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The Changing Shape of Artemisia Scholarship

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About a film by Agnes Merlet, Griselda Pollock remarked, “Perhaps history should be understood as a domain of transference, projection, and fantasy that tells us more about ourselves, the dreamers, than about those about whom we do this projective and often identificatory dreaming.”¹ Although the film, entitled *Artemisia*, was rife with historical inaccuracies, Pollock observed the key problem in the study of Italian Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi—our own ideas about her life story. The details that we know about her life, the rape as a teenager and the later abandonment of her husband, for example, lead to an often biased interpretation of Artemisia as an artist. Some interpretations, including Mary Garrard, presume that Artemisia contributed to proto-feminist epistemologies, working through an artistic medium for the equality of women. Others, such as R. Ward Bissell, rebuke the feminist standpoint and maintain that Artemisia depended on her father, Orazio, for artistic inspiration. Such vastly disparate views create a convoluted web of assumptions ranging from canonizing to denigrating the artist. The stigmatizations that remain contribute to an overwhelming confusion about Artemisia, begging for a reexamination of the known facts, scholarship and artworks themselves.

Many art historians have acknowledged the problems that plague Artemisia scholarship. Perhaps the largest obstacle of them all is separating her biography from her artistic oeuvre. Recently, novels, films and exhibitions have surfaced that attempt to make sense, in one way or another, of her story. Yet, myth intertwines with reality, and still it seems that we know little about her. Mary Garrard, Ward Bissell, Judith Mann and Keith Christiansen have all contributed to a large surge in scholarship over the past twenty years. Their work toward accurate attributions has led to a matrix of conflicting conclusions which climaxed during the 2002 exhibition of Orazio and Artemisia’s work. Anticipated for years, I believe they all hoped that by gathering works together attributions could finally be solidified. However, attributions are as murky as ever before, and even Bissell has reattributed several works that he formerly thought

¹ Griselda Pollock, “Feminist Dilemmas with the Art/Life Problem.” in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*, ed. by Mieke Bal. (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago Press, 2005). p. 177

to be by Artemisia to Orazio. Fortunately, innovations in Artemisia research have unfolded. Emphasis has been placed on studying the paintings and less on the documents from the rape trial. While the condition of some paintings and similarity between Orazio and Artemisia's technique have hindered scholars, innovative style interpretations have emerged that blur aesthetic and narrative components. Moreover, scholars have examined the tendency to identify self-portraits throughout Artemisia's oeuvre and acknowledge the consequence of doing so. All in all, there has been a shift in the past five years concerning the way in which we look at Artemisia's paintings, a vacillation that will hopefully lead to stronger conclusions in the future.

First, a brief overview of the known facts about Artemisia's artistic career should be explained in order to place her into the context of seventeenth century Italy. A bit of wanderlust, or perhaps a need for patrons, caused Artemisia to spend her life in Rome, Florence, Venice, Naples and London. Born and trained in Rome, she arrived in Florence, newly wedded shortly after the rape trial ended circa 1613. Here, the Buonarroti and Medici families patronized her.² By 1614, she became the first female to enter Florence's Accademia del Disegno.³ During the 1620s, she lived again in Rome, working under the House of Savoy and Cassiano dal Pozzo. While in Rome, she worked closely with the Accademia dei Desiosi. Later, she relocated to Venice, where King Philip IV of Spain provided patronage. By 1630, she found herself in Naples, continuing work for Philip IV and his sister, Empress Maria of Austria, and for the third Duke of Alcala.⁴ Thus, Artemisia worked for a variety of patrons, mingling with various artists on collaborative projects, and became a member of art academies throughout Italy. This could explain why her style changed so frequently, consequently problematic for present day historians ascribing attribution. More importantly, she became fairly well known. Simon Vouet, Antonio Colluraffi, and Jerome David created portraits and inscriptions that flatter her skill as an artist.^{5/6} One might say, Artemisia attained a minor celebrity status in her time.

Scholars, however, critical of contemporary publicity, often analyze how Artemisia compared to her male counterparts. Richard Spear's research about the payment to baroque artists for works can assist this question. The Buonarroti patronized Artemisia's first documented commission in 1615, *Allegory of Inclination* (Fig. 1). Records

2 Elizabeth S. Cohen. "What's in a Name? Artemisia Gentileschi and the Politics of Reputation." In *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 126

3 Cropper. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. (Yale U. Press, 2001), P. 268

4 Cropper. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. (Yale U. Press, 2001), P. 269

5 Judith Mann. "The Myth of Artemisia as Chameleon: A New Look at the London Allegory of Painting." In *Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 52.

6 Cropper, P. 268

show that she received twenty-two florins for the piece, about average for work done for the Buonarrotti.⁷ However, this early voucher for equality decidedly turned against her by the end of her career. Documents dated in the 1630s consistently show that Ribera, Artemisia's top competitor in Naples, often earned twice the amount for comparable oil paintings that she created. Moreover, he typically received the public commissions. Yet in 1649, Artemisia wrote a letter that stated she regularly collected one hundred scudi per figure. If Artemisia's statement holds truth, she earned sums similar to Guercino, among the most highly praised Baroque painters. Artemisia, however, may have quoted an inflated price as a marketing negotiation in order to receive a higher commission.⁸ While Spears's work on payments illuminates patron and artist relations, it appears not enough documented cases occur for scholars to make an accurate estimate of Artemisia's regular earnings.

As for artistic style, Garrard, creator of the first major monograph about Artemisia in 1989, placed Artemisia firmly within the realm of feminist activism. These roots, Garrard explained, extend back to around 1400 to the French woman Christine de Pizan.⁹ Pizan advocated the education of women on the basis of intellectual equality to men. Garrard noted this time as the beginning of the *querelle des femmes*, a momentous movement towards equality that continued through the voice of humanist scholars. She also pointed to recent enthronements of women, beginning with Elizabeth I in the sixteenth century and Marie de' Medici and Anne of Austria of the seventeenth century, which created a stir of feminist and misogynist literature.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, Garrard pointed to Lucrezia Marinelli and Arcangela Tarabotti as literary representations for feminist thinking in Venice during the seventeenth century.¹¹ Thus, Garrard attributed Artemisia's themes of heroism, such as *Judith Beheading Holofernes* (Fig. 2), to a flourish of feminist activity.

Yet Garrard failed to solidify any tangible connection between Artemisia and these powerful women. She argued that Artemisia, through the Medici in Florence between 1614 and 1620, could have been aware of the ideas circulating about feminist action.¹² Additionally, during Artemisia's stay in London, Marie resided at the court of Charles I. She also tenuously suggested that Artemisia's painting *Minerva* (ca.

7 Richard Spear. "Money Matters: The Gentileschi's Finances" in *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 147

8 Richard Spear. "Money Matters: The Gentileschi's Finances" in *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 149

9 Mary Garrard. *Artemisia Gentileschi*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1989). p. 142

10 Garrard. p. 156

11 Garrard, p. 151, 153

12 Mary Garrard. *Artemisia Gentileschi*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton U. Press, 1989) p. 159

1615) truly depicted a portrait of Anne of Austria.¹³ These comprise only a few of the numerous possibilities that Garrard raised in her monograph. Statements Artemisia elicited during the trial in 1612 expressed that she could barely read. Researchers do not know how accurately the statement represents reality for Artemisia's early years, although later she wrote eloquent letters to potential patrons. Moreover, class distinctions may have prevented her from engaging in feminist discussions with patrons. The core facts that support Garrard's premise that Artemisia gave feminist characteristics to her paintings lie in the interpretations of the paintings themselves and our assumptions about the effect of her alleged rape as a teenager. Naturally, how we believe the rape affected Artemisia plays a crucial role in how we interpret her paintings.

A reexamination of the rape trial documents conducted by Elizabeth Cohen avoids the often clichéd regurgitation in order to place them into a historical context. In 1611, Agostino Tassi, an associate of Orazio and teacher to Artemisia, allegedly deflowered the teenager in her home.¹⁴ Nine months later, Orazio filed a civil suit against him which resulted in a seven month long trial. During this time Artemisia testified, verifying the truth through physical torture and answering questions posed by Tassi himself.¹⁵ This form of a trial may appear to be cruel by our standards, but it was routine, and therefore expected by Artemisia. Cohen even suggested that Artemisia gave “legally calculated” testimony that she rehearsed beforehand, although it seems convincing when we read it.¹⁶

Moreover, the emotional effect of rape and the ensuing public trial probably did not have the adverse affects on Artemisia that we assume. Rather, damage amounted to the level of social and economic loss. If a victim won her case, a judge usually forced the rapist to marry her, thereby restoring social honor. Since Tassi was already married and hence unavailable, the judge ordered him to pay a fine to contribute to Artemisia's dowry.¹⁷ Cohen emphasized that these proceedings showed no interest on individual trauma. She admitted that while Artemisia may have felt personally violated, it would be inaccurate for historians to assume that the event influenced her entire career. Placing the rape in historical context allows us deemphasize the significance that Garrard placed on it shaping her artwork.

13 Garrard p. 160

14 Elizabeth Cohen. “The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History.” In *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 31, No. 1 (Special Edition: Gender in Early Modern Europe. Spring, 2000), p. 47

15 Cohen, p. 59

16 Elizabeth Cohen. “The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History.” In *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 31, No. 1 (Special Edition: Gender in Early Modern Europe. Spring, 2000, p. 70

17 Cohen. p. 60

Moreover, several technical factors hinder scholars in their plight to understand Artemisia as an artist. For example, the condition of Artemisia's paintings must be taken into account. Because she painted on a darker ground than Orazio, certain color subtleties have been lost over time.¹⁸ Furthermore, Mann pointed out that in Bissell's catalogue he estimated that 108 works were lost.¹⁹ From the works we have, accurate dates are problematic, thereby creating even more difficulty when charting changes in Artemisia's style.

Furthermore, Orazio and Artemisia shared several stylistic characteristics that problematize attributions. For this reason, Bissell attempted to place Artemisia within a broader understanding of the role of Orazio. Orazio, her father and painting mentor, obviously played a large part in establishing Artemisia as an artist. Bissell acknowledged the similarities between Artemisia and Orazio. Their techniques for tracing and reusing images cause supreme difficulty when differentiating their work, especially when they painted in the same workshop during Artemisia's early career. Evidence shows that Artemisia attained a skill for painting at an early age. Documents from the rape trial insinuate that she taught painting by 1611.²⁰ Moreover, in a letter dated July 3, 1612, Orazio wrote, "Artemisia has in three years become so skilled that I can venture to say that today she has no peer; indeed, she has produced works which demonstrate a level of understanding that perhaps even the principal masters of the profession have not attained..."²¹ Bissell believed, however, that Orazio wrote these words out of fatherly pride or as an agent to attract patrons for his daughter. In fact, Bissell supposed that Orazio resorted to deceptive measures in order to further his daughter's career.

The painting in question is *Susanna and the Elders* (Fig. 3), which Artemisia signed in 1610 as her debut into the art world as an adult. Now, scholars question how much she really contributed to the piece. Bissell, who attributed the piece primarily to Artemisia in his 1999 catalogue raisonnee, has since withdrawn this attribution. An inventory from 1637 was published attributing the Spada *Madonna* (Fig. 4) and *Saint Cecilia* (Fig. 5) to Artemisia from around 1610. Bissell viewed these paintings as much lower-quality works, thus proving that Orazio painted a majority, if not all, of the *Susanna*.²² On the other hand, a joint exhibition of Orazio Artemisia's work in 2002 strengthened Mann's attribution

18 Judith Mann, "Introduction". p. 11

19 Judith Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*, also ed. by Keith Christensen. (New Haven, CT: The Metropolitan Museum of Art: NY/Yale U. Press, 2001). p. 260

20 Ward R. Bissell. "Re-Thinking Early Artemisia." In *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 20

21 Bissell. p. 20

22 Ward R. Bissell. "Re-Thinking Early Artemisia." In *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 22

to Artemisia. The *Susanna* hung next to the Detroit *Judith and Her Maid-servant* (Fig. 6) and Mann saw several similarities in the handling of paint, drapery and palette.²³ Scholars' opinions vary drastically from one extreme to the other, but most agree that Orazio at least assisted his daughter while she painted.

Cleopatra (Fig. 7) also plagues attribution scholarship. At least three inventories, from 1780, 1792 and 1811, have attributed the painting to Orazio.²⁴ Presently, scholars, such as Mann and Garrard, attribute the painting to Artemisia, while others, such as Christiansen and Bissell maintain that Orazio deserves authorship.²⁵ An argument for Orazio can be found in a letter that Niccolo Tassi wrote to Galileo in 1615 in which he described a painting of Cleopatra in Orazio's studio. The description matches the painting that we now know.²⁶ Other arguments rely on comparing the treatment of drapery to Orazio's other work, although not all scholars acknowledge the similarities.²⁷ Furthermore, Bissell acknowledged the similarities between Orazio's lute player in the ceiling fresco in the Casino of the Muses. Thus, for Bissell, authorship of *Cleopatra* certainly must go to Orazio.

However, Harris pointed out the anatomical differences between the *Cleopatra* and other female nudes that Orazio painted around 1620, for example *Danae* (Fig. 8) and *Penitent Magdalene*.²⁸ The *Cleopatra* shows breasts that sag slightly with gravity rather than using geometric shapes placed at odd areas of the chest. She also compared the image to Artemisia's nudes from the 1610s such as *Allegory of Inclination* (Fig. 1) (another artist added drapery at a later date) and *Lucretia* (Fig. 9). These figures are more naturalistic with plump proportions and facial features that seem to dominant Artemisia's oeuvre.²⁹ Garrard further compared the piece to Artemisia's known works, and she concluded that the attribution can be made by studying the hands of figures.³⁰ While Orazio painted female hands elegantly, a tradition that dates back to Renaissance treatises of feminine beauty, Artemisia tended to depict hands in action, for example clutching something, in this case a snake, or playing a

23 Judith Mann. "The Introduction: Taking Stock of Artemisia and her Symposium." In Taking Stock. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 3

24 Bissell. P. 23

25 Mary Garrard, "Artemisia's Hand." In Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism. (U. California Press, 2005). p. 69-70

26 Bissell P. 23-24

27 Ann Sutherland Harris. "Artemisia and Orazio: Drawing Conclusions" in Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 142

28 Ann Sutherland Harris. "Artemisia and Orazio: Drawing Conclusions" in Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 142

29 Ann Sutherland Harris. P. 142

30 Mary Garrard, "Artemisia's Hand." In Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism. (U. California Press, 2005). p. 64

musical instrument.³¹

The factor of painting female nudes should be investigated in order to understand the arguments against Orazio's attributions. Between 1500 and 1800, artists rarely studied female anatomy by using a live model.³² However, male models often posed, and artists simply added female attributes, such as breasts and wider midsections. The practice of piecing together a female explains Orazio's odd positioning of these attributes. Scholars speculate that Artemisia, as a female painter, had access to female models.³³ If not, she at least had access to her own body and features, which some insist emerge in her work. These factors explain why Artemisia would be adept in portraying works such as *Allegory of Inclination* (Fig. 1) and *Susanna and the Elders* (Fig. 3). Scholars, however, question whether Orazio, too, had access to a female model. During the trial in 1612, a witness statement accused Orazio of using Artemisia as a nude model.³⁴ The validity of this statement is controversial; perhaps the witness only wanted to discredit both Orazio and Artemisia and amounts to mere slander. Yet, this idea introduces certain questions about various nude paintings that may be attributed to Orazio.

Similar in composition to *Cleopatra, Danae* (Fig. 10) poses as many questions of attribution. In 1986, the Saint Louis Art Museum acquired the piece as a work completed by Orazio.³⁵ Importantly, this work is oil on copper, which has been preserved much better than canvas. Thus, paintings on copper can sometimes provide a more adequate representation of an artist, although they are much smaller in size. Orazio kept copper paintings as records of his works, and in 1637 he gave a set of plates to Charles I.³⁶ Artemisia, however, also used copper paintings to keep records. An inventory of her belongings taken in 1621 showed that at that time she possessed at least three copper paintings.³⁷ Also, because the pose is nearly identical to that of *Cleopatra*, scholars have assumed that the same artist completed both pieces. Since Bissell reattributed *Cleopatra* to Orazio, he also believes that Orazio painted *Danae*. His reasoning for attributing the former painting continues to dominate his argument for the latter. He also noted that the headdress of the servant appears similar to one found in a previous Judith painting,

31 Mary Garrard. p. 65

32 Ann Sutherland Harris. P. 142

33 Ann Sutherland Harris. P. 143

34 R. Ward Bissell. "Re-Thinking Early Artemisia." In *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 24

35 Judith Mann. "The Introduction: Taking Stock of Artemisia and her Symposium." In *Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 1

36 Ann Sutherland Harris. "Artemisia and Orazio: Drawing Conclusions" in *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 133

37 Judith Mann, *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. (Yale U. Press, 2001) , P. 305

and the profile is comparable to one found in the Oslo Judith piece.³⁸ The arguments surrounding attribution for *Susanna*, *Cleopatra* and *Danae* represent a larger body of scholarship in which debates about Artemisia's oeuvre run rampant. The problem of using traditional, aesthetic approaches can easily become a vicious cycle, often rooted in value laden opinions as to who was the better artist, Orazio or Artemisia. Once that question dominates, it seems that a warped sense of the particular contributions or adaptations an artist makes prohibits a deeper understanding of the art itself. Thus, a new mode of looking must be utilized, especially in the case of Orazio and Artemisia, whose styles overlap so easily and limited facts are known.

Mann developed a new way to view Artemisia's work that scholars have embraced. Rather than concentrate on the particular narratives Artemisia painted, generally stereotyped as feminist, Mann fused subject with aesthetics. The key, according to Mann, is the interpretive moment Artemisia chose to depict.³⁹ Artemisia's paintings typically display a moment of contemplation just before an action occurs during the story, rather than during or after a climactic event.⁴⁰ Thus, in the case of *Susanna*, the painting demonstrates the pivotal moment when she chose to risk death rather than submit to the elders. In *Cleopatra*, she has not yet allowed the asp to bite her. *Danae's* particular timing has been disputed. Mann has proposed that it is the moment after she submits to Zeus; however, another interpretation explains that it could be a moment of resistance.⁴¹ Both interpretations coincide by expressing a philosophical thought process, which differs from contemporary depictions of the story.

Although Mann concurred that Artemisia did not initiate a certain style, she called for study of Artemisia as a stylistic adaptor.⁴² Thus, when we consider Artemisia as a business woman attempting to gain commissions, this skill would be extremely useful. Throughout Artemisia's career, her painting style varied dramatically as she adapted to particular variables of location and patron. However, the narrative moment captured by Artemisia which reflected the psychological meditations just before an action appears to occur continuously.

Some scholars interpret Artemisia's work by correlating the particular narratives that she depicted with her own life. Bal argued that this method exploits her biography, drawn largely from the trial documents of

38 Judith Mann, P. 305

39 23 Judith Mann. "The Introduction: Taking Stock of Artemisia and her Symposium." In *Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), P. 302-303

40 Judith Mann, P. 302-303

41 Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi. "The Gentileschi 'Danae': A Narrative of Rape." In *Woman's Art Journal* (vol. 19, No. 2), p. 13-14

42 Judith Mann. "The Introduction: Taking Stock of Artemisia and her Symposium." In *Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), p. 9

1612. Consequently, past scholarship emphasizes the possibility that Artemisia made statements about feminism by depicting her own portrait as Susanna, Judith, Lucretia, Cleopatra and other mythical or Biblical characters.⁴³ Scholars have thereby interpreted her work as autobiographical, through what Bal called allo-portraiture.⁴⁴ In other words, if Artemisia portrayed herself as allegorical figures, the possibility of social commentary takes place. The problem, according to Bal, occurs because historians study these connections in Artemisia's work while disregarding them in contemporary artists' work, such as Orazio.⁴⁵ Thus, she called for more equal analysis of Artemisia and Orazio's paintings.

The tendency to focus on allo-portraiture can be found in analysis of two allegories of painting. The first example at the Musée de Tessenay, Le Mans, although attributed to Artemisia, proves controversial. Some scholars question why Artemisia painted a self-portrait in such an erotic style. According to Garrard and Bissell, the answer is, quite simply, that she did not.⁴⁶ As a possibility, they suggest that she found herself caught between a long standing feud between Orazio and Baglioni. Baglioni sued Orazio and Caravaggio around 1610 for libel, and Bissell suggested that he painted this *Allegory* alluding to Artemisia as revenge.⁴⁷ If so, then the London *Allegory* (Fig. 11) might conceivably be Artemisia's reaction against the painting, albeit, probably at least two decades later. Mann pointed out the significance of a gold chain that dominated the London piece. A patron gave Baglioni a chain of honor, which prompted Orazio and Caravaggio to write about "the chain of gold that he wears unworthily around his neck."⁴⁸ Indeed, if Artemisia painted the London piece to spite her opponents, she also chose a very difficult pose in which to do it. In order to paint her self, a complex set-up of at least two mirrors would have been necessary, thus flaunting her skill for all to see.⁴⁹

On the other hand, the London *Allegory* may not be a self-portrait of Artemisia after all. For example, she depicted herself with black hair when previous self-portraits showed auburn. One explanation could be that Artemisia adapted to a description that Cesare Ripa wrote in 1593 that elaborated the physical attributes an allegory of painting

43 Mieke Bal. "Grounds of Comparison." In *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*. (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago Press, 2005) P. 138

44 Mieke Bal. P. 141

45 Mieke Bal, P. 143

46 Mary Garrard, "Artemisia's Hand." In *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*. (U. California Press, 2005), p. 68

47 Judith Mann. "The Myth of Artemisia as Chameleon: A New Look at the London Allegory of Painting." In *Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), p. 58-59

48 Judith Mann. p. 58-9

49 Judith Mann. p. 57

should possess.⁵⁰ He wrote:

A beautiful woman, with full black hair, disheveled, and twisted in various ways, with arched eyebrows that show imaginative thought, the mouth covered with a cloth tied behind her ears, with a chain of gold at her throat, from which hangs a mask, and has written in front 'imitation'. She holds in her hand a brush, and in the other the palette, with clothes of evanescently coloured drapery.⁵¹

Judging by the similarities between Ripa's description and Artemisia's painting, it is fairly safe to deduce that she created an allegory that followed the rules, so to speak. In fact, when Artemisia sold her belongings in 1621, there were no mirrors inventoried, let alone two. As expensive items, to settle her debts she surely would have contributed a mirror to her other belongings which included furniture, palettes and partially completed canvases.⁵² Also, when compared to the Detroit *Judith*, the maidservant and La Pittura have similar postures, lighting and fabric, suggesting that she reused a former modello.⁵³

It seems that wherever a scholar glimpses the generic Artemisia face, most easily identified by dark hair, he or she correlates the piece with a piece of biographical information, as I have just demonstrated. Paintings depicting Judith or Susanna, consequently, have been given extra emphasis by correlations to Artemisia's rape as a teenager. Bal and Mann, however, believe a differentiation must occur between true self-portraits and representations of another using the self image as a model.⁵⁴ Bal believes that by focusing on self-images, historians have ignored Artemisia as an artist and persist to intertwine her biography into every aspect of her art.⁵⁵ Bal also questioned Orazio's use of Artemisia's image in paintings such as *Lot and his Daughters* (Fig. 12). She pointed out that most scholars simply gleam over Artemisia's presence by maintaining that she played a role and did not represent the real person. However, she disagrees that one can derive meaning from one allo-portrait and not another. She wrote, "Either we sever the ties between life and representation in both cases, or we sever them in neither."⁵⁶ In fact, Bal believed that the comparisons between Artemisia and Orazio's work has been created in overwhelmingly unequal ways. She

50 Judith Mann. p. 51

51 Judith Mann. "The Myth of Artemisia as Chameleon: A New Look at the London Allegory of Painting." In *Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), p. 51

52 Ann Sutherland Harris. "Artemisia and Orazio: Drawing Conclusions" in *Artemisia Gentileschi: Taking Stock*. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), p. 142

53 Ann Sutherland Harris. p. 141

54 Mieke Bal. "Grounds of Comparison" in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*. (U. of Chicago Press, 2005). P. 139

55 Mieke Bal. P. 138

56 Mieke Bal. "Grounds of Comparison" in *The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People*. (U. of Chicago Press, 2005).P. 143

warned against the tendency to judge works of art rather than objectively compare. When scholars have made attributions based on the idea that Orazio must have been better, for he was her teacher, an automatic bias excludes the possibility that Artemisia was a talented and innovative artist. She believed, as Mann, that Artemisia depicted narratives at a different moment than other artists. She called this an intellectual style, one that merged stylistic aesthetics and cultural background.⁵⁷ If scholars deemphasize allo-portraiture and turn toward an equal evaluation of paintings, more objective comparisons can be made between Artemisia and contemporary artists' works.

Analysis of the trends used by scholars to study Artemisia shows the difficulty faced in placing her within the art historical cannon. Beginning with Garrard, who perhaps sought out Artemisia because of possible links to early feminism, paved the way with emphasis on her sex and violent images of femme fatale. While she attempted to correct centuries of misguided art historical analysis by contributing a female, she undermined her own agenda by concentrating on the sexualized nature of Artemisia's work. She tenuously created links to literature and high ranking patrons and supplied little evidence with which to fortify it. Bissell, writing a decade later, attempted to remedy the shape of Artemisia's work by comparing it to Orazio's paintings. While attempting to place her within a context of her contemporaries, Bissell, perhaps inadvertently, brushed against value judgments, which tainted his view about Artemisia. Perhaps his re-attributions of some of Artemisia's most prominent works to Orazio demonstrate how easily we fall into the teacher student scenario, where assumptions run rampant again. These assumptions, in my opinion, threaten Artemisia's place in the art historical canon, and therefore must be avoided.

Thus, in the midst of research that seems to be up in arms, steady progress has been made in an attempt to grasp Artemisia as an artist. While Garrard, Bissell, Mann and Christiansen paved the way in the late twentieth century, new emphasis has been attached to their work as more scholars revisit the problematic nature of Artemisia studies. Even these founders have been flexible. Attributions still conflict, and scholars sway from one to another, ceaselessly searching for answers. Inventories and statements from the trial seem to help little, for their reliability is questionable, and at times they have been proven to be inconsistent. Perhaps humbled by disenchanting quests to seek confirmation of what scholars might like to believe about Artemisia, they have returned to the basic source for art historical study—the paintings themselves. This has led to new investigations into the narrative moments that Artemisia depicted.

If Artemisia chose to freeze narrative moments that other artists did not,
57 Mieke Bal, "Introduction" in The Artemisia Files: Artemisia Gentileschi for Feminists and Other Thinking People. (Chicago, IL: U. of Chicago Press, 2005) P. xx

this could lend tremendously to understanding her style in continuity. Moreover, if the questions about allo-portraits are not analyzed quite so arduously as in the past, attributions can avoid reflection about her biography. Perhaps one day we will find documents that confirm our ideas, but most importantly, interest is still cultivated, and students continue to watch as Artemisia scholarship, no doubt, morphs from shape to shape.



Figure 1: Artemisia, Allegory of Inclination, c. 1615, Casa Buonarroti, Florence.

Figure 2: Artemisia, Judith Beheading Holofernes, 1620, Uffizi, Florence.





Figure 3: Artemisia, Susanna and the Elders, 1610, Pommersfelden.



Figure 4: Artemisia, Madonna and Child, c. 1610, Galleria Spada, Rome.



Figure 5: Artemisia, Saint Cecilia, c. 1615, private collection.



Figure 6: Artemisia, Judith and her Maid-servant, c. 1625, Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 7: Artemisia or Orazio, Cleopatra, c. 1620, Milan.



Figure 8: Orazio, Danae, c. 1621, Cleveland Museum of Art.



Figure 9: Artemisia, Lucretia, c. 1621, Private collection.



Figure 10: Artemisia, Danae, c. 1615, St. Louis Art Museum.



Figure 11: Artemisia, *Allegory of Painting*, c. 1630s, Royal Collection, Windsor.



Figure 12: Orazio, *Lot and his Daughters*, c. 1621, Madrid.

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