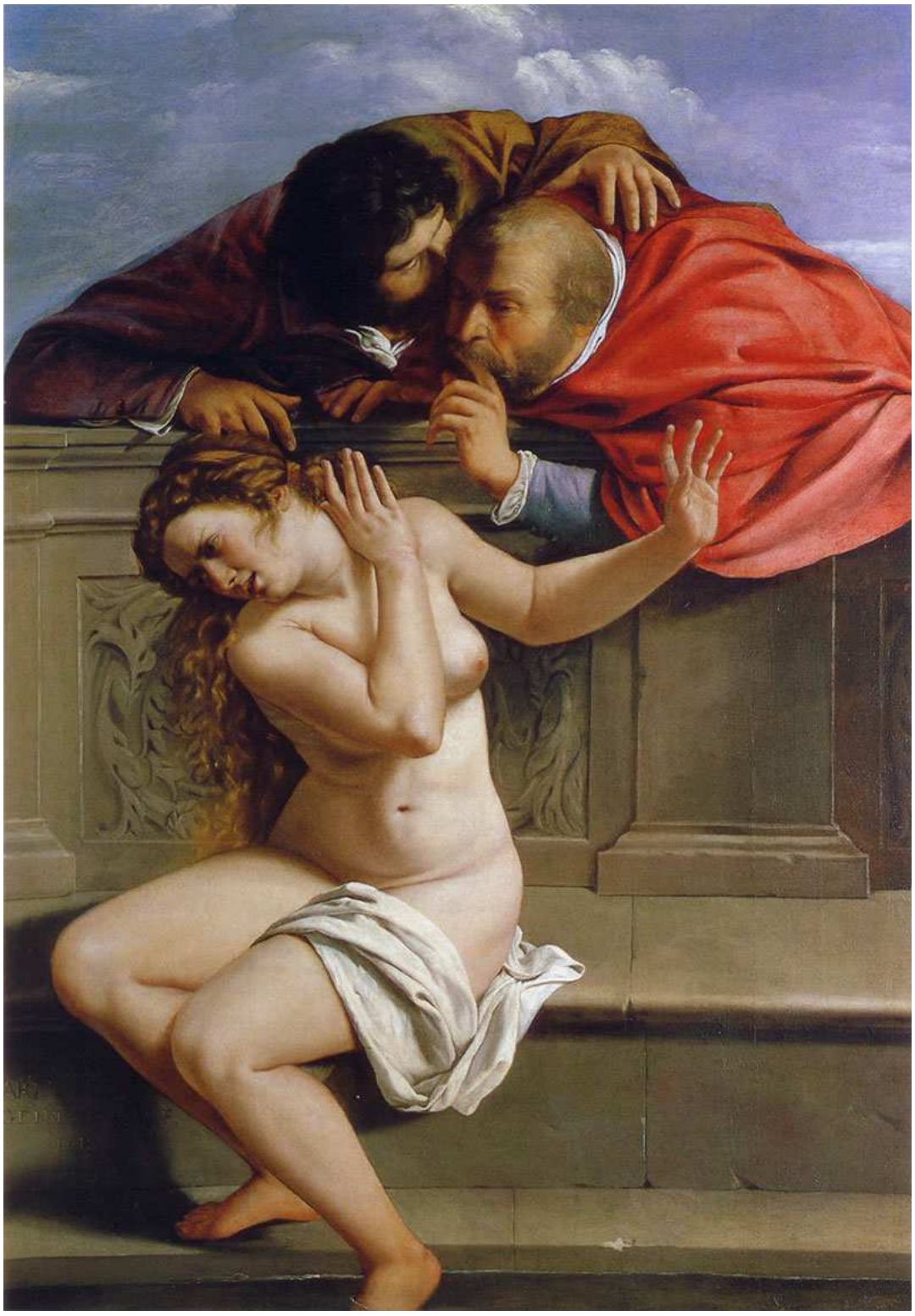

Figure 6

Figure 7

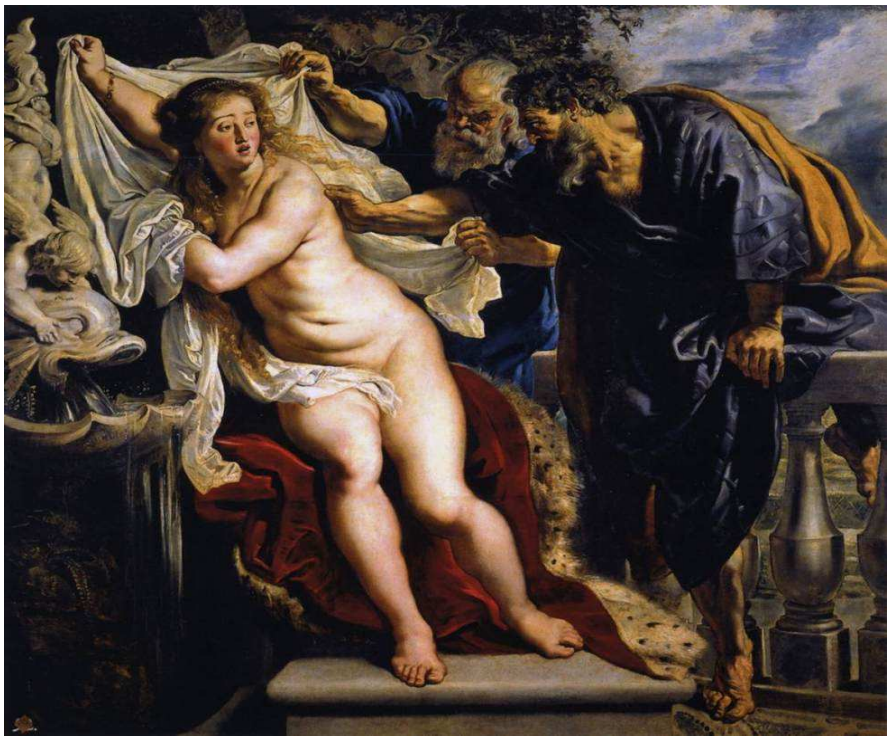

Figure 8

Figure 9

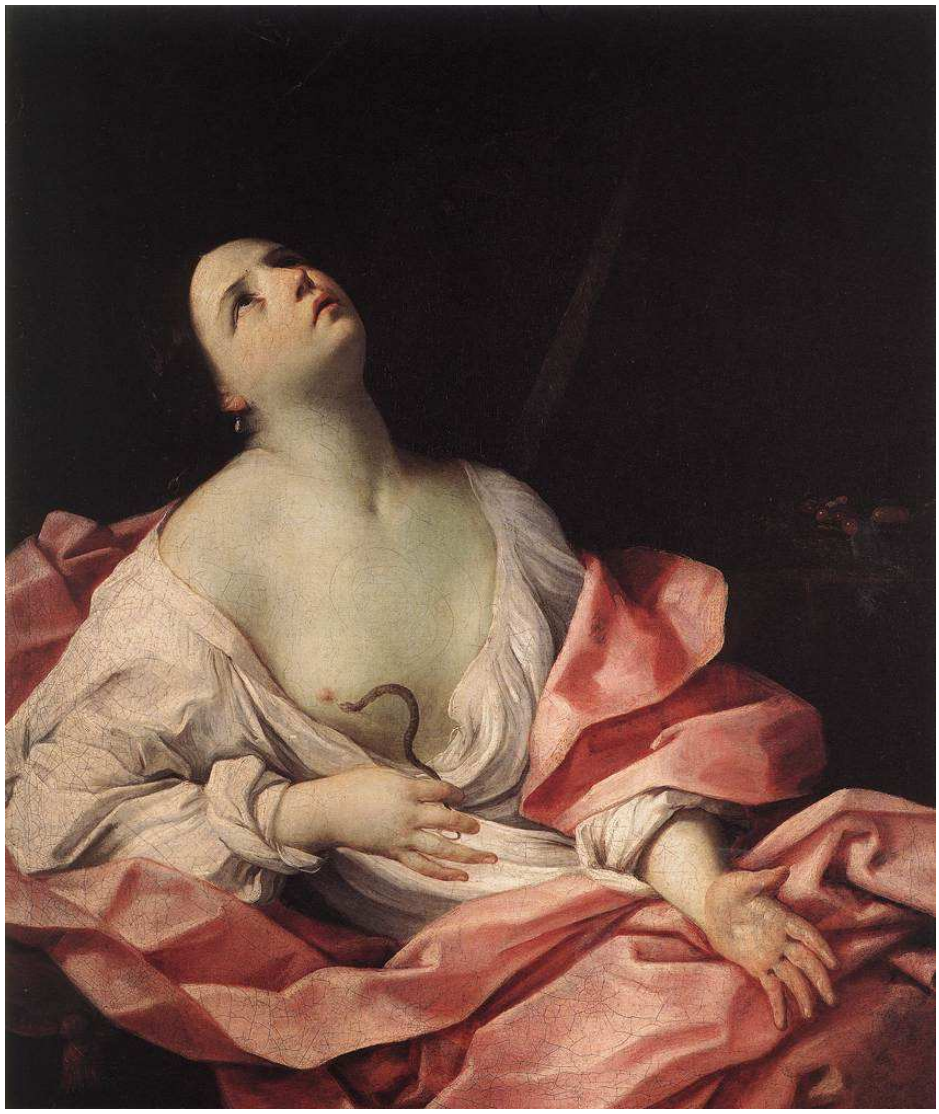

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16