Artemisia Gentileschi: Inspiration and Influence in Early Modern Italy

By

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A Thesis Submitted to

Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Bachelor of Arts, Honours in History

April 2023, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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Date: 13 April 2023

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Abstract:

This thesis analyses the life and work of the early modern Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-ca. 1654) to understand her sources of inspiration and influence. Artemisia rose to prominence during the 20th century when feminist art historians began to research women artists. Artemisia's body of artwork, however, is often overshadowed by the work of her father Orazio or her ordeal of rape and the trial of her attacker in Rome. This thesis will look at the context of Artemisia's life in Rome and Florence to draw connections between what she experienced and what she created. By comparing the art and ideologies Artemisia encountered against her own paintings, this thesis develops a deeper understanding of her unique female perspective and choice of subjects in a male-dominated era of artistic production. Through the examination of her work, the thesis aims to understand Artemisia's talent and resilience.

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Introduction

Artemisia Gentileschi, an early modern Italian artist, has spent much of the last 400 years nearly forgotten by history in favour of her male counterparts. The Renaissance produced the artists – Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael – all men placed on a pedestal as masters by the art history community. While interest in Artemisia has grown alongside the growing disciplines of feminist history and feminist art history, much of Artemisia's life has been reduced to her experiences with men, whether her father, tutor, husband, patrons, or acquaintances. Artemisia's exceptional artwork, despite living in a time where women were deemed second-class and unworthy of the titles of "genius" or "master," is a window into her life. The figures she chose to paint and how she chose to portray them reflect the seventeenth-century world around her, whether positive or negative. Artemisia needed to draw inspiration and gather information from her surroundings to portray the women in her art successfully. Early modern Italy was filled with classical, biblical, and historical literature, examples of Renaissance and mannerist art, and a thriving artist community, which could have contributed to Artemisia's knowledge and, thus, her paintings. Before looking to the Renaissance, it is necessary to understand what historians have written about Artemisia previously and how they portrayed her and her work. Then sources from Renaissance and Baroque Italy can be analyzed to paint a picture of Artemisia's life and how she understood her world such as published literature and other artworks.

Artemisia Gentileschi became of interest during the second-wave feminist movement because of her undeniable talent and ability to face and overcome obstacles to become a success in her lifetime. In 1976, Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin published *Women Artists: 1550-1950,* highlighting several women artists, including Artemisia as pioneering feminist figures. Early historians placed Artemisia on a pedestal, calling her "...the first woman in the

history of western art to make a significant and undeniably important contribution to the art of her time."[1] Her immediate rise to acclaim from her rediscovery reflects the historians' view of Artemisia – as an exception. She was a woman able to rise beyond what was thought possible by the limitations imposed on woman artists of the European past. However, the narrative established by these early historians of Artemisia perpetuates the issues regarding judging a woman's talents within a male-dominated and controlled society. Rather than being deemed a talented artist in her own right, historians praise her because she is a woman who rose above. While not necessarily an incorrect view of Artemisia's story, these kinds of portrayals remove much of Artemisia's agency in becoming a well-known artist. As this was very early research regarding Artemisia, it lacks the depth needed for a more comprehensive study of her life, including the more intimate parts and how she developed as a person and an artist.

Mary Garrard further attempted to understand Artemisia's first official known painting, *Susanna and the Elders*. Garrard's chapter "Artemisia and Susanna" in *Feminism and Art History* analyzes the story behind the subject and how Artemisia's life may have impacted its composition. Garrard refers to Artemisia's interpretation of Susanna as "unorthodox" and is an example of a young artist with an exceptional talent for her age (about 17 at the time of its completion).[2] Susanna had been the subject of many works before Artemisia's, but Garrard described them as "...sexually exploitative and morally meaningless...because most artists and patrons have been men, drawn by instinct to identify more with the villains than with the heroine."[3] While historians have contested the attribution of *Susanna* to Artemisia, the clear displeasure on Susanna's face and her defensive gestures against the elders display the unique

[1] Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, ed., *Women Artists: 1550-1950* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976): 118.
[2] Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia and Susanna,"" in *Feminism in Art History*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper and Row, 1982): 147, 148.
[3] Garrard, "Artemisia," 152.

female perspective that feminist art historians have tried to understand or uncover.[4] Garrard argues that Artemisia's experience as a young woman provides enough evidence to support her treatment of Susanna.[5] Considering this is the first work attributed to Artemisia, the artist fascinated with strong female characters from the beginning and represented women in a way that artists had not done before. The previous painted iterations of women such as Susanna, lead one to wonder where Artemisia drew from to present these women through a new and uniquely feminine lens rather than the 'male gaze'.

Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews' "The Feminist Critique of Art History" strove to understand art created by women in the context of art history. At the time of its publication in 1987, little scholarship on women artists existed.[6] Yet, the feminist art historians had to determine whether women artists could be analyzed "...within the traditional historical framework...for it fixes women within pre-existing structures without questioning the validity of these structures."[7] Gouma-Peterson refers to structures created by men, thus intended to uphold the greatness of men. The authors question previous historians' ignorance of women artists[8] and whether being a woman changed how the artist created art with a "female sensibility" or how others viewed their art.[9] The idea of gender difference because of experiences and training as women or men is fundamental when looking at Artemisia and how she chose to portray women in her works. For example, the author notes Artemisia's *Susanna*, as it focuses on "...the heroine's plight, not the villain's anticipated pleasure."[10] While Gouma-Peterson and Mathews

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[4] Garrard, "Artemisia,", 153.
[5] Ibid., 162.
[6] Thalia Gouma-Peterson and Patricia Mathews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin,* 69:3 (September 1987): 326.
[7] Gouma-Peterson, "The Feminist," 327.
[8] Ibid., 328.
[9] Ibid., 336.
[10] Ibid., 337.

criticized previous historians for their ignorance of the structures created by men that dominated art history, their analyses must be understood within the context of the 1980s.

Feminist art historians of the late 20th century, then, began to look at how female artists had been studied (or not) and what issues arose. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard wrote "An Exchange on the Feminist Critique of Art History" in 1989 to detail the progression of feminist art history from the first generation of scholars who tackled the subject. Attempting to understand the beginnings of feminist art history is complicated, as the "first generation" of American historians and "second generation" of British historians began their work in fundamentally different directions.[11] While the American historians worked along more traditional boundaries, the British historians strove to work with "new methodologies," including postmodernism and deconstructive theories, which were considered more radical approaches to the subject.[12] Before historians could look at feminist art history, they had to determine the biases and gaps in art history, finding what information needed to be collected or questions historians wanted to answer.[13] Ultimately, it is impossible to remove art and history from their patriarchal roots; however, it is possible to create space for women to exist and be celebrated within the discipline of art history.[14] The early works of feminist historians are the foundation from which the rest of feminist art historians built their research, thus necessary for comprehending why feminist art histories developed the way they did. This trajectory is also helpful when looking at more modern scholarship, as tracing back to whether the foundations are

[11] Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "An Exchange on the Feminist Critique of Art History," *The Art Bulletin*, 71:1 (March 1989): 124.
[12] Broude, "An Exchange," 124.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 12.

from the American or British perspectives of art history can give more context to the theories or theses explored in other works.

In "Feminist Art History and the Academy: Where Are We Now?", Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard's sentiments mirrored Gouma-Peterson and Mathews, looking at how the male-dominated fields of art and art history have influenced the study of women in art. However, Broude and Garrard's writing examines the Renaissance as a starting point for how historians view women. The authors examine the barriers faced by female artists of the Renaissance, such as an overall lack of education and access to proper training.[15] Additionally, they highlight the sentiment of artistic genius being "...not born but made, and their makers were men..." - a fundamental aspect of Renaissance.

Historians explain some women tried to earn a living or to break into the field of art during the Renaissance. Women were excluded from training opportunities that would have created a foundation for success, and such exclusion was a "...result of institutional bias, and not gender deficiency."[16] Again, historians raise the idea of women having a unique aesthetic, solidifying this question as important in the study of feminist art historians.[17] However, in understanding women's art and their unique vision, one cannot ignore "legacy of the patriarchy," nor erase the nuances of how societal structures impacted women's contributions.[18] The ideas of the great male artist and "female lens" were essential to early art history studies.

Griselda Pollock, in her chapter "The Female Hero and the Making of a Feminist Canon: Artemisia Gentileschi's Representations of Susanna and Judith," in *Differencing the Canon:*

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[15] Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, "Feminist Art History and the Academy: Where Are We Now?" *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 25:1-2 (Spring-Summer 1997): 213.
[16] Broude and Garrard, "Feminist," 213.
[17] Ibid., 214.
[18] Ibid., 219.

Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories, discusses the narrative of Artemisia as an artist sensationalized because of her life story, rather than historians taking interest because of Artemisia's talent.[19] Pollock accuses historians of reducing Artemisia's art "...to therapeutic expressions of her repressed fear, anger, and or desire for revenge."[20] The traumas and tragedies Artemisia experienced often overshadow the work she created when critics see her pieces as reactionary rather than planned. The author reviews misguided analysis of Artemisia's life; Artemisia was often the "...site of exchange between men..."[21] Whether working for her father in his studio, being raped by her tutor, being married off, or having a variety of male acquaintances, Artemisia's life is seen through her relationships with men. Pollock's analysis of Artemisia is one of the first to step beyond the surface-level studies of Artemisia's life. Pollock delves into the details of Artemisia's life and acknowledges her as a woman who was more than just her artistic talent and her trauma, but a fully formed person whose art was not merely a reaction to her life but a carefully crafted work. Pollock recognized how historians often discussed Artemisia in relation to her father, rapist, or any other men in her life. This narrative was a turning point in the study of Artemisia, opening the door to new interpretations.

Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, edited by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, published in 2001, is an in-depth view of the life of Artemisia Gentileschi and her father, Orazio Gentileschi. This catalogue and compilation essays accompanied the Metropolitan Museum of Art's exhibit. While it does not focus exclusively on Artemisia, this work provides a different view regarding her life. The discussion of Orazio's life and career between 1599 and 1639,

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[19] Griselda Pollock, "The Female Hero and the Making of a Feminist Canon: Artemisia Gentileschi's Representations of Susanna and Judith," in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 97.
[20] Pollock, "The Female," 107.
[21] Ibid.

contributes information regarding how her father's career might have impacted Artemisia, while the book covers Artemisia from her adolescence to her death, 1610-1652.[22] Despite Artemisia's outstanding work as a female artist in the Renaissance, this exhibit and catalogue presents her father's name and work first, with Artemisia closely attached to him. It is still a narrative of a woman who is famous because of her father was and not because of her talents. Despite Pollock's criticisms of historians two years prior to the exhibit, it is evident in the chapters that the sentiment of Artemisia as an independent talent was yet to take hold in the museum and art history worlds.

In the first chapter "Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi," Judith W. Mann traces Artemisia's introduction to the world of art history alongside her father by a Caravaggio scholar in 1916.[23] Historians connected Artemisia to her father from the first notice of her. Art historians long debated whether she could have painted her Susanna and the Elders, as professionals dated it in 1610, and for a period, Artemisia's supposed birth year was 1597.[24] Even after discovering her baptism in 1593, historians still debated to what extent Orazio influenced this artwork. Historians have argued that he is fully responsible for the works, while others are convinced, he had nothing to do with the painting.[25] Despite Artemisia's current attribution to the painting, Mann makes it clear in 2001 that historians were divided; whether because of legitimate concerns of the attribution or doubt because of Artemisia's gender, it is clear there was a questioning of her abilities.

[22] Judith W. Mann, "Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi," in *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, edited by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001): 248.
[23] Mann, "Artemisia," 249.
[24] Ibid., 253.
[25] Ibid.

Elizabeth Cropper's "Life on the Edge: Artemisia Gentileschi, Famous Woman Painter," also in *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi,* is a narrative of Artemisia's life. However, this narrative still ties Artemisia closely to the men in her life, leaving little room for her to emerge as her own person. The author forfeits Artemisia's early life for a retelling of Artemisia's rape, trial, and subsequent marriage, reducing a large portion of her life to what her father wanted, "...Tassi was sentenced, Artemisia was married to Pierantonio Stittesi, and after the wedding 1612, the couple left for Florence." The author refers to her rape and subsequent marriage to another man as a "...near miss with social ostracism." While Cropper does sing Artemisia's praises throughout the chapter, she continues to bind Artemisia to the men around her and treat Artemisia differently than she may have treated a male counterpart. Her process by which she increased her business, creating works depicting only a few subjects, is called "manipulating," when Artemisia was an intelligent businesswoman who knew what kinds of paintings would sell. [26]

"Artemisia in Her Father's House," by Patrizia Cavazzini, in *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, gives light to Artemisia's early life, which helps to determine potential sources of artistic inspiration near her home and neighbourhood in Rome. Cavazzini writes about Artemisia's childhood, the life her father wanted Artemisia to have, and the churches that she was surrounded by.

Artemisia's relationship with other female artists remains speculative. Ann Sutherland Harris discusses the potential influence of Artemisia on a younger female artist, Elisabetta Sirani and suggests Lavinia Fontana a potential connection between Lavinia Fontana and Artemisia. Harris writes how it was typical for information and ideas to flow freely between Italian artists.

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[26] Elizabeth Cropper, "New Documents for Artemisia Gentileschi's Life in Florence," *Burlington Magazine,* 135:1008 (1993): 269.

However, since women were largely confined to their homes or nighbourhoods, it was more difficult for women to know artists outside their city.[27]

The question of Artemisia's relationship with other female artists is relatively new. Mary Garrard researched the potential relationship between Artemisia and Renaissance artist Giovanna Garzoni. While Garzoni's rise to prominence began while Artemisia already had a solid career, it does not diminish the importance of potential connections between female artists in the Renaissance, a rare instance.[28] Garzoni and Artemisia had similar patrons and supporters and likely met at the Medici court while Artemisia was working there, when Garzoni visited sometime between 1618 and 1620. There is also evidence of the two women travelling to the same places simultaneously – Venice to Naples, then to London from Turin.[29] Beyond their overlap outside work, Garzoni's, *Self-Portrait as Apollo,* c. 1618-1620, boasts similarities to one of Artemisia's self-portraits. Garrard's established preliminary connections between Garzoni and Artemisia are a solid base for discovering further evidence of their relationship and the possibility of communities of female artists during the Renaissance.

One of the most comprehensive and modern works regarding Artemisia is Mary Garrard's *Artemisia Gentileschi and Feminism in Early Modern Europe*, published in 2020. In this monograph, Garrard's goal is to portray Artemisia as more than an "isolated phenomenon."[30] Garrard addresses how Artemisia has been viewed historically and explores the world that helped form Gentileschi's works. The first chapter of the book, "Artemisia and the Writers:

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[27] Ann Sutherland Harris, "Artemisia Gentileschi and Elisabetta Sirani: Rivals or Strangers?" *Women's Art Journal*, 31:1 (Spring-Summer 2010): 3.
[28] Mary D. Garrard, "Two of a Kind: Giovanna Garzoni and Artemisia Gentileschi," Copyright 2019, https://artherstory.net/two-of-a-kind-garzoni-and-gentileschi/ (accessed 11 December 2022).
[29] Garrard, "Two."
[30] Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi and Feminism in Early Modern Europe* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2020): 1.

Feminism in Early Modern Europe," analyses published works on womankind that would have been available during the Renaissance and into the 1600s.

Garrard also builds on her analyses of *Susanna and the Elders* and further elaborates on how Artemisia's experiences seventeenth-century Rome may have influenced how she depicted *Susanna*. As other historians have debated the accurate attribution of Artemisia's *Susanna*, Garrard is confident in Artemisia's abilities at seventeen to complete such a work. To combat historians' questions of Artemisia's age and talent, Garrard cites Raphael's major altar painting done at the same age and Mozart's three completed operas, showing the double standard in historical analyses.[31] Garrard writes how Artemisia was able to give "...Susanna back her story."[32] The discussion of *Susanna* addresses the questions about a female aesthetic that earlier feminist art historians pondered. Artemisia's *Susanna* is described as "...the reality and validity of the girl-woman's experience," explaining how Susanna's displeasure inherently represents a woman's perspective, as the work focuses on the woman's plight and paints men as clear villains.[33] Garrard is able to further secure Artemisia as the painter of *Susanna and the Elders* and she successfully explains the unique ability Artemisia had to portray women's experiences in Renaissance Italy in her works, a feat that would be difficult to accomplish by a man.

Artemisia Gentileschi's rise to prominence in the art history community did not come quickly or easily. Before historians could evaluate her story for relevance or prominence, feminist art historians had to establish their entire discipline. Early feminist art historians had to establish that women artists were worth examining separately from men and how the works of women artists differ from their male counterparts while gaining a foothold within male-

[31] Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism*, 84.
[32] Ibid., 74.
[33] Ibid., 80.

dominated academia and museums. Once these feminist art historians and curators gained footing, they raised more interest in specific artists, including Artemisia. As feminist history progressed, Artemisia became more recognized as an artist who overcame challenging situations and was successful despite her disadvantages. Eventually, Artemisia rose through the ranks in feminist art history and art history, becoming a feminist icon. In 2020, London's National Gallery presented a solo exhibition of Artemisia's works, the gallery's first major exhibition dedicated to a woman in its 196-year history.[34] The exhibition was inspired by the gallery's acquisition of Artemisia's *Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, which was the first of Artemisia's paintings to enter a United Kingdom public collection.[35] The curators strove to highlight Artemisia's "wit, passion and resilience...and vulnerability" through her artwork.[36] The Director of the National Gallery, Dr. Gabriele Finaldi, called Artemisia a "remarkable and immensely admired artist in her lifetime and she is an inspirational figure in our own time."[37]

Nevertheless, there are still questions left unanswered. She is often discussed alongside her father or rapist, suffocating her narrative, and not allowing her to be seen as her own person. Additionally, given her progression as a young girl in her father's studio to a successful woman travelling Europe, there is not yet an in-depth study as to what may have inspired or informed Artemisia to make her art, whether that be the literature of her time, the art in churches, or even other women artists. This thesis intends to help fill this gap.

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[34] Isis Davis-Marks, "Why a Long-Awaited Artemisia Gentileschi Exhibition Is So Significant," Copyright 2023. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/national-gallery-exhibits-work-artemisia-gentileschi-180975971/ (accessed 12 April 2023).
[35] The National Gallery, "Artemisia," Copyright 2016-2023. https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/about-us/press-and-media/press-releases/artemisia (accessed 12 April 2023). Her 17th century ceiling fresco work was already part of the Royal Collection.
[36] The National Gallery, "Artemisia."
[37] Ibid.

Chapter 1:

Who Was Artemisia Gentileschi: Early Life and Defining Moments

"I could not cry out; nevertheless I tried to scream as best I could..."[38]

- Artemisia Gentileschi, 1612

Artemisia Gentileschi was born on July 8th, 1593 to Orazio Gentileschi and Prudentia Gentileschi (née Montone).[39] Artemisia was the only daughter and oldest child of Orazio and Prudentia.[40] Orazio, born in Tuscany, was a painter; the family lived in the artists'' quarters in Rome. The Gentileschi family moved at least twice during her youth. They moved in 1610 from Via del Babuino to Via Margutta and again in 1612 to Via della Croce [Figure 1.1].[41] All three streets existed within the artists' quarters of Rome, which were innately masculine and characterized by pilgrims, tricksters, artists, and prostitutes. The neighbourhood could prove dangerous for a young woman such as Artemisia[42] and she was largely sequestered to her home to prevent her from falling victim to her environment. After her mother, who succumbed to death in childbirth in 1605 when Artemisia was just 12, as the eldest and as a daughter, Artemisia was particularly vulnerable.[43] Upon her mother's death, Orazio took Artemisia under his wing as an artistic apprentice. Artemisia did have the opportunity to explore one facet of Rome's culture; while there were no art galleries as are known today, churches displayed many artworks. Additionally, public piazzas boasted exquisite statues for any onlooker. Accompanied by her

[38] Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 31:1 (Spring 2000): 70.
[39] Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism*, 21.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.

chaperone, Artemisia explored the religious sectors of Rome, taking in the works available to her.

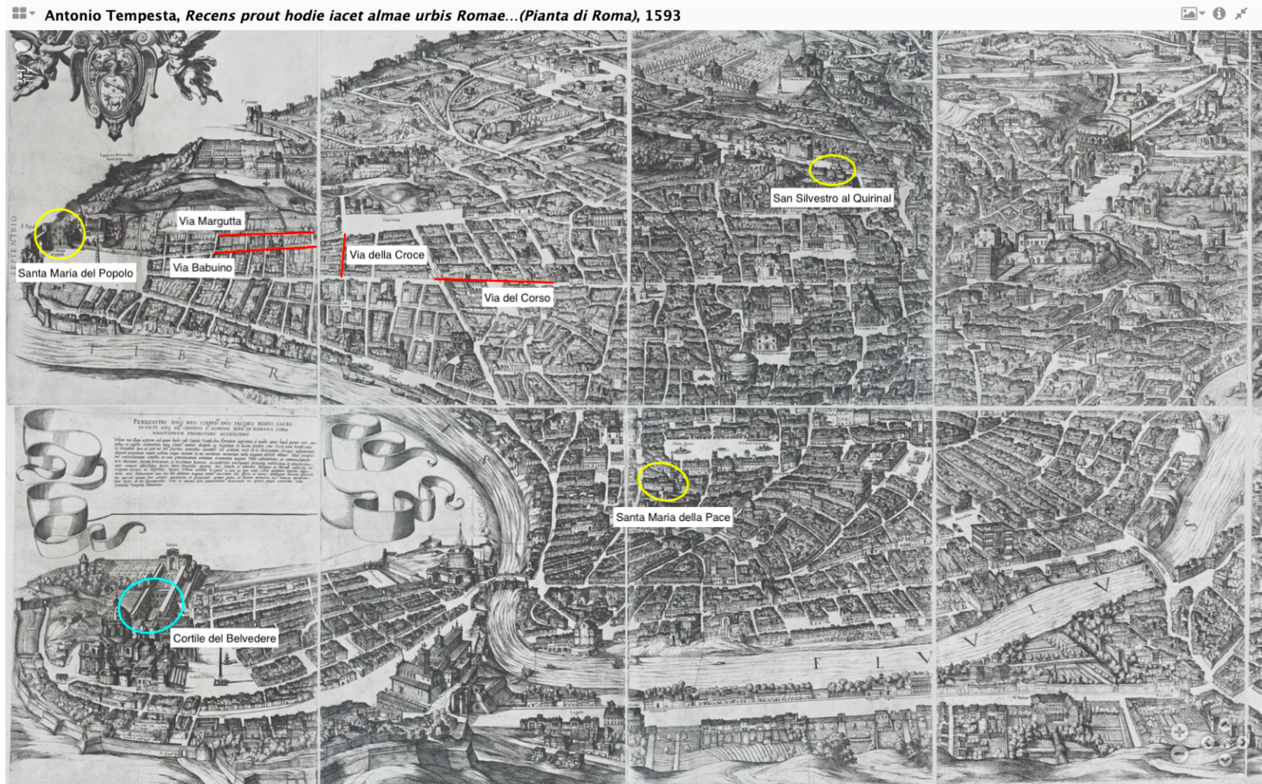

Figure 1.1 Map of Rome with Locations, https://www.nga.gov/accademia/en/maps/Tempesta-Pianta-di-Roma.html

However, Artemisia's journey from young girl to successful artist was difficult. In 1612, at just 17, Artemisia was raped by her tutor, a man hired by her father to foster her flourishing talent.[44] Artemisia called it rape, while the tutor reduced it to seduction, arguing a much different explanation: that Artemisia participated consensually.[45] However, retain her honour, Artemisia continued to have a sexual relationship with her rapist. She hoped that her relationship would end in marriage, and that she could escape with her and her family's reputation intact.[46] Artemisia's

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[44] Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism*, 23.
[45] Dan W. Clanton Jr., *The Good, the Bold, and the Beautiful: the Story of Susanna and its Renaissance Interpretations*, 159.
[46] Cohen, "The Trials," 49.

rapist knew how to manipulate the situation in his favour, as he promised Artemisia his hand in marriage if she continued the relationship. Artemisia's father took her rapist to trial when the marriage proposal fell through. Orazio brought the case to trial, not because of the disgusting acts committed against his daughter, but because the loss of Artemisia's virginity devalued her as property, threatening her marriage prospects.[47]

As a part of the judicial process in early modern Rome, Artemisia was subject to torture via sibille[48] to ensure she told the truth regarding the attack, physically and emotionally. The torture consisted of cords wrapped tightly around her fingers, damaging the young artist and threatening her virtue and hands.[49] According to the trial transcripts, as the cord's tension increased, Artemisia looked at her rapist standing before her and said, "This is the ring that you gave me and these are your promises."[50] Artemisia proceeded to detail the rape, ensuring that her testimony gave all the necessary details to catalogue her experience of loss of virginity as rape.[51] She also explained how she did not give in to her attacker but countered him by scratching his face and pulling his hair. Once she got away, she grabbed a knife and threatened to kill him.[52] Artemisia's trial gives a devastating yet enlightening view into one part of Artemisia's life; though the circumstances are grim, Artemisia's strength and resilience shine through.

Closely following the conclusion of the trial, Artemisia was married off to Pierantonio Stiatessi and moved to Florence.[53] She set up a studio within her father-in-law's studio on Via

[47] Cohen, "The Trials," 60.
[48] The National Gallery, "Artemisia in her own words," Copyright 2023. https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/artemisia/artemisia-in-her-own-words (accessed 10 April 2023).
[49] Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists*, 118.
[50] The National Gallery, "Artemisia in her own words."
[51] Cohen, "The Trials," 70.
[52] Cohen, "The Trials," 70.
[53] Letizia Treves et al., *Artemisia* (London: National Gallery Company, 2020): 13.

del Campaccio in 1614 before moving to a studio on Borgo Ognissanti in 1615 [Figure 1.2].[54] Artemisia moved back to Rome, then to Venice, Naples, and later England for a brief period, before returning to Naples to live out the rest of her life.[55] Artemisia Gentileschi surpassed the gender-based barriers to success that the Renaissance presented, becoming an artist with patrons such as Duke Cosimo II de' Medici of Tuscany, Philip IV of Spain, and the English crown.[56]

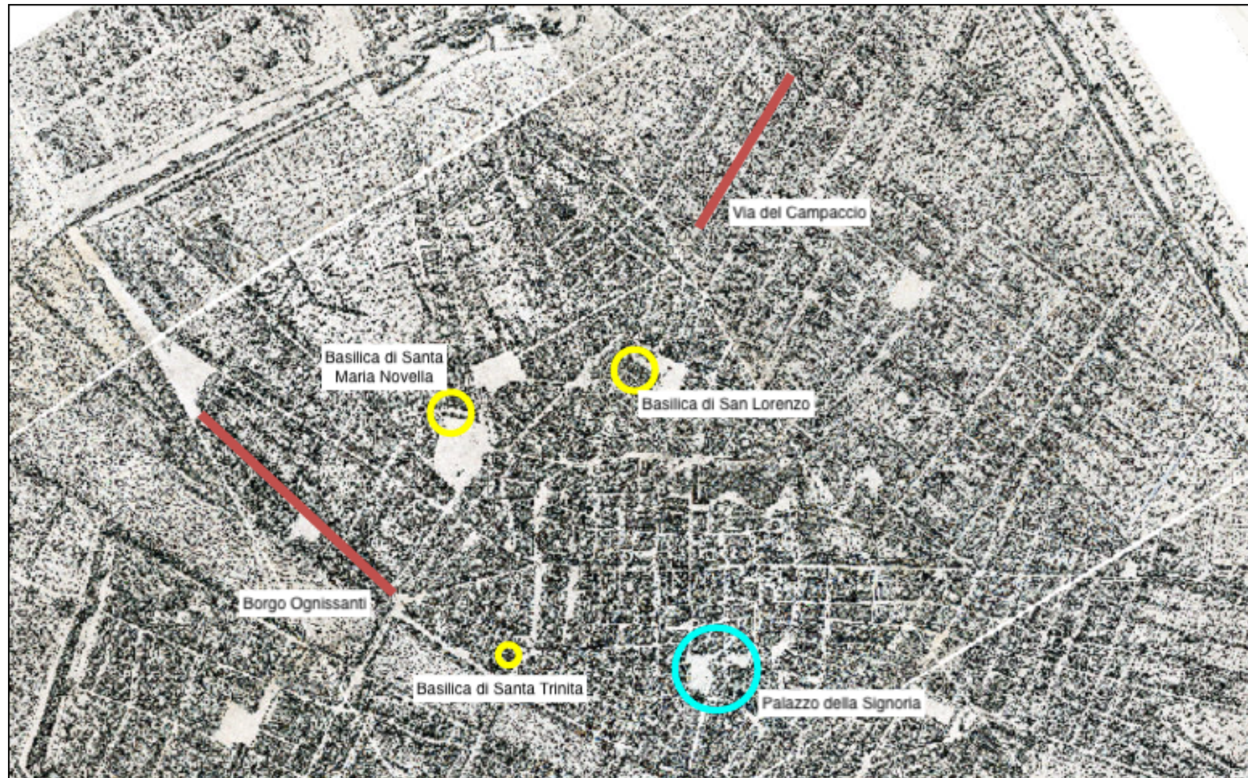

Figure 1.2 Map of Florence with Locations,

https://utoronto.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d9692905ff41436d99cf7c398552ca39

Despite Artemisia's incredible successes during her lifetime, she has fallen victim to historians describing her only in relation to the men in her life. From her patrons to her

[54] Treves, *Artemisia*, 13, 88.
[55] Ibid., 51, 248.
[56] Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001): XV, XVI, XVII, XIX;

contemporaries, her father and attacker, the men in Artemisia's life have long received credit for inspiring the work that Artemisia created. Whether it be her father, given all the credit for Artemisia's artistic ability, despite her leaving her father's house at just twenty, and further developing her abilities over the next thirty-four years, her rapist, given credit for inspiring Artemisia for painting such strong, yet violent women, as if all of Artemisia's paintings were simply reactions to her assault. Artemisia deserves to have historians analyze her as a woman who took in the wealth of art around her and took inspiration from it. She deserves acknowledgement for her incredible ability to present women in a new way unique to her male-artist counterparts. Artemisia presents her subjects through a uniquely female lens, returning agency to the biblical, classical, and historical women she portrayed. Artemisia took advantage of her career as an artist, and a relatively successful one, to paint women in a positive light, portraying them with favourable characteristics and choosing moments in their stories that help to support their narratives as strong women.

Chapter 2:

Biblical and Classical Figures as Influence: Artemisia and the Women of Early Modern Italy

"With me Your Illustrious Lordship will not lose and you will find the spirit of Caesar in the soul of a woman."[57]

- Letter from Artemisia Gentileschi to Don Antonio Ruffo, 13 November 1649

The sixteenth century was a time of flourishing artistic creation and intense religious influence. In the mid-1500s, the Counter-Reformation introduced a new view on masculinity, changing how women in the bible were viewed and portrayed. The Council of Trent, 1545-1563, renewed interest in presenting classical and biblical figures as exemplars for men's and women's lives. Male artists portrayed women as still feminine, yet distinctly heroic, thus exemplary women became models for men to model themselves.[58] Heroic women in this new narrative included Judith and Esther, as well as Saint Cecilia and Saint Catherine of Alexandria, all of whom Artemisia painted during her career. In their daily lives, women became greater participants in religion and the targets for moral lessons presented through religious narratives.[59] From the Old Testament's women to the New Testament's Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, Artemisia's muses were at the forefront of biblical narratives during her life. To fully understand the resurgence of specific biblical figures in Renaissance and Baroque art, it is essential first to understand the Council of Trent, which reaffirmed the "true" biblical narratives of the Catholic church.

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[57] The National Gallery, "Artemisia."

[58] Virginia Cox, *The Prodigious Muse: Women's Writing in Counter-Reformation Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011)*:* 31.

[59] Cox, *The* Prodigious, 42.

The Council of Trent determined which biblical figures were relevant to the Catholic church in Italy during the Renaissance and into the seventeenth century. Before the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic bible went through several versions, combining various translations, books, and sections from the Old and New Testaments.[60] Charlemagne requested the production of the Vulgate, including the "best manuscripts," which later became the foundation for the 13th-century Paris Bible. In 1542, Pope Paul III established a Universal Council to rework the bible, moving back towards "original faith."[61] The desire was to reject Greek biblical texts and pull only from the Hebrew canon.

Eventually, the Council of Trent reviewed the Roman version of the Vulgate. The decision to determine an official version of the bible came from fear of heretical ideals from the Protestant Reformation; thus, the Catholics introduced the new vulgate as a base upon which renewed Catholics built their beliefs.[62] Under Pope Clement VIII, in 1592, the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate became the official Catholic vulgate bible.[63] The Bible included the books from the Hebrew Bible and the books of Esther and Daniel. Ultimately, the goal of the Council was to end any controversy and to ensure that Catholics could reference the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate for all arguments regarding faith, preaching, or teaching.[64] The narratives of women in the bible served to re-educate female worshippers because women were considered the "ultimate carriers of original sin"[65] as descendants of Eve. Thus, young girls or daughters required examples of pious, devout, and penitent women to which they could aspire. Artemisia's artwork fits into this

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[60] Daniel Kerber, "The Canon in the Vulgate Translation of the Bible," *The Bible Translator*, 67:2 (2016): 175.
[61] Kerber, "The Canon," 177.
[62] Ibid., 176.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid., 179.
[65] Heather Sexton Graham, "Renaissance Flesh and Women's Devotion: Titan's Penitent Magdalen," *Comitatus*, 39:1 (2008): 144.

cultural niche as she created several portraits and works representing religious and biblical figures, including Judith.

During the Counter-Reformation, Judith rose in popularity in biblical narratives. Before the Counter-Reformation, *The Book of* Judith was not considered authentic and thus not an official part of the Catholic canon.[66] The Council of Trent confirmed the Vulgate, later reaffirmed the 1590s versions and made it an act of heresy to refute Judith's story as anything but the truth.[67] Judith became an allegory for the triumph of the Catholic Church over the Protestant Reformation, as the Protestants rejected the Book of Judith as apocryphal within their tradition.[68] Judith's story was preached in the church, written about in poetry, or depicted in artworks in churches and palaces.[69]

With the renewed vulgate as the official bible of the Catholic Church came a rise in popularity regarding Judith. In 1599, *In Libros Iudith* by Nicholas Serarius was printed in Germany, marking the first significant Judith narrative since the Middle Ages.[70] The public sphere had also fostered an increased appreciation and connection to Judith, especially in Florence—Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* [c. 1455-60] marked the defeat over the Medici family and symbolized Florentine resilience.[71] Judith and later David in the early 1500s became Old Testament protectors and symbols of the city, portraying chastity and domesticity to the public.[72]

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[66] Elena Brizio and Marco Piana, eds., *Idealizing Women in the Italian Renaissance* (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2022): 85.
[67] Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies across the Disciplines* (Cambridge: OpenBook Publishers, 2010): 350.
[68] Brizio, *Idealizing*, 85.
[69] Brine, Ciletti, and Lähnemann, 352.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 292.
[72] Ibid. 292-293.

Susanna experienced a resurgence as a subject in Renaissance art, but male artists depicted her as a sexual and eroticized woman.[73] Patrons and artists, overwhelmingly men, focused more on representing Susanna's story as a sexual tale rather than the core narrative of a woman violated by men. Artists neglected Susanna's story from a female perspective – the object of unwanted attention – until artists such as Artemisia emerged. Male artists' interpretations of Susanna showed a submissive woman, reflecting the new ideals of women introduced by the Counter-Reformation; the Counter-Reformation favoured women who were passive, submissive, and chaste, rejecting women's agency.[74] As most patrons of Susanna paintings were men, they were "drawn by instinct to identify more with the villains than with the heroines."[75] Thus, Artemisia's depictions of Susanna varied from her male counterparts, as she likely related to Susanna on a much deeper level.

The Counter-Reformation, as with the female heroines Judith and Susanna, championed the resurgence of the repentant saint, Mary Magdalene.[76] Despite the New Testament mentioning her only twelve times, Mary Magdalene rose in popularity among Catholics.[77] Christians celebrated Mary Magdalene for her penitence and rejection of vanity. However, she also lived a life of sin prior to her introduction to Jesus.[78] Mary Magdalene became a more relatable biblical woman than the Virgin Mary; the Virgin was born without original sin, while Mary Magdalene sinned in her life but was able to become a follower of Jesus and repent for her sins.[79] Mary Magdalene, as a figure, served as a versatile character, with artists portraying her as a witness to

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[73] Clanton Jr., *The* Good, 121.
[74] Ibid., 145.
[75] Ibid., 121.
[76] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 325.
[77] Graham, "Renaissance Flesh," 143.
[78] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 325.
[79] Michelle Erhardt and Amy Morris, *Mary Magdalene, Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, vol. 7 (Boston: Brill, 2012): 1.

Jesus' Resurrection, a prostitute, a preacher, and a penitent.[80] Mary Magdalene's dedication to Jesus and her absolution of sin made her the ideal woman to look up to during the Renaissance.[81]

The Book of Esther narrates Esther's story, which the Catholic Church included in the new Catholic vulgate following the Council of Trent. The Book of Esther was one of the additions to the books of the Hebrew biblical tradition and the Book of Daniel.[82] In the Book of Esther, a Jewish queen, Esther, risks her life to convince her husband, King Ahasuerus, not to kill all the Jewish people of his city and that the accusations made against the Jewish people are false.[83] Before meeting Ahasuerus, she fasted as a show of piety; her devotion caused her to nearly faint while confronting Ahasuerus.[84] Esther, foiling the plot against the Jewish people, becomes their saviour. Esther is also described in the Bible as "fair and beautiful," following the pattern of Old Testament heroines such as Judith and Susanna.[85] Esther became a famous heroine depicted by artists as early as the 13th century[86] as artists' interest in depicting women grew, as did interest in the cult of the Virgin. In Florence's early modern period, Esther became a symbol of modesty and chastity, the ideal virtuous married woman, and an example of whom young girls should aspire to be.[87]

Saint Catherine of Alexandria has a long history of representations in literature and art that made her the most popular female saint in Renaissance Europe and the second most popular

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[80] Erhardt, *Mary Magdalene*, 1.
[81] Ibid., 13.
[82] Kerber, "The Canon," 176.
[83] Philip E. Satterthwaite and J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Historical Books* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2012): 233.
[84] Babette Bohn, "Esther as a Model for Female Autonomy in Northern Italian Art," *Studies in Iconography*, 23 (2002): 184.
[85] Bohn, "Esther," 183.
[86] Bohn, "Esther," 184.
[87] Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, "Bride, Court Lady, Oriental Princess, Virgin Mary, Jewess: The Many Faces of Queen Esther in Early Modern Florence," *Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 24:2 (Fall 2021); Bohn, "Esther," 184.

woman (the Virgin Mary was the most popular).[88] Saint Catherine of Alexandria's first mention was in the 7th century, though she became a popular figure in the 15th century after printing various versions of her story that spread across Europe.[89] The story follows a young and beautiful queen who was extremely intelligent. Roman emperor Maxentius took over her kingdom and introduced pagan gods, which Catherine vehemently opposed. Catherine refused to marry Maxentius and faced Rome's greatest orators in a debate on Christianity. Catherine convinced every single orator to convert to the Christian faith. Catherine eventually died defending her faith, establishing her as a faithful martyr.[90] Depictions of Saint Catherine of Alexandria during the Renaissance and Baroque periods were symbols of devoutness to the Christian faith.[91] Saint Catherine also became a vessel for portraits of young women shown with her attributes, as she was a heralded virgin martyr and symbol of wisdom and intelligence.[92]

Historical figures have always been of interest to artists; though, particularly during the Renaissance, historical and mythological figures rose in popularity due to the heightened interest in classical literature. The 15th century saw authors such as Boccaccio and Chaucer revisiting some of these stories, re-evaluating the narratives and presenting them in new ways.[93] Cleopatra was viewed by consumers of her story as morally ambiguous, mainly due to her story ending in suicide. Early modern authors heralded her as a "heroine of true love,"[94] yet the same consumers criticized her because of her manner of death. She pivoted between martyr and sinner. Before the

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[88] Tracy Cosgriff, "Raphael's Rainbow and the vision of Saint Catherine," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 72:1 (2019): 100.
[89] Cosgriff, "Raphael's," 101.
[90] Cosgriff, "Rapheal's," 100.
[91] Ibid., 101.
[92] Diane Owens Hughes, "Representing the Family Portraits and Purposes in Early Modern Italy," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 17:1 (Summer 1986): 28.
[93] Anna Maria Montanari, *Cleopatra in Italian and English Renaissance Drama* (Madrid: Amsterdam University Press, 2019): 51, 60.
[94] Montanari, *Cleopatra*, 45.

Renaissance, male artists typically portrayed Cleopatra after she killed herself by getting an asp to bite her. Thus the depiction was rather grizzly, depicting Cleopatra in pain after she poisoned herself.[95] As art evolved during the Renaissance, Cleopatra became a figure that artists could eroticize, likening her to Eve, and shown at the moment before death rather than after, perhaps to grant the opportunity for a more seductive image of Cleopatra.[96] Along with classical figures, Renaissance artists, including Artemisia, turned to mythological figures for inspiration.

Artemisia painted a variety of figures from mythology, including Aurora and Minerva. The resurgence of Greek and Roman knowledge, including their mythologies, characterized the Renaissance[97] with a renewed interest in the figures and their aesthetics, leaning into the ancient depictions of gods and goddesses.[98] Renaissance artists used such figures as symbols of their moral or political beliefs and gave artists dramatic narratives from which they could represent techniques in form and colour.[99] Aurora, the bringer of dawn in Roman mythology, was portrayed by Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo and Guido Reni.[100] Minerva, the Roman equivalent of Athena, would have risen along with other mythological figures but did not garner as much interest as Aurora. She had "limited appeal"[101] as the goddess of war.[102] However, Minerva was unique because she could represent war or peace, dependent on what iconography

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[95] Christiansen. *Orazio*, 304.
[96] Montanari, *Cleopatra*, 71.
[97] Carla Brenner, et al., *The Inquiring Eye: Classical Mythology in European Art* (Washington D.C.: Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, 1996): 9.
[98] Noa Leibson, "Aurora: A Painting of the Coming Dawn," *Wonders of Nature and Artifice*, 5 (2017).
[99] Brenner, *The Inquiring*, 11.
[100] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 338.
[101] R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi – A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin,* 50:2 (June 1968): 161.
[102] Michael Trevor Coughlin, *From Mythos to Logos: Andrea Palladio, Freemasonry, and the Triumph of Minerva* (Boston: BRILL, 2019): 28.

the artist used to portray her; thus, Renaissance artists and patrons alike could determine whether they portrayed Minerva as a warring goddess or a peaceful one.[103]

[103] Coughlin, *From Mythos*, 28.

Chapter 3

Artemisia Gentileschi and the Art in the World Around Her

"I have made a solemn vow never to send my drawings because people have cheated me. In particular, just today I found...that, having done a drawing of souls in Purgatory for the Bishop of St. Gata, he, in order to spend less, commissioned another painter to do the painting using my work. If I were a man, I can't imagine it would have turned out this way."[104]

- Letter from Artemisia Gentileschi to Don Antonio Ruffo, 13 November 1649

3.1 Churches as Influence

Artemisia Gentileschi grew up in Rome, surrounded by dozens of churches, all boasting incredible works of art. She lived with her family from birth; her first home was on Via del Babuino, moving to Via Margutta in 1610 and Via della Croce in 1612.[105] The three streets are connected, narrowing the radius of which churches Artemisia may have frequented. Artemisia's focus on biblical women in her artwork, such as Susanna, Judith, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Mary Magdalene, and Esther, suggests religious influences in her life, either directly from the bible or through interactions with the Catholic church. As a young woman, Artemisia's father primarily bound her to her home, with church outings accompanied by a chaperone, Tuzi.[106]

Churches acted as art galleries for Artemisia, exposing her to various works of art within her Roman neighbourhood.[107] Works of art in churches served as visual representations of biblical characters during a time when vernacular bibles were uncommon or banned. Occasionally works by female artists such as Plautilla Nelli or Lavinia Fontana were displayed in

[104] Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi, The Image of a Female Hero in Baroque Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989): 398.
[105] Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism,* 21.
[106] Ibid., 23; Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 17.
[107] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi,* 17.

altars or surrounding walls. Historians write that Artemisia would go around the city with her art supplies and ride in carriages to visit churches throughout Rome.

Rome is the birthplace of Artemisia, and thus where she spent the first two decades of her life, eventually moving to Florence in 1612 or 1613. Artemisia would return to Rome for a period between 1620 and 1626. During Artemisia's time in Rome as a married woman, she had access to many churches, with exposure to a broader range of artistic influence. Each church has some connection to Gentileschi's life, whether very concrete or more conceptual; while there is evidence available to prove that Artemisia visited some, others have some connection to her but no certainty. In analyzing the churches proximal to Artemisia, as well as any connections there may have been between Artemisia and the church, Santa Maria della Pace is an ideal location from which Artemisia may have drawn inspiration.

Santa Maria della Pace displayed the commissioned works of Orazio Gentileschi, opening the possibility for Artemisia to access the site and its art.[108] In 1607, Orazio worked on the chapel in Santa Maria della Pace, painting the *Baptism of Christ*. At this time, Artemisia would have been fourteen, and it would be four years before she completed her first official artwork, but she was at an impressionable age and working in her father's studio. For example, the central panel in the chapel, by Baldassare Peruzzi, featured Saint Bridget and Saint Catherine of Alexandria [Figure 3.1].[109] Only eight years later, Artemisia would begin to work on her *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* [Figure 3.2], completing it two years later in 1617. She also completed her *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* [Figure 3.3] the same year.

[108] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 284.
[109] Cynthia Stollhans, "Peruzzi's Standing Saint Paul in the Ponzetti Chapel, Santa Maria della Pace: Tradition or Innovation?" *Notes in the History of Art*, 10:3 (Spring 1991): 14.

Figure 3.1 Peruzzi, Baldassare, Ponzetti Chapel, ca. 1516, fresco, Santa Maria della Pace, Rome, https://www.througheternity.com/en/blog/art/hidde-renaissance-art-rome-7-chapels-you-need-to-visit.html.

Artemisia's *Self Portrait* and the altarpiece of Saint Catherine bear few resemblances in style – as the title suggests, Artemisia's painting portrays herself as Saint Catherine. However, as with most depictions of saints, the iconography confirms their similarities. Both portraits include the crown atop Catherine's head, as well as the inclusion of a wheel, representing the torture Catherine endured.[110] Additionally, both portraits portray Catherine's image in a three-quarter portrait of her left side.

[110] National Gallery, "Recognising saints: wheel," Copyright 2023, https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/learn-about-art/paintings-in-depth/painting-saints/recognising-saints-objects/recognising-saints-wheel (accessed 21 January 2023).

Figure 3.2 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Self-Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, oil on canvas, ca. 1615-1617, The National Gallery, London, https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/artemisia-gentileschi-self-portrait-as-saint-catherine-of-alexandria.*

Figure 3.3 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, oil on canvas, unknown, Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, Florence, https://catalogo.uffizi.it/it/29/ricerca/detailiccd/1184292/.*

The position of Saint Catherine is where the similarities end. While Artemisia's Saint Catherine stares directly at the viewer, Peruzzi's gazes at the central figures of the three-figure portrait, the Virgin and Child. Even the clothing on the Saint Catherine's differs – Artemisia's boasts a dress of what appears to be red velvet, and Peruzzi's a light green dress, lighter in weight. Nonetheless, the exposure to a depiction of Saint Catherine could have sparked something in Artemisia's mind, perhaps a desire to create a version all her own, so much so she decided to represent herself as the saint. San Paolo fuori le Mura, or Saint Paul's Outside the Walls, was the site of another work of Artemisia's father, Orazio, thus creating an opportunity for Artemisia to have visited the location.

In 1596, shortly after Artemisia's birth, Orazio painted the *Conversion of Saint Paul*. Artemisia, accompanied by her chaperone Tuzi, visited San Paolo fuori le Mura during Artemisia's adolescence.[111] Various works decorated San Paolo, several depicting Jesus at various points throughout his life, including *Carrying the Cross*, *Descent from the Cross*, and *Display of the Body of Christ*.[112]

Adjacent to Orazio's painted altarpiece was, according to a 1615 travel guide of churches in Rome, a painting by Lavinia (Fontana), the "Donna Bolognese."[113] The patron of the altar dedicated it to St. Stephen; thus, Lavinia created her *Martyrdom of St. Stephen*.[114] Tragically, the basilica, and all the art that graced its walls, were lost to a devastating fire in 1823.[115] Lavinia

[111] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 17.
[112] Nicola Maria Camerlenghi, "Rebirth and Modernization (1423-1655)," in *Saint Paul's Outside the Walls: A Roman Basilica, From Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018): 183.
[113] Pietro Martire Felini, *Trattato nuovo delle cose maravigliose dell'alma citta' di Roma: ornato de molte figure, nel quale si disorre de 300. & più chiese* (In Roma: Per Bartolomeo Zannetti, 1615): 17, National Gallery of Art – Digital Collections, https://library.nga.gov/permalink/01NGA_INST/1cl1g8d/alma99565283504896 (accessed 21 January 2023).
[114] Felini, *Trattato*, 17.
[115] Ibid., 4.

Fontana's original painting may be lost, but fortunately, one artist took the time to engrave the artwork, which still exists today. Thus, by examining Jacques Callot's engraving, completed between 1607 and 1611, an understanding of what Artemisia could have seen can be established.[116] In her work on the martyrdom of St. Stephen, Lavinia chose to portray the moment before stones strike St. Stephen down.

During the early 17th century, artists and patrons saw Lavinia Fontana as *the* woman artist, able to successfully overcome the barriers of her gender for her male peers to accept her as a true artist. However, the presence of the work of a woman painter, especially on an altar, was atypical for Rome at the time - Lavinia, along with Artemisia, did transcend the ideals of the woman artist through their pieces, which can be noted especially with Lavinia's altarpiece and many of Artemisia's paintings. Women artists could not achieve the same standards of success as men focused on far different subject matters. Artists such as Elisabetta Sirani painted still lives, which society considered more acceptable for a lady to be painting. Lavinia and Artemisia portray far different subjects, such as portrayals of violence, especially biblical violence. Considering the lack of women artists in conjunction with the typical women's subject matter, it is not unlikely that Artemisia looked to Lavinia for inspiration in breaking out of the traditional female artist mould.

Artemisia's father and tutor Agostino Tassi were jointly commissioned to create a fresco in the Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, creating the *Musical Concert Sponsored by Apollo and the Muses* [Figure 3.4], finished in 1612.[117] The fresco includes nine muses from Greek myth, including Clio, the muse of history. In 1632, twenty years later, Artemisia painted *Clio, Muse of*

[116] The MET, "The Martyrdom of St. Stephen, from Les Tableaux de Rome, Les Eglises Jubilaires (The Paintings of Rome, The Churches Jubilee), plate 1," Jacques Callot, Copyright 2000-2023, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/415537 (accessed 21 January 2023).
[117] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, 20.

History [Figure 3.5].[118] Artemisia's depiction of Clio includes typical symbology associated with the muse, including a book, a trumpet, and a laurel crown. Clio wears a blue-green mantle with muted orange sleeves, gazing off to the right of the painting.[119] Looking at the fresco by Orazio, it is not abundantly clear which muse is supposed to be Clio, as the muses are all presented with musical instruments, though one may have a trumpet. Assuming this figure is Orazio's interpretation of Clio, it differs significantly from Artemisia's creation. The only similarities are the trumpet imagery and the blue-green garments. Twenty years apart, and with Artemisia's distinct styling, it is not surprising that the Clio portrayals differ so significantly. Nonetheless, Artemisia saw these muses created by her father's hand and would, in her life, create her own versions.

Figure 3.4 Gentileschi, Orazio, and Agostino Tassi, Musical Concert Sponsored by Apollo and the Muses *unknown, fresco, Palazzo Pallavicini-Rospigliosi, Rome, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pgs. 16-17, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.*

[118] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 400.
[119] Ibid., 401.

Figure 3.5 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Clio, Muse of History, *1632, oil on canvas, Palazzo Blu, Pisa, https://palazzoblu.it/permanent-exhibition-4/?lang=en.*

Nearby the church of San Silvestro al Quirinale had more to offer for Artemisia, including altarpieces of two saints by Polidoro da Caravaggio.[120] Between 1524 and 1527, Caravaggio created frescoes interpreting the stories of Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Catherine of Siena, although he focused more on the landscape than the figures.[121] Artemisia likely did not draw direct inspiration from Polidoro da Caravaggio regarding figures in terms of artistic technique or depiction, but it is worthwhile to note her exposure to the 16th-century depictions of Mary Magdalene and Saint Catherine of Siena. Artemisia's connection to this fresco comes to fruition in two different artworks.

Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Bridget make secondary appearances adjacent to Polidoro's depictions in the Fetti Chapel. Dominican Fra Mariano Fetti commissioned the

[120] Karl A. E. Enenkel and Christine Göttler, eds. *Solitudo: Spaces, Places, and Times of Solitude In Late Medieval and Early Modern Cultures* (Boston: Brill, 2018): 275.
[121] Cynthia Stollhans, "Fra Mariano, Peruzzi and Polidoro da Caravaggio: A New Look at Religious Landscapes in Renaissance Rome," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 23:3 (1992): 516.

chapel, which artists finished in 1527.[122] There is no current knowledge as to the artist or the date of the altarpiece, but the flanking images of Mary Magdalene and Saint Catherine are also by Polidoro. The depiction of Mary Magdalene is on the right of the chapel between the altarpiece and the *Landscape with Scenes from the Life of Mary Magdalene* [Figure 3.6]. The chapel's left mirrors Mary Magdalene, except with Saint Catherine of Alexandria.[123] While these stand at the altar today, initially, they were near the front of the church, perhaps greeting visitors and parishioners alike.[124] Artemisia painted her version of *St. Mary Magdalene* eight years following her father's 1612 commission at San Silvestro al Quirinale, titled *Penitent Magdalene*. Artemisia's paintings diverge significantly from the Fetti Chapel altarpieces.

Figure 3.6 Caravaggio, Polidoro, Scenes of Saint Mary Magdalen*, Fetti Chapel, San Silvestro al Quirinale, Rome, in "Fra Mariano, Peruzzi and Polidoro da Caravaggio: A New Look at Religious Landscapes in Renaissance Rome," by Cynthia Stollhans, pg. 520, The Sixteenth Century Journal, 23:3 (Autumn, 1992): 506-525.*

[122] Alexis R. Culotta, *Tracing the Visual Language of Raphael's Circle to 1527,* 152.
[123] Culotta, *Tracing,* 163.
[124] Ibid., 162.

Artemisia’s artworks reference Saint Catherine of Alexandria, while the Fetti Chapel houses a portrayal of Saint Catherine of Siena. Artemisia painted Mary Magdalene six times throughout her career, from the first in 1616 [Figure 3.7], and subsequently in the 1620s twice [Figures 3.8 and 3.9], then once in the 1630s [Figure 3.10], in works spanning Rome, Florence, and Naples. Four of six of Artemisia’s Mary Magdalenes wear yellow garments and have long, reddish hair. One is full-length, two showing all but her feet, and one from the waist up. The other two paintings are outliers of the others – one with a semi-nude Mary Magdalene in red, the other wearing purple, leaning back in ecstasy.

Figure 3.7 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy*, oil on canvas, ca. 1620-1625, Private European collection, Photographed by Dominique Provost, https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/mary-magdalene-in-ecstasy-artemisia-gentileschi/EgEu1LxJ_Jqecg?hl=en&ms=%7B%22x%22%3A0.5%2C%22y%22%3A0.5%2C%22z%22%3A9.17672557501365%2C%22size%22%3A%7B%22width%22%3A1.6586807793681244%2C%22height%22%3A1.2375%7D%7D.*

Figure 3.8 Gentileschi, Artemisia, St. Mary Magdalene*, oil on canvas, ca. 1625-1627, Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, Florence,*

https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/artemisia-saint-mary-magdalen.

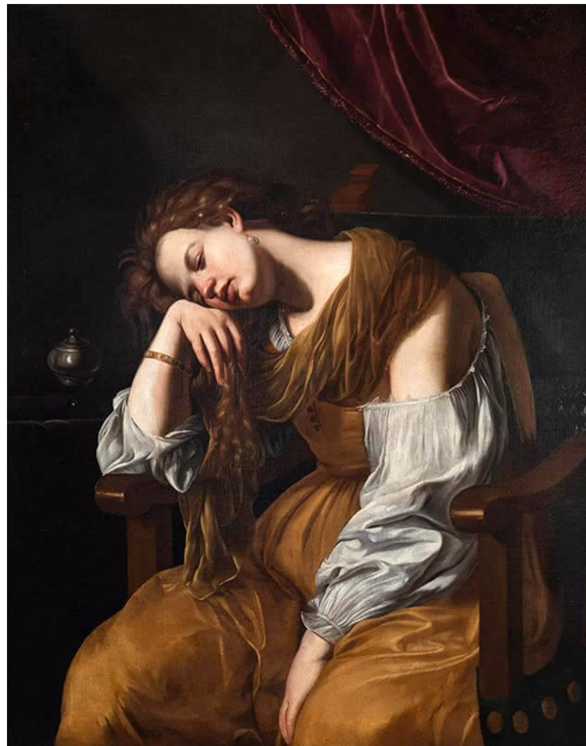

Figure 3.9 Gentileschi, Artemisia, La Magdalena*, oil on canvas, ca. 1625-1627, Catedral de Sevilla, Sevilla,*

https://www.catedraldesevilla.es/la-catedral/patrimonio/pintura/.

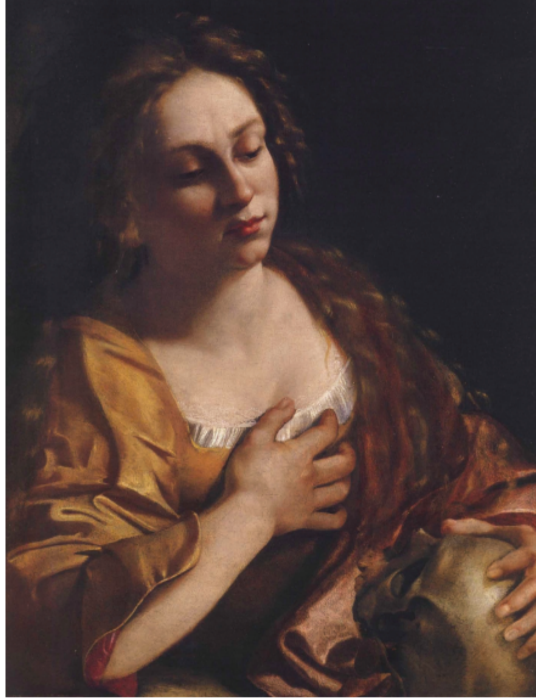

Figure 3.10 Gentileschi Artemisia, Penitent Magdalene*, oil on canvas, ca. 1630-1632, Private Collection, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pg. 396, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.*

The Mary Magdalene in San Silvestro al Quirinale differs greatly from Artemisia's depictions. The artist dresses her in blue and red, rather than yellow, with a crown that does not appear in any of Artemisia's Magdalenes.[125] Additionally, all of Artemisia's depictions have distinct red hair, while the other has long blonde hair. This altar is an exciting addition to Artemisia's potential inspirations, featuring Mary Magdalene and a scene about her story. Especially if the original portrait of Mary Magdalene were nearer to the entrance, it would be difficult to miss a young Artemisia.

The Bandini Chapel at San Silvestro al Quirinale has two works by the early 17th-century artist Domenichino. The chapel's ceiling features four frescoes, each depicting a different scene from biblical narratives. Two such scenes are *Esther Swooning before Ahasuerus* and *Judith Holding Up the Head of Holofernes*. Viewers can compare each to one of Artemisia's works:

[125] Culotta, *Tracing*, 162.

Esther Before Ahasuerus and *Judith Beheading Holofernes.* Analyzing each of the works, Artemisia took a different approach than Domenichino, furthering the idea that Artemisia's experiences as a woman influenced her portrayal of female figures.

Looking at the two Esther works, immediately, the names provide a sense of the presentations of Esther. While Domenichino describes Esther as "swooning," [Figure 3.11] the title assigned to Artemisia's painting simply states Esther's position in front of Ahasuerus [Figure 3.12]. The title indicates the male gaze Domenichino places on Esther, assuming that she is intimidated by or attracted to King Ahasuerus. Given the context of Esther's story, a woman who risked her life to save her people "swooning" in front of a king who chose her as his bride does not seem to fit her narrative. However, Esther "before" lends more to the original story, where Esther faces the king, proving her bravery and commitment to the Jewish people. Artemisia's *Esther Before Ahasuerus* shows a stronger and braver Esther than Domenichino's.

Figure 3.11, Frey, Jakob, Esther Swooning before King Ahasuerus *(after Domenichino), ca. 1700-1750, hand-coloured etching and engraving on paper, Stourhead, Wiltshire, https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/730914.*

Figure 3.13 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Esther before Ahasuerus, *ca. 1630s, oil on canvas, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436453.*

Both versions of Esther feature similar elements: Women flank and support Esther behind her, standing in front of King Ahasuerus, who is in motion and rising from his throne. Looking at Domenichino's Esther, she is visibly less stable, leaning greatly on the women around her. Additionally, King Ahasuerus is already reaching out to assist, moving to catch Esther and aide her. However, while still supported by the women, Artemisia's Esther leans slightly back rather than forward, giving her an air of openness; she also appears more assertive and better able to hold herself than Domenichino's version. In this depiction, King Ahasuerus is not as quick to rise, still standing to meet Esther. The king's stance could be a suggestion of hesitation of the king that is not present in Domenichino's fresco. As the king in Domenichino's fresco is so close to Esther, the king becomes the centre of attention, fulfilling a duty as a strong male character and saving the woman. Since Artemisia's king lacks the same apparent concern, her painting focuses more on Esther, the central figure in this portion of the *Book of Esther*.

Domenichino's second fresco, *Judith Holding Up the Head of Holofernes* [Figure 3.13], differs from Artemisia's two *Judith Slaying Holofernes* [Figure 3.14] in which section of Judith's story Artemisia and Domenichino chose as their subject. Domenichino chose a more tame, less brutal scene from Judith's story – her return from the tent of Holofernes with his head, presenting it to a crowd of onlookers. Unlike Artemisia's bloody version of Judith, there is a lack of violence. Domenichino posed the heroine in the aftermath of the act of beheading Holofernes, perhaps to uphold the ideal of Judith as a feminine ideal, not a murderer. She stands with her hand raised, holding the head of Holofernes above her head, with her face tilted down. On the other hand, Artemisia chose the less travelled path; Judith and her maidservant control the narrative in Artemisia's painting, the force of their weight against Holofernes, holding him down, seen clearly in how Artemisia positions them.

Figure 3.12 Judith Holding up the Head of Holofernes *(after Domenichino), ca. 1700-1750, hand-coloured etching and engraving on paper, Stourhead, Wiltshire, https://www.nationaltrustcollections.org.uk/object/730923.*

Figure 3.14, Gentileschi, Artemisia, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, oil on canvas, ca. 1613, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples, https://capodimonte.cultura.gov.it/litalia-chiamo-capodimonte-oggi-racconta-giuditta-decapita-oloferne-di-artemisia-gentileschi/.

Additional information can be revealed regarding the artists' views on their subject by looking more closely at each work. Domenichino's Judith has a softer demeanour, her eyes gazing down towards the children below her on the steps who look to her as the hero and saviour from the tyrant Holofernes. The docility of Judith's expression and relative neutrality of her stance, along with the children of the scene, do not make for as strong a heroine as Artemisia devised. Judith has a distinct emotionality in Artemisia's work, reflected in her downturned mouth and slightly knitted brows. Judith's anger is very apparent in this representation, as opposed to the lack of reaction in Domenichino's. Artemisia's Judith was far bolder than Domenichino's; she chose to represent an angry woman in charge of the scene, taking ownership of her actions.

When Artemisia returned to Rome after her time in Florence in 1620, she stayed for six years. Her home was on Via del Corso, near the church of Santa Maria del Popolo, where she

attended Mass.[126] Moreover, her mother, who died when Artemisia was young, is buried at del Popolo.[127] According to Felini's 1615 travel book of churches in Rome, del Popolo was also home to the bones of several saints – including some believed to be the relics of Mary Magdalene.[128]

Artemisia Gentileschi moved to Florence following her marriage to Pierantonio Stiattesi. In Florence, Artemisia set up her studio in her father-in-law's house, Giovanni Battista Stiattesi, along the Via del Campaccio, now known as Via Santa Maria Reparata [Figure 1.2].[129] This location places Artemisia near numerous Florentine churches, including the Basilica di Santa Maria Novella, the Basilica di Santa Croce di Firenze, Chiesa di Santa Maria Maggiore, and the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore. In 1615, it appears Artemisia had moved into her studio on Borgo Ognissanti; Santa Lucia sul Prato stood at the end of the borgo.[130] Artemisia's first concrete connection to a church in Florence is Santa Maria Novella.

Artemisia gave birth to her son, Giovanni Battista, on September 21st, 1613, in the parish of Santa Maria Novella,[131] which includes the Tornabuoni Chapel and Plautilla Nelli's *Last Supper.* Suor Plautilla Nelli is the first known Florentine woman artist; a nun at Santa Caterina de Siena, she painted the *Last Supper* for her convent and *Pentecost* in Perugia, *Deposition* for the public church of Santa Caterina de Siena, and *Annunciation*, whose original location is unknown.[132] Nelli was featured in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, asserting her abilities as

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[126] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 289.
[127] Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism*, 34-35.
[128] Felini, *Trattato,* 27.
[129] Treves et al., *Artemisia,* 13.
[130] Ibid., 88
[131] Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism,* 26; Cropper, "New Documents for Artemisia Gentileschi's Life in Florence," 760.
[132] Sheila Ffolliott, "Plautilla Nelli: Art and Devoiton in Savonarola's Footsteps/Arte e Devozione SUlle Orme di Savonarola. Gallerie degli Uffizi," *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal,* 12:2 (1 March 2018): 158-159.

an artist in Renaissance Florence.[133] A female artist of Nelli's calibre available to Artemisia is significant. Artemisia's continued exposure to successful female artists provided assurances of women's abilities in art. Aside from Nelli's *Last Supper*, there were depictions of St. Catherine of Alexandria.

The travel guide *The Beauties of the City of Florence* by Francesco Bocchi from 1591 describes a Mary Magdalen carving in Santa Maria Novella.[134] The carving was created by artist Desiderio da Settignano and completed by Benedetto da Maiano. Additionally, Bocchi wrote about the Minerbetti chapel in Santa Maria Novella, discussing Giovanni Battista Naldini's Magdalen.[135] Bocchi describes the Magdalen as "clothed in yellow" and "beautiful above all else." As previously discussed, Artemisia's *St. Mary Magdalen* [Figure 3.8] features Mary Magdalen in a yellow dress, mirroring what Naldini presents in his portrait.

Bocchi's sixteenth-century guide describes a portrait of St. Catherine of Alexandria. The Rucellai Chapel features a panel by Giuliano Bugiardini of *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* [Figure 3.15] described by Bocchi as St. Catherine martyred on the wheel.[136] Bugiardini's dramatic recreation of her martyrdom features St. Catherine at the centre while an angel frees her from a torture wheel with a beam of light. Bugiardini's St. Catherine wears the iconic crown of St. Catherine of Alexandria, but her dress differs from Artemisia's paintings of Saint Catherine in a red dress. Both feature a crown and the wheel of Saint Catherine's torture. Artemisia's *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* [Figure 3.1] resembles Bugiardini's in one distinct manner. While Saint Catherine in *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* [Figure 3.2]

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[133] Ffolliott, "Plautilla," 159.
[134] Francesco Bocchi, Thomas Frangenberg, and Robert Williams, *The Beauties of the City of Florence: A Guidebook of 1591* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers)*:* 116.
[135] Andrea Gáldy and Sara Cecconi, *The Art, History and Architecture of Florentine Churches* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016)*:* 118.
[136] Gáldy, *The Art*, 99.

looks directly at the viewer, *Martyrdom of St. Catherine* and *Saint Catherine of Alexandria'*s subjects look upwards. Bugiardini's Catherine has something to look *to* – the angel breaking her free from torture. While Artemisia's painting only shows Catherine, the subject has her chin lifted and eyes set on a point beyond the frame of the painting, perhaps gazing towards the same angel seen in Bugiardini's work.

Figure 3.15 Bugiardini, Giuliano, Martyrdom of Saint Catherine *ca. 1530-1540, oil on panel, Rucellai Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giuliano_Bugiardini,_martirio_di_santa_Caterina_d%27Alessandria,_1530-40_ca._01.JPG.*

Santa Trinità is home to a portrayal of the penitent *Mary Magdalen* [Figure 3.16] by sculptor Desiderìo da Settignano and completed by Benedetto da Maiano, [137] which Bocchi wrote about this sculpture in his descriptions of Florence, *The Beauties of the City of Florence*. Mary Magdalen was on display right at the entrance of Santa Trinità next to the door on the

[137] Gáldyi, *The Art,* 99.

right.[138] This version of the Penitent Magdalen portrays a gaunt Mary, wearing scrappy clothing, no shoes, and has her eyes downcast.[139] Artemisia lived in Florence nearly 150 years after the sculpture's completion, yet would have had access to Santa Trinità, and with the sculpture's prominent display, would have made for easy viewing. Though, Artemisia took quite a different approach to interpret penitent Mary Magdalen.

Figure 3.16 Settignano, Desiderio da, and Giovanni d'Andrea, Penitent Magdalene, *ca. 1459, before 1499, painted wood, stucco, and cork, Santa Trinita, Florence, https://qspace.library.queensu.ca/handle/1974/24199?show=full.*

Artemisia's *St. Mary Magdalene* [Figure 3.8], her portrayal of a penitent Mary and painted during her final years in Florence circa 1620, starkly contrasts the Santa Trinità sculpture. Artemisia's Mary Magdalene is full-bodied and dressed in a glowing yellow-gold

[138] Bocchi, *The Beauties,* 99.
[139] A. Victor Coonin, "New Documents Concerning Desiderio da Settignano and Annalena Malatesta," *The Burlington Magazine,* 137:1113 (December 1995): 795.

dress. Her hand clasps her chest over her heart, which reflects the feelings of a sorrowful, or penitent, Mary, with her facial expression of worry or regret. Artemisia chose to show Mary's penitence purely through her positioning and facial expression rather than with her body and clothing. The differing media also allows for Artemisia to show Mary Magdalen in full colour; this allowed for *St. Mary Magdalen* to have flushed cheeks, auburn hair, and a supple dress, giving her a liveliness that the Santa Trinitá sculpture could not achieve.

The San Lorenzo church includes artistic and physical ties to Artemisia's oeuvre and is one of the churches where Artemisia attended Mass.[140] Most notably, the church boasts a Michelangelo work entitled *Dawn* [Figure 3.17]; the sculpture is found at the tomb of Lorenzo de'Medici. Bocchi describes the statue in *The Beauties of the City of Florence* as "youthful and flourishing," giving an overall positive view of the depiction of Dawn.[141] She is in repose on the right side of the tomb, opposite a male figure, *Dusk*. Viewers praise *Dawn* for Michelangelo's ability to carve a woman's body so well – Bocchi writes about her "chest fashioned so subtly...arms...as if taken by nature" and continues to appreciate the rest of the female form.[142] *Dawn* appears as a figure created to please the male gaze and to show off the artist's abilities. Artemisia's depiction of Dawn varies greatly from Michelangelo's.

[140] Christiansen, *Orazio*, 289
[141] Bocchi, *The Beauties,* 249.
[142] Ibid.

Figure 3.18 Buonarroti, Michelangelo, marble, tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence, https://artifactsblog.com/michelangelo-night-day-dawn-dusk/.

Artemisia created *Aurora* [Figure 3.18] (the Roman name for Dawn) between 1625 and 1627 during Artemisia's return to Rome. Her *Aurora* stands firmly at the centre of the painting, making clear that she is the subject of the work despite the presence of a cherub. Artemisia presented Aurora standing primarily in the nude, though Artemisia painted Aurora wearing a gold garment that flows behind her. Artemisia depicts Aurora with her right arm held up, seemingly blocking the cherub, while her left appears to be blocking something from the other side. Her head is turned away from the viewer towards the unknown presence beyond her left hand. While Michelangelo presents his *Dawn* in a position of relaxation, her body on display for the viewer, Artemisia's *Aurora* is in motion, not presenting herself to the viewer in a suggestive way; Aurora is caught amid the action, unaware of the viewer. The contrast of positioning

between *Dawn* and *Aurora* indicates the intended audience and the intended response each artist hopes to elicit from their audience.

Figure 3.18 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Aurora, *ca. 1625-1627, oil on canvas, Private Collection, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pg. 252, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.*

It is challenging to place Artemisia at any church later in life; her specific locations in Venice, Naples, or London are currently unknown; while Artemisia only spent two years in each Venice and London, she spent over two decades in Naples[143]. As Artemisia's career progressed, she also turned to secular figures featured in her works. In the 1630s and 40s, Artemisia painted Cleopatra twice, Venus, and Clio, the muse of history. She did not shift away entirely from religious women, as she also painted Lucretia, Bathsheba (four times), Delilah, and Saint Apollonia during this period.

[143] Treves, *Artemisia*, 48-49.

3.2 Secular Spaces as Influence

Artemisia's access to art in the public and private sphere was limited compared to the abundance of art available within religious spaces, which were decorated with various works and were freely accessible to a woman of Artemisia's status and profession as a female artist. Contemporary museums that are popular today, open to the public and filled with numerous works of art were non-existent in Renaissance and Baroque Italy. Instead, the first "museums" were royal collections of art that were open to the public.[144] Wealthy patrons commissioned works by artists to display in their homes where guests could access such collections. Public spaces like palazzos or cortiles held statuary that any passers-by could view. As Artemisia grew up in and later spent six years in Rome, the artworks available in secular and public spaces are just as crucial in determining inspiration and influence.

Wealthy Italians decorated their palaces with fresco cycles of mythological and historical scenes that, throughout the centuries, transitioned to religious subjects and a new interest in oil paintings characterized 16th-century Rome.[145] However, villas continued to be decorated with frescoes, though their themes also transitioned to religious narratives. Fresco artists decorated various locals, from villas to papal palaces, to churches and chapels.[146] Artemisia spent considerable time in Rome between her childhood and adolescence and her return for six or seven years beginning in 1620. Her stay in Rome during the 1620s would have afforded her greater access to private collections, giving her rise to prominence in the art world because of her acceptance to the Accademia and the commissions by notable figures such as Cosimo II de'

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[144] David Carrier, "Why Were There No Public Art Museums in Renaissance Italy?" *Notes in the History of Art*, 22:1 (Fall 2002): 45.
[145] Clare Robertson, *Rome 1600: The City and the Visual Arts Under Clement VIII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015): 127.
[146] Robertson, *Rome*, 128.

Medici. One such public space that boasted impressive works of statuary was the Cortile del Belvedere.

The Cortile del Belvedere, located in the Vatican City in Rome, was described by Girolamo Francini, author of a guidebook of Rome in 1625, as having "statue bellisime, e quel tanto famoso Laoconte, e Cleopatra," beautiful statues of Laoconte and Cleopatra [Figure 3.19].[147] Historians now know that the statue represents Ariadne, though, as the travel guide shows, the community considered it a representation of Cleopatra during the Renaissance. Because the public thought the statue was Cleopatra during Artemisia's life in Rome, comparing the depictions to reveal how artists viewed Cleopatra during the 16th and 17th centuries is acceptable.

[147] Elisabeth B. MacDougall, "The Sleeping Nymph: Origins of a Humanist Fountain Type," *The Art Bulletin,* 57:3 (September 1975): 357; Girolamo Francini, *Le cose marauigliose dell' alma citta di Roma: dou si tratta delle chiese, stationi, relique et corpi santi: con la guida romana: I nomi de sommi pontefici, imperatori et altri principi, Christiani, con le prencipal' pose d'Italia* (Italy: Per Loduico Grignani, 1625): 67.

Figure 3.19 Unknown, Sleeping Ariadne*, 2nd century BCE, marble, Museo Pio-Clementino, Vatican Museums, Vatican City, in Artemisia, by Letizia Treves, fig. 43, London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2020.*

The pose of the Belvedere Cleopatra is most reflective of Artemisia's *Cleopatra* [Figure 3.20] from ca. 1611-12; thus, that is the work that will be used in understanding the differences between the portrayals. Artemisia and the sculptor position their women, similarly, leaning back, ankles crossed, and one arm positioned behind the head. However, there is a distinct difference in the overall feeling of each. Belvedere Cleopatra is positioned overall with her body more angled toward the viewer; the artist wants her body to be displayed. She is draped in a garment, though the artist strategically leaves one of her breasts uncovered. Her head rests on her arm, and her eyes appear closed or nearly closed. Cleopatra, in this representation, seems at ease and docile; no distinctive emotion can be drawn from her face or form. Artemisia's *Cleopatra*, in comparison, paints an entirely distinctive image of the ancient ruler.

Figure 3.20 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Cleopatra, *ca. 1611-1612, oil on canvas, Private Collection, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pg. 303, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.*

Artemisia has Cleopatra in a position that nearly mirrors the Belvedere Cleopatra, yet *Cleopatra* is an example of a woman with strength and fortitude. The Belvedere Cleopatra seems to depict Cleopatra during an indeterminant point in her life; she is lounging with no distinctive characteristics to suggest any context. On the other hand, Artemisia painted Cleopatra at the climax of her story, right before Cleopatra's death. Artemisia's move to Florence, between her time in Rome, offered her greater opportunity for access to secular spaces as her career was taking off, granting her access to the spaces her patrons occupied.

The wealthy and powerful Medici family who ruled in Italy was a significant patron of art, with several family members avid art collectors.[148] The Medici held their art in various estates, such as the Uffizi Gallery and Pitti Palace in Florence.[149] Given Artemisia's patronage

[148] Julia de Wolf Addison, *The Art of the Pitti Palace, With A Short History of the Building of the Palace, and Its Owners, and an Appreciation of Its Treasures* (Massachusetts: L.C. Page & Company, 1910): 33-34.
[149] Wolf Addison, *The Art*, 36.

from the Medici family, her membership with the Accademia del Disegno in Florence in 1616, and her connections with other artists such as Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger, the Medicis may have invited Artemisia to their palaces as a respected artist and recipient of Medici patronage.[150] Cosimo II de' Medici of Tuscany commissioned paintings "executed or to be executed" by Artemisia in 1618 during her stay in Florence.[151] Several of Artemisia's paintings entered the Medici collection, including her *Saint Apollonia* in the inventory of the Medici Villa Imperiale, *Self-Portrait as a Lute Player* and *Self-Portrait as an Amazon with Curved Sword and Helmet* in the inventory of the Villa Medici at Artimino, *Judith Slaying Holofernes* at the Palazzo Pitti, *Judith and Her Maidservant* in a Medici inventory, and *Susanna and the Elders* with Averado de' Medici in Florence.[152]

Under the patronage of the Medici family, specifically Cosimo II de' Medici, and given that many of Artemisia's works entered the Medici collections, it is likely that Artemisia visited some of the Medici-owned residences and palaces. Additionally, evidence suggests that Artemisia performed at the Palazzo Pitti in 1615. According to Tinghi's record of the *Ballo delle Zingare,* a woman, "Sig.ra Artemisia," described wearing virtually the same outfit as Artemisia's *Self Portrait as a Lute Player*, performed.[153] Thus, the Pitti Palace and other Medici residences are available to discover potential connections between their art and art executed by Artemisia.

The Medici family's Palazzo Vecchio in Florence houses the famed *Judith and Holofernes* [Figure 3.21] by Donatello. The statue first resided at the Palazzo Medici gardens until the Florentine government ordered it be moved in 1495 to the Palazzo della Signoria

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[150] Ann Sutherland Harris, "Review of *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting* by Jesse Locker," *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 47:1 (Spring 2016): 275; Christiansen, *Orazio and Artemisia,* XV.
[151] Christiansen*, Orazio and Artemisia*, XVI.
[152] Ibid., XVIII, XIX.
[153] Jesse M. Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015): 139-140.

outside the Palazzo Medici.[154] Despite initial ownership by the Medici family, the statue represented the Florentine victory over the Medici family. Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* was a well-known statue among Florentines and artists. Judith became a city protector as her slaying of Holofernes mirrored Florence's defeat of the Medici. The statue by Donatello became a symbol of an underdog's victory, yet Artemisia's representations of Judith are overwhelmingly more indicative of a strong woman overcoming the male enemy.

Figure 3.21 Lelli, Oronzino after Donatello, Judith and Holofernes*, ca. 1455 (sculpted), 1893 (cast), plaster, Victoria and Albert Museum, London https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O40965/judith-and-holofernes-figure-group-lelli-oronzio/.*

Artemisia and Donatello chose nearly the exact moment in Judith's story to portray; Donatello, however, chose to depict Judith just a few moments before the beheading of Holofernes, her blade raised in anticipation, while Artemisia chose to depict the action of the

[154] Marilyn Bradshaw, *Italian Renaissance Art: A Sourcebook* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education Inc., 2009): 108; Roger J. Crum, *The Sword of Judith*, 291.

story, Judith, and her maidservant amid murder. As discussed, the point in the story the artist chooses to represent is almost as important as *whom* they represent. In this case, Artemisia takes Judith and her maidservant and ensures that they are the narrative's focus; Artemisia also presents a realistic view of the beheading. Judith and her maidservant appear to be struggling to keep Holofernes down, using their weight to prevent him from escaping their hold. Donatello's depiction has Judith easily holding Holofernes, who appears to still be asleep, with only one hand. Her other hand has the sword raised in preparation for the killing. Donatello's Judith also lacks the facial expressions of Artemisia's painting that give life to the narrative. In Artemisia's *Judith Beheading Holofernes* [Figure 3.14], there is evident emotion across Judith's face, whether anger or determination; it is difficult to tell. Donatello's Judith has a neutral expression, seemingly lacking any feelings towards the situation, thus eliminating a layer of the narrative. Overall, Donatello's Judith is a passive character in the scene he sculpted, while Artemisia takes Judith to the forefront, painting her as a heroine.

Chapter 4

Literature as Influence: Ideas and Inspiration through Text

"I will show Your Illustrious Lordship what a woman can do."[155]

- Artemisia Gentileschi

Artemisia positioned herself at an epicentre of a new culture, including newly circulated works by authors such as Christine de Pizan and Boccaccio. She would have surrounded herself with emerging humanist thinkers, most importantly printed female authors whose discourses were available to the public. Historians are still debating the level to which Artemisia could read or write; nobody taught her to read or write with any fluency earlier in her life, but later, she could write with grammatical errors and phonetic spelling.[156] Thus, it is impossible to know whether Artemisia could have consumed information from works circulated in print. However, oral forms of storytelling were prevalent in academic circles in which Artemisia participated.[157] Histories and mythologies could be read aloud in dynastic courts, academies, galleries, taverns, piazzas, or brothels.[158]

During the Renaissance, literacy and learning were features of upper-class life; families of potential suitors for young girls of high status expected them to be able to read and write in preparation for marriage.[159] While middle-class girls had the same expectations, the Catholic church expected lower-class girls to at least be able to read prayer books.[160] Additionally, following the Council of Trent and during the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church, in

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[155] The National Gallery, "Artemisia."
[156] Treves, *Artemisia,* 57.
[157] Locker, *Artemisia*, 7.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991): 88.
[160] Grendler, *Schooling*, 89.

1606, required that all parishes in Rome teach boys and girls the Christian doctrine.[161] Artemisia may have had some semblance of literacy, as nineteen of her works, nearly 40% of her total oeuvre, bears her signature.[162] According to her rape trial, Artemisia was barely literate by 1612, yet she learned to write during her stay in Florence.

Additionally, Artemisia has been characterized as a "superb writer of love letters," suggesting potential literacy in her adult life.[163] There is some evidence of Artemisia knowing how to write. According to Jesse Locker, Artemisia had written letters that were "incorrect but profound, ungrammatical but cultured."[164] Thus, Artemisia may have had a basic comprehension of literature, though not in the early years of her life.

Understanding that the barrier of literacy may have made it difficult for Artemisia to consume these books, working under the assumption that she either had enough of a grasp to peruse a book or heard others reading these books aloud, there are most certainly connections between stories of illustrious women recounted in 16th and 17th-century literature and the women portrayed by Artemisia in painting.

Christine de Pizan was a pioneer in what modern scholars consider to be feminist literature; an intellectual, Christine's works, including her *Book of the City of Ladies,* defended womankind against misogynistic thought of the 15th century.[165] Written in 1405, *Book of the City of Ladies* reflected on female accomplishments throughout history, including classical and biblical women. Christine's female perspective was overwhelmingly positive on the women

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[161] Pamela M. Jones et al., *A Companion to Early Modern Rome, 1492-1692* (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 494.
[162] Judith W. Mann, "Identity signs: meanings and methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's signatures," *Renaissance Studies*, 23:1 (2009): 71.
[163] Cohen, "The Trials," 52.
[164] Locker, *Artemisia*, 7.
[165] Sarah Gwyneth Ross, *The Birth of Feminism: Woman As Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009): 133.

subjects building her City of Ladies and encouraged female readers to be proud of the women who came before them.[166] Christine's writings introduced feminist thought to late medieval to Renaissance Europe, as she "reinvented terms of debate" regarding women's contributions to society.[167] Christine's defense of women inspired later 16th and 17th century feminist thinkers and writers, such as Moderata Fonte and Lucrezia Marinella. Fonte and Marinella built on Christine's accomplishments to further argue for women's "merits" and attempted to argue against the barriers that inhibited gender equality.[168]

Christine was also a vigilant supporter of women's access to education. Throughout her books, Christine tackles popular beliefs such as: women lack chastity, women want men to rape them, or that women have brought nothing to the world. She utilizes biblical and classical figures to present her arguments and includes brief narratives of other women, such as several Amazon women, Queen Zenobia, Circe, or Dido. The women overlapping with Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies* and Artemisia's portrayals include Susanna, Judith, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Lucretia, Esther, Mary Magdalene, and Minerva. While Christine presented women in a uniquely positive light, she wrote in defiance of other works that were not as complimentary to women.

Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women,* 1374, collected the stories of biblical, classical, and mythological women. Christine de Pizan's feminist perspective did not enjoy as much attention in Renaissance Italy, while male perspectives, such as Boccaccio's, prevailed, with many printings and translations.[169] Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women* follows a similar outline to Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies* in that it retells the stories of various women

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[166] Ross, *The Birth,* 134.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Ibid. 194-195.
[169] Laurence C. Witten, "Boccaccio in Beinecke: Early Editions and Manuscripts," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, 60:3-4 (1986): 109-110.

collected by the author. Unlike Christine's book, which places these female exempla in a "city of women," Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women* discusses the women separately and not within a larger contextual narrative.[170] Artemisia's work overlaps with three classical figures from Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women*. Minerva, Lucretia, and Cleopatra. Artemisia painted women represented by Christine and Boccaccio and women represented by only one author or another, but her resulting works align themselves with her fellow female creator, Christine de Pizan. Analyzing Christine de Pizan's *Book of the City of Ladies*, where a woman writes about other women, there are far more similarities between how Christine presents each famous woman. As for Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women*, how he describes women from his male perspective is far less complimentary and contradicts the elements Artemisia uses to characterize her women.

Artemisia painted several depictions of Susanna throughout her life. Her first attributed work also was a *Susanna and the Elders* [Figure 4.1], painted with her father Orazio in 1612 at 17, followed by other iterations in 1622 [Figure 4.2], 1649 [Figure 4.3], and 1652 [Figure 4.4].[171] Christine de Pizan wrote about Susanna in the chapter entitled "Contradiction to Those who Claim Women Chaste," where she described chastity as "the supreme virtue in a woman."[172] Susanna is included in the ranks of biblical women who would rather die than lose their chastity. Susanna rejected two men who tried to tempt her into sin. The men took Susanna to court, where the court wrongfully convicted her of adultery, allegedly found with a young man and then sentenced to death by stoning.[173] Just as with Saint Catherine's story, Susanna faced false

[170] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. by Guido Aldo Guarino (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963).
[171] Treves, *Artemisia*, 97.
[172] Christine de Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies and Other Writings* (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2018): 141.
[173] Pizan, *Book,* 142.

accusations about her virtue; Susanna's story is even closer to Artemisia's and the reality of a court interrogation over questions of chastity and virtue. The two men harassing Susanna were found guilty after the cross-examination by Daniel, sent by God to save Susanna.

Figure 4.1 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Susannah and the Elders, oil on canvas, 1610, Kunstsammlungen Graf von Schönborn, Pommersfelden, https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/past/artemisia/in-conversation-gina-siciliano-and-letizia-treves.

Figure 4.2 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Susannah and the Elders*, oil on canvas, ca. 1622, Burghley House, Stamford, https://collections.burghley.co.uk/collection/susannah-and-the-elders-by-artemisia-gentileschi-1593-1652/.*

Figure 4.3 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Susanna and the Elders*, oil on canvas, 1649, Moravská Galerie, Brnê Husova, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pg. 425, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.*

Figure 4.4 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Susannah and the Elders*, oil on canvas, 1652, Polo Museale dell'Emilia Romagna, Collezioni della Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, https://www.pinacotecabologna.beniculturali.it/it/2-non-categorizzato/2951-riapertura-della-pinacoteca-nazionale-di-bologna.*

In *Susanna and the Elders* paintings, male artists typically presented Susanna as a blushing, unsuspecting, yet not disgusted woman, sometimes bashful, sometimes provocative in the face of the two elders who spy on her. Artemisia's portrayals of Susanna are vastly different and suggest a strong connection to the narrative, as she created three versions throughout her career. Christine de Pizan's writings in *Book of the City of Ladies* give Susanna agency because she rejected the elders, echoed by Artemisia's Susanna physically representing the rejection with her raised arms and body turned away from the elders. Her face also shows clear disdain towards the men. Artemisia ultimately shows Susanna in a vastly different light to her male predecessors, Susanna showing visible disgust and physical recoil to the elders' advances.[174] Whether in writing or painting, women such as Christine and Artemisia gave Susanna agency. Judith, another biblical figure who fought against men, was portrayed by both Christine and Artemisia.

Artemisia created four known depictions of Judith starting with *Judith Beheading Holofernes* in 1611/12 [Figure 3.14], 1619 [Figure 4.5], 1620 [Figure 4.6], another between 1623 and 1625 [Figure 4.7]. Christine's chapter on Judith represented a strong and notably "noble" and "valiant" woman, "young and lovely...of exemplary virtue and chastity."[175] As told by Christine, Judith's story begins with the siege of Jewish people in Israel by the tyrant Holofernes; God sent a saviour, Judith, to save the city. She used her beauty and intellect to convince the guards of Holofernes to let her into his tent; Holofernes, "taken by her intelligence," invited Judith to stay with him in his tent. Judith spent three days seducing Holofernes and gaining his trust. When Holofernes wanted sex from Judith, she said yes, after she convinced Holofernes to

[174] Clanton, *The Good,* 161.
[175] Pizan, *Book of the City*, 131.

clear the tent of any guards or other men. When they were alone, Judith, with her maidservant, took Holofernes' sword and cut off his head, thus freeing Israel.[176]

Figure 4.5 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, ca.1619, oil on canvas, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pg. 331, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001*

Figure 4.6 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Judith Beheading Holofernes*, oil on canvas, ca. 1620, Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, Florence, https://www.uffizi.it/en/artworks/judith-beheading-holofernes.*

[176] Pizan, *Book of the City*, 132.

Figure 4.7 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Judith and her Maidservant*, oil on canvas, ca. 1623-1625, Detroit Institute of Arts, Michigan, https://dia.org/collection/judith-and-her-maidservant-head-holofernes-45746.*

Artemisia created four versions of Judith's story; two, *Judith and Holofernes* and *Judith Beheading Holofernes* [Figures 3.14 and 4.5], represent the moment Judith attacks and beheads Holofernes. *Judith and Her Maidservant* [Figure 4.7] depicts the moments before the attack and *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* [Figure 4.6], the moment after the beheading. Artemisia's portrayals embody the descriptors Christine used for Judith, portraying a noble and valiant woman. In the paintings of Judith slaying Holofernes, Judith displays an impressive feat of strength and bravery, placing her weight onto Holofernes to aggressively attack the conqueror. In both Christine's literary work and Artemisia's physical creation, Judith is emblematic of the intelligence and strength written about in Judith's story, but artists rarely address it and rarely recognize it in works of art. Following Judith, Artemisia moves to analyze the biblical figure of Saint Catherine.

Christine thoroughly details Saint Catherine of Alexandria's story in the *Book of the City of Ladies*. Saint Catherine appears in two of Artemisia's paintings during her period in Florence; her *Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria* [Figure 3.2] between 1618 and 1619, and the other *Saint Catherine* [Figure 3.3], between 1615 and 1617. Saint Catherine stands out amongst Artemisia's oeuvre as this self-portrait is the only one in which Artemisia represented herself as a historical, biblical, or classical figure.

Christine opens her narrative of Saint Catherine by saying that women can benefit from stories of women whose "heads are crowned with glory."[177] The glory, in this case, is the death and martyrdom of Saint Catherine because she refused marriage to devote herself wholly to God. Though Saint Catherine's story features many gruesome details, both of Artemisia's Saint Catherine paintings are portraits, diverging from her narrative paintings of strong women. In this case, Artemisia's portraits of Saint Catherine cannot be analyzed in the same way as her depictions featuring female heroines in a scene of their story but must be viewed in conjunction with her pre-established narrative. While the portraits are tame – Saint Catherine is seated with a neutral expression, her iconography featured in the background, it is her origin story that is indicative of the kinds of women portrayed by Artemisia. Artemisia returned to her biblical inspirations with Mary Magdalene, as did Christine.

The *City of Ladies* chapter titled "About Our Lady's sisters and Mary Magdalene" is brief yet still bears the weight of Christine de Pizan's opinions and interpretations of Mary Magdalene.[178] Christine praises Mary Magdalene for her devotion to the "Son of God," Jesus. Christine describes her as an example of God valuing women's love, which according to Christine, is often described as "paltry" in an attempt to establish Mary Magdalene and her

[177] Pizan, *Book,* 203.
[178] Pizan, *Book*, 203.

fellow women as important.[179] Mary Magdalene and the other women of the chapter, the "sisters," are also celebrated for their devotion to God and Christianity; Christine wrote, "He sparked a flame in the hearts of both the Magdalene and these other ladies that caused them to reveal their burning devotion."[180] Christine's description of Mary Magdalene focuses entirely on the non-physical attributes of Mary Magdalene; she is more interested in the Magdalene's exceptional devotion, love, and commitment to God and Jesus rather than any other aspects. Due to Christine's choice of descriptors, Mary Magdalene's strength and devotion are evident.

There are four known portraits of Mary Magdalene by Artemisia, her 1613 *Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy* [Figure 3.7], the *St. Mary Magdalene* [Figure 3.8], ca. 1620, *La Magdalena* [Figure 3.9], ca. 1625-27, and the 1631 *Penitent Magdalene* [Figure 3.10]. Artemisia's depictions of Mary Magdalene span the possibilities from her first portrayal of Mary Magdalene in ecstasy to her fourth, *Penitent Magdalene*, with Mary Magdalene repenting for her sins. It is as if Artemisia chose to follow Mary Magdalene's life, each phase of the saint's life receiving its portrait. While Artemisia's other portraits of women follow a similar narrative and presentation to Christine de Pizan's interpretations of the same women, Artemisia's *Mary Magdalene in Ecstasy* runs counter to Christine's characterizations of Mary Magdalene. This version of Mary Magdalene presents her before she became a devout follower of Jesus and Christianity; she is more exposed than the other iterations Artemisia created, continuing to defy norms surrounding the presentation of Mary Magdalene. However, as Artemisia's career progressed, she began presenting Mary Magdalene like her early modern artist contemporaries, simply as Saint Mary Magdalene or a penitent Mary Magdalene.

[179] Pizan, *Book*, 203.
[180] Ibid.

Christine underlines Lucretia's chastity in her chapter titled "Contradicting Those Who Claim Women Want to be Raped." Christine reiterates this theme throughout her book "women who are chaste and lead a moral existence would find no pleasure in being raped."[181] Nevertheless, Lucretia proves herself to be a virtuous Roman woman when faced with an impossible decision: surrender herself to Tarquin the Proud or be killed by him.[182] As a chaste woman, she told Tarquin to kill her; he rebutted by saying he would posthumously arrange her body next to a servant, thus defaming her. To retain as much of her honour and chastity, Lucretia gave into Tarquin's advances, and Tarquin raped her. The next day, Lucretia informed her father and husband of the threats against her; however, Lucretia's shame was overwhelming. She decided that "...no woman need live in shame and dishonour because of what has been done to me,"[183] and stabbed herself, maintaining her virtue and taking her fate into her hands. Christine suggests that after Lucretia's death, a law was introduced in Rome that "sentenced to death any man who raped a woman."[184]

Boccaccio's *Concerning Famous Women* entitled a chapter, "Lucretia, Wife of Collatinus," thus reducing the famous woman to her role as a wife.[185] Immediately, Boccaccio's book's tone indicates a male view of women. Due to her appearance and virtue, Boccaccio described Lucretia as the "model of Roman chastity" and "more lovely" than all other Roman women. Much of Boccaccio's chapter on Lucretia focuses on her appearance – he wrote how she deserved praise for dressing without ornaments.[186] A man forced Lucretia to give herself to him,

[181] Pizan, *Book,* 147.
[182] Pizan, *Book,* 147.
[183] Ibid., 148.
[184] Ibid.
[185] Boccaccio, *Concerning*, 101.
[186] Ibid., 102.

as otherwise, "there would be no one to avenge her innocence."[187] Boccaccio, while addressing the assault, finishes the chapter by describing Lucretia as an "unfortunate beauty," revealing the male gaze that influenced his writing.[188] Lucretia is a victim, though, in the end, Boccaccio still focuses on her appearance in relation to her story.

Artemisia painted Lucretia thrice between 1620 and 1650 [Figures 4.8, 4.9, 4.10], twice focusing exclusively on Lucretia and once including her attacker Tarquin. Artemisia's portraits of Lucretia are incredibly poignant, exhibiting the moment Lucretia decides to take her own life, holding a knife above her chest. In both Artemisia's and Christine's depictions, Lucretia is so sure of herself and devout in her belief that death is the only option in her eyes, as it is a decision between living with shame or dying with the knowledge that she retained her virtue. Artemisia's *Tarquinius and Lucretia* [Figure 4.10] shows a different moment in the Lucretia narrative; in the painting, Tarquin has his arm raised, holding a knife, and in the moment, he tries to kill Lucretia. With her arm outstretched above her, completely naked and vulnerable, Lucretia attempts to block the blow. It is likely that at this moment, Lucretia decided that she did not want to be killed by Tarquinius and would instead decide her fate for herself. She rescues her agency.

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[187] Boccaccio, *Concerning*, 102.
[188] Ibid., 103.

Figure 4.8 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Lucretia, oil on canvas, ca. 1623-1625, Gerolamo Etro, Milan, in Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi, by Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, pg. 363, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001.

Figure 4.9 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Lucretia*, oil on canvas, ca. 1627, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/109Q8G#full-artwork-details.*

Figure 4.10 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Tarquinius and Lucretia*, ca. 1620-1650, Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten Berlin-Brandenburg, Potsdam, https://brandenburg.museum-digital.de/object/11894.*

Boccaccio chose a different path than Artemisia in his interpretation of Lucretia. As discussed, Boccaccio introduced his chapter with Lucretia's role as a wife, removing her independence and taking away Lucretia's autonomy within her narrative. In Artemisia's works, two out of three of her depictions of Lucretia focus solely on Lucretia at her most vulnerable and most decisive moment in her story, the moment just before she drove her knife into her chest, ending her own life. Boccaccio's analysis fails to discuss Lucretia's choice or her action beyond that she sought to live without sin as the "unfortunate beauty." Artemisia froze Lucretia's action to show her last moment, symbolizing her courage in the face of death or defamation, following her morals. Minerva, the Roman version of Athena, was also represented by Artemisia, Christine, and Boccaccio and further solidified the differences between the female and male lenses.

In Artemisia's portrait, Minerva appears solid and steady, reflecting much of what Christine wrote about in her *City of Ladies.* Christine describes Minerva as supremely intelligent, highlighting her long list of inventions, such as the Greek alphabet and numbers, the art of making cloth and wool and building carts and chariots.[189] Minerva also created armour for knights, iron, and steel weapons, crossing into the male domain. Christine promoted Minerva's intelligence and her conduct as "supremely chaste," conforming to the theme applied to all the heroines throughout the rest of the *Book of the City of Ladies.*[190] She wrote how Minerva "conquered" the passions of the flesh and thus was greatly respected. Looking past the praise of her chastity, Christine described Minerva as undeniably strong and intelligent, qualities Artemisia favoured in the subjects she painted.

In Boccaccio's "Minerva, Also Known as Pallas," he notes that she was a "perpetual virgin," citing her sexuality before any other characteristics.[191] Similarly to Christine's section on Minerva, Boccaccio dives into Minerva's achievements, especially her inventions. Boccaccio compliments the goddess for the myth that she is responsible for the invention of wool working, iron weapons, all rules of battle, and numbers; Boccaccio celebrates her intelligence that ultimately benefitted men.[192] Boccaccio refers to Minerva's appearance, painting her as a goddess with "stern, frightening eyes."[193]

Artemisia painted *Minerva* [Figure 4.11], sometimes known as *Anne of Austria as Minerva* between 1630 and 1635 while she lived in Naples.[194] Artemisia depicted a robust and seated woman holding an olive branch, adorned in a laurel crown (despite a laurel not being an

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[189] Pizan, *Book of the City of Ladies and Other Writings,* 67.
[190] Pizan, *Book,* 67.
[191] Boccaccio, *Concerning*, 14.
[192] Ibid., 14-15.
[193] Ibid., 15.
[194] Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism,* 40.

iconographic representation of Minerva), with the Gorgon Medusa on a bronze shield in the bottom corner of the painting.[195] The laurel, a Greek and Roman representative of victory, hints towards Minerva's various victories with invention and intelligence. Artemisia reflects the representation of armour and weaponry in *Minerva* as the shield to her side. Her resolve is palpable, reflected in her posture and a firm grasp on her weapon. Artemisia's *Minerva* shows the strength and fortitude of a goddess, presented as a human woman.

Figure 4.11 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Minerva, ca. 1615, oil on canvas, Le Gallerie Degli Uffizi, Florence, in *Artemisia Gentileschi, The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, by Mary D. Garrard, pg. 178, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

In comparing Boccaccio's version of Minerva to Artemisia's, it is most notable that Artemisia's *Minerva* does not fit the mould of Boccaccio's description of a goddess with "stern, frightening eyes." Perhaps Boccaccio wrote this description as a reaction to the immense intelligence and power that Minerva wielded, somehow intimidated by the notion of the goddess,

[195] Garrard, *Artemisia and Feminism,* 40.

while the same characteristics inspired Artemisia. Her *Minerva* does not inspire fear of the goddess; Minerva does not look towards the viewer, and her upturned mouth hints at a smile. While she sits with strength, showing her weapon and shield, it is not in a way to suggest violence or arrogance about her inventions. Instead, with her arm resting casually on her shield, it feels more like pride – Minerva is proud of her achievements and willing to share the fruits of her labour with the audience.

Cleopatra is the final woman represented by Artemisia and Boccaccio. His "Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt," paints a less than favourable picture of the woman who ruled Egypt alone. Boccaccio bypasses Cleopatra's qualities as a great ruler in favour of other traits, such as the gossip that follows her. Additionally, Boccaccio ignores any intelligence or strength as a leader; Boccaccio mentions Cleopatra's beauty briefly to focus on her supposed greed for material wealth.[196] Boccaccio uses descriptors such as "wicked," "lewd," "greedy," and "insatiable" to characterize the queen.[197] Boccaccio believes Cleopatra to be a "wretched woman" who "put an end to her greed, her concupiscence, and her life."[198] It is abundantly clear that Cleopatra was not of interest to Boccaccio as an independent ruler of Egypt but rather as a salacious and greedy woman whose death was in vain.

Boccaccio's clear misogynistic views regarding Cleopatra are not evident in Artemisia's various *Cleopatra* paintings. Two of the three known Cleopatras by Artemisia are of the moments before Cleopatra's death with asp in hand, about to set the venomous creature upon her and kill herself. Artemisia's first version of *Cleopatra* [Figure 3.20] was created sometime between 1611 and 1612, the same time as Artemisia's first attributed work of *Susanna and the*

[196] Boccaccio, *Concerning*, 193.
[197] Ibid., 194-195.
[198] Ibid., 196.

Elders, and a second version created circa 1620 [Figure 4.12]. A later image painted between 1633 and 1635 shows Cleopatra in her last moments [Figure 4.13], perhaps taking in the reality of her situation, eyes closed in preparation of what is to come. This 1630s Cleopatra is in repose, one hand behind her head, the other holding the asp, her eyes closed. The other depiction is reminiscent of Artemisia's *Lucretia*, though Cleopatra holds an asp to her chest instead of a knife. With her head tilted up and a look of disdain, this version of Cleopatra evokes discomfort compared to the other, as the realities of the situation are more evident.

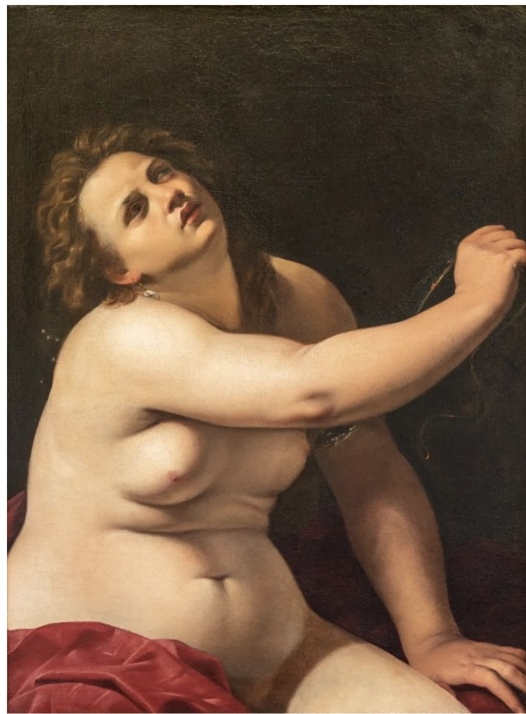

Figure 4.12 Gentileschi, Artemisia, *Cleopatra*, ca. 1620, oil on canvas, Fondazione Cavallini Sgarbi, Ferrara, https://www.cinello.com/cleopatra-2.

Figure 4.13 Gentileschi, Artemisia, Cleopatra*, ca. 1633-1635, oil on canvas, Private Collection, in Artemisia, by Letizia Treves, pg. 203, London: National Gallery Company Limited, 2020.*

Nonetheless, the "wicked," "lewd," and "greedy," Cleopatra as described by Boccaccio is not reflective of Artemisia's work. Rather than focusing on Cleopatra's downfalls, Artemisia gives light on the most challenging part of Cleopatra's whole story, where she is in the terrifying moments of holding the asp yet has not felt the bite. Artemisia humanizes Cleopatra in her paintings, her anguish acknowledged, and her strength undeniable in the circumstances she finds herself.

Conclusion

"As long as I live, I will have control over my being."[199]

- Artemisia Gentileschi

Artemisia Gentileschi was born into a world that did not favour women to be anything more than daughters, wives, and mothers. Society reduced women to their relationships with men, who were considered responsible for society's most outstanding achievements. Artemisia chose a different life for herself, breaking from the typical mould of women in Italy during the 16th and 17th centuries. Artemisia faced life experiences that may have been insurmountable to other women, yet she overcame the fallout of a rape and its public trial to become a successful artist. She took the technical skills she learned from her father and combined them with her natural talent; Artemisia travelled to Rome, Florence, Venice, Naples, and England, seeking and receiving commissions and painting many subjects. Artemisia's corpus of work focused on strong, intelligent, and formidable women from classical or biblical sources.

Renaissance Italy surrounded Artemisia with works of art in churches and secular spaces, and famous authors inundated society with ideologies about the deficiencies of most women with some exceptional heroines. Artemisia was surrounded mainly by art created by men and thus she reinterpreted these images to create a different perspective of biblical or classical women. Additionally, male authors such as Boccaccio popularized narratives about women that highlighted either their physical appeals over intellectual ones or focused on their negative attributes. Christine de Pizan's feminism in Europe inspired generations of feminist authors and give rise to ideologies favouring equality amongst the genders, or a generally more positive view of women into which Artemisia was born.

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[199] Vicki León, *Uppity Women of Medieval Times* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1997): 98

The inspiration and influence available to Artemisia were vast – yet she was able to develop her unique interpretations of women that varied greatly from men's interpretations that came before. Artemisia chose to portray certain women who were exemplars of virtue, chastity, and strength and emphasized these qualities. She also made poignant decisions as to which scenes from the women's stories she told, often choosing the most difficult moments that Artemisia took as an opportunity to give these women their agency back. Whether it was Esther, Judith, Aurora, Cleopatra, or Susanna, Artemisia put a uniquely female spin on each portrait.

By exploring the churches that Artemisia visited or accessed, a picture is created of the major themes and figures artists imposed on Artemisia. It also shows how artists depicted women in a religious sphere and how men depicted women. Churches in Rome and Florence housed depictions of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Mary Magdalene, Esther, and Judith, all figures Artemisia chose to include in her works. While depicting the exact figures, Artemisia's works challenged the narratives presented in religious art. For example, her *Judith Slaying Holofernes* took a wildly different approach to Judith killing Holofernes than Domenichino's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*. Churches gave Artemisia a view into the larger world of art outside her father's studio early in her life and remained a potential inspiration for the rest of her life.

Beyond the religious, secular spaces presented Artemisia with works of art, including public piazzas and palaces owned by her patrons. While the secular spaces proved less saturated with the same subjects that Artemisia painted, they were nonetheless influential in her works, as can be seen with her *Cleopatra* mirroring the positioning of the Belvedere *Ariadne*. Secular spaces also provided more inspiration through statuary, moving away from churches' fresco and oil painting decorations.

The literature popularized in the Renaissance, including works by Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan, gave rise to a debate on the benefits of women in society and detailed the lives of famous women. Boccaccio wrote about the lives of biblical and historical women, though he was not always complimentary of the women he described. His chapter on Cleopatra called her "greedy," emphasizing her pitfalls more than her successes as a queen. On the other hand, Christine celebrated women by creating her city with famous women, using the women as symbols to spread the message of gender inequities. She used her manuscript to promote the successes and abilities of women. Ideologies inspired by both authors surrounded Artemisia, left to conclude ideas about women herself. She ultimately took the feminist approach of Christine, giving women power in their narratives.

The study of Artemisia's life has long focused on her tragic rape and the men around her, so it is crucial to understand Artemisia as her own woman. Artemisia made the decisions on how to portray women in her artwork and had an endless list of inspiration and influence in the cities where she lived. She used her experiences as a woman to give additional depth to her works, creating more realistic scenes of the lives of famous women. Artemisia was a victim but did not let that define her. Her art was much more than reactionary – it was revolutionary.

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