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# Between Historical Truth and Story-Telling: The Twentieth-Century Fabrication of "Artemisia"

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BETWEEN HISTORICAL TRUTH AND STORY-TELLING:  
THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FABRICATION OF “ARTEMISIA”

by

Britiany Lynn Daugherty

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
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In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
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Under the Supervision of Professor Marissa Vigneault

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BETWEEN HISTORICAL TRUTH AND STORY-TELLING:  
THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY FABRICATION OF “ARTEMISIA”

Britiany Lynn Daugherty, M.A.

University of Nebraska, 2015

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This research focuses on the twentieth century rediscovery of the seventeenth-century Italian painter Artemisia Gentileschi by scholars, novelists, playwrights, filmmakers, and artists. I argue that the various authors who told her story constructed two distinct “Artemisias,” what I identify as the “Academic Artemisia” and the “Celebrity Artemisia.” The “Academic Artemisia” results from writings by scholars focused on her 1610 *Susanna and the Elders*, who used approaches from formalism and connoisseurship, to feminism and iconography. The “Celebrity Artemisia” stems from popular fictions that refashioned the life and art of Artemisia according to pop culture tastes. Studying what has been said about Artemisia’s life – great woman artist in a time when patriarchy allowed few, survivor of rape, slandered in a public trial, married matron, and single mother – reveals why her story captivates art historians and fans, especially women who identify with her struggle. However, it is also made evident that while scholars are bound to the historical evidence, writers of fictional narratives in novels, plays, and the film have drastically revised “Artemisia” into a twentieth-century heroine.

Dedicated to my Tim.

Who felt all the stresses of this process as if they were his own.

Thank you.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

My approach to Artemisia Gentileschi reviews the history of depictions of the Biblical Susanna, from Early Christian catacomb paintings, to seventeenth and eighteenth century paintings created at the height of popularity of the subject, and finally to later, less frequent depictions by modern artists such as Pablo Picasso.<sup>1</sup> I wanted to understand Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* (fig. 1) within this iconographic history, but in doing so, I became increasingly concerned with the language of the scholars who write on Artemisia and their relationship to popular media accounts. The changing art historical methodologies brought to bear on Susanna and Artemisia over the course of the twentieth century profoundly affected our popular modern myth of artistic genius.

Artemisia painted at least three Susannas over the course of her career, others may be lost or attributed to other artists at this time: *Susanna and the Elders* (1610), *Susanna and the Elders* (1622) (fig. 2), and *Susanna and the Elders* (1647) (fig. 3). Nannette Salomon, in her 2005 essay "Judging Artemisia: A Baroque Woman in Modern Art History," compares how scholars have analyzed all three differently. Salomon briefly reminds the reader how the personal vision or ideology of the art historian contributes, in some degree, to their interpretation of the artwork. Salomon asserts that, "Each reading has some validity. Together they are a sobering reminder of how personal vision is and of

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<sup>1</sup> While common practice is to refer to an artist by last name, I will refer to Artemisia Gentileschi interchangeably as Artemisia Gentileschi or Artemisia. I avoid calling her Gentileschi alone because of the confusion it may cause with her father, Orazio Gentileschi, who is frequently discussed in relation to Artemisia, especially in discussion of the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders*. Likewise, I refer to her father as Orazio Gentileschi or Orazio, rather than Gentileschi alone, to avoid confusion.



what we are doing when we “do” art history.”<sup>2</sup> Starting from this notion that all interpretation is done through the lens, or personal vision, of the author, in this thesis I unpack the representations of Artemisia that are present in academic and popular culture formats. My interest is in identifying the “Artemisia” constructed from the various voices. What I identify as “Artemisia” is not the historical seventeenth-century painter, but the fabrication of a dramatic woman painter who challenged social and professional traditions, and inspired scholars, writers, playwrights, directors, artists, and passionate fans centuries later.

Before beginning to explore these fictional accounts, it is important to outline the known facts about the historical Artemisia Gentileschi. Artemisia was born July 8, 1593, in Rome, the only daughter of painter Orazio Gentileschi and Prudentia Montone. She was trained in Orazio’s workshop by him and by her father’s colleague, the painter Agostino Tassi. Her style first emulated Orazio’s, but quickly developed into sharply contrasting lights and darks that show the influence of Caravaggio, through her father who was also a follower. Her earliest recorded painting is the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders*, completed while training in her father’s studio. Legal records indicate she was a victim of rape in May of 1611, and a public trial over the assault in March of 1612 led to public scandal. A quickly arranged marriage to Florentine painter Pierantonio di Vincenzo Stiattesi in the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, Rome, followed, on November 29, 1612. Afterwards, she relocated with him to Florence. On July 19, 1616,

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<sup>2</sup> Nanette Salomon, “Judging Artemisia: A Baroque Woman in Modern Art History,” in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, edited by Mieke Bal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 45.

she was the first woman admitted to the Accademia del Disegno in Florence.<sup>3</sup> She pursued a successful career in portraiture and religious subjects and received commissions from collectors all over Italy and England as she moved between Rome, Florence, Venice, London and Naples, which are documented in her letters.<sup>4</sup> She died around 1654 of an unknown illness. She was buried in San Giovanni dei Fiorentini, a Tuscan church near Naples.<sup>5</sup>

While the rape and trial encompassed only a little over a year at the beginning of her career, it is an ever-present element in scholarship. The transcripts of the 1612 trial survive and were translated and published by Mary Garrard in her 1989 monograph on Artemisia.<sup>6</sup> The following details are included here because the trial has so deeply marked the literature on Artemisia and her art. This summary is quoted from a “Fact Sheet” compiled by Garrard and celebrated feminist icon Gloria Steinem:

In the fully documented trial of 1612, Agostino Tassi was charged with and convicted of the rape of Artemisia Gentileschi. He never confessed to the crime, and on the contrary, tried to accuse Artemisia's father of having deflowered her, and to insist she had also written love letters to other men -- though she could barely write at the time. Artemisia testified repeatedly under oath and torture that she had been raped by Tassi. She described the event in explicit and graphic detail, and her own resistance to the point of wounding him with a knife. After the rape, Agostino promised to marry Artemisia, which would have been the only socially acceptable remedy in 17th century Italy for a woman who had become "damaged property." She evidently believed him at first (though she came to doubt his intentions) and had reluctant sexual relations with her assailant: "What I was doing with him, I did only so that, as he had dishonored me, he would marry me" (from her rape trial testimony). In reality, Tassi was known as what might

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<sup>3</sup> R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Moir, *The Italian Followers of Caravaggio* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 100.

<sup>5</sup> Jesse Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Language of Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), Appendix.

now be called a multiple sex offender. He had been sued for raping and impregnating his sister-in-law, equated with incest, and there was testimony at the trial that he had arranged and paid for the murder of his own wife, whom he had also acquired by rape.<sup>7</sup>

These sensational events have taken over scholarship to the point that discussion often focuses only on the rape trial. Early discussion of Artemisia by art historians often characterized her as an immoral woman due to the rape scandal while later feminist commentary projected the trauma of the rape onto her artwork.

While later scholars, notably Garrard and R. Ward Bissell, wrote monographs emphasizing the entire breadth of Artemisia's life and works, fictionalized accounts of "Artemisia" focus almost exclusively on the rape trial and scandal, and generally neglect her subsequent career. Feminist scholars have taken varied positions, either arguing that the events of her life are relevant to understanding her artwork, or that biography should be set aside in favor of considering her work in relation to general artistic production of the seventeenth century. However, even as such scholars have attempted to separate the rape from analysis of her art, as Richard Spear noted, the relationship between the two still "dominated and sensationalized the literature and Artemisia's fame in a way that CNN should envy."<sup>8</sup>

While history forgot Artemisia after her death in 1653, historians of Italian Baroque painting revived her oeuvre in the early twentieth century based on formalism and connoisseurship. Their interest was mainly due to her status as a follower of Caravaggio. Her real renaissance came in the 1970s following her inclusion in the 1976-

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<sup>7</sup> Mary Garrard and Gloria Steinem, "Now You've Seen the Film, Meet the Real Artemisia Gentileschi," *Artemisia Gentileschi in the Movies*, May 1998, accessed 18 February 2015, <http://members.efn.org/~acd/Artemisia.html>

<sup>8</sup> Richard E. Spear, "Artemisia Gentileschi: Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (2000): 568-579, 569.

77 exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950*.<sup>9</sup> Twentieth-century feminist scholarship on Artemisia led to popular interest resulting in books, plays, and a feature film. In order to trace the symbiosis of the “Academic Artemisia” and the “Celebrity Artemisia,” Chapter One chronicles the historiography of her 1610 *Susanna*. This scholarship mirrors the changing methodologies of twentieth-century art historical writing, from early formal analysis based on connoisseurship to later feminist analysis merged with iconography and psychoanalysis. Connoisseurs and scholars such as Roberto Longhi, Hermann Voss, and Bissell were particularly concerned with the attribution of the 1610 *Susanna*, which lacks provenance records between 1610 and 1715. This scholarship put the problem of distinguishing her style from her father’s at the center of research. Despite Artemisia’s signature on the 1610 *Susanna*, which was uncovered in 1839, scholars rejected her as the artist, because of her sex and age (thought to be thirteen, then later revealed to be seventeen) at the time of the painting.

Even after the signature on the 1610 *Susanna* was authenticated in 1977 by scientific processes, scholars continued to debate the degree of involvement Orazio had in the painting. However, by the mid-1970s Garrard successfully shifted the focus of analysis on the *Susanna* from formalism to iconography and psychoanalysis. Garrard put forward a gender-based analysis, positing that Artemisia’s experiences as a woman, in a patriarchal society, directly affected the artwork she produced. In terms of the 1610 *Susanna*, Garrard suggested that Artemisia’s interpretation of the popular theme was

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<sup>9</sup> The exhibition was shown at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from December 23, 1976, through March 13, 1977; the University of Texas at Austin from April 12, 1977, through June 12, 1977; the Museum of Art, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, from July 14, 1977, through September 4, 1977; and the Brooklyn Museum from October 1, 1977, through November 27, 1977.

different than depictions by male artists because of her gendered experience, especially in terms of her sexual vulnerability. Noted feminist visual theorist and art historian Griselda Pollock, however, argued that *Susanna* should be considered in terms of seventeenth-century artistic production rather than as a “revenge” painting based on Artemisia’s biographical experience. Countering Garrard, Pollock posited that Artemisia’s *Susanna* was made with a male patron in mind, not as a personal expression. She also suggested that Artemisia’s inexperience explains certain formal aspects of the painting. Ultimately, the 1610 *Susanna* is in an unstable position within Artemisia scholarship due to the lack of records from this portion of her career other than those relating to the trial. Though that occurred after the painting, it obscures the true history and intention, if such could ever be known, of this particular *Susanna*. There are no records of Artemisia’s activities or feelings. It is unknown if she chose the subject herself. This early painting might be a commissioned work, a showcase of her talents, or suggested by Orazio.

Chapter Two focuses on the development of the “Celebrity Artemisia,” which stemmed from Anna Banti’s 1947 novel *Artemisia*. Of greatest interest to these popular writers are the sources for Artemisia’s artistic inspiration. Their creations of a “modern” Artemisia hinge on her imagined emotional response as a woman in the shadow of male masters, dominated by male society. The “Artemisia fictions” produced in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-centuries are a response to Artemisia’s struggle against patriarchal structures to become a great woman painter.<sup>10</sup> Often it is women struggling in male-dominated professions who produced the novels, plays, and film. Where the novels

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<sup>10</sup> Tina Olsin Lent, ““My Heart Belongs to Daddy”: The Fictionalization of Baroque Artist Artemisia Gentileschi in Contemporary Film and Novels,” *Literature Film Quarterly*, 34, no. 3 (2006): 212-218, 212.

dramatize the relationship between Artemisia and her father, often suggesting Orazio as the source of Artemisia's inspiration, the plays point to Artemisia's desire for revenge against Tassi. French writer and director Agnès Merlet, in her 1998 film *Artemisia*, took the greatest artistic liberty in representing Artemisia's life, greatly distorting the known and published facts. Scholars and political activists, such as Garrard and Steinem, and even authors of other Artemisia fictions, such as Susan Vreeland, recognized the degree to which Merlet revised Artemisia's story in order to present an empowered modern woman in a romanticized relationship with Tassi. Such inaccurate portrayals risk a loss of the valuable historical Artemisia to art history and to contemporary women.

The "Artemisia" constructed during the twentieth century cannot ever be the real Artemisia who once existed in the past. But despite or because of the tension between art history and popularizers she remains a figure of empowerment. Her powerful, skillful art and her determination to succeed serve as inspiration to those in any generation struggling against institutional controls. It is impossible to speak of her without thinking of all the obstacles she overcame in an attempt to earn a living and respect as a professional artist. She battled against sexual violence, a male-dominated profession, and the limitations of women in social roles; these are battles women still identify with today. By gathering here nearly all that has been said, and more or less all that has fashioned the "Artemisia" that exists in this moment, I hope that further scholarship and representations of Artemisia may benefit from recognizing that each voice who told her story has facilitated the construction of a living "Artemisia."

## CHAPTER ONE

### Rediscovering Artemisia

Little about Artemisia Gentileschi's life survives in seventeenth-century accounts, and since women artists were generally neglected by art historians until the mid-twentieth century, no scholars sought to find or preserve accounts of her in her own time. This chapter chronicles what is known and has been said of the history of the 1610 *Susanna*, as well as the construction and reconstruction of Artemisia and her subsequent placement into art history's lineage. I focus on the historiography of the 1610 *Susanna* because it was her first major painting and as such had a prominent place in the dialogue between formalism and feminism. The painting raises a lot of the questions and concerns – her training as an artist, her reliance on her father as a teacher, her relationship with her tutor Agostino Tassi, the extent that the trauma of the rape and trial played in her artistic production, and her inspiration and development as an artist – that scholars and writers have attempted to answer since Artemisia's early twentieth-century rediscovery.

Of the thirty-four attributed artworks in Artemisia's oeuvre, her 1610 *Susanna* most aptly illustrates the tension that developed within scholarship between traditional formalism and feminist biography.<sup>11</sup> Conventional formalism deals with traditional issues of attribution and chronology. Connoisseurship drew attention to her because of questions of authorship, as most of her paintings were initially attributed to her father, Orazio. The 1610 *Susanna* is the most controversial in this regard. Later feminist scholars in the 1970s all claimed *Susanna* for Artemisia, but were divided in their arguments; some, like

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<sup>11</sup> Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's Histories* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 104.

Mary Garrard, attempted to attribute it to her on the basis of her “feminine” treatment of Susanna, caused by her experience as a seventeenth-century woman. Others, like Griselda Pollock, called for a purging of her gender and biography from readings of *Susanna* and her art. But it was this seemingly narrow debate over attribution and the various methodologies brought to bear on it that resulted in the Artemisia that exists beyond academic circles.

The limited knowledge of Artemisia’s career and practice may be attributed to her status as a woman artist who, while successful during her lifetime due to commissions, did not paint many frescos or major altarpieces, which were not only signs of a prosperous artist but often resulted in substantial records. She was also not mentioned by early seventeenth-century Caravaggio biographers such as Giulio Mancini, Francesco Scannelli, Giovanni Bellori, or Giovanni Battista Passeri, though she was noticed by some general Baroque biographers in the seventeenth-century.<sup>12</sup> Baroque painter and biographer, Giovanni Baglione (1566–1643), noted her “ability to work from nature” and the recognition she received from patrons for her “beautiful works.” German Baroque painter and writer Joachim von Sandrart (1606–1688) noted that her portraits were “extremely good,” and Italian art historian and biographer Filippo Baldinucci (1624–1697) described her outstanding skill at still-life and her ability to render fruit from nature.<sup>13</sup> They praised the skill and beauty of Artemisia’s paintings, but in genres often

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<sup>12</sup> Richard E. Spear, “The Critical Fortune of a Realist Painter,” in *The Age of Caravaggio*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art: Electa/Rizzoli, 1985), 22-27. See also Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 2000, 569; and Genevieve Warwick, *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, (Newark [DE]: University of Delaware Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 301, 44, 105. R. Ward Bissell, “Artemisia Gentileschi: Painter of Still Lifes?,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 32, no. 2 (2013): 27-34, 27.



reserved for women artists, who painted portraits, fruits, and flowers. Even her naturalism – one of Caravaggio’s hallmarks – is here tied to reproduction of nature. These accounts were also limited by the lack of personal correspondence. There are only about twenty-eight surviving letters written by Artemisia, mostly to patrons concerning commissions.<sup>14</sup>

Further obscuring the history of the 1610 *Susanna* was its placement in a private collection and its original attribution to the artist’s father. The first documented mention of it is was in a 1715 letter written by Florentine painter Benedetto Luti, who was working in Rome and owned the painting. Luti offered to send to his patron, the Hofrat Bauer von Heppenstein, a painting of the “chaste Susanna” by Orazio Gentileschi from his personal collection.<sup>15</sup> The early attribution to Orazio indicates that Artemisia’s signature was fully or partially obscured, perhaps intentionally, while it was in Luti’s possession. Artemisia’s signature, cast in shadow on the step below Susanna’s knee (fig. 4), was uncovered during a restoration in 1839 by a Nürnberg conservator while in the Graf Franz Erwein Damian von Schönborn’s Schloss Weissenstein collection.<sup>16</sup> The first publication of the correct attribution was in Joseph Heller’s guide to the Pommersfelden collection in 1845, suggesting that it was on display there at least by that date.<sup>17</sup> The painting has since been around the world, including exhibitions in 1977 and 2002 in the United States. It is currently on display in the private Baroque-style castle in

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<sup>14</sup> Garrard, *The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Appendix A. Garrard’s 1989 monograph was the first English translated publication of the twenty eight letters written by Artemisia, two responses from one patron, and an exchange of notes with another patron, which are all the correspondence we have left from the artist.

<sup>15</sup> Keith Christiansen and Judith Walker Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, (New York; New Haven: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2001), 298.

<sup>16</sup> Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 188.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Heller, *Die gräflich Schönborn'sche Gemälde-Sammlung Zu Schloß Weissenstein in Pommersfelden*, (Bamberg: 1845), 23, cited in Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 2001, 298.

Pommersfelden, Germany, amongst other Renaissance and Baroque artworks (fig. 5).<sup>18</sup> Among those paintings displayed in the same ornately decorated room, called the Italian Chamber, is *Cain and Abel*, c. 1600 (seen to the left in fig. 5), by Orazio Riminaldi, an Italian painter who also studied under Orazio and followed the style of Caravaggio while in Rome. While other works in the room are difficult to identify from the photograph, it is likely that they too are associated with Orazio and/or Caravaggio.

Following the publication of Artemisia's signature in Heller's 1845 text, there was little more scholarship on Artemisia. However, in 1859, American writer Elizabeth Fries Ellet devoted about two pages of her *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries* to Artemisia. Ellet was a feminist with the means and education to study languages, and her publications emphasized the role of women in history and in art.<sup>19</sup> Ellet stated that her goal for the book was to rectify the lack of publications on "Female Artists" and to inspire women to "overcome difficulties" and elicit a "higher general respect for the powers of women."<sup>20</sup> Ellet used some of the same conventions as Vasari in his *Lives*, such as childhood prodigy, to identify these women and to subvert the conventional male artist narrative.<sup>21</sup> Her respect for women extended to supporting contemporary artists, including trying to ensure they illustrated her works which also appeared in magazines. Ellet did not include a bibliography of her sources, but she says that she consulted authorities in German, French, Italian, and English, making it possible that she came

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<sup>18</sup> Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 188.

<sup>19</sup> Sandra L. Langer, "Review of *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries* by Elizabeth Fries Lummis Ellet," *Woman's Art Journal* 1, no. 2 (1980-1981), 55-58, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Fries Ellet, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries*, (New York: Harper & Bros., 1859), preface. She cites in her introduction one German volume by Ernest Guhl dealing with female artists.

<sup>21</sup> Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 33.

across Artemisia in the above-mentioned seventeenth-century histories. However, it is more likely that Ellet encountered Artemisia through more recent writings about Artemisia's time in England. Artemisia was briefly mentioned in Charles Eastlake's 1847 *Materials for a History of Oil Painting* and Michael Byran's 1849 *A Biographical and Critical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*.<sup>22</sup> Ellet may have used these sources in her own text. Ellet stated briefly that *David with Goliath's Head*, given to King Charles I, was Artemisia's best work, an opinion from Byran's text, suggesting Ellet was familiar with it.<sup>23</sup> Ellet offers no formal analysis as to why the *David* was Artemisia's best. She does, however, emphasize Artemisia's portraits and mentions some scholars, including Wägen, who claimed that Artemisia "excelled her father in portraits."<sup>24</sup>

While Ellet's book was well received, criticisms of Ellet's aesthetic judgments, by critic Sarah Langer, indicated that she had a "woman's eye" for art. Ellet's preference for idealized femininity and "womanly graces" in the female artists of her book were ideas made popular by followers of Ruskin and doctrines of true womanhood.<sup>25</sup> Laura Prieto echoed this criticism in recognizing that Ellet's goal of respect for women still conformed to "cultural expectations" and maintained certain "gender ideologies" that meant Ellet would often acknowledge that a woman artist's career did not take away from her duties as a "true woman."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Eastlake's wife, Elizabeth Eastlake, was a feminist art historian and critic who wrote for a London based-periodical, the *Quarterly Review*, and translated German art histories into English.

<sup>23</sup> Ellet, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries*, 66 and Michael Byran, *A Biographical and Critical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers*, (London: 1849), 277.

<sup>24</sup> Ellet, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries*, 66. This may be a reference to German art historian Gustav Friedrich Wägen (1794–1868).

<sup>25</sup> Langer, *Review of Women Artists in all Ages and Countries*, 57.

<sup>26</sup> Prieto, *At Home in the Studio*, 34-35.

Aside from these Anglo-American sources, there is little other scholarship on Artemisia in the nineteenth century. Possibly German sources exist, or texts on Orazio or Caravaggio have passing mention of her. Roberto Longhi, art historian and enthusiast for Caravaggio, was the first to bring major scholarly attention to Orazio and Artemisia in his 1916 article “Gentileschi Padre e Figlia,” published in *L'Arte*. Longhi’s scholarship influenced much of the scholarship in the twentieth century and nearly every scholar that studied Artemisia after him recognized his text as pioneering. Such attention to Longhi’s scholarship is strikingly opposite that given to Ellet’s writing, which is not usually mentioned in Artemisia scholarship. As she was writing before art history was regarded as an academic discipline in the United States, perhaps her work could be dismissed as lacking institutionally credentialed authority.

Longhi’s interest in both Artemisia and her father was based mainly on exhibitions devoted to Caravaggio and his followers.<sup>27</sup> Due to the then “primitive state of research on Italian Baroque painting,” and the fact that Artemisia had been neglected by the writers of her time (even though she worked for prominent clients in Rome, Florence, Naples, and London), Longhi’s 1916 attempt to identify her oeuvre was nearly two-thirds incorrect, according to art historian Richard E. Spear.<sup>28</sup> Of the thirty-one paintings Longhi attributed to Artemisia, only eleven are now accepted. However, Longhi did correct many of those attributions in his later publications on Artemisia.<sup>29</sup> While Longhi correctly attributed the 1610 *Susanna* to Artemisia in 1916, his belief that Orazio

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<sup>27</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 249.

<sup>28</sup> Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 568.

<sup>29</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 260.

‘essentially’ painted it was a stance later scholars would follow.<sup>30</sup> Longhi credited Orazio, despite the signature and date, largely due to Artemisia’s age. In 1610 Artemisia would have been merely thirteen years old. At the time of Longhi’s writing there was confusion over Artemisia’s birth date, stemming from Orazio’s statement of her age as younger than the age of consent at the Tassi trial.<sup>31</sup> He also declared in a 1612 letter that Artemisia had already been painting for three years, meaning that by 1610 she had been painting, presumably independently, for about a year.<sup>32</sup> Due to these statements, along with years of scholarly neglect of her life and a general academic bias against women artists, Longhi and other scholars reasoned that the *Susanna* must be Orazio’s creation.

In a text on Caravaggio from 1968, Longhi stated that, “however imprecise its effect, an artist’s early background is always a factor which a critic must take into consideration.”<sup>33</sup> While Longhi’s article is often regarded as the study that rediscovered Artemisia, his critique of her early background was not generally favorable. Longhi’s method was influenced by the esthetics of Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce and the positivism of Italian art critic Giovanni Morelli, and he accordingly analyzed Artemisia’s paintings in terms of formal qualities.<sup>34</sup> However, as a woman artist he saw her paintings

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<sup>30</sup> Roberto Longhi, “Gentileschi Padre e Figlia,” *L’Arte* 19, (1916): 245-314. Longhi attributes the 1610 *Susanna* to Artemisia; however Garrard states that the *Susanna* was incorrectly attributed to Orazio in Longhi’s 1916 article (see Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 183). Lack of translation of this text makes my knowledge of which was correct limited.

<sup>31</sup> See Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 2001, 435, Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 481-82 and Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and their Work*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), 192.

<sup>32</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 184.

<sup>33</sup> Roberto Longhi, *Caravaggio*, translated by B. D. Phillips and A. S. G. Green, (Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 1968), 6.

<sup>34</sup> See Benedetto Croce, *Æsthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistic*, translated by Douglas Ainslie, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1909); Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of their Works*, translated by Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes, (London: John Murray, 1892); and Richard Wollheim, *Giovanni Morelli and the Origins of Scientific Connoisseurship*, (London: Allen Lane, 1973).

and her character in a negative light. Art historian Laura Benedetti highlighted this in her 1999 article, stating that Longhi's recognition of Artemisia as the "the only woman in Italy who ever knew what painting is," (a statement already categorizing her as a "woman") was undercut by a chauvinist attack.<sup>35</sup> Longhi described Artemisia as inferior to her father and other male artists, agreed with Agostino Tassi's testimony to her as sexual promiscuity, and sarcastically mocked her circa 1620 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Uffizi Gallery) (fig. 6).<sup>36</sup> He stressed Artemisia's stereotypical femininity in his statement that, "Judith's only concern is to move away so that the blood won't stain her silky, yellow, brand new outfit."<sup>37</sup>

I find Longhi's comments regarding Artemisia's *Judith* curious, especially when comparing Artemisia's *Judith* to Caravaggio's *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, ca. 1598–1599 (fig. 7), which Artemisia was quite familiar with. Caravaggio depicted Judith in a pure white dress, visibly leaning away from the blood and the task, which might be equally seen as an attempt to avoid staining her clothing. If anything, Caravaggio's Judith seems more concerned with the blood splatter. So while Longhi judged Artemisia's Judith as only concerned with her dress, a statement evoking stereotypes of female vanity, is it not more appropriate to claim that Artemisia was responding to Caravaggio's example? Artemisia inserted her own artistic voice into *Judith*, but Longhi should have recognized Caravaggio's influence on Artemisia's painting, rather than suggesting she

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<sup>35</sup> Laura Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia: Twentieth-Century Images of a Woman Artist," *Comparative Literature* 51, no. 1 (1999): 42-61, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Little of Longhi's work has been translated into English, which has made it difficult to fully assess his texts on Artemisia. Scholars who have read and commented on his work regarding Artemesia have not spoken of any comments on the 1610 *Susanna* specifically, so I include his comments on *Judith*, a painting close in date and in subject matter, to underscore how her gender tainted his formal analysis of her work.

<sup>37</sup> Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia," 42-43.

made her artistic decisions based on supposedly universal female traits. Given that Longhi's interest in Artemisia was primarily as a follower of Caravaggio, it seems difficult to see why he would ignore Caravaggio's influence on the young artist. He seemed instead to aim to set her apart, and not in a good way, from her male peers.

Longhi's analysis offers insight into the commonplaces of early twentieth-century art historians regarding artworks by women. Male art historians pigeon-holed her as only able to paint 'women's concerns' such as nature, still-life, or portraits. Following Vasari's model, art historical lineage was often traced through generations of teachers and students, Cimabue to Giotto and on to Michelangelo. However, Longhi, in his analysis of Artemisia, disinherited her as a student of Gentileschi, labeling her "Signora Schiattesi," (or Stiattesi) the family name of her husband, one she never used in her professional career.<sup>38</sup> Taking the Gentileschi name from her was an attempt by Longhi to suggest that she should not be included in any artistic lineage.

Longhi also considered Artemisia inferior to her father and male counterparts in his formal analysis of her paintings. One assumes a formal analysis of Caravaggio's *Judith* would not include a discussion of his gender as a man, because, after all, he was already the right *man* for this profession. In Longhi's text on Caravaggio he assesses the artist's Judith as possessing dramatic "delicacy and cool decisiveness" in the face of the "terrifying spectacle" of the beheading.<sup>39</sup> Longhi's analyses of other Caravaggio works also praise his technique, especially his use of chiaroscuro, his interest in the complexity

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Longhi, *Caravaggio*, 1968, 22.

of nature, and the “shadows which eat into” the outline of his figures.<sup>40</sup> He even states that Caravaggio’s rendering of expression in the *Incredulity of St. Thomas* (1601–1602) and the *Taking of Christ* (1602) are due to Caravaggio’s “fearless and tormented genius.”<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Longhi criticized Artemisia because of her gender in early writings that were supposedly only concerned with formal qualities. For example, Longhi says that Artemisia in *Judith* “even managed to notice that when a gush of blood is violent enough, the central spurt can be decorated with scattered drops on both sides.”<sup>42</sup> Longhi is far from praising Artemisia for her realistic technique, attention to detail, or the meaning the violence brings to the canvas, though he praised Caravaggio for his naturalistic treatment. Instead, he refers to the violent actions of Artemisia’s *Judith* as beastly and unbelievable, asking, “How could a woman paint all this?”<sup>43</sup>

Longhi was not the only scholar to comment on Artemisia’s character rather than her artistic ability. Early twentieth-century scholars often alluded to her promiscuity, indicating she was less a victim of rape and more an opportunist with a long list of sexual dalliances. Often her rape is regarded with skepticism. Museum director and connoisseur Hermann Voss wrote in 1925 of Artemisia’s trial with Tassi as a proceeding “apparently without evidence” and suggested that Artemisia was “rumored to have had an earlier affair.”<sup>44</sup> Art historian Rudolf Wittkower and his artist wife, Margot, published in 1963 a history of the character and conduct of Renaissance and Baroque artists. In this text they described the rape and trial, characterizing Tassi by his list of many escapades that

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>42</sup> Benedetti, “Reconstructing Artemisia,” 43.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hermann Voss, *Die Malerei des Barock in Rom*, (Berlin: Propyläen-Verlag, 1925), 461. (This is my translation from Voss’s text.)



included: rape, incest, sodomy, lechery and possibly homicide. Yet their final thought on the matter of Gentileschi v. Tassi was that Artemisia was a “lascivious and precocious girl,” who only later on had a “distinguished and highly honourable career as an artist.”<sup>45</sup> Their assessment of her character suggested that the notoriety of the trial benefited her career; they did not regard her as a victim. The assertion of Artemisia’s character as “lascivious and precocious” perhaps led Germaine Greer to state that Artemisia was “probably in love with her rapist, for Tassi’s charm is evident in the loyalty that he excited in all kinds of people.”<sup>46</sup>

### **The Debated *Susanna***

Early scholars of Artemisia’s work were most interested in formal analysis and connoisseurship. Consequently, they focused on determining the authorship of the 1610 *Susanna*. In a 1943 publication by Longhi, he proposed that Orazio basically painted the entire *Susanna* composition and added Artemisia’s name to it; in 1967, art historian Alfred Moir also suggested that Orazio considerably assisted his pupil in the “planning and execution.”<sup>47</sup> Voss argued in 1925 that the date on the canvas should be read as 1619 rather than 1610.<sup>48</sup> Since the date was obscured when the painting was first brought to light, Voss suggested that the signature be accepted as Artemisia’s, but that 1619 better

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<sup>45</sup> Rudolf and Margot Wittkower, “Agostino Tassi - the Seducer of Artemisia Gentileschi,” in *Born Under Saturn; the Character and Conduct of Artists: A Documented History from Antiquity to the French Revolution*, (New York: Random House, 1963), 162-164.

<sup>46</sup> Greer, *The Obstacle Race*, 193.

<sup>47</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 1989, 184.

<sup>48</sup> Cited in Bissell (1968), Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists, 1550-1950*, (Los Angeles; New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Distributed by Random House, 1976); Garrard (1989); and Christiansen and Mann (2001). My translation of Voss’s text reads as follows: “*Susanna und die Ältesten*. Signed and dated 1610 (1619?). The similarity of style with that of Orazio Gentileschi is obvious, but the softer styling of Artemisia is already clearly visible.” (Voss, *Die Malerei des Barock in Rom*, 463).

fit the chronology of Artemisia's career. Art historian Rose-Marie Hagen also suggested that the painting was actually made years later when Artemisia was in Florence and backdated to 1610 as a way to perpetuate the "mystique of Artemisia."<sup>49</sup> This idea was advanced by other scholars, such as art historian R. Ward Bissell in his publications before 1968, as Artemisia's age made the stylistic technique and skillful composition too extraordinary for a girl of thirteen.<sup>50</sup>

However, in 1968 Bissell uncovered documentation from the baptismal register of San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome establishing Artemisia's date of birth as July 8, 1593, rather than 1597, making her seventeen in 1610.<sup>51</sup> This discovery led to a scholarly reexamination of the 1610 *Susanna*'s authorship. Yet even after the discovery of Artemisia's actual date of birth, scholars continued to question the degree of her authorship of the 1610 *Susanna*.<sup>52</sup> These later scholars, accepting the date as 1610 because of scientific analysis done on the canvas in 1977, believed that the painting was by Artemisia's hand, but still debated the involvement of Orazio.<sup>53</sup> No scholar post-1968 suggested that the painting was entirely Orazio's, including Bissell, who in 1982

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<sup>49</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 298; Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 1999, 188.

<sup>50</sup> R. Ward Bissell, "Artemisia Gentileschi-A New Documented Chronology," *The Art Bulletin* 50, no. 2 (1968): 153-168, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>52</sup> In 1968 Mina Gregori suggested that the idea was Orazio's (Bissell, 1999); in 1970 Evelina Borea stated that an attribution to Orazio must be assumed if the date is to be read as 1610 (Bissell, 1999); in 1976 Harris suggested that Orazio helped with the design (Garrard, 1989); in 1988 Rose-Marie Hagen suggested that the painting was made in Florence and then backdated to 1610 (Christiansen and Mann, 2001); and in 1991 John Spike attributed the design of the *Susanna* figure to Orazio, making *Susanna* a "collaboration directed by Orazio who, in an understandable reversal of workshop tradition, proudly encouraged his daughter-assistant to take the credit" (Bissell, 1999).

<sup>53</sup> When the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* was brought to the United States for the 1977 *Women Artists: 1550-1950* exhibition it was subjected to laboratory analysis to verify the signature and date on the canvas. Ultraviolet photography revealed no overpainting of a previous date or signature, and both the date and signature were regarded as part of the original composition. See Harris and Nochlin (1976), 120, and Garrard (1989), 184 and 529.

questioned why Orazio would put his daughter's name on a painting of his own in the first place.<sup>54</sup> After the 2002 *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy* exhibition (figs. 8 and 9), Keith Christiansen, of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, wrote that Artemisia's signature was not so much an "assertion of artistic independence than a declaration of Artemisia's mastery of her father's style," suggesting that even in her first independent painting her style would emulate the style of her teacher, as was the common practice of the time.<sup>55</sup> Christiansen also stated that Artemisia's later *Judith Slaying Holofernes* more aptly marked her as an independent artist, whereas the 1610 *Susanna* was an "advertisement of [Artemisia's] talents," suggesting that she was closely supervised by her father and he probably made a number of compositional decisions.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, I find Christiansen's assertion most persuasive; however, this does not excuse the lengthy debate art historians had regarding attribution, to the extent it was based on the superiority of father (man) over daughter (woman).

The continued debate reveals the tension between historical and material evidence and the subjective human eye, as well as the bias against women artists in art history.

Artemisia is one of the first early modern women artists to be considered within the art history canon, yet attribution of her 1610 *Susanna* was debated for nearly a century. Early

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<sup>54</sup> Judith W. Mann, "Artemisia Gentileschi in the Rome of Orazio and of the Caravaggesques: 1608-1612" in *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Story of a Passion*, eds. Roberto Contini and Francesco Solinas, (Pero, Milan: 24 ORE Cultura, 2011), 51. This question, while valid, may suggest, as Mann asserted in 2011, that the painting was used to promote Artemisia as a gift or at an exhibition, but I find it implausible that Orazio would try to pass his own painting as Artemisia's to launch her career unless he intended to assist her in all later commissions to equal that same skill level.

<sup>55</sup> Keith Christiansen, "Becoming Artemisia: Afterthoughts on the Gentileschi Exhibition," *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2004), 102.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 104.

twentieth-century male art historians refused to grant Artemisia the same “boy genius” qualities as Giotto or Michelangelo. An art historian may concede that Giotto was guided by Cimabue as a teacher, but as a male artist it is not suggested that his works be sold under his teacher’s name for more profit or recognition. The legacy of Michelangelo is of the boy prodigy, not an artist whose teacher made his compositional decisions. A painting with a male artist’s signature would not have been further questioned, but celebrated as a discovery. However, in the case of Artemisia, the presence of her original signature was problematic in a system of connoisseurship where women artists were not considered equal to men. Thus her male father/teacher was always present as a contributor to the painting to explain its excellence.

### **The Feminist Artemisia**

Early scholarship on Artemisia was in Italian or German and not immediately translated into English. Serious discussion of her paintings in the United States was also delayed by a bias against her gender. This would change in the 1970s due to a series of American exhibitions that brought Artemisia to an American audience. In 1977, Artemisia was featured in the groundbreaking exhibition *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, curated by Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, and shown in Los Angeles, Austin, Pittsburg, and Brooklyn (fig. 10). Just as Longhi rediscovered Artemisia in 1916 under the aegis of Caravaggio, this exhibition was spurred by the 1971 *Caravaggio and His Followers* at the Cleveland Museum of Art. After the Cleveland exhibition Harris and Nochlin proposed a comprehensive exhibition of Artemisia’s works, but they ultimately

decided to expand the exhibition to embrace other neglected artists.<sup>57</sup> The *Women Artists* included a large sample of Artemisia's work: six paintings, including the 1610 *Susanna*. Her works were third in number only behind Mary Cassatt and Georgia O'Keeffe. Feminist art historian Mary Garrard's interest in Artemisia's work was sparked, leading to a 1978 College Art Association (CAA) panel where Garrard discussed Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna* from a biographical and feminist perspective.<sup>58</sup> Following the panel, Garrard's 1982 "Artemisia and Susanna" essay was published in the anthology *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, where she argued against the "traditional" male-dominated art historical canon. Garrard's monograph *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* was published in 1989, and remains a central text for scholarship on Artemisia.

Garrard's feminist art history reflects a broader shift in the field away from formalism. While formalist interpretation suggested that issues of context "must be set aside in favor of a pure and direct engagement with a work of art," the mid-twentieth century methodology proposed by German-born art historian Erwin Panofsky, a pupil of Aby Warburg, suggested that art cannot be divorced from content, religion, philosophy, literature, or culture.<sup>59</sup> In 1939, Panofsky distinguished iconography as an art historical method of connecting artistic motifs with meaning.<sup>60</sup> Garrard accordingly focused on the *Susanna* in terms of gender, iconography, and psychoanalysis. Garrard emphasized the

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<sup>57</sup> Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Garrard stated in the preface to her monograph that her interest was sparked by Eleanor Tuft's *Our Hidden Heritage* and a consideration of the iconographical complexities of Artemisia's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* shortly before the exhibition.

<sup>59</sup> Anne d'Alleva, "Formalism in Art History" and "Iconography and Iconology" in *Methods and Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2005): 17-28, 17-22.

<sup>60</sup> Erwin Panofsky, "Introduction" in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 1-17.

narrative and the depiction of Susanna's body, both of which support her conclusion that women's art was "inescapably, if unconsciously, different from men's," due mainly to their different experiences in the world.<sup>61</sup> Pointing out that gender inequality and sexual double standards were prevalent in the seventeenth century, it seemed reasonable that Artemisia's experiences as a woman would be distinctly different from those of male artists of the time. Ironically, it was the misogynistic scholarship of early twentieth-century art historians that called attention to this.

Most feminist scholars, like Garrard, used gendered terms to analyze the 1610 *Susanna*, a work they unquestionably attributed to Artemisia. In the 1977 exhibition catalogue, Harris stated that the problem remained of the extent of participation by Orazio, but more importantly, argued that Artemisia's composition suggested her own "strong feelings about the attitude of men towards women."<sup>62</sup> Her insight suggests that Artemisia's depiction of Susanna naturally reflected Artemisia's sensitivity to women's situations in a patriarchal society. Harris concluded that the "chief argument in favor of the attribution to Artemisia is the heavily built female figure, who is also more emotionally expressive than is usual for Orazio."<sup>63</sup> This suggests that Artemisia's women were significantly different than the women depicted by her father. Garrard reinforced Harris' argument, stating that Artemisia's female characters "respond and act in an entirely different way" than Orazio's, speaking to their considerable expressive differences.<sup>64</sup> Garrard did concede that, in formal terms, "we must acknowledge Orazio's

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<sup>61</sup> Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 568.

<sup>62</sup> Harris and Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>64</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 5.

likely literal participation in many of Artemisia's early works," on the grounds that the first achievement of the student was to emulate the master's model. Garrard's analysis, however, was mostly about the "treatment of the theme" which had received little scholarly attention until that point.<sup>65</sup> So while it may never be possible to completely separate Artemisia's hand from Orazio's in this early work, feminist theorists did advance a reading that moved beyond formal assessments.

The 1970s advent of feminist scholarship on Artemisia reflected the women's liberation movements which recognized and responded to patriarchal systems similar to those present in Artemisia's seventeenth-century social structure. Feminist art historians responded so strongly to Artemisia's paintings because she was likewise a woman repressed and controlled by patriarchal conditions. Early art historians had generally been men, so for women art historians to insert their voice into the art historical narrative was political and revolutionary. They sympathized and related to Artemisia's struggle to become a woman artist at a time when male artists were dominant. For this reason, the renaissance of Artemisia scholarship is closely tied to feminism. It is also for this reason that the 1610 *Susanna* was the subject of Garrard's inaugural publication on Artemisia. Earlier art historians dismissed the actual narrative of "Susanna and the Elders" because it was of little importance to their formal analysis. However, for feminist theorists the story held deep significance not only because of its tie to Artemisia's life, but also because of the overall theme of the control of women's sexuality in patriarchal societies.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

The “Susanna and the Elders” story is found in the thirteenth chapter of the Old Testament *Book of Daniel*, probably written in the second century BCE.<sup>66</sup> The beautiful and God-fearing Susanna, wife of Joakim, was watched by two prominent judges of Babylon who frequented Joakim’s house (1-6). The two Elders were “inflamed with lust” for Susanna, who they saw walking in her garden. They perverted their minds and turned their eyes away from God as they watched her every day (9-12). One day, when she sent her maidservants to fetch oil for her bath, they confronted her, saying they were in love with her and she must consent to lie with them (19-20). They threatened to accuse her of adulterous acts; which for a married woman carried the punishment of death. She did not comply, but instead realized it was better to take the risk of a trial than sin in the sight of the Lord (21-25). The two Elders’ respected social status led the people to believe their testimony and Susanna, found guilty, cried out to God against those who bore false witness against her (41-43). Hearing her voice, God answered her prayers, inspiring Daniel to speak for her (44-49). Daniel separated the two Elders and exposed the inconsistencies in their testimonies (51-61). The Elders were stoned to death for their wickedness, their lustful and perverted hearts, and for bearing false witness. Susanna was exonerated, not by her own innocence, but by Daniel who “became great in the sight of the people from that day” (62-64).

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<sup>66</sup> “Daniel 13:1-65,” Douay-Rheims Bible, accessed November 27, 2014.

From the Douay-Rheims: “*This history of Susanna, in all the ancient Greek and Latin Bibles, was placed in the beginning of the book of Daniel: till St. Jerome, in his translation, detached it from thence; because he did not find it in the Hebrew: which is also the case of the history of Bel and the Dragon. But both the one and the other are received by the Catholic Church: and were from the very beginning a part of the Christian Bible.*” Since the Douay Rheims Bible is the translation sixteenth- and seventeenth-century patrons and artists would have known, it is used here. In newer translations of the Bible Susanna’s story is separated from the Book of Daniel and included in the Apocrypha.



While the Susanna story has obvious moral and theological implications, Garrard suggested that by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the popularity of the theme in art was due to the “purely secular” sexual appeal of a nude female in a garden setting. The Biblical narrative thus became a justification for the depiction of a naked female body. While earlier scholarship avoided discussion of Susanna’s body, Garrard brought the nude Susanna to the forefront by comparing Artemisia’s less sexualized and more victimized Susanna to contemporary examples (the history of types, as Panofsky termed it) painted by male artists, such as Tintoretto (fig. 11), Annibale Carracci (fig. 12), Domenichino (fig. 13), Rubens (fig. 14), and Rembrandt (fig. 15). These works have what Garrard called a “hard-core eroticism.”<sup>67</sup> Following contrasting analysis of Artemisia’s naturalistic treatment of the body, choice of defensive pose, and the painful emotional undertones, Garrard boldly stated that Artemisia’s “uniquely sympathetic treatment of the Susanna theme is more than explained by the simple fact that she was a woman.”<sup>68</sup>

Naturalistic treatment of Susanna’s body might be possible for a woman artist, even without access to other models (fig. 16).<sup>69</sup> In Garrard’s opinion, the movement away from an idealized female nude to the inclusion of neck and groin wrinkles marks her *Susanna* as designed by a woman. Garrard additionally explained the defensive pose and traumatized expression in terms of Artemisia’s biography. She stated that Artemisia avoided the traditional crouching Venus iconography (fig. 17) popularly used by male artists in favor of Orestes’s nurse from the *Orestes Slaying Clytemnestra and Aegisthus*

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<sup>67</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 188-89.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 204.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 157.

depiction on a circa 150 CE Roman sarcophagus (fig. 18), also used as a prototype in Michelangelo's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve* (fig.19). Artemisia also avoided the traditional garden setting; she instead compressed Susanna into the foreground against a cold, hard, stone wall, shown under attack by the predatory Elders. This nontraditional iconography and setting conveyed a "character being hounded on a psychological level," and ultimately Garrard concluded that it was Artemisia's biographical experience that explained the expressive character of Susanna.<sup>70</sup>

Garrard's response to Artemisia's infamous rape trial does not echo that of Longhi or Wittkower, the former who marked her an immoral woman, and the latter who claimed she was purely an opportunist. Neither regarded her as the victim of a psychologically haunting event, as does Garrard. Ultimately, Garrard's breakthrough in scholarship on Artemisia was to find a parallel between Artemisia's true-life events and the subjects she depicted, and in the case of the 1610 painting, between Artemisia, a seventeenth-century woman, and Susanna, a Biblical heroine. It is worth noting that in the Biblical tale Daniel is inspired to speak for Susanna, just as art historians have done for Artemisia. In connecting the two women's stories, Garrard further suggested that Artemisia "documented" her own honesty and virtue through the Biblical heroine's testimony of innocence.<sup>71</sup> Both Bissell –who went as far as to imply the lawsuit by Orazio against Tassi was "irrational" – and Spear had referred to the rape with skepticism.<sup>72</sup> Taking a stance against these misogynistic statements by their peers,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> See Bissell (1968) and Spear (1971), as cited in Garrard (1989). Bissell and Spear use "rape" in quotes in their text.

Garrard and Harris insisted that the rape and trial were central to her empathetic treatment of female subjects. Garrard argued the theme of the 1610 *Susanna* reflects how a “young woman felt about her sexual vulnerability in 1610 with the intimidating threat of rape.”<sup>73</sup> Following Garrard, Chloë Taylor further suggested that the faces of the two Elders are that of Agostino Tassi and Cosimo Quorli, both of whom are said to have sexually threatened Artemisia.<sup>74</sup> Others have suggested the younger male is Tassi while the older male is Orazio.<sup>75</sup>

Following Garrard’s monograph, all subsequent scholarship has quoted or referred to her analysis of Artemisia in one way or another; the same can be said for Bissell’s monograph. But their respective monographs differ in methodology. Bissell’s 1999 *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art: Critical Reading and Catalogue Raisonné*, was the first catalogue raisonné of her work. Bissell explained her life and work but focused on attribution, chronology, sources, and financial arrangements including four appendices with supplemental documents. The catalogue of her works cites not only the signed paintings, but also incorrect and questionable attributions and lost works, all of whose authorship he determined by traditional formal and documentary methods.<sup>76</sup> Garrard, on the other hand, stated in her introduction that her intention was not to catalogue Artemisia’s paintings based on connoisseurship, but on “expressive

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<sup>73</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 208.

<sup>74</sup> Chloë Taylor, *The Culture of Confession from Augustine to Foucault: A Genealogy of the 'Confessing Animal,'* (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), 202. Cosimo Quorli was another character prominent in Artemisia’s life and the trial proceedings, who is mentioned far less than Tassi. Quorli tried, but failed, to rape Artemisia, stole paintings from her father, and helped Tassi plan visits to her house when her father was absent. See Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 2001, 432.

<sup>75</sup> Christiansen mentions art historian Gianni Papi who suggests the Elders are Tassi and Orazio. See Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 298.

<sup>76</sup> Cited in Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 572.

character.”<sup>77</sup> Her appendices include the letters written by Artemisia, translated by Efram G. Calingaert, which give a glimpse into the woman and painter behind the historical documents. She also included the entire testimony of the rape trial of 1612, as it plays a central role in her analysis of Artemisia’s work. The different approaches by Bissell and Garrard are made evident in their respective catalogues of her paintings. Even though Garrard did not make an official catalogue, she included thirty-four paintings in her book while Bissell included fifty-seven. Overall, they only agree on twenty-six paintings as belonging to Artemisia. Their approaches, Bissell as traditional connoisseur and Garrard as feminist, form the basis of their attributions, resulting in this difference of opinion.

Bissell’s exhaustive catalogue continues to be referenced by Artemisia scholars. However, Garrard’s gender-based definition of Artemisia’s oeuvre has effectively trumped the formal/connoisseurship-based readings. Garrard’s work reads Artemisia’s artworks as extensions of the artist. However, the limits of this variety of feminist scholarship in regards to the 1610 *Susanna* may have been reached. There is no further way to connect the painting to Artemisia’s biography. Artemisia’s identity is said to be projected onto Susanna; Tassi and Cosimo (or Orazio) projected onto the Elders, and Artemisia’s experience projected onto Susanna’s story. The reading of Artemisia’s paintings as deliberate and personal expressions of her life, as suggested by Garrard, is limited because ultimately the feelings of the artist are unknown. So while Garrard has posited that Artemisia painted Biblical heroines as expressions of her personal life, there is no new evidence outside the paintings themselves to support this theory, contributing

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<sup>77</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 5.

to current scholars' abandonment of this approach. Post-structuralists in the mid-twentieth-century opened the door to multiple interpretations of Artemisia's painting.<sup>78</sup>

Post-structuralists began to analyze art with an understanding that meaning and language are not necessarily stable. The language of art history used throughout the modern period often elevated the idea of artistic genius, confirming that the artist maintained control over the meaning of an artwork. With Roland Barthes' essay "Death of the Author" (1967) came the realization that the author, or artist in this case, did not determine meaning, and that art could mean multiple things to different readers, because the readers brought with them their own context.<sup>79</sup> This idea encouraged feminists like Griselda Pollock to look for determinants of meaning outside the artist's agency or intent. Thus some feminist scholarship especially coming from Britain took significant issue with Garrard's gender-based analysis. Pollock, while appreciating Garrard's intensive study of Artemisia, rejected the application of Artemisia's biography to her paintings. Pollock took issue with Garrard's conclusions that Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna* was a "vehicle of personal expression to an extraordinary degree."<sup>80</sup> To bolster her position Pollock cited American scholar Nanette Salomon's argument that biographical materials work differently according to gender, and that while biographical details of a man are conveyed as 'universal' the "details of a woman's biography are used to underscore the idea that she is an exception," and thus her art is "reduced to a visual record of her

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<sup>78</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 112.

<sup>79</sup> Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author" in *Image, Music, Text* translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 147.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 106.

personal and psychological makeup.”<sup>81</sup> Salomon suggested that while Artemisia was justly inserted into the canon, the discussion of her sexual history operated against her while the well-documented sexual histories of male artists were dismissed altogether or not discussed in terms of their artistic production.<sup>82</sup> Salomon reasoned that the trial proceedings may or may not add to our understanding of Artemisia’s art, but will do so only in historical context and only when considered as part of the “sexuality and politics” of rape of the seventeenth century.<sup>83</sup> Along the same lines, historian Elizabeth Cohen’s research into the trial records of the rape as documents of seventeenth-century conduct suggest that if Artemisia was making “feminist” images it had a lot more to do with other aspects of her culture than the assault.<sup>84</sup> Cohen argues that rape was a common event in seventeenth-century Rome. While she commended Artemisia as a strong woman and admits that the rape did affect Artemisia’s development, she does not suggest that it defined the artist to the same extent as Garrard and others have argued, given the complexities of women’s lives generally in her time.<sup>85</sup>

For Pollock, Garrard’s insistence on defining the 1610 *Susanna* in terms of Artemisia’s experience as a victim of sexual intimidation reduced Artemisia’s work to “therapeutic expressions of her repressed fear, anger and/or desire for revenge.”<sup>86</sup> Pollock instead argued that the *Susanna* and *Judith* themes were popular with artists and patrons alike as “images of sex and violence,” and to divorce Artemisia from her cultural context

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<sup>81</sup> Nanette Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission," in *The Art of Art History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 344-355. Cited in Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 106.

<sup>82</sup> Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission," 351.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 352.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth S. Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 31, no.1 (2000): 47-75, 73-74.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

<sup>86</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 107.

would be to ignore history. For Pollock, Garrard merely interpreted the work as man versus woman.<sup>87</sup> Because the patron of the *Susanna* is unknown, however, scholars like Pollock can only theorize as to why, and for whom, it was painted. Museum curator and art historian Judith W. Mann, influenced by Garrard, suggests that Artemisia selected the *Susanna* subject herself; however, it is also possible that it was selected by an unknown patron or by her father. Mann speculated that it might have been painted for self-promotion, as a gift to build a client relationship, or for an exhibition, as Orazio exhibited his paintings at the Pantheon in 1610.<sup>88</sup> Pollock firmly asserts that Artemisia, like any other artist eager to sell paintings, painted the subject according to the demands and tastes of a patron, more than likely a male patron.<sup>89</sup> Even Ellet, writing in the nineteenth century, recognized the influence of the patron in her defense of Artemisia's c. 1613-1614 Pitti Palace *Judith and her Maidservant* (fig. 20). When a critic called the *Judith* "dreadful" and stated that it was proof of Artemisia's "atrocious misdirection," Ellet stated, "the artist should not be censured for her treatment of a subject which may not have been her own choice."<sup>90</sup> Ellet's defense of Artemisia's *Judith* suggests she recognized it was likely a patron chose Artemisia's subjects. This assessment agrees with Pollock's argument that Artemisia painted for the art market, rather than as cathartic self-expression. Pollock's interpretation emphasizes the economic and material conditions of artistic production which she believes cannot be divorced from the analysis of art.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 501.

<sup>88</sup> Mann, "Artemisia Gentileschi in the Rome of Orazio and of the Caravagguesques," 51.

<sup>89</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Review of Mary Garrard, Artemisia Gentileschi," *The Art Bulletin* 72, no. 3 (1990): 499-505, 503.

<sup>90</sup> Ellet, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries*, 67.

Garrard argued that Artemisia's composition displayed the female victim in conjunction with a male opportunity for voyeurism. In contrast, Pollock suggested that the painting was commissioned and painted for male pleasure.<sup>91</sup> Pollock questioned why such a "deviant" painting, as Garrard defined Artemisia's *Susanna*, if not pleasurable to be seen, would be commissioned and hung at all. It seems clear that Artemisia was attempting to "function within the market," living on commissions by mostly male patrons, as documented by Alfred Moir's statement that Artemisia had success as a portraitist, received church commissions, and was patronized by collectors all over Italy.<sup>92</sup> If the painting was so utterly against the grain of seventeenth-century tastes, then why would an artist hoping to sell paintings create it at all? Pollock suggested that when interpreting the work with the seventeenth-century patron in mind the "vulnerability and anguish" might actually serve to "heighten the sadistic pleasure offered by the painting."<sup>93</sup> While Garrard concluded that the reclaiming of *Susanna* as victim discouraged pleasurable viewing, Pollock suggested, quite to the contrary, that the conventions of Baroque patronage more than likely encouraged a sadistic pleasure in the viewing of the victimized, yet still exposed, body of *Susanna*.

Where Garrard found gender-based cause for the wrinkles of *Susanna*'s body, Pollock questioned why women artists would opt to depict "real wrinkles over idealized perfection which is as much a fantasy we carry in our heads and discipline our own bodies to conform to."<sup>94</sup> After all, even the 'victimized' body of Artemisia's 1610

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<sup>91</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 115.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 145, and Moir, *The Italian Followers of Caravaggio*, 100.

<sup>93</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 112.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 143, 146-47.



*Susanna* is beautiful; her long flowing hair, exposed breast, and soft, supple skin rival that of the beautiful women painted by her male counterparts. Harris stated in a film interview that Susanna's breast might be one of the first realistically depicted breasts in art history, complete with a ring of hair around the nipple.<sup>95</sup> Artemisia's grasp of the anatomical features of the female nude, displayed in her first major painting, became her hallmark, much as male artists were noted for their depictions of classical male nudes. This, for Pollock, is yet another example of Artemisia working within the art market, competing against the skills of male artists who also produced naturalistic beauty intended to arouse a male audience.

While Garrard argued that Artemisia continued to paint female heroines because of psychological trauma sustained by the rape and trial, Pollock countered that Artemisia gained a reputation for depicting the female nude from the beginning of her career and, participating in the art market, exploited what she came to be known for. Bissell, in his 1999 monograph, suggested that her sex resulted in her specialization in female nudes, not because she was concerned with women's rights, but because male patrons delighted in a woman painting the female body for "male desires."<sup>96</sup> While she was not given the commissions for public frescos, altarpieces, or images of Christ offered to her male peers, she did find success with female nudes. This trend may be seen in Artemisia's 1615-1616 *Allegory of Inclination* (fig. 21) ceiling canvas for the Casa Buonarroti in Florence. Michelangelo the Younger commissioned Artemisia to paint the allegory, suggesting that

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<sup>95</sup> Ann Sutherland Harris in Ellen Weissbrod's *A Woman Like That*, 7<sup>th</sup> Street Film Syndicate, 2010, film.

<sup>96</sup> Analysis of Bissell cited by Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 2000, 573.

her reputation for painting beautiful nudes preceded the Casa Buonarroti commission.<sup>97</sup>

According to Bissell, the allegory of inclination, like the allegory of painting, was based on a set iconography that called for a nude female, which Artemisia painted (it was covered over in 1684 for ‘moral’ reasons). It is clear, even covered, that Artemisia was skilled at painting female nudes; it was even rumored that she received three times what other artists did for their ceiling paintings at Casa Buonarroti.<sup>98</sup>

Completed well before such a reputation for painting nudes, Garrard characterized the 1610 *Susanna* as Artemisia’s attempt to work against the “hardcore eroticism” and “blatant pornography” of the theme as handled by male artists, as exemplified by the twisting and distorted body, the absence of the garden, and the compressed surface space.<sup>99</sup> Following Garrard’s analysis, art historian Whitney Chadwick, in her late twentieth-century survey of women artists, presented Artemisia’s 1610 *Susanna* as a departure from tradition that transformed the “conventions of seventeenth-century painting in ways that would give new context to the imagery of the female heroine.”<sup>100</sup> In contrast to Garrard and Chadwick, Pollock argued that the radical compression of space was due to Artemisia’s lack of perspectival skills at this point in her training.<sup>101</sup> She further argued that Artemisia’s immaturity as an artist was the reason for the “simplicity” of the composition, and the simple juxtaposition of figures. Susanna’s body likewise was explained by Pollock as a sign of an inexperienced artist working through the “grammar

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<sup>97</sup> Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 206-207.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>99</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 188 and 192. Cited by Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 105.

<sup>100</sup> Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, (New York, N.Y.: Thames and Hudson, 1990), 100.

<sup>101</sup> Pollock noted that Agostino Tassi in fact was the master brought in by Orazio to teach Artemisia the techniques of perspective (Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 113)

of historical painting” from the High Renaissance, and therefore it was not the intention of Artemisia to convey any personal experience in the depiction of the body.<sup>102</sup>

Pollock traces Artemisia’s artistic decisions to her training emulating her father’s style and taking inspiration from Classical Roman relics, such as the *Orestes* sarcophagus. Garrard does not deny Renaissance influences on Artemisia; in fact, she acknowledged the influence of heroic traditions in Artemisia’s *Judith and her Maidservant*, c.1613-1614 (Pitti Palace) (fig. 20). She parallels Judith to Michelangelo’s 1501-04 *David*, as Judith similarly holds her weapon to her shoulder and stares past the frame at an unknown foe.<sup>103</sup> Artemisia further established heroic connections by including Michelangelo’s *David* on the broach worn in Judith’s hair (fig. 22). Garrard suggested that Artemisia projected herself onto the figures of her Judiths, not only in features, but also in a cathartic manifestation of her own demons.<sup>104</sup> However, Salomon and cultural theorist Mieke Bal suggested that Artemisia’s face was “projected on” Susanna, not because of identification with the subject, but in emulation of the Old Masters who often incorporated their self-portraits into paintings.<sup>105</sup> However, when considering the ideas of physiognomy – the belief that the qualities of the soul can be seen in the exterior features – Susanna, while unequipped with a sword for defense, is better compared to *David* in her facial features.<sup>106</sup> Susanna’s wide-open eyes and furrowed brow are the characteristics of a hero, signifying self-will like a lion (fig. 23);

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<sup>102</sup> Pollock, *Differencing the Canon*, 113-14.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 316-319.

<sup>104</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 312.

<sup>105</sup> Mieke Bal, "Grounds for Comparison" in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, ed. Mieke Bal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 141.

<sup>106</sup> See David Summers, "David's Scowl" in *Collaboration in Italian Renaissance Art*, ed. Wendy Stedman Sheard and John T. Paoletti (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978): 113-124.

they also echo and emulate the wide eyes and furrowed brow of Michelangelo's *David* (fig. 24). The influence of Michelangelo in *Susanna*, and the inclusion of his *David* in her *Judith*, suggests that Artemisia trained from Renaissance models, as did all other Baroque artists.

Salomon also made an argument for Michelangelo's influence on Artemisia, akin to his impact on other late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century artists. Far from relying on Artemisia's gender, Salomon established her argument in the artistic techniques of the Italian Baroque style, particularly the well-recognized concept of *disegno*.<sup>107</sup> She stated that the 1610 *Susanna* was visually abstract due to the extreme compression, the "stark stage-like foreground," the stretching stone wall that "bounds Susanna but does not keep the elders out," the body language that does not protect nor defend, the removal of a garden scene for the stone foliage relief, and the minimal indication of bath water.<sup>108</sup> Salomon also stated that Artemisia's *Susanna* had been compared to the bodies of Adam and Eve in Michelangelo's *Expulsion*, but that a better comparison is to the Eve figure in the *The Fall* (fig. 19) and to Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* (fig. 25), where the aged St. John hovers above Mary and the stone wall separates the Holy from the pagan.<sup>109</sup>

Salomon's interpretation suggests that art historians are still finding additional sources for Artemisia's painting; a return to formal analysis also suggests that the 1610

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<sup>107</sup> *Disegno* is an Italian word for drawing or design. It involves the ability and imagination of the artist as the creator and the inventor, and due to its complex meaning involving intellectual capacity it was a way to raise the status of painting to the highest intellectual levels. For discussion on its complexities and application to Renaissance art see Barbara Cassin, Steven Rendall and Emily S. Apter, *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 224-226.

<sup>108</sup> Salomon, "Judging Artemisia," 40-43.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

*Susanna* does not require comparison only to figures of shame. Salomon's comparison to other Biblical heroines allows for readings that do not draw on Artemisia's life events as a source for her paintings. Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna* thus may be read in terms of Italian Baroque technique and design, as influenced by the same masters who influenced her peers. In Garrard's and Salomon's/Pollock's analyses of the 1610 *Susanna* the division between the two feminist approaches is clear. While Garrard's theories discuss Artemisia as an exception because of her gender, Pollock called for a rewriting of art history in an attempt to completely break down gender categorizes. It is important to recognize that Garrard makes her arguments within the discourse of art history, bringing a feminist voice to a male-dominated narrative. Garrard's method effectively inserted Artemisia into the canon in opposition to those who assumed only males are capable of artistic genius. Pollock viewed Artemisia's artwork based on her position as a seventeenth-century painter, working in large part for male patrons, a frame for analysis applicable to male and female artists both. Art historical writing, at least moving into the twenty-first century, allows for writings to "blend or clash," as Barthes would say.<sup>110</sup>

### **Three Susannas**

Artemisia produced three images of *Susanna* during her career; she also produced many different depictions of *Judith*. In the *Susannas* from 1622 and 1649, the opposing approaches by Garrard (gender-based) and Pollock (cultural context of patronage) continue to control interpretation. Garrard deemed it "virtually unthinkable that the seductive and dreamily responsive" Burghley House *Susanna* of 1622 (fig. 2) could be by

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<sup>110</sup> Barthes, "Death of the Author," 147.

Artemisia; the attribution was also questioned by Bissell who included it in his catalogue under *Incorrect and Questionable Attributions*.<sup>111</sup> Garrard concluded that the depiction of the 1622 *Susanna* was “out of character” for Gentileschi, suggesting it was too seductive to be made by the painter of the 1610 *Susanna*.<sup>112</sup> However, where Garrard saw seduction, Christiansen and Mann saw Susanna devoutly looking heavenward to beg God’s help, which was an element of the original Biblical tale. The acceptance of this attribution was problematic for Garrard because of the tone and the signature, which Bissell also noted as problematic because it was signed Gentileschi Lomi, a name she had not used before. In defense of the Artemisia attribution, Christiansen and Mann argued that there is no consistency in Artemisia’s signatures.<sup>113</sup>

The 1649 *Susanna and the Elders* (fig. 3) is rarely seen and has received little academic attention, but its historiography is much the same as the others. Garrard originally questioned the attribution and later accepted it; Bissell accepted the painting as part of Artemisia’s oeuvre.<sup>114</sup> The 1649 *Susanna* displays the same landscape as in one from 1622, and while Susanna defends herself as the victim, much like in 1610, she also looks heavenward, as in 1622. In all three the Elders are separated from Susanna by a wall or railing. Susanna in both the 1622 and 1649 paintings has been described as Artemisia-esque. While Garrard was on the fence in attributing these later Susannas to Artemisia, because they do not neatly fit her theory of Artemisia empathizing with victims, Pollock’s argument that ultimately patronage determined the subject and tone of

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<sup>111</sup> Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, 348-353.

<sup>112</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 204.

<sup>113</sup> Garrard (1989 and 2001), Bissell (1999) and Christensen and Mann (2001).

<sup>114</sup> Garrard (1989) and Bissell (1999), cited in Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 426.

art led scholars to look at the three as simply the case of a popular subject being repeatedly commissioned. Rubens and Rembrandt did the same. It is less likely that all of these artists developed an obsession with Susanna and is more likely that patrons requested the nude over and over, especially after each became known as a painter of the subject. More successful artists may have been able to refuse commissions or have their workshop paint them. Of course artists might also take commissions for Susanna or other Biblical heroines because they were fond of the subject themselves.

Salomon observed that both the 1622 and 1649 Susannas were more naturalistic than Artemisia's 1610 nude, but reasoned that this might be the result of Artemisia's "progressive realism" over the course of her artistic career. This aligns with Pollock's theory that the 1610 *Susanna's* perspective compression is because of her artistic immaturity. Second, and more in tune with Garrard's feminist theory, Salomon posited that perhaps psychological "distance" from the biographical event may have caused the change, and that the later Susannas quote the Biblical narrative of threat, but not rape. A further consideration regarding the shift in depiction is that the three were painted for different audiences and patrons in different cities, which follows Pollock's theory of artistic production.<sup>115</sup> The 1622 *Susanna* corresponds with Artemisia's Florentine period, so using her father's paternal name, Lomi, probably gave her more prominence as her father was the son of a Florentine goldsmith.<sup>116</sup> The 1649 *Susanna* belongs to her later years in Naples, where she remained until her death. In this more naturalistic scene

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<sup>115</sup> Salomon, "The Art Historical Canon: Sins of Omission," 47-48.

<sup>116</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 6.

Susanna protests wildly against the Elders at her back, but more traditionally looks heavenward, following the Biblical narrative.

While it is known that Artemisia worked from commissions throughout her later career, it is still unknown if the 1610 *Susanna* was a commission too. Do the three Susannas represent Artemisia's distance from traumatic events? Do they show a "progression" of her artistic talents? Or were they ultimately composed with specific patrons in mind? With so many unknowns scholars are forced to insert their own speculative interpretations. Such interpretations, even when clashing, helps remove her art from obscurity, encouraging scholars to discover new documentation, as Bissell did, that will advance our understanding of her art, and maybe even of her as a human being. In terms of understanding the 1610 *Susanna*, more research needs to be done to uncover the history of the painting between 1610 and 1715, including any early scholarship on the work. German and Italian texts on Caravaggio, for example, may still hold insights.

However, this period and the 1610 *Susanna* are not the only areas of Artemisia's life that could still be researched to provide understanding on who she was and what her paintings mean. Art historian Jesse Locker is adding to the conversation by researching her later career. His research is bringing a new understanding to Artemisia's paintings as he recently uncovered "numerous references to poems about Artemisia by Neapolitan poets" in the pages of a nineteen-century Naples journal, *Napoli nobilissima*, that suggest she was well-received in her time and had close relationships with prominent writers, poets, playwrights, and other intellectuals.<sup>117</sup> Locker suggests that this contradicts earlier scholarship that portrayed Artemisia as largely ignored by her contemporaries and

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<sup>117</sup> Locker, 5.



Artemisia herself as illiterate and not involved in social circles, an attitude Banti adopted in her novel when portraying Artemisia as bitterly alone and distant in her interactions.

In the seven anonymous poems, dated 1627, devoted to Artemisia Locker found in a manuscript in the Barberini archives, and published by Ilaria Toesca in 1971, there is one poem devoted to a painting of *Susanna and the Elders* by Artemisia.<sup>118</sup> While George Hersey, according to Locker, suggests that the description of Susanna “caught between two elders, her eyes cast downward in shame, emphasizing her chastity, modesty and piety” may apply to the 1622 Burghley House *Susanna*, this description is more applicable to the 1610 *Susanna* who, of all the known Susannas by Artemisia, casts her eyes downward in shame while others look heavenward, including the Burghley House *Susanna*, as previously discussed.<sup>119</sup> The poem may also refer to another Susanna painting by Artemisia that was perhaps well-known at the time but is now lost. It is known that she painted several canvases of this theme in her lifetime and there are at least three known. However, it is likely that there are others, such as the 1652 *Susanna and the Elders* by Artemisia, now in the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna (fig. 26), which was recently rediscovered by Locker and brought into the conversation. This painting was owned and discussed by eighteenth-century Florentine nobleman Averardo de’ Medici in a biography on Artemisia in 1792 that was previously lost but rediscovered by Locker’s research.<sup>120</sup> With the new documents and texts Locker has uncovered and published in 2015, it is clear that there are still more interpretations of Artemisia’s paintings out there, and more research to be done.

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 45-48.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 161.

In retrospect, it appears that two avenues ultimately led to Artemisia scholarship: scholarship on Baroque art, noting her as a follower of Caravaggio, and feminist scholarship, originally inspired by a 1970s Caravaggio exhibition. Early twentieth-century scholarship focused on formalism and connoisseurship, while later twentieth-century scholarship developed iconographic and psychoanalytic methodologies that reshaped art historical writing. Feminist theory, while divided as to method, brought attention to Artemisia, focusing first on her gender and biography, and then stressing her involvement in artistic production specific to the seventeenth century. Of all Artemisia's paintings, the 1610 *Susanna* most clearly reveals the methodological struggle in scholarship during the twentieth century. Where academic facts and historic records failed to provide answers, some, like novelist Anna Banti, created fiction to enhance the life of Artemisia, creating the "Celebrity Artemisia," which is the focus of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

The art historical scholarship discussed in Chapter One was constrained by the historical evidence available to explain Artemisia's painting and career. I say constrained because as scholars we believe that academic writing should follow certain standards that define it as reliable and factual. Scholars depend on the accuracy of previous scholarship and sources and they fact check until their writing passes the standards of an academically written text. Perhaps because of these controls and limitations the art historian is often expected to be detached and objective. Early twentieth-century scholars of Artemisia, such as R. Ward Bissell and Roberto Longhi, were not interested in connecting Artemisia's life with their own. Their detached approach resulted in a dry analysis, evident in the tone of their writing.

However, art historians can be attached, passionate, and even obsessive when they feel a connection to their subject. Scholar Catherine Grant stated that "to be a fan of something often indicates an over-attachment, an excessive engagement that goes beyond the intellectual."<sup>121</sup> A passionate study of a subject gives rise to the "fan-scholar," who functions in-between "academic context and/or their participation in fan culture."<sup>122</sup> Mary Garrard's interest in Artemisia is an example of a fixation. She connects the restrictions Artemisia presumably felt as a woman artist to the writers of feminist art history in her own time who struggled against similar patriarchal structures. Garrard's identification with Artemisia led her to become more than just a methodical scholar; her passion went beyond the intellectual and made her a fan, or as Grant terms it a "fan-scholar," who has

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<sup>121</sup> Catherine Grant, "Fans of Feminism: Re-Writing Histories of Second-Wave Feminism in Contemporary Art," *The Oxford Art Journal*, 34, no.2 (2011): 265-286, 267.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 269.

dedicated almost forty years of her career to Artemisia. Garrard's passion for Artemisia is also evident in the tone of her writing, as in the dedication of her monograph: "Artemisia Gentileschi, artist *prima inter pares*, with admiration, gratitude, and affection."<sup>123</sup>

Though a fan, Garrard is still a scholar. She writes within the constraints of the art historical discipline to present peer-reviewed interpretations of historical facts.

Non-academic historical writing includes fiction, which are works not bound by such standards of evidence. Thus, fans have taken artistic liberties in narrating Artemisia's life, often beyond, and sometimes in contradiction of, the known facts. These fans are not scholars; they may have knowledge of scholarship on Artemisia's life and work, but they may not always be constrained by the truth of the facts and thus may distort them to add drama to the narrative. As such, there is an "Artemisia fandom" that emerged in the mid-twentieth century, which led to the "Academic Artemisia" and eventually to the "Celebrity Artemisia," or more fictionalized account of the woman behind the paintings. I evaluate the Artemisia fictions with consideration of the degree of artistic liberties, distortion of the truth for storytelling, progression away from the historical "Academic Artemisia," and their interpretation of Artemisia for a popular audience.

It is in the space between fact and fiction, history and truth, and document and text where we find the pop culture fabrication of "Artemisia."<sup>124</sup> This construction and refashioning of the historical woman into a contemporary celebrity developed alongside

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<sup>123</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, dedication page.

<sup>124</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem" in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, ed. Mieke Bal, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 170.

the academic scholarship, beginning with Anna Banti's 1947 novel *Artemisia*, and continued throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first with additional novels, plays, and a feature film. These narrators aspired to give voice, albeit a fictional one, to the Baroque painter, using drama and suspense to capture the imagination. Laura Benedetti summed up the emotional appeal of *Artemisia* that inspires contemporary novels, plays, and films: "victim of rape, protagonist – and, again, victim – of what is probably the first documented rape trial in western history, single mother, great artist: the story of *Artemisia*'s triumph over events that could have condemned her to failure ... to the image of female talent doomed to destruction by a male-dominated world."<sup>125</sup> I believe that *Artemisia*'s appearance in popular culture has everything to do with the drama of her life and art as summarized in Benedetti's statement. *Artemisia* rose from being a victim of rape and subjected to the laws of a male-dominated society to being branded as a defiant figure with whom contemporary women can identify. She fought off Tassi's rape attempt, stabbing him in the process; she fought against the traditions of a male-dominated profession, becoming the first female admitted to the Accademia del Disegno in Florence; and she fought against the expectation that she should be less than a great painter simply because she was a woman, evident in the letters to patrons she left behind.<sup>126</sup>

The fictional accounts are not the only voices present in *Artemisia*'s fabrication. It is important to remember that the personal vision of art historians impacted popular perceptions of the artist. Longhi, who referred to *Artemisia* as "Signora Schiattesi" in his

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<sup>125</sup> Benedetti, "Reconstructing *Artemisia*," 45.

<sup>126</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Appendix A.

1916 article, attempted to deny Artemisia the Gentileschi name that, in terms of seventeenth-century art practices, linked her to the lineage of male masters. But by the end of the twentieth century, the Gentileschi name was no longer needed to validate Artemisia's fame; her first name alone calls to mind the seventeenth-century painter. While she lived in the shadow of her father during her lifetime, and continued to do so in early twentieth-century scholarship, by the time of the 1977 *Women Artists* exhibition she began to surpass his fame and the limitations of the art historical canon. The drama and uniqueness of her story helped to propel her into an exciting celebrity in need of only one name, like Michelangelo and Leonardo, but also like Madonna or Bono.

My analysis of the fabricated "Celebrity Artemisia" who exists in contemporary popular culture includes novels: Anna Banti's *Artemisia* (1947), Alexandra Lapierre's *Artemisia: The Story of a Battle for Greatness* (1998), and Susan Vreeland's *The Passion of Artemisia* (2002); theatrical presentations: Anna Banti's *Corte Savella* (1960), Sally Clark's *Life Without Instruction* (1994), Cathy Caplan's *Lapis Blue Blood Red* (1995) and Olga Humphrey's *The Exception* (1996); and the cinematic: Agnès Merlet's film *Artemisia* (1997).<sup>127</sup> These fictional accounts of Artemisia's life all focus on Artemisia as a feminist heroine: rape-survivor, single mother, and determined and skillful artist capable of promoting herself in a male-dominated profession. The writers and filmmakers of these fictions, all women, identify with Artemisia and pulled from their experiences and imagination to reconstruct Artemisia's world.

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<sup>127</sup> Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi," 54. Cohen also notes a television docudrama: "Artemisia" by Adrienne Clarkson (1993), mystery novel: *What Men Say* by Joan Smith (1993) and television drama: "Painted Lady," Granada Television (1997). There is also one other play: *Vanishing Point: Scenes from the Life of Artemisia Gentileschi* by Robin Masi (2001). Information on these is obscure and I was unable to evaluate them for this research.

## Artemisia and the Novel

Banti's 1947 novel precedes most modern historical investigations, and may have influenced them. Trained as an art historian, Banti's shift into historical fiction, starting with *Artemisia*, kept to the known facts. Banti's *Artemisia* was an inspiration for later fictional interpretations of Artemisia. Alexandra Lapierre's 1998 novel functions as a type of academic novel as she too considers the historical facts in her construction of Artemisia's character.<sup>128</sup> Lapierre conducted extensive research on Artemisia and included her notes in her text. Shortly after Lapierre's 1998 publication her new archival findings were published in Bissell's 1999 monograph, enriching her portrayal of Artemisia and contributing to academic Artemisia scholarship. Susan Vreeland's 2002 novel, reinforced by recent feminist perspectives, offered an even more modern and dramatized version of Artemisia. Vreeland, an author and art enthusiast, incorporated modern attitudes into her characterization of Artemisia as an obsessed artist attempting a modern day balance of career and family. Her Artemisia is self-confident of her own greatness, more like a twenty-first century woman than a seventeenth-century one.

The predecessor of these historians and feminists was Elizabeth Fries Ellet's 1859 book on women artists, discussed in Chapter One. Ellet's text on Artemisia mixes praise for being "esteemed not inferior to her father" and undeveloped analysis of a few paintings, but the majority of her writing is on Artemisia's biography.<sup>129</sup> Ellet also mentions letters by Artemisia to the Cavalier del Pozzo that contain personal matters.

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<sup>128</sup> Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi," 54, refers to Lapierre's novel as a hybrid of scholarship and imagination.

<sup>129</sup> Ellet, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries*, 66. Ellet mentions the scenes and drapery of a pleasing *Susannah and the Elders* (67).

Ellet's book is not a novel, and though it was well-researched, there is little documentation of her sources or indication of a peer reviewed process. Her book popularizes art history, and her admiration for women artists connects Ellet's writing to what Craft calls the "intellectual and beyond" category. Ellet's awareness of the biographical interest of Artemisia's life to the public led her away from connoisseurship's concerns. Ultimately, Ellet's book anticipated the demand for women artists to be considered both within art history and by future feminist popularizers.

Like Ellet's feminist interest in women artists, Banti's 1947 novel was an alternative, non-academic interpretation that abandoned the formal concerns of early twentieth-century scholars.<sup>130</sup> Banti, the literary pseudonym of Lucia Longhi Lopresti, was married to Roberto Longhi, with whom she shared scholarly interests in seventeenth-century Baroque art, especially Caravaggio and his followers.<sup>131</sup> Banti wrote her thesis on the Baroque Italian painter, engraver, and writer Marco Boschini.<sup>132</sup> The publication of *Artemisia* marked a turn in her career, as it was her first fictionalized biographical novel. Her novel was motivated not only by the work her husband was doing in establishing Artemisia's oeuvre, but also by archival documents she located that include the few known facts regarding Artemisia's life.<sup>133</sup> Banti may have turned towards

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<sup>130</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 249.

<sup>131</sup> Katharina M. Wilson, *An Encyclopedia of Continental Women Writers, Vol. I*, (New York: Garland, 1991), 77.

<sup>132</sup> Daria Valentini, *Beyond Artemisia: Female Subjectivity, History, and Culture in Anna Banti*, ed. Daria Valentini and Paola Carù, (Chapel Hill, NC: Annali d'Italianistica, 2003), 2.

<sup>133</sup> See afterward by Shirley D'Ardia Caracciolo in Anna Banti, *Artemisia*, translated by Shirley D'Ardia Caracciolo, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 215-219. Banti supplies the facts in the foreword to her novel (along with some of her own embellishments as to their importance): "I think that the reader is owed a little information about the life of Artemisia Gentileschi, one of the most talented female artists, and one of the few, recorded by history. She was born in Rome in 1598 to a family of Pisan origin. Daughter of Orazio, an excellent painter. Her honor and her love violated on the threshold of womanhood. The reviled victim in a public rape trial. She established an art school in Naples. And bravely set off, in or



literature and away from academic scholarship as a means to find a freedom of voice that the discourse of art criticism, like that her husband wrote, could not provide.<sup>134</sup> From bits and pieces of archival information supplemented with literary flourishes, Banti reconstructed the life and character of Artemisia as a means to bring Artemisia back to life through fiction. Even in reading the brief foreword, where Banti stated that Artemisia was “one of the most talented female artists,” among other praise, it is not hard to see that Banti’s intentions were to excite admiration in her readers for a woman painter long since passed into history.<sup>135</sup>

Banti’s background as an art historian is reflected in the amount of academic research undertaken in order to write the novel, which Banti alluded to in her mention of the “mold-spotted” trial documents she read.<sup>136</sup> However, what Banti produced in 1947 was a pseudohistorical biography of the “real” Artemisia. Deborah Heller terms Banti’s novel a “realistic psychological fiction” focused on bringing to life and celebrating a “woman painter of excellent abilities, one of the few whom history remembers.”<sup>137</sup> Banti wrote *Artemisia* at a time when there was little uncovered about the painter and little appreciation for her work. Using primary sources, such as letters and trial records, and secondary sources, including writings by Longhi, Banti introduced what was missing from Artemisia’s scholarship: a biography of her life that accounted for the development

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about the year 1638, for heretical England. One of the first women to uphold, in her speech and in her work, the right to do congenial work and the equality of spirit between the sexes. Biographies do not indicate the year of her death.”

<sup>134</sup> Benedetti, “Reconstructing Artemisia,” 52.

<sup>135</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 1.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>137</sup> Deborah Heller, “History, Art, and Fiction in Anna Banti’s *Artemisia*” in *Contemporary Women Writers in Italy a Modern Renaissance*, ed. Santo L. Aricò (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 45-46.

and growth of the artist, much as Giorgio Vasari did in his 1550 *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. Banti's novel went much further into Artemisia's biography than Ellet's short text. Unfortunately, Banti's novel was not translated into English until 1988, not long after Garrard started publishing. Banti's fictional pseudo-biography became a major source for later novelists interested in Artemisia's life.<sup>138</sup>

Banti referred to her work as "historical-literature symbiosis," or the interaction and cooperation between history and literature.<sup>139</sup> Fictional literature on Artemisia may also be referred to as historical fiction, fictional biography, historical novels, *Kunstlerroman* (the artist novel), or "Artemisia fictions."<sup>140</sup> Art historian Tina Olsin Lent included the novels, plays, and film in the category of "Artemisia fictions," which she argued did not "dispense entirely" with the facts of the historical Artemisia Gentileschi, but did "place higher value on the construction of a dramatically coherent subject whose life is structured as a narrative that conforms to the conventional literary genres."<sup>141</sup> This emphasis on the importance of literary conventions was confirmed by *The Passion of Artemisia* author Susan Vreeland, who stated in her author's note that a work of fiction about a historical person "is and must be a work of the imagination, true to the time and

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<sup>138</sup> Valentini, *Beyond Artemisia*, 1.

Banti's novel was first published in English in 1988 by the University of Nebraska Press in Lincoln; the Nebraska Press publishes translated literary works as part of their mission.

<sup>139</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 1988, 1.

<sup>140</sup> Lent, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," 217. The *Kunstlerroman* (German) is a sub category of the Bildungsroman (German) or coming-of-age story. The *Kunstlerroman* focuses on the "formation of an artist" which is different from the quest of the Bildungsroman because the *Kunstlerroman* presents a "conflict between art and life" not present in the Bildungsroman. See Lent, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," 212. The *Kunstlerroman* is a long standing genre dating back to the Romantic period "or even to the foundations of art history" in Vasari's *Lives*. See Pollock, "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem," 178.

<sup>141</sup> Lent, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," 212. I also refer to the various literatures I reference in my research as "Artemisia fictions" because I believe it is the best term for the variety of media I discuss.

character always, but true to the fact only so long as fact furnishes believable drama.”<sup>142</sup>

Banti’s creation of Artemisia, while rooted in the records of the historical Artemisia – birth and childhood in Rome, the rape of 1611, the public trial of 1612, her marriage to, and separation from, husband Antonio Stiattesi, her painting career in Florence and Naples, her trip to England to join Orazio in 1638 – is ultimately a fluent narrative work of imagination, which the author admitted to in one of her first chapters, when she refers to some details of her Artemisia as “invented” and “even if [she] wrote it, it wasn’t true.”<sup>143</sup> Banti remained true to the historical facts of Artemisia, but imagined the inner life of her character, invoking artistic freedom to move beyond evidence.

Banti’s construction of “Artemisia” is woven through with the story of the author’s loss of her original *Artemisia* manuscript during the German retreat and destruction of parts of Florence, including her home, during World War II (August 1944).<sup>144</sup> Banti inserted herself as a character in her novel just as Vasari inserted his voice into the biographies of the artists he wrote about, leading up to his own entry in his book. The “author-narrator” structure thus set up a dialogue between Banti as character and the “Artemisia” from her lost manuscript, one who comforts the author following her loss saying, “Do not cry.”<sup>145</sup> The novel was written in the present tense and centers on the interaction between the author-narrator and the Artemisia from her lost manuscript.

While the original text may have been more of a “true” history of Artemisia Gentileschi,

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<sup>142</sup> Susan Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia*, (New York: Viking, 2002), introduction.

<sup>143</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 17.

<sup>144</sup> See Banti, *Artemisia*, 1; Heller, “History, Art, and Fiction in Anna Banti’s *Artemisia*,” 45; Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 575, and Siobhan S. Craig, “Translation and Treachery: Historiography and the Betrayal of Meaning in Anna Banti’s *Artemisia*,” *Italica: Bulletin of the American Association of Teachers of Italian*, 87, no.4 (2010): 602-618, 605.

<sup>145</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 3.

the narrative in Banti's published version fictionalizes and connects both the author and the artist in their attempt to narrate Artemisia's story.<sup>146</sup> Banti's connection to Artemisia, writing both her own autobiography and merging it with Artemisia's, is an example of how Artemisia came to be the female protagonist who struggled against the conventions of her time to succeed.

Spear writes that Banti's approach displays a refined ability to weave between the true and the plausible, creating "one of the most intriguing portrayals" of Artemisia.<sup>147</sup> However, for scholar of contemporary literature Siobhan Craig, the fluidity of the past and present between artist and author-narrator betrays an authentic history. She argues that Banti essentially created a "new" history rather than remaining true to one in which Artemisia actually existed.<sup>148</sup> Prior to Craig, Griselda Pollock had argued that it was Banti's "feminist desire" to understand the "story" behind Artemisia as a seventeenth-century woman artist that led to the construction of Banti's dialogue and her identification with the determined woman artist, as Banti was also a determined woman writer in a time controlled by patriarchal structures.<sup>149</sup> The insertion of the author into the narrative is often distracting. The two voices, the author and subject, contend with each other at times, to the point that it is unclear who is telling the story. On one occasion the author states that she recognizes the way Artemisia "wants to force my interpretation, my memory."<sup>150</sup> This is Banti's acknowledgment that she is creating Artemisia's story from her imagination, while also struggling with how to interpret the historical Artemisia.

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<sup>146</sup> Craig, "Translation and Treachery," 607.

<sup>147</sup> Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 575-76.

<sup>148</sup> Craig, "Translation and Treachery," 603-608.

<sup>149</sup> Pollock, "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem," 180-81.

<sup>150</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 85.

While it is impossible to know the emotions and thoughts of a woman who lived four hundred years ago, Banti's invented emotions give a voice back to the artist.<sup>151</sup> Banti turned her "sympathetic imagination to re-create the emotional texture of Artemisia's response" to events.<sup>152</sup> Heller notes that Banti's chronology diverges from what scholars such as Bissell have put forth. One such example is Artemisia's marriage and move to Florence. These events did not immediately occur after the trial in Banti's novel; Artemisia remained in her father's house for a few years after the trial, unmarried and isolated in the house, hiding from pointing fingers.<sup>153</sup> Whether Banti's envisioning of these events is due to literary license or to the fact that she was working with less chronological evidence is unknown.

Banti's intentions for writing the novel were to praise Artemisia as an exceptional woman artist; however, Judith W. Mann suggests that Banti also "established the biases that continue to inform our ways of thinking about Artemisia."<sup>154</sup> Banti's interpretation of Artemisia's 1612-1613 *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (fig. 27), now in the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples, as a "visual revenge" on Tassi continues to be the popular reading for not only this heroine by Artemisia, but also Susanna and all of the Biblical heroines she painted.<sup>155</sup> Banti emphasized that Artemisia identified with the Biblical heroine Judith, even modeling Judith's features and expression after herself, in an attempt to pictorially inflict the punishment on Tassi she felt he deserved. Writing in a time dominated by formalism, Banti was the first to portray events in Artemisia's biography as

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<sup>151</sup> Cited in Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction" 575.

<sup>152</sup> Heller, "History, Art, and Fiction in Anna Banti's *Artemisia*," 50.

<sup>153</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 27.

<sup>154</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 1, and Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 298.

<sup>155</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 298.

influences on her paintings. Heller suggests that Banti's assertion should be pushed one step further, that Artemisia painting *Judith* was part of a process of "working through" her shame and rage, so that when she finished the painting she effectively liberated herself of the anger and freed herself to be the "great painter she became."<sup>156</sup> According to Banti, upon finishing the *Judith*, when Artemisia was alone with no father, husband, or friends, "her revenge had been consummated; her lasting shame in Rome atoned for."<sup>157</sup> In this powerful sentence is the long-lasting perception associated with the *Judith*, that she is a representation of Artemisia's desire for revenge against her rapist. This is a perception that endures in scholarship to this day.

While Banti's novel is generally hailed as a success, some scholars, such as Craig and Benedetti, took issue with Banti's literary license. Craig's main criticism is the idea of a history in which Artemisia and Banti both existed, rather than Banti narrating the "actual" history of Artemisia. Benedetti's criticism focuses on Banti's exclusion of evidence. In Banti's persistent attempt to figure Artemisia in lonely isolation she created a tense and resentful relationship between Artemisia and her daughter, Prudenza, which opposes Artemisia's actual closeness to and guidance of her daughter as a painter.<sup>158</sup> Benedetti argues that Banti would have been aware of a letter from 1635 that Artemisia sent to a patron with paintings in which it is clear that Artemisia protected her daughter.<sup>159</sup> Banti quoted at least one other letter from 1638 by Artemisia to a patron, making it hard to believe she would not have known about the 1635 letter about

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<sup>156</sup> Heller, "History, Art, and Fiction in Anna Banti's *Artemisia*," 53.

<sup>157</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 48-49.

<sup>158</sup> Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia," 56.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 57.

Prudenza.<sup>160</sup> I believe that the tone in which Banti portrays Artemisia perpetuates the dark genius of the artist, which is commonplace in describing male artistic genius, and may have stemmed from the tone of Caravaggio's biography as written by scholars like Longhi and Genevieve Warwick.

There is no denying that Banti's Artemisia has been at the heart of the Artemisia fictions that continue to be produced. Banti's "historical-literature symbiosis" gives readers the details of the historical events of Artemisia's life, especially the rendering of her paintings and the trips she took in preparation to make the work, which may have been gathered from reading art historical accounts, such as Longhi's. Banti added emotional details missing from the sparse facts about Artemisia's life. So while Longhi rediscovered Artemisia's art, Banti constructed the "Artemisia" that lives into the present century. After *Artemisia* Banti did not return to traditional art history, but instead continued to write fictional novels exploring issues of sexual difference and an autobiographical perspective on women experiencing a conflict between society and their own ambitions.<sup>161</sup>

The domination of the patriarchal society in which Artemisia lived was a theme that feminist theorists have worked to expose since Garrard's 1989 monograph. Prior to Garrard, Banti presented a revision of the patriarchal account of the life of this exceptional woman, which Pollock identified as Banti's 'transference' of her own struggles as a mid-twentieth century Italian woman writer to Artemisia's struggles as a

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<sup>160</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 112.

<sup>161</sup> Wissia Fiorucci, *Anna Banti and the (Im)Possibility of Love* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 31.

seventeenth-century woman painter.<sup>162</sup> Spear also commented that Banti wrote in the “shadow” of her husband, which allowed her to easily “slip back and forth” between her time and a painter in the shadows of her father (and every other male painter for that matter).<sup>163</sup> While Banti may have attempted to reveal patriarchal control of Artemisia’s life and art, she also, perhaps counter-productively, presented Artemisia’s deep admiration for her father, and her need for his approval as a father and as a teacher, a theme that also transmitted to later Artemisia fictions. Banti dealt with the Tassi trial in just ten pages, but the profound influence of Orazio spanned the nearly two-hundred-page novel in which Artemisia longs for the love of her father and teacher as the devout daughter and student who begs for approval to vindicate her life and work.<sup>164</sup> The influence of Banti’s novel and her characterization of Artemisia reverberate in later novels.<sup>165</sup>

French novelist and biographer Alexandra Lapierre’s 1998 novel, *Artemisia: The Story of a Battle for Greatness*, was originally published in French, but has been translated into English, Italian, Spanish, and German. She wrote the novel after extensive research in the archives, resulting in a book rich in information, but sometimes confusing in delivery, as the author switches between novelist, art historian, and biographer.<sup>166</sup>

While her storytelling may be weakened by her adherence to the facts, Lapierre’s

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<sup>162</sup> JoAnn Cannon, “Artemisia and the Life Story of the Exceptional Woman,” *Forum Italicum* 28, no.2 (1994): 322-341, 332, and Pollock, “Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem,” 180.

<sup>163</sup> Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 575.

<sup>164</sup> Lent, “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” 214.

<sup>165</sup> Here I acknowledge two such novels, Maria Àngels Anglada’s 1989 *Artemisia* and Rauda Jamis’s 1998 *Artemisia Gentileschi*. Little has been written on these as neither has been translated into English (Anglada’s is in Catalan and Spanish and Jamis’s is in Spanish, Dutch and French). Because there is no translation I was unable to assess these for myself. Other scholars (Benedetti and Spear) say that they both focus on Artemisia’s ultimate source of creativity as Banti’s Artemisia did. See Benedetti (1999) and Spear (2000).

<sup>166</sup> Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 576.



research gives weight to her novel. Lapierre stated that while she spent five years researching Artemisia, she found that the best way to express her research was through telling a fictional account.<sup>167</sup> The combination of the fictionalized story with the notes from her research allows readers to be both intrigued by the story and informed by the facts, resulting in a sort of academic novel written by a fan.

In the notes of Lapierre's book are nearly one-hundred pages of historical evidence, including the books that were her main sources and some original and unpublished research regarding the Tassi trial.<sup>168</sup> More than half of Artemisia's story in her novel takes place before 1613, coinciding with the years of the rape and trial. While twentieth-century scholars, like Bissell and Longhi, scoffed at the trial and the allegation of rape, Lapierre's research was the first to show that the court did believe Artemisia and punished Tassi through banishment, even though it was later overturned.<sup>169</sup> Lapierre's archival findings were published in the notes of her book in time to be included in Bissell's 1999 monograph.<sup>170</sup> Garrard's 1989 publication of the trial testimony had indicated that the resolution was unknown. Ten years later Lapierre's newly uncovered archival evidence indicated that Tassi was found guilty and sentenced to choose between banishment from Rome or five years in prison; he chose banishment and was warned that he would be fined if he tried revenge on Orazio.<sup>171</sup> Orazio, as the wronged party, sued Tassi for the 'damages' to Artemisia and his own reputation as her father.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Alexandra Lapierre, *Artemisia: The Story of a Battle for Greatness* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), xv.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 363-442.

<sup>169</sup> See Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 575, and Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia," 50.

<sup>170</sup> Garrard (1989), Bissell (1999), and Spear (2000).

<sup>171</sup> Lapierre, *The Story of a Battle for Greatness*, 186.

<sup>172</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 85.

While Lapierre's novel is true to the historical facts of Artemisia, the emotional responses and feelings of Artemisia are just as much an invention of Lapierre's imagination as in Banti's novel. Lapierre identified Artemisia's source of inspiration as her obsession with her father, whose rejection of Artemisia's efforts, in Lapierre's text, left them estranged and Artemisia more determined to be an artist.<sup>173</sup> The emotional, everyday details of the relationship between Orazio and Artemisia are fictional. Lapierre in them echoes the tone of Banti in portraying an Artemisia who always sought her father's approval. In Banti's novel, Orazio in England finally praised her paintings, stating "There is no longer any doubt, a new painter has been born: Artemisia Gentileschi."<sup>174</sup> For Lapierre, the relationship between father and daughter was one of master and student. This relationship is displayed early on in the exchange between Artemisia and Orazio regarding the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders*. In the beginning of the novel Artemisia's artistic process is overseen by her father. In a heated fight between Orazio and his defiant daughter/student, Artemisia claims the *Susanna* as hers, a fact that Orazio counters as he proclaims she stole the *Susanna* from him.<sup>175</sup> Lapierre writes that Artemisia signed the painting without her father's consent, while Orazio roared that the signature does not belong, as it was his masterpiece.<sup>176</sup> In this conflict over the *Susanna*, Lapierre turns argument in scholarly circles over the attribution of the *Susanna* into a fundamental break between father and daughter.

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<sup>173</sup> Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 576.

<sup>174</sup> Banti, *Artemisia*, 183-184.

<sup>175</sup> Lapierre, *The Story of a Battle for Greatness*, 48-49.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

Ultimately Lapierre suggests that the 1610 *Susanna* was Artemisia's first masterpiece, not made with the help of her father, but made in spite of her father who actually worked against her development. Lapierre gives the father/daughter relationship so much weight that the many female heroines in Artemisia's paintings are explained as an expression of her resistance to him, rather than a consequence of seventeenth-century commissions or a sentiment of symbolic revenge against Tassi. After the death of Orazio in 1639, Lapierre's Artemisia no longer needed to paint such Biblical heroines.<sup>177</sup> While this may have been true for Lapierre's fictional Artemisia, the presence of her 1649 *Susanna*, painted after London and her father's death makes the claim untrue. However, Lapierre's novel was published in 1998, prior to Bissell's 1999 discussion of the 1649 *Susanna* and Garrard's acceptance of it in 2001, which could account for the discrepancy.<sup>178</sup> Regardless, Lapierre's novel begins and concludes with Orazio's death, as does Banti's, a framing device that ensures the reader sees the importance he had on Artemisia's life.

Many Artemisia fictions present a strained relationship between father and daughter, in which Orazio does not recognize the presence of his daughter's talents. However, a letter published by Garrard in 1989, written by Orazio in 1612 to Cristina of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, indicates that Orazio was well aware of her talents and a champion for his daughter. He wrote that Artemisia had "in three years become so skilled that I can venture to say that today she has no peer, she has produced works which demonstrate a level of understanding that perhaps even the principle masters of the

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Christiansen and Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, 426.

profession have not attained.”<sup>179</sup> This suggests that Orazio’s relationship with Artemisia was not strained, even if he is attempting to gain patronage for his daughter by overstating her abilities.

In these Artemisia fictions the authors positioned men in Artemisia’s life as sources for her creative achievement. Lapierre’s novel centers on the struggle of Artemisia to attain greatness as defined by her father, just as Banti’s Artemisia was validated by Orazio’s acceptance of her as a great artist.<sup>180</sup> Susan Vreeland’s *The Passion of Artemisia*, though published in 2002, still presents Orazio as Artemisia’s emotional and creative center, having created her “literally and artistically.”<sup>181</sup> Vreeland, an art enthusiast and English teacher, was not trained as an art historian, but used the information she read about Artemisia (presumably from Garrard and other sources) and the events of Artemisia’s life to “explore issues of gender roles in the seventeenth-century.”<sup>182</sup> Vreeland is candid in her introduction about the role of fiction in trying to make a woman who lived four centuries ago relevant today. She acknowledges that the imagination of the author is fundamental, as is using the evidence available to stay true to the historical figure.<sup>183</sup> While Vreeland continued the theme of Orazio’s dominance, she opted to begin the story during the rape trial while integrating “contemporary views of rape and women’s victimization,” in an attempt to modernize the story.<sup>184</sup> Vreeland’s Artemisia “talks openly about rape,” not in the voice or language of a seventeenth-

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 253.

<sup>180</sup> Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 576.

<sup>181</sup> Lent, “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” 216.

<sup>182</sup> Susan Vreeland, “Genesis of the Book,” *The Passion of Artemisia* (no date), accessed 19 February 2015, <http://www.svreeland.com/gen-art.html>

<sup>183</sup> Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia*, Author’s Note.

<sup>184</sup> Lent, “My Heart Belongs to Daddy,” 216.

century woman, but in the voice of a twentieth-century feminist.<sup>185</sup> Vreeland applied the most recent evidence on Artemisia's life to her interpretations of the paintings, as for example in the rage her Artemisia displays during the trial and retribution by painting Tassi's face on Holofernes in the 1612 *Judith*.

These three novels show the influence of feminist scholarship. Banti's and Lapierre's novels are grounded in historical facts, but imagine the unknown emotions of the painter. Vreeland's Artemisia resembles a twenty-first-century feminist who is so headstrong, confident, and determined that she shows no shame regarding the rape and public trial. She is consumed by hatred for Tassi immediately following the court's pardon. Even knowing from Lapierre the actual sentencing, Vreeland chose to enrage her Artemisia further by having Tassi pardoned instead.<sup>186</sup> The contemporary language of her novel brings Artemisia into the twenty-first century, suggesting it is set in contemporary Rome.

The 1610 *Susanna* serves Vreeland as an example of Artemisia's work submitted when she was applying to the Academy in Florence around 1616 (Vreeland does not include a specific date). Vreeland's modern feminist language is apparent in the scene where Artemisia sees Signor Bandinelli and another official peering at "Susanna's nakedness with the same lewd voyeurism the elders did, as though titillated that it was painted by a woman with a shaded reputation."<sup>187</sup> These observations are in the voice of the artist; they are Artemisia's thoughts as she watches the men leer at *Susanna*. Vreeland's Artemisia also recognizes that Bandinelli does not understand the painting

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<sup>185</sup> See Lent's notes regarding Vreeland's text, 217.

<sup>186</sup> Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia*, 29.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 64.

because unlike others, Susanna's "anxiety" is the "true subject of the painting."<sup>188</sup> Both Garrard's analysis of the *Susanna*, as well as Pollock's argument that *Susanna* was a source of pleasure for a male audience, as a nude woman painted by a woman artist are recognizable in these passages. When Artemisia shows the *Susanna* to Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger in anticipation of the commission at Casa Buonarroti in Florence, he remarks that Susanna's flesh is real, with the lines in her neck, the crow's feet at her underarm, the fold of flesh below her stomach," all details male painters "wouldn't think of."<sup>189</sup> This suggests a direct knowledge of Garrard's monograph, which cites the same details. Vreeland also implies that Michelangelo the Younger knows great art, unlike Bandinelli, as he recognizes immediately that her interpretation of Judith will "change how the world thinks of her."<sup>190</sup>

Vreeland's conceptualization of Artemisia further sexualizes Artemisia's story, which is a selling point in the twenty-first century. This is apparent in the novel when Artemisia sexually pleasures herself with her "prized possession," a paintbrush from the Renaissance master Michelangelo; a scene an uninformed reader might readily accept as plausible in the era of E. L. James' *Fifty Shades of Grey*.<sup>191</sup> This modernization of Artemisia into a sexually aware woman is, perhaps surprisingly, a response to a different version of Artemisia. Vreeland states that she wrote her novel after seeing the 1998 film *Artemisia* in which director Agnès Merlet "wildly distorted" Artemisia's character; Vreeland thus aimed to "correct the wrong done to her," an issue I will address when

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Diana Postlethwaite, "Pigments of the Imagination," *The Women's Review of Books* 19, no.7 (Apr., 2002): 14-15, 14; and Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia*, 2002, 116.

analyzing the film at the end of this chapter.<sup>192</sup> It is also worth noting that Vreeland's novel may have been influenced by a series of plays that presented a more modern and determined Artemisia as the central character.

### **Theatrical Representations**

There is less reason for a playwright to remain true to the facts of a historical character. A play is a short-lived performance, often occurring only a few times. And while plays are often published, it is less likely that they will be read by the general public, as they were meant to be experienced as a live production. This means plays are not as widely distributed as novels or films, and therefore may take more artistic liberties. The stage allows for visual drama that is not possible in the novels, and so the Artemisia plays foreground the most dramatic events of her life, her early years, and the drama of the rape trial.

Thirteen years after publishing her novel on Artemisia, Banti returned to the drama of the rape in a play entitled *Corte Savella* (1960).<sup>193</sup> The three acts of the play focus attention on the “most graphic peaks of the action” of the rape and trial, aspects that Banti felt she may have “submerged” in her original novel.<sup>194</sup> Banti believed that her literary treatment of Artemisia was “too cold and detached” and thus returned to these three crucial moments in an attempt to further explain Artemisia's life: the “young and

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<sup>192</sup> Vreeland, “Genesis of the Book.”

<sup>193</sup> Savella Court is where the trial took place in Rome.

<sup>194</sup> Anna Banti, *Corte Savella: [a play]*, Milano: A.Mondadori, 1960, cited in Benedetti, “Reconstructing Artemisia,” 1999, 57-58.

naïve” Artemisia as prey for Tassi, the trial and her torture by the *sibille*, or thumbscrews, and the painting of the *Judith* following the trial, while she was in Florence.<sup>195</sup>

The graphic action of the rape and trial is also a feature of later plays by Sally Clark, Cathy Caplan, and Olga Humphrey. Clark trained as a painter before she became a writer. Before writing about Artemisia in her play *Life Without Instruction*, Clark studied Germaine Greer’s chapter on Artemisia, as well as Garrard’s monograph.<sup>196</sup> The play, which premiered on August 2, 1991, in Toronto, focuses on the years 1610 and 1611, dealing only with the rape and trial as the events Clark’s Artemisia must endure in order to become an artist.<sup>197</sup> Clark’s play, influenced by Greer and Garrard was founded on the feminist notion that the Judith from Artemisia’s paintings, especially the one directly following the rape trial in 1612, is a reflection of Artemisia herself and made in response to the events of the rape and trial. While that connection seems logical to anyone familiar with Artemisia scholarship, Clark made sure the connection was made by the general audience as well by casting one actress to play both Artemisia and Judith and one actor to play both Tassi and Holofernes, as the scenes of the two-act play move back and forth between seventeenth-century Rome and Old Testament Bethulia, with no change in costumes.<sup>198</sup>

In Clark’s play, Artemisia openly admitted that the 1612 Naples *Judith* was symbolic revenge for Tassi’s actions.<sup>199</sup> While Clark’s play claimed to be based on true

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<sup>195</sup> Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia," 57-58.

<sup>196</sup> Sherrill Grace, "Life without Instruction: Artemisia, and the Lessons of Perspective," *Theatre Research in Canada* 25, no.1 (2004).

<sup>197</sup> Grace, "Artemisia, and the Lessons of Perspective;" and Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction" 576.

<sup>198</sup> Sally Clark, *Life Without Instruction: [a play]* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1994), viii.

<sup>199</sup> Clark, *Life Without Instruction*, 163; Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 576; and Grace, "Artemisia, and the Lessons of Perspective."



events of the trial, made available by Garrard in 1989, she altered them in at least two instances, both affecting Tassi. First, in the play Tassi is tortured, while in fact Artemisia alone was tortured. As a woman, she needed to ‘prove’ her innocence, while Tassi was innocent until proven guilty.<sup>200</sup> Second, Tassi confesses to murdering Caravaggio, who died in 1610; in fact his cause of death is unknown. This obvious historical inaccuracy added dramatic flair to Clark’s story.<sup>201</sup> Caravaggio’s influence on Artemisia’s art is historically documented, but for Clark it adds a further rationale for Artemisia’s revenge. Clark’s emphasis on Caravaggio may have also come from Banti’s *Corte Savella*. Banti’s Artemisia was “secretly in love” with Caravaggio, and his death in 1610 was, at least for Banti, the catalyst for Tassi’s rape.<sup>202</sup>

Clark also represented the relations between Artemisia and Tassi as somewhat consensual. In the play Artemisia is raped by Tassi, biting his hand in defense. But following the incident she becomes the aggressor, trying to get him to propose marriage and even alerting her father to the situation.<sup>203</sup> After months of Tassi saying he will marry her but never following through, Orazio brings charges against Tassi for abducting both his daughter and a painting from his studio.<sup>204</sup> This shift in the Tassi-Artemisia relationship changes how Clark sees the father-daughter dynamic too. In Clark’s play Orazio admits to Tassi that the 1610 *Susanna* was painted by Artemisia.<sup>205</sup> Orazio calls Artemisia brilliant, brags that he taught her everything she knows, and laments the fact

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<sup>200</sup> Clark, *Life Without Instruction*, 138.

<sup>201</sup> Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia," 47-48. For details on the mysteries of Caravaggio’s death, see Warwick, *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*, 31-32.

<sup>202</sup> Cited in Benedetti, "Reconstructing Artemisia," 58.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 52-53, 78.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>205</sup> Clark, *Life Without Instruction*, 24-25.

that she is already better than him.<sup>206</sup> So while Banti and Lapierre suggest that Artemisia's struggle to gain her father's approval (Lapierre's Orazio even claiming that Artemisia stole *Susanna* from him), Clark's Artemisia was solely motivated to paint by her anger toward Tassi. Clark's play ends with *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, in which Artemisia is so absorbed with her revenge on Tassi that she tells her father she is now Judith and Tassi is dying a gruesome death for eternity that the entire world will see.<sup>207</sup>

Clark sacrificed historical accuracy for dramatic effect. Cathy Caplan's play *Lapis Blue Blood Red* and Olga Humphrey's play *The Exception* also took liberties with Artemisia's relationship to Tassi. Caplan's play premiered in 1995 in Baltimore and was performed by the Splitting Image Theatre Company. According to Caplan, her play was based on letters from Artemisia and the trial records in the appendices of Garrard's monograph. These details "reconstructed" Artemisia for Caplan, offering Caplan a glimpse into seventeenth-century Baroque life.<sup>208</sup> Caplan stated that the trial records were contradictory at best with all parties lying or exaggerating at one point or another. Ultimately, her play is about sifting through the testimonies to "create the plausible story of Artemisia's entanglement with Agostino."<sup>209</sup> Caplan questions whether Artemisia loved Tassi, as the play alternates scenes from two crucial periods in Artemisia's life: 1612 Rome, where the rape trial was taking place, and 1638 Naples, when her own daughter, Prudenza, was marrying.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 162-163.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>210</sup> Neil Genzlinger, "Will the Real Artemisia Please Stand Up?" *The New York Times* (New York, NY), Feb.18, 2002. Web.

For the father/daughter relationship, Caplan suggests that Artemisia was angry with her father for bringing charges against Tassi, who by that time had promised to marry her. This resulted in her long-term estrangement from her father.<sup>211</sup> Orazio's motivation is presented as caused by his anger over Tassi selling Artemisia's *Judith* for three times what Orazio got for his version.<sup>212</sup> Prior to the *Judith* sale, Orazio had admitted to Tassi that Artemisia was a better painter than the both of them, but his jealousy towards Artemisia led him to bring charges against Tassi.<sup>213</sup> Orazio's jealousy of his daughter's talents continues as a theme of earlier novels, such as Banti's.<sup>214</sup>

Caplan depicted a charming Tassi, as did Greer, who suggested Artemisia was probably in love with her rapist. Along the same lines Olga Humphrey's play *The Exception* presents a loving relationship between the two with Artemisia as the instigator of the affair.<sup>215</sup> Humphrey's two-act play premiered at the University of Arkansas in November 1996. It is set between 1611 and 1612, and is entirely preoccupied with the rape and trial.<sup>216</sup> The play opens in the Gentileschi studio where Artemisia argues with her father over color choices. She then shows him the 1610 *Susanna* she has completed in secrecy, asking for his approval. Thus the foundation of the play, and Artemisia's character, is based on the question of the source of her creativity, from where her artistic

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<sup>211</sup> J. Wynn Rousuck, 'Lapis': portrait of an artist Theater review: A female Baroque painter is movingly portrayed in "Lapis Blue, Blood Red," *The Baltimore Sun* (Baltimore, MD), Nov.15, 1995. Web.

<sup>212</sup> Cathy Caplan, *Lapis Blue Blood Red: [a Play]*, New York: Playscripts, Inc., 2004, 50.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 576.

<sup>216</sup> Olga Humphrey, *The Exception: [a play]*, (Woodstock, Ill.: Dramatic Pub., 1997). Humphrey is a New York-born playwright, screenwriter, and television writer, but I was unable to find more about her background, education, or interest/research in Artemisia.

genius came. Humphrey suggests that the relationship between Artemisia and her father is crucial, a claim that also appears in other Artemisia fictions.<sup>217</sup>

However, Humphrey's play also represented the relationship between Artemisia and Tassi as loving rather than leading to a traumatic rape. Indeed, the description of the play says it examines "the nature of the creative spirit and the limitations of even the most all-consuming love."<sup>218</sup> Humphrey's Artemisia asked Tassi to teach her and to pose nude for her as part of her ever-present drive to make art, even after Tassi raped her and she refused his marriage offer.<sup>219</sup> While the terms of Tassi and Artemisia's relationship cannot be known and so may be interpreted with artistic license, Humphrey's Artemisia ultimately left for Florence unmarried, a documented inaccuracy.<sup>220</sup> Perhaps showing Artemisia's drive to be an independent artist, or that she would not take a husband because she loved Tassi still, for whatever reason it does not match the historical evidence.

These playwrights, with the exception of Banti, constructed an Artemisia who had a reciprocal relationship with Tassi, to varying degrees, despite the conviction of rape. They accordingly changed details of the trial, making Tassi innocent, tortured, or turning Artemisia against her father who brought the charges against her "lover." However, even with these glaring misrepresentations, the plays did not receive the same criticism and outrage as the mass-marketed film *Artemisia* by Agnès Merlet. This is perhaps because no feminist art historians had the chance to see the plays, or because they were not as

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<sup>217</sup> Humphrey, *The Exception*, 16-17.

<sup>218</sup> From the description at the back of the book, and also the description by Dramatic Publishing, [http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/p448/The-Exception/product\\_info.html](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com/p448/The-Exception/product_info.html)

<sup>219</sup> Humphrey, *The Exception*, 51, 69, and 88. Also cited in Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 2000, 576.

<sup>220</sup> Humphrey, *The Exception*, 96.

widely seen as the novels and film. However, in Caplan's introductory note to her published play she stated that Garrard "most generously recognized that the goal of the writer is different than the goal of the art historian," suggesting that her play at least did not depart from key feminist messages. By contrast, the film was highly criticized for erasing the rape, and instead showing a loving and willing relationship between Artemisia and Tassi from the start.<sup>221</sup>

### **Cinematic Representation**

Of all the Artemisia fictions it is the 1998 film that most distorts the historical record. *Artemisia*, directed by Agnès Merlet as a "biography" of Artemisia's life during the years of the rape and trial, was first released in France in 1997, then in 1998 in the United States.<sup>222</sup> The April premiere in New York City outraged feminists, and ultimately led to their challenging distributor Miramax's advertisement that the film was the "true story of the first female painter in art history."<sup>223</sup> Garrard, along with feminist activist Gloria Steinem, distributed a fact sheet titled "Now You've Seen the Film, Meet the Real Artemisia Gentileschi" to the audience at the premiere. It was subsequently posted on the internet to help dispute the film's claims.<sup>224</sup> The film was also protested at a

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<sup>221</sup> Caplan, *Lapis Blue Blood Red*, 11.

<sup>222</sup> Pollock, "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem," 173.

<sup>223</sup> Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 2000, 576. IMDB stated that the film grossed \$377,512 at the box office on opening weekend, June 7, 1998, and steadily dropped subsequent weekends. See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0123385/business>. Agnès Merlet, *Artemisia*, Miramax Home Entertainment: Distributed by Buena Vista Home Entertainment, Burbank, Calif: 1998.

<sup>224</sup> Mary D. Garrard, "Film: Artemisia's Trial by Cinema," *Art in America* 86, no.10 (1998): 65-73, 65. Pollock, "Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem," 174.

symposium in May 1998 at the Richard Reign Gallery in New York.<sup>225</sup> Miramax ultimately withdrew their claim and has since called it a “fascinating, extraordinary story,” even while still insisting that “a lot of research went into this film” and they stand behind it.<sup>226</sup>

The advertising for the film not only claimed that it was based on the true story, but also that “her [Artemisia’s] forbidden passion changed the face of history,” a tagline printed on the poster/DVD cover, which suggests that it was her inner sexual passion that ultimately changed art history (fig. 28). Notably, this poster does not feature Tassi, but rather Artemisia’s friend who in the film who first poses nude for her. An alternate promotional poster is more provocative in showing the midsection of a woman, presumably Artemisia, with shadowy brushstrokes over her body (fig. 29). This advertisement features the words “sexy,” “defiant,” and “provocative,” suggesting a carnal theme to the film from the onset. This may have been the original poster for the film that Garrard and Steinem protested, as it states “the untold true story of an extraordinary woman” under the title. Due to the outrage over the poster’s claims, the later DVD cover only features the word “erotic” as a quotation from a review by the *Seattle Weekly*. The inclusion of this language still sets the tone of the film as carnal, but removes the protested “true story” claim. This terminology however suggests the same lascivious characterization of Artemisia put forward initially by Wittkower that has followed Artemisia to the end of the twentieth century.

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<sup>225</sup> The symposium included comparative literature scholar Leonard Barkan, art historian Mary Garrard, art historian Rona Goffen, English historian Simon Schama and art historian Bette Talvacchia. See Garrard, “Film: Artemisia’s Trial by Cinema,” 65 and Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 576.

<sup>226</sup> Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 576, and Garrard, “Film: Artemisia’s Trial by Cinema,” 65.

In contrast to the sensational posters for the film, the covers of the novels and plays do not display such taglines. While the author might not have much say in their cover/advertisement, the covers distributed by publishers display Artemisia's artwork without sensational claims, letting the art she made speak for itself. The cover of Banti's *Artemisia* novel (fig. 30) simply displays Artemisia's 1638 *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* without any imaginative taglines. Likewise, the covers of Lapierre's and Vreeland's novels feature paintings by Artemisia of singular women. Lapierre's novel cover features Artemisia's *The Penitent Mary Magdalen* (1617-1620) (fig. 31), another Biblical heroine, and Vreeland's features Artemisia's 1615 *Female Martyr* (fig. 32).<sup>227</sup> The covers of Clark's and Caplan's published scripts both feature versions of Artemisia's *Judith*, as both plays make the paintings relevant to the rape trial. Clark's cover features the Uffizi *Judith* (fig. 33) while Caplan's cover highlights the more obscure engraving after the Uffizi *Judith* (fig. 34). The artwork for each of these was pragmatically chosen to represent the Artemisia depicted within. The novels follow the development of her career, with attention to the woman who was, to some degree, shaped by her father and a male-dominated profession. These books interpret specific paintings by Artemisia, including her *Self-Portrait* and others painted later. The plays more specifically cite the rape and trial as the major influence on her paintings. The promotions for the film, on the other hand, represent an Artemisia creatively awakened by her own sexuality, aroused through a relationship with Tassi. The official DVD cover features an Artemisia running

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<sup>227</sup> Artemisia's *Female Martyr* has also been known as *Self-Portrait as Female Martyr* and her *Mary Magdalen* may have been modeled after her own features as well, since she was easily available as a model. The selection of each of these may correspond to each author's intention to create a portrait of the "real" Artemisia, or the Artemisia as she may have imagined herself – as the allegory of painting, as Mary Magdalen, as a Female Martyr – on their novels.

with her arms out, as if freed from social structures, while the sensual woman's midsection on one of the posters alludes to her inner sexuality, and both focus less on Artemisia as artist than as a sexually awakened woman.

During the opening weekend (May 8, 1998) the film grossed \$79,725 at the American box office; it grossed a total of \$377,512 by the last theatrical weekend (June 7, 1998), while only being shown in nineteen theaters nationwide.<sup>228</sup> The largest growth in box office numbers occurred after the opening weekend, presumably due to the increased publicity created by the fact sheet distributed online by Garrard and Steinem. In comparison, the generally well-received 2002 Miramax film *Frida*, which was more widely distributed, earned \$205,996 during opening weekend at the box office (October 25, 2002) and grossed a total of \$25,885,000 by May 23, 2003, appearing in 794 theaters nationwide.<sup>229</sup> Sixty-seven percent of critics and sixty-four percent of audiences positively reviewed *Artemisia*, while seventy-six percent of critics and eighty-six percent of audiences positively reviewed *Frida*.<sup>230</sup> *Artemisia* was also nominated for a 1998 Golden Globe Award for Best Foreign Language Film.<sup>231</sup>

It is not hard to see why feminists and fans, such as Garrard, took issue with the film. Merlet's fictionalization of Artemisia's relationship with Tassi showed it as not only consensual, but as a relationship of love and passion up until the very end of the trial. As discussed previously, Garrard's scholarship argued that the rape was far from consensual

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<sup>228</sup> "Artemisia Box Office," *IMDB.com*, accessed 21 February 2015, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0123385/business?ref\\_=tt\\_dt\\_bus](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0123385/business?ref_=tt_dt_bus)

<sup>229</sup> "Frida," *The Numbers*, accessed 22 February 2015, <http://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Frida>

<sup>230</sup> "Artemisia," *Rottentomatoes.com*, accessed 22 February 2015, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/artemisia/>

"Frida," *Rottentomatoes.com*, accessed 22 February 2015, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/frida/>

<sup>231</sup> <http://www.goldenglobes.com/artemisia>



or loving, but that it was a violent act that was psychologically damaging to Artemisia on such a level that it affected the production of most of her artwork. Garrard's book included the complete translation of the testimony of the rape trial of 1612, because of its importance to her argument. This translation was used by other authors, such as Clark, in her presentation of the trial. Vreeland's 2002 novel cited Merlet's film the spur for her novel, calling it offensive as it "romanticizes violent rape as appealing and arousing to women, and it perpetuates the myth of her promiscuity."<sup>232</sup> Vreeland's novel was an attempt at correcting the Artemisia Merlet presented. Merlet's film not only misinformed audiences about the nature of the relationship, but changed the proceedings of the trial in order to do so. The obscuring of the historical facts surrounding Artemisia's actual "relationship" with Tassi, as well as the actual record of the trial, weakened the feminist argument put forward by Garrard that some of Artemisia's strong heroines are directly connected to her damage from the rape, inspired by her own experiences.<sup>233</sup>

For Merlet, a self-proclaimed feminist, depicting Artemisia as a woman sexually self-aware and empowered in both her sexuality and her inspiration for painting was of primary interest.<sup>234</sup> While many of the Artemisia fictions focused on Orazio's influence as key to her progressiveness and transcendence of traditional ideas, Merlet's film, which spans only the two years Artemisia was involved with Tassi, portrays him as the awakener of her creativity and casts Orazio as the jealous and angry father who tried to keep them apart.<sup>235</sup> To do so Merlet ignores the facts of the trial. Merlet's film portrayed

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<sup>232</sup> Vreeland, "Genesis of the Book."

<sup>233</sup> Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet, *Cinema and the Second Sex: Women's Filmmaking in France in the 1980s and 1990s*, (New York: Continuum, 2001), 274.

<sup>234</sup> Spear, "Ten Years of Fact and Fiction," 577.

<sup>235</sup> Lent, "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," 215.

a sympathetic Tassi during the rape trial who continued to propose marriage even after his first marriage and past indiscretions were revealed. According to the actual trial records, Artemisia cried out “this is the ring you give me, and these are the promises!” when the *sibille* was administered. However, Merlet’s portrayal of the scene includes Artemisia crying out “I love only you!” to Tassi, showing the full extent to which Merlet’s cinematic decisions destroyed the true story of Artemisia Gentileschi.<sup>236</sup>

Much of the antagonism toward the film by feminists was due to these inaccuracies. However, there is no denying that the intentions of art history scholarship and films are vastly different and the way in which the story is conveyed by directors may include imaginative fiction. Garrard and Steinem took issue with Merlet’s erasure of the rape, a significant change in Artemisia’s characterization. Pollock, while more forgiving of the film because it “was never intended to be art history,” also took issue with the film’s “true story” claim on the grounds that Artemisia is presented as the first woman painter in the history of art, even though feminist scholars have recovered many other women artists.<sup>237</sup> Film historians Carrie Tarr and Brigitte Rollet in contrast say that Merlet’s visualization of Artemisia’s story is an empowering film for women’s rights, making her not a victim but a force against patriarchal ideology.<sup>238</sup> However, even they recognize that the relationship with Tassi is problematic, enforcing the “stereotypical notions” that a woman artist must depend on a man to “channel her creativity” and that a woman is “more likely to fall in love with her rapist than to seek justice.”<sup>239</sup> In reducing

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<sup>236</sup> Garrard, “Film: Artemisia’s Trial by Cinema,” 66, and Spear, “Ten Years of Fact and Fiction,” 577.

<sup>237</sup> Griselda Pollock, “A Hungry Eye [Review of Agnès Merlet’s *Artemisia*]” in *Film/literature/heritage: A Sight and Sound Reader*, ed. Ginette Vincendeau (London: BFI Pub., 2001), 34-37.

<sup>238</sup> Tarr and Rollet, *Cinema and the Second Sex*, 274-276.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

Artemisia's story to just the period of the trial, both the film and plays denied audiences the life story of "arguably, a genuine feminist heroine" who was later married, had a daughter, separated from her husband, and ran her own professional studio making money for herself.<sup>240</sup>

Merlet also altered the timeline of Artemisia's paintings. Artemisia's *Judith* is connected to the rape trial in Merlet's film, as Artemisia is shown painting the *Judith* with the help of Tassi, who remains her teacher during the trial. However, the version included in the film was actually painted around 1620; the 1612-1613 Naples *Judith Slaying Holofernes* would have been a more believable part of the 1612 trial.<sup>241</sup> The film also depicted Artemisia painting her *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (fig. 35) as central to her development of an artistic drive, even though the work was painted much later in her career, in 1638. Merlet ignored the 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* in the film, even though it belonged to that period, presumably because of its theme of sexual humiliation.

Merlet's choice to focus on the *Judith* rather than the *Susanna* mostly likely stemmed from the active nature of the *Judith* character rather than what may be seen as a passive *Susanna* who recoils in distress from her persecutors. The Artemisia Merlet created was a rebellious girl, struggling against the rules of the society in which she lived. Even before Tassi, Merlet's Artemisia was outspoken and defiant, asking young men to

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> *Artemisia* (Merlet, 1998). Humphrey's play also disregarded the later date of the *Judith* and used this painting and story as Tassi's alleged reason for rape.

pose nude for her.<sup>242</sup> Merlet utilized the *Judith* to show an active woman who took matters into her own hands, rather than a woman who requires a male advocate.

Artemisia's creation of the *Judith* is also essential to the storyline of the film because it brings Tassi and Artemisia together as teacher and student, which ultimately leads to physical closeness when Tassi poses as her model. This subverts the traditional dichotomy of active male artist and passive female model. In this way Artemisia is presented as a rule breaker/trendsetter, the active artist, which historically is the place of the male artist.

But to achieve this, the film perpetuates an overly sexualized Artemisia and falsifies the historical record. For Pollock, Merlet's film perpetuates the myth of Artemisia as the first woman artist to cinematic audiences who may never be exposed to other women in art history.<sup>243</sup> As importantly, the real heroism of Artemisia is lost; her success at acquiring the skills of a great artist and her ability to compete in a male-dominated art market, what Cohen calls her "womanly finesse."<sup>244</sup> The "Artemisia fictions" all serve to disseminate Artemisia's name to the general public, giving her a life and influence outside of academia. However, the fictional "Artemisia" that these modern women writers identified with is the strong, defiant woman, the feminist heroine and rape-survivor or sexually liberated woman, a woman who obstructs the real Artemisia Gentileschi's contributions. In these interpretations, especially those that focus on the period of the trial, there is a risk of losing the narrative of the real Artemisia who

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<sup>242</sup> Insights about the film came from Merlet's interview regarding the film. "Artemisia: Agnès Merlet," *SBS.com*, accessed 22 February 2015, <http://www.sbs.com.au/movies/video/11695683661/Artemisia-Agnes-Merlot>

<sup>243</sup> Pollock, "A Hungry Eye," 37.

<sup>244</sup> Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi," 74.

achieved much more through her career than just surviving the rape and trial. Audiences of these fictions are thus unexposed to knowledge of her later paintings, as well as the will she had to compete economically with men in this profession, and to ultimately succeed.

## CONCLUSION

There is one final avenue to consider in conjunction with the historiography of Artemisia Gentileschi. Artists inspired by Artemisia have created works that have affected and perpetuated how Artemisia has been perceived. Judy Chicago's 1978 *Dinner Party* (fig. 36) and Kathleen Gilje's 1998 *Susanna, Restored* (fig. 38) pay homage to Artemisia, but differ from the Artemisia fictions since they record a response to Artemisia, rather than speak for her. Ellen Weissbrod's 2010 film *A Woman Like That*, seeks to tell Artemisia's story through responses to her work from scholars, collectors, and general audiences.

### Artistic Representation

Artemisia was initially recognized in connection with her role as one of the major Caravaggio followers, but it was feminist scholarship that made her a celebrity within the art world. Since the 1970s Artemisia has been recognized as the "most significant woman artist of the premodern era."<sup>245</sup> As a canonized artist, Artemisia is featured in Judy Chicago's large-scale installation *The Dinner Party*. Just as the exhibition of *Women Artists: 1550-1950* grew from the realization that women had been absent from art history, Chicago's work represents the women who deserve fame and inclusion in history. While Garrard presented her inaugural research on Artemisia at the College Art Association Conference in 1978, Chicago simultaneously counted Artemisia among the great women worthy of recognition.

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<sup>245</sup> Mary D. Garrard, "Artemisia Gentileschi: The Artist's Autograph in Letters and Paintings" in *The Female Autograph: Theory and Practice of Autobiography from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donna C. Stanton, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 81.

Artemisia's place setting (fig. 37) is included in Wing Two (From the Beginning of Christianity to the Reformation) of *The Dinner Party*, and celebrates Artemisia's "strong and courageous" female heroines, who are so essential to Artemisia's place in feminist theory.<sup>246</sup> Chicago crossed Judith's sword with the artist's paintbrushes to form the "A" of "Artemisia" in front of her place setting. The combination of Judith's sword with Artemisia's paintbrushes signifies the importance of the female heroine to Artemisia's artistic success both in her lifetime and in later feminist scholarship. These icons exemplify Artemisia for feminists: she was a painter of strong women. The plate at her place setting is painted with the "twisting and turning forms" of the Baroque style in celebration of the "extraordinary efforts" of women of that time.<sup>247</sup> Here, again, Artemisia is praised for her exceptionalness. Chicago visually included Artemisia's relationship with her father, in his role as father, rather than teacher. Orazio's protectiveness toward his talented daughter is symbolized through the velvet forms that engulf her black place-runner, which represent Orazio's protectively bringing charges against Tassi in 1612.<sup>248</sup> Orazio acted as a father, but also on behalf of his own reputation. It was Orazio, considered by the court as the wronged party, who could sue Tassi for damages to his property.<sup>249</sup>

Artemisia's name appears among thirty-nine place settings on the three tables of *The Dinner Party*. Chicago also included nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine names in black script on what she named the *Heritage Floor*, grouped according to place settings.

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<sup>246</sup> Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1996), 97.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 97.

<sup>249</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, 85.

Artemisia thus also represents twenty-eight additional women artists who surmounted the social obstacles of their time, including Sophonisba Anguisciola, Angelica Kauffman, and Elizabeth Vigée-LeBrun.<sup>250</sup> Artemisia's place at the table is representative of her importance and impact on the narrative of art history. She was chosen from twenty-eight other women artists who all could easily have been selected instead. She in particular represents someone who overcame the sexual as well as social barriers faced by women artists. Chicago's early work, installed even before the publication of Garrard's influential monograph, embodies the character of Artemisia as a woman painter who should have been constrained by the confines of seventeenth-century traditions and society, but overcame those limitations through her act of painting.

Contemporary New York artist Kathleen Gilje responded to Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna and the Elders* in 1998 by painting an exact copy titled, *Susanna and the Elders, Restored* (fig.38). A large part of her "restoration" of the painting was making visible the underpainting of her own *Susanna, Restored* through X-Ray imaging (fig. 39). Gilje's painting participates in the formation of layers of meaning, both theoretically and literally, underneath the painting. It was common practice for seventeenth-century artists to adjust their compositions while in progress. The visible shifts are called *pentimenti*. X-Rays of paintings reveal hidden changes made during the painting process, such as a moved tree, a hand position changed, or the tilting of a head to another angle. Gilje used the layers of paint under her *Susanna, Restored* to depict what she believes are the veiled meanings underneath the surface of Artemisia's painting. The violence depicted by Gilje in the *pentimenti* suggests that she had knowledge of Artemisia scholarship, particularly

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<sup>250</sup> Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 98-99. Chicago's spelling, more commonly spelled Sofonisba Anguissola.



Garrard, who argued Artemisia's 1610 *Susanna* represented Tassi's sexual pressure on Artemisia prior to the trial.

Gilje's precise copy of the 1610 *Susanna* seems to affirm the often-cited comparison between Artemisia and Susanna. Gilje shows the public threat of rape for Susanna on the surface, while the underpainting displays the rape of Artemisia. Some feminist theorists, such as Garrard, have argued the rape was the reason Artemisia painted such heroines.<sup>251</sup> Gilje's *Susanna, Restored X-Ray* is displayed alongside her *Susanna, Restored*. The *X-Ray* shows the *pentimenti* under the top layer of her finished *Susanna, Restored* (fig. 40). In the *X-Ray* version of *Susanna, Restored*, the underpainting shows the Elders violently grasping Susanna's hair, pulling her towards them, while she screams in pain and clutches a dagger in her hand. Gilje's *Susanna Restored* and *X-Ray* reveal the violence of the rape Artemisia endured as revealed through the story of Susanna, who was fortunate to escape the trauma of such an act, if not the trial after. Given the violence of the image in *X-Ray*, I believe it is likely Gilje was influenced not only by academic scholarship, but also by Artemisia fictions by Banti and Lapierre, and perhaps the plays and Merlet's film, most of which focus heavily on the impact of the rape and public trial.

### **Artemisia in the Documentary**

Director, producer, writer, and editor Ellen Weissbrod made the 2010 film *A Woman Like That*. She wanted to document Artemisia's paintings by filming them while they were on display in the 2002 exhibition: *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father*

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<sup>251</sup> Bal, "Grounds for Comparison," 159.

*and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy*. Weissbrod stated that she was inspired by Artemisia and wanted to film the exhibition in order to tell Artemisia's story so she would not be lost again to history.<sup>252</sup> When the Saint Louis Art Museum backed out, she filmed the exhibition undercover so she could record all of Artemisia's works on display. Once she had the footage she turned to telling Artemisia's story. By acting out the paintings, reading aloud Artemisia's letters, and gathering impressions of Artemisia from people she met, she was able to tell Artemisia's story. Ultimately, she found that scholars, collectors, and viewers interpreted Artemisia as beautiful, charming, seductive, and determined.<sup>253</sup> Weissbrod traveled to see Artemisia's other paintings in person and talked to others who were also inspired by Artemisia's story. The film shows modern reactions to Artemisia and demonstrates that Artemisia was a good seventeenth-century painter. Though she was not the only female seventeenth-century painter, she is today widely respected for what she did, how she did it, and how hard she worked over a lifetime when women were not professionally supported.

Throughout the film Weissbrod says that she cannot let Artemisia down. It is clear that Weissbrod is a fan of Artemisia and that she identifies with her on a deep, meaningful level. Weissbrod turned to Artemisia to revive her own career, as she said that she found herself again as an artist while telling Artemisia's story. She interviewed scholars such as Garrard, Spear, and Sutherland, connoisseurs and collectors of Artemisia paintings, other fans, and members of the public. In Italy, Weissbrod interviewed

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<sup>252</sup> <sup>252</sup> *A Woman Like That* (Weissbrod, 2010). The exhibition was shown at the Museo del Palazzo di Venezia in Rome from October 15, 2001, through January 6, 2002, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from February 14 to May 12, 2002, and at the Saint Louis Art Museum from June 15 to September 15, 2002.

<sup>253</sup> *A Woman Like That* (Weissbrod, 2010).

Lapierre, who spoke of becoming obsessed with “finding evidence” to give Artemisia back her voice, to know what Artemisia thought.<sup>254</sup> In the film, women read and react to Artemisia’s letters, hearing her determined and strong voice in her dealings with her patrons. However, of the documents we have that give voice to Artemisia none more aptly express her character than her testimony in the trial, which is why I believe Garrard relied so heavily on those records in her analysis of Artemisia’s paintings. In the testimony, her feelings escape from the pages as she vehemently wrote that “it is all true,” and as she tells Tassi, “this is the ring you give me and these are your promises” as the *sibille* tightens on her fingers.<sup>255</sup>

### **Artemisia Beyond: What is to come?**

While the trial records do give partial voice to Artemisia, the drama of the rape and public trial have overwhelmed Artemisia’s career. The trial has dominated to the point that it often distracts from her paintings. People still snicker about the rape and question Artemisia’s actions even four hundred years later, because modern readers do not necessarily understand its severity. Garrard stated in Weissbrod’s film that the rape is a “red herring” that distracts from the true importance of Artemisia’s life, her paintings. This is echoed by others who want to read scholarship on Artemisia that does not mention the rape in the very first chapter or paragraph. There is a desire in the twenty-first century to not read the events of the rape as the determining factor of Artemisia’s life, maybe to not even mention it at all. This desire is one that I whole-heartedly endorse.

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Garrard, *Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Appendix B.

It may be impossible at this stage to engage a new generation of scholars and fans with Artemisia without mentioning the rape. However, if it could be done, how then would Artemisia's body of work be seen? What would Artemisia's paintings say without our knowledge of the rape and the trial testimony? While it may never be possible to dissociate an artist from her biography, women's biographies will be problematic as long as they are thought of as exceptions, rather than just as artists. In this current climate further scholarship should aim to set aside gender so that Artemisia may be seen as a great painter rather than just a great woman painter.

While Garrard's approach to the analysis of Artemisia's heroines has become the prevalent one, Pollock's focus on Artemisia and her works from the perspective of seventeenth-century art production offers direction that could be further pursued. If her biography cannot be divorced from her artworks, perhaps further scholarship (and eventual cultural citations) should focus on other events of her biography. Pollock has suggested the impact of her mother's death in her early life, her marriage and her daughters who she trained as artists and her successful negotiations of commissions.<sup>256</sup> Elizabeth Cohen also argued for understanding Artemisia through her social relations with patrons.<sup>257</sup>

In the dual "Artemisias" constructed through the span of the twentieth century, her attributions have been debated, her artworks compared or granted to Orazio and Caravaggio, her character questioned, her heroines analyzed, her life dramatized in various media, and her biography distorted to make her a modern erotic protagonist to a

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<sup>256</sup> Pollock, "A Hungry Eye," 36-37.

<sup>257</sup> Cohen, "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi," 74.

wider audience. We can never set aside her biography or what has already been written about both the “Academic Artemisia” and the “Celebrity Artemisia,” but with the removal of the rape as the determining force in her life and a refocusing on other aspects of her biography and seventeenth-century society and markets, perhaps there is simply an “Artist Artemisia” still to be written. This Artemisia ought to still be considered a heroine, a strong woman, if only because of the career she built in the “boys club” of seventeenth-century artists and patrons. Finally, while Artemisia is acknowledged in academia, and has been popularized to some extent, the majority of the public has never heard of her. During this research, nine times out of ten I have been confronted with blank stares when I reply “Artemisia Gentileschi” to the question “what is your research about?” While I believe it is important that her gender as an artist and the rape are separated from research, I also genuinely hope for a day when she is widely recognized as a great painter like Michelangelo and Leonardo.

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Figure 1. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, Pommersfelden, Schloss Weissenstein, Collection Dr. Karl Graf von Schönborn.

Provenance:

Benedetto Luti, Rome (until 1715); family of Dr. Karl Graf von Schönborn, Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden (from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century).





Figure 2. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1622, oil on canvas, Stamford, Lincolnshire, Collection of the Marquess of Exeter, Burghley House.

Provenance:

Possibly Cardinal Ludovico Ludovisti, Rome (by 1623-before 1633); the ninth earl of Exeter, Brownlow Cecil (before 1793); collection of the marquess of Exeter, Burghley House, Stamford, Lincolnshire.



Figure 3. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1649, oil on canvas, Moravska Galerie, Brno, Czech Republic.

Provenance:

Heinrich Gomperz, Brno (until 1894); the city of Brno (by the Gomperz testament of 1892); Moravska Galerie, Brno.



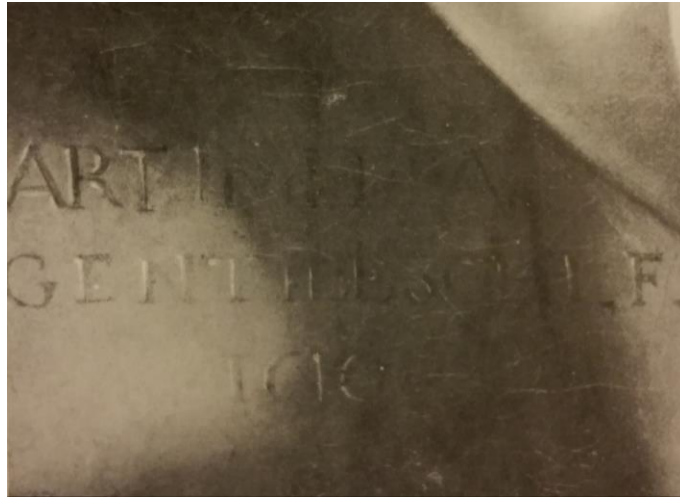


Figure 4. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, detail of signature, Pommersfelden, Schloss Weissenstein (from Garrard, 1989).



Figure 5. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, displayed at Schloss Weissenstein, Pommersfelden, Germany.



Figure 6. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, ca. 1620, oil on canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.



Figure 7. Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, 1598-1599, oil on canvas, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.





Figure 8. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Special Exhibition Galleries, 2nd floor: *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy* exhibition (February 14-May 12, 2002). Photographed in 2002.



Figure 9. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, installed in the *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi: Father and Daughter Painters in Baroque Italy* exhibition.



Figure 10. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, installed in the *Women Artists: 1550-1950* exhibition, Brooklyn Museum, October 1, 1977 through November 27, 1977.



Figure 11. Tintoretto, *Susanna and the Elders*, c. 1555, 147 x 194 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria.





Figure 12. Annibale Carracci, *Susanna and the Elders*, ca. 1590-95, etching and engraving, 34.6 x 30.5 cm, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.



Figure 13. Domenichino, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1603, Palazzo Doria-Pamphilj, Rome.



Figure 14. Peter Paul Rubens, *Susanna and the Elders*, c. 1607, 94 x 65 cm, Galleria Borghese.



Figure 15. Rembrandt, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1647, 76.6 x 92.7 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.





Figure 16. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, detail of Susanna's body.



Figure 17. *Crouching Venus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> century, Roman copy, British Museum, London.



Figure 18. Roman sarcophagus, *Orestes Slaying Clytemnestra and Aegisthus*, detail, ca. 150 CE.



Figure 19. Michelangelo, *The Fall and Expulsion of Adam and Eve*, 1508-11, fresco, Sistine Chapel ceiling, Vatican, Rome.





Figure 20. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant*, c. 1613-1614, oil on canvas, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



Figure 21. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Allegory of Inclination*, 1615-1616, ceiling canvas, Casa Buonarroti, Galleria, Florence.





Figure 22. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant*, c. 1613-1614, detail of Judith's brooch.



Figure 23. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1610, detail of Susanna's face.



Figure 24. Michelangelo, *David*, 1501-04, marble, Accademia di Belle Arti di Firenze, Florence.



Figure 25. Michelangelo, *Doni Tondo (The Holy Family with St. John)*, ca. 1504-1506, oil and tempera on panel, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.





Figure 26. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders*, 1652, oil on canvas, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.



Figure 27. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612-13, oil on canvas, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples.

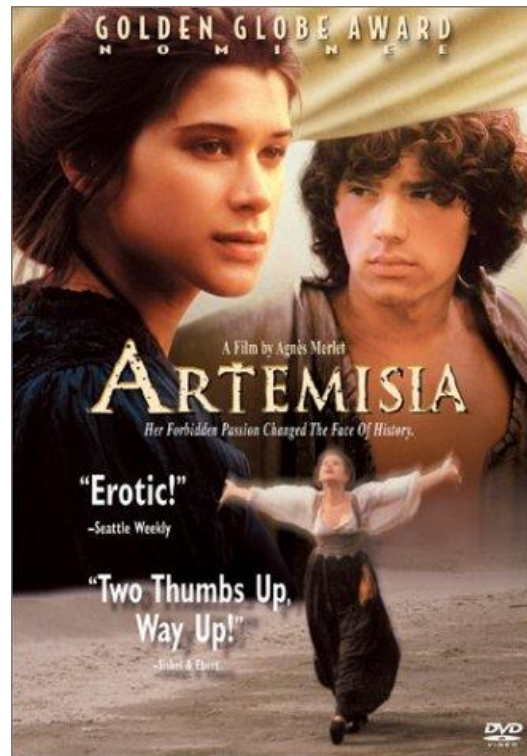


Figure 28. *Artemisia* poster and DVD cover, 1998.

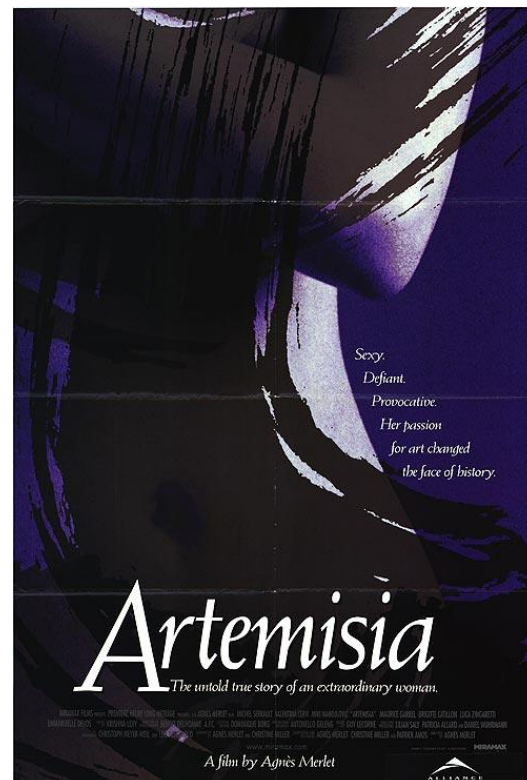


Figure 29. Alternate *Artemisia* promotional poster, 1998.

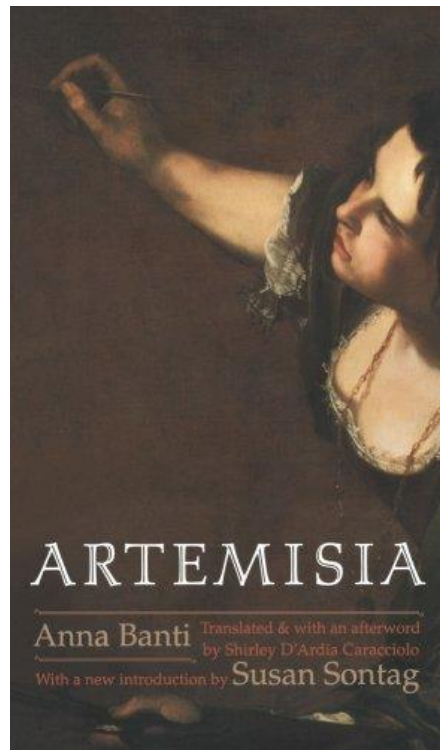


Figure 30. Anna Banti, *Artemisia* cover, 1988, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln.

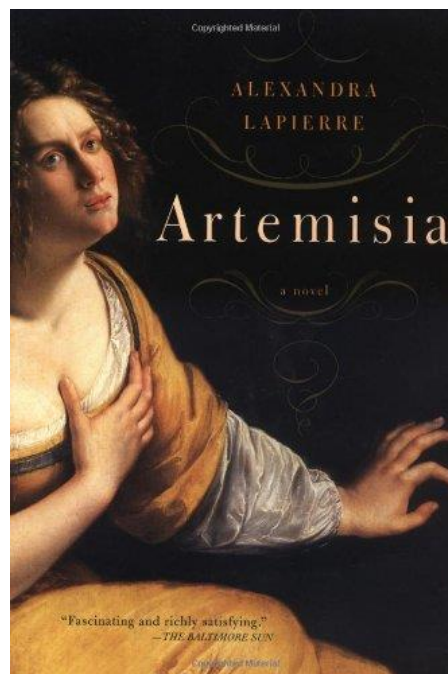


Figure 31. Alexandra Lapierre, *Artemisia* cover, 1998, Grove Publishing, New York.

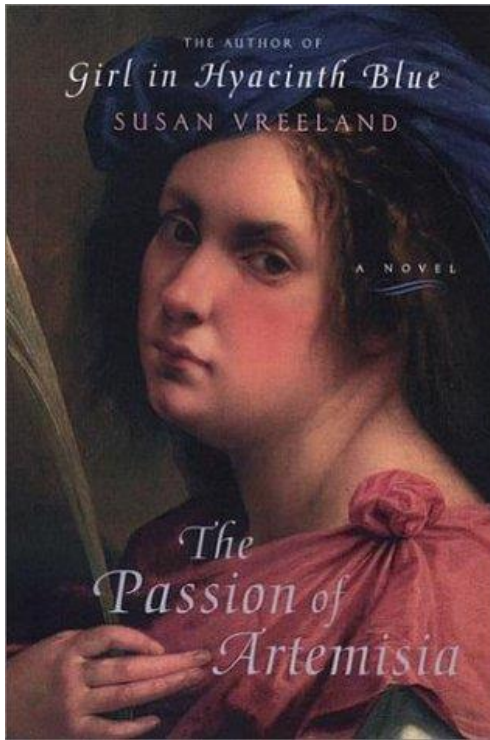


Figure 32. Susan Vreeland, *The Passion of Artemisia* cover, 2002, Viking Publishing, New York.

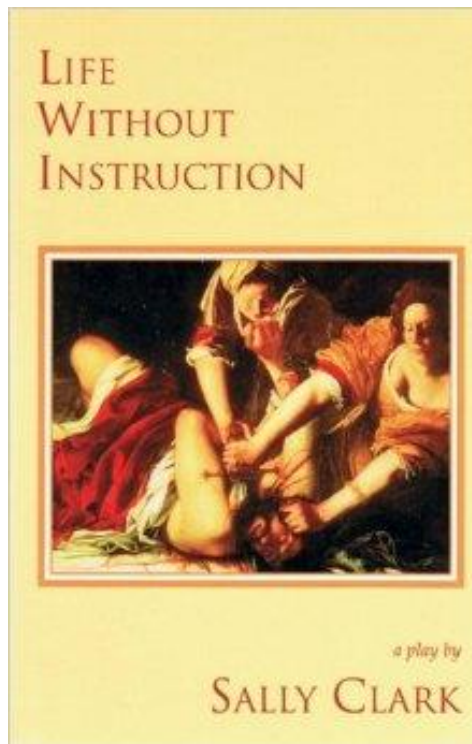


Figure 33. Sally Clark, *Life Without Instruction* cover, 1994, Talonbooks, Vancouver.





Figure 34. Cathy Caplan, *Lapis Blue Blood Red* cover, 2004, Playscripts, Inc., New York.



Figure 35. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting*, 1638-39, oil on canvas, British Royal Collection.

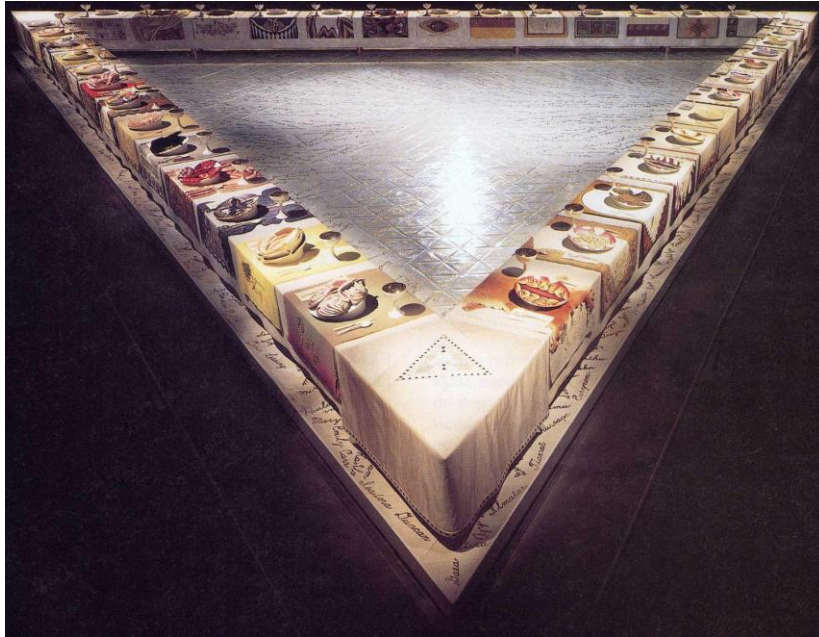


Figure 36. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974–79, ceramic, porcelain, textile, Brooklyn Museum.



Figure 37. Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-79, detail of Artemisia's place setting.



Figure 38. Kathleen Gilje, *Susanna and the Elders, Restored*, 1998, oil on linen, New York.



Figure 39. Kathleen Gilje, *Susanna and the Elders, Restored, X-Ray*, 1998, oil on linen, New York.





Figure 40. Kathleen Gilje, *Susanna and the Elders, Restored and X-Ray*, 1998, oil on linen, New York.