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*Rape and defence in early modern Italy and England:
female reactions in law, art, and literature*

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Introduction

“Pure Chastity is rifled of her store / and Lust, the thief, far poorer than before”¹. These Shakespearean lines describe a situation that has always existed in the past, exists today and probably will exist in the future: sexual violence. In these words, we find the contrast between the female side and the male one, represented by the personifications of “Pure Chastity” and “Lust”. The first one resumes in two simple words the struggle of women of protecting their gift, their virginity, on which their social acceptance and respect depended. Until last century, it was the symbol and proof of the woman’s fidelity towards her future husband and her family. It was a double-edged sword because it could elevate the woman’s reputation or it could destroy her life, forcing her to accept the social and familiar non-recognition and in extreme cases, even her exile. Rich or poor, every woman could risk losing her virginity every single day because of the male uncontrollable “Lust”.

In the several writings analysed, men have been depicted as hungry predators incapable of retaining their sexual desires, who wait for the right moment to attack their prey and gain violently what they have coveted for a long time. Yet, in the end, both parts will lose something. The woman will lose her status symbol, and her rapist will be “far poorer than before”: because once his sexual desire is satisfied, it will come back forcing him to choose another prey to ravish. Moreover, he will lose the woman whom he deflowered before and could also face a legal action in court.

The main aim of my thesis is to describe some rape cases that happened in early modern Italy and England and explain female struggle in fighting against the misogynistic society’s rules and injustices that imposed them a forced silence.

¹ *Shakespeare’s poems*, Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen, The Arden Shakespeare (2007), p.296 v.692-693.

This work is divided in four chapters. The first one, *Rape cases in the Venetian and Roman courts*, presents, as the title suggests, the reactions of several unknown Italian female victims of sexual assault who had to defend themselves in courts, demonstrate and convince through their words their innocence to the judges, the main representatives of their misogynistic society.

The second chapter, *Artemisia Gentileschi – the modern Judith*, focuses on the rape case of the well-known Italian female artist, Artemisia Gentileschi. It begins with a description of the entire case, focused on the main speeches of the victim, her rapist and all the other witnesses; it ends with a personal consideration of her artistic reaction towards her rape, which I have defined as unconscious feminism. Even though she depicted several mythological and religious rape scenes where the female victims take their revenge against their rapist, she never meant to become a premature feminist icon, as she is defined nowadays.

The third section, *Rape cases in England – Margaret Knowsley & Suzan More*, is the reflection of the first chapter because it describes two rape cases in England. They have different endings: the first story focuses more on social injustices that the female victim had to face, while the second one is more an exception, because it has a happy ending, where the rapist is considered guilty and is persecuted for the pain he caused to an innocent and good hardworking woman.

The last chapter, *Philomela and Lucrece: literary exemplum of forced silence*, focuses on the reactions of several female English writers, who used two classical examples of raped women, Philomela and the Roman matron Lucretia, to express their feelings towards the social injustices and the imposed forced silence, and express their hope for a common female reaction to change their current state of subordination. In order to write this chapter, I consulted the site of Women Writers

Project, promoted by the Northeastern University of Boston. It is a long-term project, whose aim is to give teachers, students and general readers the chance to come in contact with several female writings of different historical periods. Every collaborator can choose a topic and analyse texts connected to it, which are provided by this site that offers many research options. The University of Padua takes part to this project, focusing on the topic of the excellence of women to create a comparison between Italy and the England.

Being an excellent woman is here connected not only to these women's private fight against the misogynistic society to gain importance and independence, but also to their pain, fears, injustices and their silence. Even though women have been able to gain more power and respect since then, there are still many episodes of sexual violence and male repression. Contemporary women nowadays should learn from these past examples what real strength is and find in them the courage to talk and fight for themselves. As the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan once said: "Violence against women is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation. It knows no boundaries of geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development, and peace."².

² Kofi Annan, Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century, New York, 5-9 June 2000.

I

Rape cases in the Venetian and Roman courts

In this chapter I will describe some rape cases that happened in two important early modern cities: Venice and Rome. The first part will be characterized by a brief description of the Venetian judicial structure and penalties, which changed on the basis of the culprit's social rank and the gravity of the sexual offense.

In the second part, I will focus more on women's speeches and their different reactions in the Roman court, which jeopardized the judges' trust and their punishment selection criteria.

I.1 - Venice

In Early modern Venice, all sexual crimes exposed several contradictory relationships, which defined human change in life and society. This criminality was sanctioned by a new code: "*the Promissione Maleficorum*". The latter was an appendix used to define and ameliorate the city's laws, organised by the Doge Jacobo Tiepolo³. It was divided in different sections (Robbery; Assault and Murder; Rape and Bigamy) and it presented a list of all the penalties that judges could give on the basis of the seriousness of the crime. It was corrected and revised many times over by a group of the city's elite members: merchants and

³ The Doge underlined that Venetian justice needed "order to correct excess and punish crime". Guido Ruggiero, "*Law and Punishment in Early Renaissance Venice*", in *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 69 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 243 (1978).

bankers. Every crime had to be solved rapidly: if one of them was known publicly, it had to be solved in three days.

The judicial system was divided in four parts: the Avogaria di Commun, the Signori della Notte, the Giudici di Proprio and the council of Forty⁴. The first three differed on the basis of the crimes they followed and solved. The Avogadori were one of the most ancient and complex of the Venetian bodies, which dealt with heterosexual sex crimes (including rape and certain nonsexual violent crimes) and civil ones. It did not enjoy judicial or legislative powers, but nevertheless, sat in the central council of state to verify if the other councils followed the rules and the procedures of the Venetian government. Moreover, this group collected all the details of each case in registers and prepared all the cases and presented the results of their investigations to the council of Forty, suggesting penalties for the culprits. The latter argued about the guilty, the innocence and the possible penalty for the criminal.

It was clear that even though this group did not have direct decisional powers, it created and maintained a considerable authority, which increased the nobles' appreciation for this group. The Signori della Notte dealt with cases of interpersonal violence, excluding heterosexual sex crimes and dividing it into two different categories: petty violence, which was handled in the streets; and murder and robbery, which were investigated and presented to the Giudici di Proprio, who decided the penalty. From this division of responsibilities there derived a hierarchy of seriousness of crime. Petty violence was not considered a dangerous case at all, as it happened with great regularity. Interpersonal violence, like murder and robbery, were considered serious situations that would have ruined the victim's reputation or its life. Heterosexual cases presented themselves as

⁴ The first three councils were known for their rigidity that opposed to the flexibility of the Ten, (which changed through the passing of time). Guido Ruggiero, "Law and Punishment in Early Renaissance Venice", in *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 69 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 243 (1978).

a massive group of misdeeds of different shapes and sizes. It was not difficult to find sexual cases that were even classified as interpersonal crimes and for this reason, although it was difficult to find an appropriate punishment and compensation.

The first case that had been ever assigned to the Avogadori could be the best example of this “mixture of crimes”. In 1343, Giovanni Andruzzo da Lucca, who worked for a Venetian silk industry, had been unjustly accused of stealing 100 ducats by one of his employers, named Federico Spira. At the beginning, the latter had been fined by the Forty with 100 ducats. However, only after that did Federico reveal his real complaint behind that story: Giovanni had broken into his house and raped his daughter, deflowering her. Through an attentive investigation of the case by the Avogadori, on the 10th September, Giovanni was publicly declared culprit of having raped a young girl. The Forty had to choose the penalty and all the members had to vote between a year in jail or the payment of 100 ducats. In the end, Giovanni had to spend one year behind bars.

Penalties were used to “punish the criminal and by inspiring terror to prevent repetition and imitation”⁵. Some of them were extremely cruel, as for example mutilation, blinding and torture. However, the Venetian concept of punishment was different from other societies; in the latter, punishment was conceived through a predominant vengeance, which was secondary to rational punishment. The main aim of Venetian councils was maintaining peace in difficult situations through an attentive analysis and rationalization of each case.

Among all the possible crimes committed in Venice, rape and attempted rape were not considered as important as murder and robbery cases. Penalties revealed this important factor. The *Promissione* underlined that there were fixed penalties if the

⁵ Guido Ruggiero, *Violence in Early Renaissance Venice*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 43, (1980).

victim was “no longer a virgin, an unmarried woman who was no longer a virgin, or a married woman”⁶. If the culprit confessed, or testimonies and proofs convicted him, he had to spend eight days in prison, till he had found a way to pay his fine, which would have been the victim’s dowry. The judges determined this sum: if the rapist could not pay the amount of money, he would lose both his eyes. Considering what the Avogadori’s registers stated, the latter situation never happened and punishment had always been minimal, consisting for example of beating and branding. However, in many cases it was difficult to understand who the culprit was; if the victim was lying or not, or if it was a real rape case; for these reasons, the penalty had to be left to the judges’ discretion⁷.

In time, justice changed. The previous punishment of eight days in jail became a choice between the latter or the payment of a fine. Everything was decided on the basis of the crime committed and even the social position of the culprit. The transition of these sentences had been quite paradoxical because jail sentences reduced the number of prisoners in jail. Fines tended to cause an excess of lower-class people who had to wait in jail till they could have paid the amount of money.

One way to control this phenomenon was the *gratia* that only the powerful men of the councils could grant. The culprit was put directly in jail for few months, as a penalty for his crime, and he was left there till the council of Forty would give the *gratia* and release him.

In the end, the guilty could choose between two different punishments: jail or fine. This choice became a social and economic factor; the upper class culprits were fined, while the lower class ones were sent to jail. On the contrary situations, a

⁶ Guido Ruggiero, “*Law and Punishment in Early Renaissance Venice*”, in *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 69 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 246 (1978).

⁷ Considering that the Venetian society was misogynistic and a male-oriented one, men, accused of having raped a woman, were most of the cases acquitted.

jail sentence for a noble would have been judged as a more severe penalty and the same was the fine for a worker.

The different penalties imposed to these two groups depended on the economical and social distinctions involved in social control. Jail sentences predominated among workers because they could not pay fines; nobles could afford them and skip months in prison. However, it was not always like this: Venice and its councils could punish both social classes through mixed penalties, imposed only if the crime committed was extremely cruel. As Ruggiero suggests, “for a worker, the mixed penalty was a means of taxing whatever wealth the criminal had while simultaneously reducing the amount of time he would take up space in jail; for nobles, the mixed penalty was designed to add severity to the usual fine”⁸⁹.

Rape cases varied on the basis of the social hierarchy, the woman’s age and the sex of the victim.

Venetian society was divided in four parts: nobles; important men; workers and marginal people. All of them were responsible of several sexual crimes.

I.1.1 - Noble rapists

The higher portion of rapes were committed by noble men; however, they were strictly punished: the Avogadori and the Council of Forty were composed by noble men, so there was quite always the will of protecting people belonging to their same social class. Rape by noble men was considered a minor crime. The victims were women coming from all social classes; the compensation changed from a social class to another one. When a noble woman was raped, she was highly compensated,

⁸ Guido Ruggiero, *Violence in Early Renaissance Venice*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 46-47, (1980).

⁹ Only 8 nobles were jailed for more than a year for rape, while most of them had been jailed for less than a year.

while the noble man was highly punished. Most of the time, the crime went underreported. The rape of a low class woman brought lower punishments and compensations.

Nobles used to act in similar way with their victims. Men bought off or intimidated their victims, bought the support of the victim's relatives or servants in order to commit the crime. However, the latter were so much organised that they managed to escape detection.

A famous example of a crime committed by a noble man was the one that occurred to a young Venetian girl, who had been raped by Franceschino dale Boccole, who had been helped by the girl's mother to commit this crime. Her daughter had not reached her puberty yet and she brought her to the noble and helped as he raped her twice. Both culprits were strictly punished: Franceschino was jailed for two years and had to pay a fine of 200 ducats; the girl's mother passed one night in a *berlina* and was whipped from Piazza San Marco to Santa Croce; her misconduct was publicly exposed by herald; she spent one year in jail.

I.1.2 - Noble victims of rape

Being a noble woman signified living a life full of advantages and richness; however, they were not excluded from negative situations such as rape. This type of sexual crime happened rarely to them and it was classified as the worst type of rape that could happen because of the social status of the woman. Rapists were noble men, who had no difficulties in creating the right situation in which they could remain alone with their victims and take advantage on them. All the attention of the girl's family was not enough to protect her against the assault of a noble man. However, the punishment was worse than the one that could have been received by raping a woman of a lower class. Social

status was also the main reason that explained why lower-class men never raped noble women, who were unreachable for them. Moreover, that type of crime committed by a non-noble man would have been interpreted more as a crime against the state, than one against the woman and her reputation.

I.1.3 - Rapists of important people

This social class was restricted to a little group of people, who played an important role in the Venetian society. They were merchants, professionals and civil officials, who wanted to succeed and being recognized by nobles. Their collaboration with the noble class represented the centre of the state.

The Avogadori registered few rape cases committed by those men, yet the penalties received were higher than the ones recognized for the nobles. Victims were women of a lower social class. 8 cases out of 32 were classified as *puellae*, because the victims were young girls who did not reached their puberty when they had been deflowered. Ruggiero reports: “important men raped *puellae* about twice as often as did any other class and received almost twice the average penalty for doing so”¹⁰. In this situation, nobles did not show empathy for the criminal behaviour of this group.

Important women and lower class ones were accessible victims; the first ones were carefully watched and more isolated, while the latter were silenced with money if necessary.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 86.

I.1.4 - Workers rapists

These groups showed unexpected levels of criminality. In this case, rape produced different results: the rapist could choose to marry his victim or pay a fine to her and his debt to the society.

Guido da Padua was a cloth worker in Venice. He raped Micola, daughter of another worker, Antonio da Barleto, the Forty gave him the chance to make a choice: marry the girl or face two years of jail and pay 200 lire piccoli as a fine for his criminal action. Guido married the young woman and provided her a dowry.

Statistics and registers revealed that there was a big difference between the rapes committed by the noble men or by workers. The latter acted in a more spontaneous way because victims were their neighbours, wives or daughters of their colleagues.

Young women belonging to this social class had to live under a constant fear of becoming a sexual prey of a man. They often used to remain alone with men and that condition invited any possible attack from the other sex. Parents could give little protection to their daughters but sometimes even they could have taken part to these acts, delivering their daughters into the hands of a rich man. Most cases ended with low penalties, which reflected the incapability of the Forty of understanding the nature of these crimes. They struggled in distinguishing a rape from fornication or adultery.

I.1.5 - Marginal people rapists

Few cases were classified in the Avogadori's registers, as "the least visible people in history"¹¹ made up this class. Simple people lived their life struggling every day to stay alive, working occasionally and sleeping in the streets. Rape could have been

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 86.

the only sexual life for them and their victims were women coming from within the group, as for example a slave of a noble. However, because they had no social importance, most of these cases were overlooked.

Women belonging to this group and who suffered from sexual assault rarely had the chance to see their cases prosecuted in a trial. Three were the main reasons that explained this situation: first of all, they were the most available victims; moreover their life did not allow them in finding protection and isolation as noble women; in conclusion, they were an acceptable sexual target. Even the penalties for rape were so marginal that they did not punished who committed the violence.

I.1.6 - Puellae rape cases

Punishments for rape became more serious even considering the age of the girl who had been deflowered. Premodern childhood and victimization were more serious than a rape of another woman. These cases were characterized by the Avogadori's will of analysing and describing all actions in detail in trials. People were not dealing with a simple deflowering, but it was an act of forcing a child to loose her innocence.

The age of the child played an important role, as it defined the "social perception of the duration of the prepubertal age of innocence"¹². Before the 1360s, puellae lasted till the child was twelve years. In the 15th century, young girls were considered by the state puellae till thirteen year. The law was not so strict: in the registers there are puellae cases, whose victims were fourteen years old. Even the physical maturity of the girl could define the borderline between a puella and a girl of marriageable

¹² *Ibiden*, p. 164.

age. The youngest victim, found in documents of rape cases of children, was “six or seven”¹³ years old.

An interesting puella case was the one of the 12-year-old Catarucia. She was a nun who lived in a convent of Padua. Pietro Solaro was her brother-in-law and he raped her before her arrival in the convent. Their relationship continued after Catarucia became a nun, Pietro’s wife died and the man had been put in prison because of the five children who were born from their illicit bound. This case was a mixture of different crimes: rape of a child and nun, adultery and incest. His penalty was not overwhelming because he had to remain in jail for three years, pay a fine to the state of 300 lire and had been banished from Venice.

Many girls could hope for a better future because the Forty punished their rapists, imposing them the payment of the girls’ dowry and/or marrying their victims.

I.1.7 - Rape of a Married woman

This crime was considered extremely serious for two different reasons: first of all, a married woman had more power in this society because she proved her values and position through her dowry. Moreover, marriage defined the woman as a piece of property of her husband, to whom she gave her dowry and her virginity. Married women were considered less attractive and incapable of encouraging sexual advances compared to the unmarried ones. Widows, on the contrary, did not occupy the same social position as the married women, because their husbands’ death diminished their importance.

In conclusion, rape cases in Venice were extremely different and various. Every crime presented different shades, which reflected

¹³ Ibidem, p. 166.

the councils' difficulties in finding the right punishment and solution for the rapist and the victim. Most of the time social status defined their final choices, which unfortunately were not always useful to protect the victim and compensate her lost social dignity.

I.2 - Rome

Between 1602 and 1604, the records of the Roman court showed that dozens of rape cases had been registered. Most of them regarded testimonies of non-virgin women, followed by the ones of some witnesses.

Women belonging to the low social class were less defended and protected by the Avogadori and the Council of Forty than the noble ones. Their poverty was perceived as the main means through which they could obtain a dowry or secure a husband and a legal marriage. In many cases, their traumatic and personal experiences are useful to understand not only if they were using strategies, but also to see how much freedom they exercised and how they shaped their stories.

The assault was connected with the topic of "shaping". Every story showed in different ways a sense of sufferance, connected to a personal and familial offense and to internal and external injuries. The rape was "used" by the girls' families to restore the social damage of the dishonoured daughters who in most cases were able to respond independently to every accusation and question. However, the victims' language and behaviour depended on the social custom, the institutional rules and the personal politics of that time. They had to construct and give the court a particular image of themselves and of their intentions in order to better control their situation.

In other cases, young women described themselves and the situation in a more dramatic way, which was different from what

the society and its culture imposed themselves. As Elizabeth Cohen underlines, this “freedom” showed a first female tentative of constructing a consciousness of self and of psychological autonomy¹⁴. This sort of pre-modern identity was defined by a constant interaction between the social identity and the individual one. Moreover, young women had to overcome one of their biggest obstacles in this legal fight: their powerlessness and poverty.

In that period, this control over women was not to be seen only under legal circumstances: their entire life was already organized and strictly handled by the family and the entire community. One of the main sensitive topics was the virginity and marriage. In general, the girl’s family used sexuality to negotiate business with another family or with a man. In Italian the word “negotiare” was used to define certain sexual and loveless activities, which were a medium of exchange. Marriage was seen as an instrument used to “promote the collective social, economic, or political interest”¹⁵. It was celebrated and accepted most of the time, when the young girl was, for all the intents and purposes, a virgin. Her virginity was difficult to preserve, especially if the girl in question was from the lower part of the society, did menial jobs and was exposed to several male assaults and attentions. It was “the essence of a young girl’s virtue”¹⁶ and it had to be lost only in a legitimate marriage, decided by the family and the entire community. Through the virginity, a family could control and protect the young girl. Being a virgin meant being classified as an honourable woman, a title that defended the girl from any threat. However, it, voluntarily or not, would have put the woman and her entire family in a negative condition of disgrace and shame. This was

¹⁴ Elizabeth Cohen, *No longer virgins: self-presentation by young women in late Renaissance Rome*, in *Refiguring Woman, Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Marilyn Migiel and Juliana Schiesari, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 171.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 172.

the main problem analyzed by the Italian court: it was difficult to understand how had she been deflowered. Had it been taken by force or by personal choice? Before, during and after the trial, some negotiations were made to find a solution in that particular situation that could restore the lost honour. The woman could choose between becoming a nun or marrying the man who had deflowered her.

The girl could still marry another man if she had been able to obtain a good dowry, which could help economically her future marriage. In order to do this, the girl's family required a solution in front of all the judges, underlining all the grievances and describing their daughter as respectable person who had been the unwillingly victim of a rapist. Parents usually asked for a dowry or for a shotgun wedding. In many cases, these requests were not even considered because the judges recognized that many families used their daughters' defloration as a way to repair their economical conditions. For this reason, they did not believe in the victim's deposition and classified it as a strategy based on good rhetoric.

In the court, judges had to deal with lies, truths and witnesses. They had to reconstruct all the episodes, focusing on all the details of all the testimonies. However, before bringing all the witnesses, the victim and her rapist in front of the Council of Forty, some preliminary and private interrogations were made of all the people who had had a role in that situation or could help in finding the truth.

The court always wanted for some evidence about the girl's virginity, as for example it asked her to report her pain and bleeding and the same was asked of all the witnesses. The last ones were important even to collect all the gossips around the figure of the victim. Female resistance, gifts from the rapist and a proposal were other fundamental elements, which could help the girl in being believed by the Council of Forty.

If it was difficult to confirm the girl's virginity, judges asked for a midwife's opinion through a physical examination.

I.2.1 – Rape Cases

Even though women's stories varied, all of them shared the same elements: blood, resistance and male promises. Victims used to add details and materials to amplify their own statements. What differed was their language and emphases. In fact, conventional language was used to describe illicit sexual encounters, as for example "per forza o per amore". In many cases, multiple emotions were entwined to shape behaviours: it was not surprising to find a story in which attraction and love played an important role. In addition to this, as it has been previously underlined, these women were poor and their social condition did not give them the chance of having a substantial dowry. For this reason, the rape could have helped them in having "an immediate material reward than the custodianship of virginity"¹⁷. On the other hand, all these male attentions would have compensated all the paternal anger and the community scorn. Consequently, women had to show that they were aware of their own sense and of the situation. Judges had to deal with rape cases of women who acted like passive victims, but in fact were just participants of a performance, used to obtain an economical help.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 176.

I.2.2 –Case of passive victims of assault

Olimpia

This girl used to live with her mother, Marta, a widow, near the Trevi Fountain. She was in the early teens because she had her first period in prison, after her arrest. The girl's description of the events is clear and detailed, because she wanted the judges to know everything about her rape without embroideries. She started her narration saying that she lost her virginity one month before her arrest. She was alone at her house and she had to take some fetch water from the cellar. In the mid-time, she saw an unknown man armed with a sword. He menaced her, entered with her at her house and closed the door. He assaulted her, preventing the girl in screaming or talking, covered her face and threw her on the ground. This man was compared to a devil and her description of the sexual act was extremely detailed.

“He lifted my skirts, he deflowered me, he made me bleed when he pushed it up into me. I wanted to shout but I couldn't because of the gag, and it hurt me a lot”¹⁸. She added that she had been incapable of walking for three days, because of the pain that she had. She tried also not to talk about it to her mother because she felt a sense of shame, she was aware that what had happened was something wrong and bad for the family. Moreover, she feared her mother's reactions and anger. This secret was so heavy, that in the end she confessed. After five days, she had been raped again, but she did not have the chance to see the face of her rapist, because her face was covered. She was at the house of a fictive aunt and the latter probably had participated in this second assault, putting her to bed with this unknown man, who was attached to the Flemish embassy.

¹⁸ “Mi alzò li panni et mi sverginò, che mi fece uscire del sangue, che me ce lo mise su, ma io volevo strillere et non potevo, perché haveva turrata la bocca, et me doleva assai” , *Ibiden*, p. 178.

Olimpia decided to talk about her assaults in tribunal because she wanted to receive a dowry to repair the damage she had received: “I would say if I could, in order to have a dowry and not go about in this way and in these clothes”¹⁹. She associated her poverty with her personal situation; moreover, she was aware that if the rapist had been found, she would have to marry him with better clothes on.

In conclusion, Olimpia showed her feeling of helplessness as a twice-raped girl, who had been left deflowered and without a dowry; however, nobody could help her and give her compensation.

I.2.3 - Case of female consciousness of self

Julia Ligie and her daughter Cecilia

Julia was a widow from Udine, who denounced Martio Fantuccio of having raped her fourteen years old daughter Cecilia. Martio was helping Julia with a lawsuit and Cecilia was charged of exchange some messages between her mother and him. Martio had pity of them and wanted to hire the girl as his new personal servant. At first, Cecilia declined the invitation but than accepted the proposal. She went to his house and had sex with him. In return, she received a candy and money. When Julia was aware of this situation, went to the authorities to denounce what happened, hoping that they would have received compensation from him. However, her tone used to describe her personal feeling, in particular the ones related to his mockery, betrayed the woman.

Moreover, the biggest failure was related to the way mother and daughter describes the facts.

¹⁹ “Io direi per havere la dote, et non andarei a questo modo e con questi vestimenti che porto”, *Ibiden* .p. 178.

First of all, Cecilia underlined that she had not been forced in having a sexual relationship with him and she was neither a virgin when the private encounter with Martio happened. Her first lover was Francesco Cecchi, with who she lost her maidenhead during the last Carnival. She explained that two women approached her with a proposal: a man was searching for the services of a virgin and in return, he would have given her the “most beautiful dresses” as dowry²⁰. This relationship was characterized by contrasts: threatening of violence and shared meals.

Cecilia continued her story, saying that she refused her first approach but than she made up her own deal.

The week after, she had been invited to have dinner with Martio and the other two women. After that, she stayed there for the night and had sex with him. Cecilia described his lovemaking: “I jumped out of the bed for the pain it caused me”²¹, and after that she cried out loudly, making the servants worried about what was happening inside Francesco’s room. The latter shouted at them saying that everything was fine and they did not have to get inside the room and he went back to bed. Cecilia underlined that he had her other five times and because of it, the next morning, the bed was entirely covered of blood and the servants compared it to a “butchery” (“macello”).

The girl concluded her narration saying that he promised her a dowry, as sing of gratitude for what happened the previous night. Moreover, she highlighted that few days after her defloration, a doctor was visited her and wrote in a document all the details of her physical situation.

After that, she went back to Francesco’s house, but he denied of have ever seen her of had a sexual relationship with her. So, he

²⁰ *Ibiden*, p. 181.

²¹ “Io saltai fuori del letto per il male che mi faceva”, *Ibiden*, p. 182.

took back all his obligations and threatened her with a public whipping. Only Martio kept his promises and paid the girl with a few scudi and some candies.

Her previous tentative of obtaining money, a dowry and an husband failed and she had to find another way to re-organize her future.

This story is an example of how a girl had been able to become independent and not being used as a pawn of her mother in front of all the judges. However, the public perceives a sense of anxiety in her speech, because she needed to explained and probably even ensure herself that she was a virtuous woman in intent. Moreover, she knew that all the future events and arrangements depended on her public speech.

I.2.4 Rape case based on attraction and love

Camilla

Her defloration recalls the one of Olimpia's, but there is a difference: the first one had a marital strategy to insure her a bright future. Her rhetoric had been fundamental to understand her real goal.

Camilla lived with her mother Antonia next to one of Rome's major prisons, Corte Savelli. She had a suitor, Pierfelice di Terni, a young man who recently moved to the city to apprentice to a notary. He probably appeared to her as "an eligible mate"²².

The day of Saint Lucia, she was alone at her house, making the beds; when the young man entered. He raised the door, ran at her and hugged her. He promised her that one day they would get married and she would have become his wife in any case.

²² Ibidem, p. 187.

After that, he raised her dress, while the girl protested, begging him to free her. Camilla did not want him to touch her. Piefrelice tried to calm her down, repeated her promise and dissuaded her.

She refused Pierfelice advances and he angrily went home. The next day, he came back to talk again about their past argument and his reactions. Even in this case, the girl refused him and underlined that she would have given herself to the young man only when he would have asked her sincerely to wed him. They made love and she lots lot of blood; she even cried out loud because of the pain felt. He reassured her again, adding that he wanted to talk about it to her mother.

She concluded saying that nobody noticed their relationship because the young guy used to frequent her building, because his aunt lived there. Nobody had ever saw them kissing or talking.

In her testimony, Camilla highlighted three important elements: first of all, Piefrelice was the one who forced her in having sex with him and not the contrary; in second instance, the young man repeated his promises more than once; and in the end, he wanted to talk about his desires to her mother, which at that time was considered a public commitment.

This man was not a devil and obviously he seemed to be in love with her, differently from all the other rapists seen in the previous cases.

It was clear that her version of facts was constructed in a perfect way in order to protect her reputation and maintain self-respect.

However, Camilla did not consider her mother's testimony. In fact, the latter underlined that one day, she saw the couple talking in her house and her arrival interrupted their conversation. The man fled and Camilla had to explain everything to her angry mother. The latter constantly repeated

that Pierfelice had ruined her daughter and her family. This encounter was considered by her as a betrayal and she immediately sent her daughter to the hospital of Santo Spirito to have a mid-wife's examination. Only after that, Camilla had to reveal the truth to her mother. This testimony had destroyed the perfect version of the young girl, who lost her credibility.

In the end, the two women and Pierfelice went under torture to verify their statements and find the truth.

In conclusion, it is evident that all these stories were different one with the other; however, this variety was characterised by an amount of conventional statements that depended on the "powerful cultural norms and legal practices"²³. In addition to this, these strategies together with women's ambition and emotional rhetoric, gave to them the chance of maintaining an individual posture in front of the judges. Unfortunately for them, poverty and powerlessness were the two main obstacles that, a priori, put women in a position of lack of credibility and the external pressure forced them to act for themselves.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 191.

II

Artemisia Gentileschi: “the modern Judith”

II. 1 - Judith, Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi

Judith played an important role in Artemisia Gentileschi's life, not only because it was one of the favourite subjects painted by this famous female artist, but also because she was extremely connected with the beginning of a long trial, which characterized a hard and difficult path of Gentileschi's life.

This woman had been a victim of sexual violence. She had been raped at the age of 19 by one of the colleagues and closest friends of her father Orazio Gentileschi, named Agostino Tassi. Everything happened in May 1611. Orazio Gentileschi denounced Tassi in a begging letter to the pope Paul the V one year later, asking for a punishment and the restore of his family pride. How is this possible, considering the fact that her daughter acquainted him about the incident few days after it happened? What is the connection between this triangle and Judith?

Eva Mazio's book *“Artemisia Gentileschi LETTERE – precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro”* gives us the possibility to reconstruct all the main events happened before and after the two main trials in the Roman court and to recollect all the witnesses' testimonies.

It starts with the begging letter of Orazio:

“Beatissimo Padre Horatio Gentileschi Pittore, humilissimo servo della Santità Vostra, con ogni reverentia Le narra come per mezzo et a persuasione di Donna Tutia sua pigionante; una figliola del’oratore è stata forzatamente sverginata et carnalmente conosciuta più volte da Agostino Tassi pittore et intrinseco amico et compagno del’oratore, escendosi anche intromesso in questo negotio osceno Cosimo Quorli suo furiere; Intendendo oltre allo sverginamento, che il medesimo Cosimo

furiere con sua chimera habbia cavato dalle mane della medesima zittella alcuni quadri di pittura di suo padre et inspecie una Iuditta di capace grandezza; Et perché, Beatissimo Padre, questo è un fatto così brutto et commesso in così grave et enorme lesione e danno del povero oratore et massime sotto fede di amicitia che del tutto si rende assassinamento et anco commesso da una persona solita commettere peggio delitti di questo, essendoci stato fautore il detto Cosimo Quorli. Però genuflesso alli sua Santi piedi la supplica in visceribus Christi a provvedere a così brutto eccesso con li debiti termini di giustizia contro a chi si spetta, perché oltre al farne gratia segnalatissima, ella sarà causa che il povero supplicante non metterà in rovina li altri suoi figliuoli et gliene pregherà sempre da Dio giustissima ricompensa. Ci...alla Santità di Nostro Signore...per Horatio Gentileschi Pittore.”²⁴

Translation:

Most blessed Father, the painter Horatio Gentileschi, very humble servant of Your Holiness, tells you, with every reverence, how the close friend and fellow worker of the orator, the painter Agostino Tassi, through the persuasion of Donna Tuzia, has forcefully deflowered and has known carnally more than once the orator's daughter. Even Your quartermaster Cosimo Furiere has taken part to this horrible business, trying not only to deflower her, but also with his chimera he stole from the spinster's hands some paintings of her father, in particular a big size one of Judith. This is an unpleasant and serious act, which caused damage to the poor orator and destroyed this friendship. Moreover, this supporter Cosimo Quorli used to commit worse crimes.

²⁴ Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 11.

Praying on bended knee in front of His holiness, I beg You in visceribus Christi to provide a fair punishment where credit is due, because besides receiving Your grace, it will not ruin the reputation of this poor supplicant's sons and the latter will always be grateful to God for this right reward.
To the Holiness of our Lord...for the painter Horatio Gentileschi.

This letter shows an important mix between the grudge and the destroyed honour of Orazio Gentileschi, which concerns two different personal offences: the rape of her daughter and a strange case of robbery of paintings, both committed by Agostino Tassi and Cosimo Quorli. Orazio Gentileschi seems to give more importance to this second fact than the first one. It seems that this robbery can not even be compared to his daughter's rape and that his role as a painter was more important than being a good and respectable father. In fact, in this letter, we can see that 13 lines out of 26 are used by Orazio to talk about his serious artistic loss; while only 5 out of 26 concern the real reason of this denouncement, which will bring Artemisia into the Roman court. In addition to this, in these 13 lines there are some clues that make clear that this is a personal revenge in order to have back his paintings. An example that can justify this concept can be found in the part in which he talks about the destruction of his friendship with Quorli. Gentileschi uses the words “assassinamento fattomi”, giving the idea that loosing a painting in that way was like “being killed” by this man. He is not talking about the murder of her daughter's virginity and purity, which was the real cause of the trial.

Why did he wait one year to denounce the rape? Readers can think that Orazio probably preferred keep this entire situation as a secret to not loose his family honour. Some critics believe that Orazio hoped for a marriage between Artemisia and Agostino, but the latter refused this possibility. Moreover, from his testimony, we can imagine that only after a long time did he

discover another part of the plan concocted by the couple Tassi – Quorli, which attacked him personally. So, considering his request to the pope, it is possible that he took his own revenge on his new enemies and used the rape of Artemisia as an excuse to punish them and have his paintings back.

Moreover, Orazio knew that this trial would impose on Artemisia different types of violence, from which she suffered not only physically but also psychologically. Artemisia was already seen in a negative way because she was a female painter: it was rare to see a woman working in order to gain economical independence and social recognitions. This trial put her more under the spotlight; from that moment on, she will be often accused of living a dishonest life and having a busy love life. She had to prove and convince everyone that her previous statements were true. For this reason, she forcefully underwent some gynaecological examinations in the presence of all the judges; she suffered the torture of the Sybille and was confronted with corrupted people, who have been paid to tell lies.

In addition to this, after one month from the conclusion of the trial, Artemisia married Pietro Antonio Stiattesi²⁵. After Agostino was released, Orazio got back in touch with him; another proof that he preferred his work interests to his daughter's reputation.

II.2 - Artemisia - Orazio – Agostino

In 1611, Artemisia was a honourable maiden, who lived in Rome with her father Orazio and her three little brothers

²⁵ Pietro Antonio Stiattesi was a painter probably related to one of the major witnesses of this trial Giovan Battista Stiattesi. However, this marriage was perceived as shotgun one, celebrated in the Santo Spirito church in Sassia. After that, Artemisia moved with her husband to Florence not only to forget what happened in Rome months before, but also to cut her relationship with her overwhelming father. They had four sons: Giovanni Battista, Cristofano, Prudenzia, who followed her mother's artistic path, and Lisabella. Their marriage had several moments of crisis. Gentileschi left Florence and came back to Rome, not only because her relationship with Cosimo II de Medici got worse, but also because her husband collected a series of debts due to his luxurious life and she had an extramarital affair with a gentleman, Francesco Maria Maringhi, which raised a scandal.

Francesco, Giulio and Marco. Rome presented itself as a highly insecure and uncertain place in which a child could grow up. She lived in Rione of Campomarzio, a quarter characterized by a swarming of nationalities and occupations. As Elizabeth Cohen declares that many artists lived there, however many people “resided only temporary”²⁶, other lived there for years, like the Gentileschi family and were wont to move from a house to another. This part of the city was also occupied by a large number of prostitutes; it was not difficult to see men searching for company or for a brawl. Residents had to be protected by the Roman government through extended orders and laws created to improve and assure personal security. For this reason, the Gentileschis were subjected to many codes of moral and social conduct. One of them was a set of social obligations towards nubile women. In that period, parents had to combine their grown daughters with men through a convenient marriage. Elizabeth Cohen underlines that “this duty imposed two often difficult tasks: locating an eligible and willing bridegroom and providing a dowry that often strained the family's resources”²⁷. Another important duty that a woman had to fulfil before getting married was being a chaste virgin. Fathers had yet another important role: safeguarding their daughters' virginity. The best ways to do this were: locking them in their houses, even though it turned out to be a double-edged sword because isolating the girl would make it harder for her to snag a husband; and forbidding them to walk alone on the streets and being instead supervised by another man of the family, who generally was a brother or another male member of it.

Artemisia's personal situation was extremely delicate, because she was the only daughter of the Gentileschi family, who had a pictorial circle. For this reason, she used to meet

²⁶ Elizabeth Cohen; *The trial of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*; Sixteen Century Journal; 2000; p.56.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p.57.

some of her father's colleagues. Orazio Gentileschi was considered a great painter and was appreciated everywhere in Rome. He worked for many important people, for example the Pope Gregorio XIII or Sisto V, in order to decorate the walls of the Sistine Library and of the Sistine chambers. He had been a friend of Caravaggio, major inspiration for the Tuscan painter. He also used real models in his paintings, without idealizing or sweetening them, in order to show the power of the real drama and tragedy of life.

When she was a little child, Artemisia was so fascinated by the ability of her father that she wanted to enter the artistic world in order to emulate him. Her father became her teacher and a personal point of reference, who was able to maximize her daughter's abilities. He introduced her to his world, teaching her how to prepare all the instruments used in order to create paintings as for example the colours' grinding; the oils' extraction and purification; the packing of brushes with bristles and animal hair; the resettlement of canvas and the reduction of the pigments into powder. In order to improve her artistic abilities, she copied her father's xylographies and paintings, as well as some incisions of Albrecht Durer.

Painting was considered at that time a path that could be taken only by men. For this reason, Artemisia could not receive the same education of her father and his colleagues; however, Orazio recognized that her daughter was extremely talented, more than her brothers. She also took other responsibilities as for example taking care of her family and the house; she had lost her mother, Prudentia di Ottaviano Montoni, in 1605, two days from her baptism in the church of San Lorenzo in Lucina, at the age of 12.

In 1608-1609, her relationship with her father became a sort of apprenticeship; she started to collaborate with Orazio in the creation or conclusion of some paternal paintings and

subsequently, she started to create her own ones as proof of having assimilated all her master's lessons.

In the pictorial circle founded by Orazio, there was Agostino Tassi²⁸, know as “Lo Smargiasso”²⁹, a 30 years old artist of thirty years old with an ambiguous talent. On one hand, he was a traditionalist, virtuous Mannerist, who painted using the so-called “trompe-l'oeil” perspective; on the other hand, he was also extremely appreciated for his creation of realistic airy and essential landscapes, such as the seascape. Orazio requested him to teach her daughter how to construct and create a perfect perspective in her paintings. This is one of the major reasons why Tassi moved around Artemisia's house.

Orazio and Agostino worked together in the creation of a fresco for the Cardinal Borghese at Monte Cavallo.



Orazio Gentileschi and Agostino Tassi, *Ceiling Fresco in the Casino delle Muse* in the Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi, Rome c.1611. (1a)

²⁸ “Tassi” was not the real surname of this man; the real one was “Buonamici”. His job as a painter, gave him the chance to change his plebeian surname into one of an old patron. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Article of Anne-Marie Boetti “*Nota su un affresco*”, *Abscondita*; Milano; 2015; p.131.

²⁹ “Smargiasso” is an Italian name, which stands for a person who boasts to have some qualities that he does not have in the reality, or to be able to do things, act, survive situations, even though he does not. Synonym: boaster; braggart. In this case, this word was used as an epithet in order to define the behaviour of this man.

The entire project was attributed to Tassi. This presents an illusionist perspective, which “breaks” the ceiling through high vaults and *grisaille* balconies, which remind us the dawn. Orazio intervened in the representation of the human characters, all metaphors of the life's “concert”: all the musical instruments play and the beautiful female musicians lean out of the boards of the balcony, laughing at the public. This project started in the spring 1611 and finished in the summer of the same year. One year later, the scandal burst. Anne-Marie Boetti in her essay “*Nota su un affresco*” offers an interesting analysis of this fresco and its connection with the rape of Artemisia. She highlights an important detail, which could clarify this intricate triangle Artemisia – Agostino – Orazio. As the particulars of this fresco **(1a)** show, in the group represented, there is one woman who is depicted twice by Orazio Gentileschi **(1b)**; **(1c)**.



(1b) Particular of the fresco Casino delle Muse, “Artemisia and the fan”; O. Gentileschi (c.1611).



(1c) Particular of the fresco Casino delle Muse; O. Gentileschi (c. 1611).

These facial features are the ones of Artemisia, who was not only his daughter, but also his confidant. He showed to his colleague how his daughter was, her beauty, her body, her expressions, everything that was hidden behind the walls of his house. She seems to be treated as a good of Orazio's, who is envied by his friend Agostino. The latter worked for months with these two images of this beautiful woman, who was looking at him and probably augmented his desire for her and his male imagination every single day passed in this balcony.

In the first detail (2), Artemisia is depicted as a young, stout, beautiful woman, looking motionless, with an open fan and a provocative sway of her hips. She does not consider the black man behind her, who is following her. The second image (3) shows only a mysterious visage of the woman, crossed by the strings of the harp in front of her. Anne-Marie Boetti suggests a possible metaphorical lecture of this image. She compares the sign of these strings on Artemisia's face to three different elements: firstly, to the instrument's strings that will torture her in the Roman court the year after; secondly, to the prison's bars in which Tassi will be put during and after the trial, and thirdly,

to the tears that will mark Artemisia's face, after having discovered the double betrayal³⁰.

These two representations of the same woman have many traits in common: chubby cheeks, the slender corners of the mouth and a lonely and proud gaze. Could these two images have been a mean through which Tassi had increased his personal interest on Artemisia? Obviously, this question will remain unanswered. However, it opens an interesting gateway to the interpretation of the beginning of Agostino's unhealthy interest for Artemisia, which took him to rape her.

II.3 - The trial: Artemisia's testimony

The trial began on March 1612 and lasted for seven months, during which the judges had to hear different contradictory testimonies. As Elizabeth Cohen underlines, people “were pressed to tell a story that conformed to the categories of law and withstood the rigours of judicial inquiry. In the end, the judges heard a cacophony of sincere assertions, naïve dissimulations, wily plausibilities, and stonewalling lies³¹”.

This case had been classified under the name of “stuprum”, which meant being violently deflowered without the woman's consent; Artemisia had to prove that she had been subjected to physical violence and many people betrayed her (Agostino Tassi; Tuzia and Cosimo Quorli) and organized the rape. Artemisia's statements in the court were not enough for the judges, because they had to have some physical proofs about the loss of her hymen, through the examination of two different

³⁰ “Tuna strana premonizione ha “tatuato” il viso con corde dello strumento: il segno delle orrende cordicelle della verità che durante il processo tortureranno le sue dita? Le sbarredella prigionie del Tassi, che sarà un po' sua? Le lacrime che solcheranno il suo viso, per l'amarezza del doppio tradimento?”. Eva Manzio; “Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro”; Article of Anne-Marie Boetti “Nota su un affresco”, *Abscondita*; Milano; 2015; p.134.

³¹ Elizabeth Cohen; *The trial of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*; *Sixteen Century Journal*; 2000; p.56.

midwives and submitting her to a direct confrontation with her rapist, followed by a physical torture. Moreover, she had to highlight the fact that she never gave her own consent to a sexual relationship with Tassi and that she had fought to defend herself.

On the 28th of March 1612, Francesco Bulgarello interrogated Artemisia for the first time concerning her relationship with Agostino Tassi and the rape. She always answered every single question, describing the events' sequence with clarity and dignity. She began showing a general ignorance about the main reason behind that interrogatory. However, she could imagine it: a few days before, Tuzia di Stefano Medaglia, who lived in the second floor of her house³², had been arrested. Moreover, she accused her of being in league with Agostino in order to organize her rape: “she made a deal against me in order to organise deflower me”³³. When Tuzia moved in there, she immediately established a friendship with “lo Smargiasso”. Around the beginning of May 1611, Tuzia tried to persuade Artemisia to get to know Agostino because of his polite and gentle nature and his good company. Once the latter tried to gain her trust, revealing a secret about what one of the Gentileschi's servants, Francesco Scarpellino, was saying behind her back: he had deflowered her³⁴. Artemisia was not upset at all, because she knew what the truth was and the lies did not bother her. On the contrary, Agostino cared a lot about her honour.

Tuzia was not the only one who tried to persuade Artemisia. Cosimo Quorli bothered her with his advices concerning the acceptance of Agostino's courtship; encouraging her to gave

³² The Gentileschi's house was in Spirito Santo street, in Sassia. Tuzia started to frequent the Gentileschis in 1611; when Orazio found her entertaining her daughter. He was so much pleased about this female company that asked to Tuzia and her family to move to his second floor and becoming neighbours.

³³ “Ha trattato contra di me un tradimento tenendo mano a farmi vituperare” Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 16.

³⁴ “Agostino lui mi disse che detto Francesco s'andava vantando ch'io gli havessi daro quel che lui haveva voluto”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p.17.

herself to Agostino, also because to him she was already a non-virgin, who used to have many lovers³⁵.

In the following day, Orazio, unaware of the situation, suggested Tuzia to bring Artemisia to San Giovanni Church. There, they met Agostino and Cosimo. After the mass, Tassi insisted in vain on walking her home and in the end was forced to follow her from afar. Arrived at her house, Agostino complained about her lack of interest towards him; threatened her saying that she would have paid for it and he went away³⁶. In the same day, after lunch, Artemisia was depicting a portrait of one of Tuzia's children. The masons, who were working inside the room, left the door open and Agostino entered. He ordered Tuzia to leave them alone; while Artemisia begged her to do the contrary. Tassi took the palette out of her hands and leaned his head on her breast, asking her to take a walk inside the room. Tuzia went outside, leaving the couple alone. After the third round of the room, they reached the door; he locked it and pushed her in the bed. He put one of his hands on her breast and the other was on the mouth, blocking any her tentative of screaming and one of his knee was between her legs, in order to prevent her from closing them. He heaved her dress and pushed violently his member inside hers, while she was trying to ask for an help. Artemisia tried to defend herself and with difficulty, scratched his face, tore his hair and before he could put his member inside her again, the young woman had been able to remove a piece of skin from it. Despite all, he continued hurting her. When the sexual assault was over, Artemisia took a knife and threatened Agostino to kill him. He challenged her, opening his jacket and waiting for her reaction. She tried to stab him, but

³⁵ “N'avete dato a tanti ne potete dar'anco a lui”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 17.

³⁶ “[...] e cominciò a lamentarsi ch'io mi portavo male di lui e che non li volevo bene dicendomi che me ne sarei pentita[...].” .Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 18.

he blocked the blow, even though he had been scratched a little. Tassi tried to calm her a little, taking her hand and promising her that he would married her one day. Artemisia underlined that his words convinced her to give herself several times in the past year of their relationship³⁷.

Another important question that Francesco Bulgarello asked her was about the broken hymen. Artemisia explained that in that moment she was on her period, so she had already a loss of blood, however she noticed that its colour became intense and darker than the usual one. Artemisia could have lied to all the judges about her deflowering, saying that effectively she had lost a lot of blood and could have added many other details in order to increase the negative reputation of Tassi. However, she did not do anything like this at all, which could be a confirmation about the truth of her testimony and this could have gained judges' trust. The latter had some problems in order to believe her completely and considering it as a real case of rape. Her story needed to satisfy two evidential requirements for “stuprum”: demonstrating her previous virginity and proving her refusal to give her own free consent to the man. In the first case, Artemisia highlighted the fact of being on her period at the moment of the assault, which prevented to have a clear vision about this situation. For this reason, another instrument was the

³⁷ “Serrò la camera a chiave e dopo serrata mi buttò su la sponda del letto dandomi con una mano sul petto, mi mise un ginocchio fra le cosce ch’io non potessi serrarle et alzatomì li panni, che ci fece grandissima fatica per alzarmeli, mi mise una mano con un fazzoletto alla gola et alla bocca acciò non gridassi e le mani quali prima mi teneva con l’altra mano mi le lasciò, havendo esso prima messo tutti doi li ginocchi tra le mie gambe et appuntendomi il membro alla natura cominciò a spingere e lo mise dentro che io mi sentivo che m’incedeva forte e mi faceva un gran male che per lo impedimento che mi teneva alla bocca non potevo gridare, pure cercavo di strillare meglio che potevo chiamando Tuzia. E gli sgraffignai il viso e gli strappai li capelli et avanti che lo mettesse dentro anco gli detti una matta stretta al membro che gli ne levai anco un pezzo di carne, con tutto ciò lui non stimò niente e continuò a fare il fatto suo che mi stette un pezzo addosso tenendomi il membro dentro la naturae doppo che ebbe fatto il fatto suo mi si levò da dosso et io vedendomi libera andai alla volta del tiratoio della tavola e presi un cortello et andai verso Agostino dicendo: “Ti voglio ammazzare con questo cortello che tu m’hai vittuperata”. Et esso aprendosi il gippone disse: “Eccomi qua”, et io li tirai con il cortello che lui si riparò altrimenti gli avrei fatto male et facilmente ammazzantolo; con tutto ciò lo ferii un poco nel petto e gli uscì del sangue che era poco perchè a fatica l’havevo arrivato con la punta del cortello. All’hora poi detto Agostino si allacciò il gippone et io stavo piangendo e dolendomi del torto che m’haveva fatto et esso per acquietarmi disse: “Avvertite che pigliandovi non volgio vanità” et io gli risposi: “Io credo che vediate se ci sono vanità”. *E con questa buona promessa mi riaquietai e con questa promessa anco me l’ha più volte riconfermata; [...]*”.Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; pp.19-20.

midwife's checkup. Two midwives, Diambra and Donna Catherina, did a gynaecological examination to confirm her deflowering. The results were not satisfactory at all because a lot of time had passed from the sexual assault and it was difficult to determine the exact moment of when it had happened.

Artemisia added other details about her relationship with Tassi. First of all, she underlined that all the their sexual relationships had happened only inside her house. Tuzia helped him to come in, leaving open the door that separated the two apartments. According to the analysis of the complex system of the Roman "Honour codes" of the XVIth century, Elizabeth Cohen explains that being raped and having a stable sexual relationship in the woman's house would have worsened the situation and compromised the honour of the entire family³⁸.

Artemisia made it clear that Tassi had an obsession for her. He often came in Tuzia's house just to check on her and on what she was doing. In public places, he never remained alone with her, except for two different situations. The first one happened in the road to San Giovanni. She was going to leave in her carriage with other people: her aunt Virginia, Tuzia and her children; when Tassi stopped it and got in it together with another man, sir Antonio. He asked to the coachman to change direction to Saint Paul. There they spent sometime together. In the way to go back, Tassi got out of it with his friend next to Sisto Bridge. The second meeting happened during the last Carnival, at Cosimo Quorli's house, where everyone was invited. There Cosimo and his wife managed to find a room in the apartment downstairs where they could have had some space alone and could have

³⁸ Elizabeth Cohen; *The trial of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*; Sixteen Century Journal; 2000; p.58.

taken advantage from the situation³⁹. Cosimo guarded the door and prevent Orazio to figure them out.

Before concluding her testimony, the inquisitors asked her to talk about her relationship with Cosimo Quorli. She confessed that the only man with who she had a sexual relationship was Agostino, while with Cosimo there had been a different approach. Before and after the rape, Quorli tried many times invain to have a physical approach with this woman. She reposed a particular situation that had happened few hours after having been deflowered by Agostino. Cosimo went to her house and forced Artemisia to have sex with him, but he failed. Before leaving the Gentileschi's house, he threatened the young girl by saying that he would have spread the voice about a sexual relationship between them; he wanted to boast about it. For this reason, Agostino, who believed in this lie, decided to break all his promises⁴⁰.

Bulgarello asked Artemisia if she had ever received any presents or money as price for having had a sexual relationship with him. The young woman always denied this: the main reason of keeping alive their bound was his promise of marrying her. The only present that she had received from him was a pair of earrings received on Christmas day. In exchange, Artemisia gave him twelve handkerchiefs⁴¹.

Before concluding this interview, she warned Bulgarello about a pact that Tassi, Quorli and Tuzia had made before the

³⁹ “Vostro danno se non havete fatto il fatto vostro”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 21.

⁴⁰ “Signor no ch'io non ho havuto mai che trattare carnalmente con alcuna persona altro che con detto Agostino. E' ben vero che Cosmo ha fatto tutte le sue forze per havermi innanzi e dopo che havevo havuto che fare con Agostino e fece tutte le sue forze per volermi sforzare ma non gli riuscì e perch'io non volsi consentirci lui disse ch'in ogni modo se ne voleva vantare e lo voleva dire con tutti, sì come ha fatto con infinite persone e particolarmente con il fratello chiamato Giovan Battista e la sua cognata et anco con Agostino che per questo sdegno si è retirato di volermi pigliare”, Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 22.

⁴¹ “Detto Agostino non m'ha mai donato cosa alcuna perchè io non l'ho voluto perchè quello che facevo seco lo facevo solo che m'havesse a sposare vedendomi da lui vituperata, eccetto che in questo Natale mi diede un paro di orecchini per mancia et io detti a lui dodici fazzoletti.” Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 22.

first was put in prison. Pietro Rinaldi, a painter and friend of Artemisia, heard them talking and agreeing on what to say at court, if all of them would have been imprisoned⁴².

Analysing the first and the only testimony of Artemisia, we do not find weak woman, but a person who is extremely aware of all the consequences brought by the rape and the trial. As Elizabeth Cohen highlights, judging from the way in which Artemisia talked in her interrogatory, it seemed that the sexual assault had not had a bodily or psychological impact on her: she focused more on the social aspects connected to her persona. Obviously, being violently deflowered had brought her a strong physical pain: the evening of the rape, Orazio saw her daughter lying on her bed complaining about not feeling well. Yet, Artemisia seemed to care much more about the fact that she was a respectable and admired professional woman, not a libertine who wanted to disrespect her father, her family and obviously her future. She tried even during the direct confrontation with Tassi, during which she was submitted to “La Tortura della Sibilla”, the Torture of the Sybil, to defend herself and her dignity as a violated woman and to prove that the man who promised her marriage and real love had mocked her.

Her report contains all the proofs that were needed to classify this case as “stuprum”. There is not only an attempt to convince the judges about the loss of the hymen, describing the blood colour and the physical pain felt in that moment; she also underlined her will to resist Tassi's aggression (scratches, hurting his member and threatening him with a knife). In addition to this, Agostino's promise of marrying this woman and his obsessed interest in her private life and acquaintances was

⁴² “[...] la sera innanzi che Agostino fosse preso peggiore venne con Cosmo da Tutia e tutti e tre insieme s'accordorno et instruirno di quello che dovevano dire se fossero stati presi che così m'ha detto il mio compare chiamato Pietro Rinaldi pittore.” Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 22.

another important piece of evidence. Yet, another interesting aspect was her denial of having had any sexual relationship with any other man, as for example Cosimo Quorli. All these elements had to be present in the confession of a rape victim; they lent credibility to the woman and augmented the possibility to be indemnified for the loss of this important social and physical asset, the hymen. Women were indemnified through a dowry that could restore their family name or by forcing the victim to marry her rapist or another man.

If the judges caught signs of love in the victim's words towards the rapist, she was considered culpable because she was emotionally involved in this relationship. Moreover, in this patriarchal society and in all cases of “stuprum”, women were considered a priori culpable: they did not have the same right as men did and even from a religious point of view, they represented the weaker sex and the main expression of temptation for men in this world. If women were victims of rape, the latter happened because basically they wanted and caused it.

Premarital defloration happened without consent of the woman, as if Artemisia's case, followed by a promise of marriage, put the rapist in a situation in which he had to honour his commitment, maintain alive his relationship with the woman and marry her. Elizabeth Cohen highlights the fact that this “loss could sometimes be made good”, because “if promises of marriage were made in private accompanied by sex, [...] for many, it was part of courtship”⁴³.

However, Artemisia 's testimony shows a bigger disappointment towards the betrayal of Tuzia than the one of Tassi. Apparently, the Gentileschi's tenant was not an ally of

⁴³ Elizabeth Cohen; *The trial of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*; Sixteen Century Journal; 2000; p.58.

Artemisia, as she thought, she had organized the rape together with Agostino and Cosimo.

II.3.1 - Tuzia ' s testimonies

Francesco Bulgarello and Porzio Camerarlo have interrogated Tuzia twice, on the 2nd and on the 23rd of March in the prison of Tor di Nona, about her relationship with the victim and the rapist. In the first interrogatory, she immediately underlined that she was unaware of the reason of her imprisonment. During the previous year, she had been living in the apartment above the Gentileschis in the Santo Spirito house with her husband and their children. Orazio, who appreciated her friendship with his daughter, the spinster Artemisia, requested Tuzia. He was happy that the latter found somebody with who she could spend her time. Tuzia did not deny the fact that during this “cohabitation”, she used to pass lot of time together with Artemisia; working in her room and vice versa.

Orazio had many friends. Tuzia referred in particular to Agostino, the painter, with who Orazio worked together in many projects and Cosimo Quorli. They used to go out together and sometimes they kept early hours. She does not hide the fact that both men used to come to his house, even when Orazio was absent. Artemisia always talked to them and never refused their company⁴⁴. Tuzia underlined that it was Agostino who came frequently at her house. When Orazio was at home, he passed the time looking at how they practice painting and he cared showing his affection towards this family and in particular towards the young woman⁴⁵. When Orazio had to go away, he

⁴⁴ “Signor sî che molte volte quando li detti Agostino et Cosmo sono venuti a casa di detto Horatio e si sono trattenuti ivi la Signora Artemisia gl'ha parlato e gl'ha visti”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 28.

⁴⁵ “[...] e perché Artemisia stava là giù a basso nelle sue stanze lui andava giù alla porta che risponde nelle sue stanze per vedere quel che facevano lei e suo padre mostrava di voler gran bene ad Artemisia...le voleva gran bene e che per lei

asked Tuzia to take care of Artemisia; update him about visitors and persuade Artemisia of becoming a nun and giving up on any idea of getting married. Tuzia tried to convince her about it, but Artemisia never wanted to get into the subject.

In the second interrogatory, Tuzia added few important details about Artemisia's relationship with Tassi, which the young girl interpreted as betrayal. She talked about few occasions in which Artemisia used to go out with her, focusing in particular on the episodes happened in San Giovanni and in San Paolo. In their journey to San Giovanni, Artemisia's aunt Virginia and older brother, Francesco, accompanied the two women. Once arrived there, Artemisia immediately recognized Agostino and Cosimo and wanted to leave immediately the church and stay with them⁴⁶. Tuzia accepted. The young girl never remained alone with the two men; on the contrary, she walked keeping a certain distance from them.

In the road to San Paolo, they were travelling in a carriage with the young woman's brothers and other three people: the spinster Faustina, Lucrezia and Diego, when Agostino appeared with one of his friends. He stopped the carriage and went in. Artemisia knew that something was happening behind her father's back and she feared about the future consequences. On the contrary, Agostino did not care about the present situation⁴⁷ and ordered the coachman to go to San Paolo. Before arriving there, Artemisia went out of the carriage. Agostino and her brothers followed her. Tassi approached to the young woman, walking one next to the other, while her brothers were playing on the streets. The group reunited only inside the church. On the

e suo padre havria messa la vita.”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 28.

⁴⁶ “[...]Artemisia mi disse: “Guardate un poco là ecco là Agostino et Cosmo andiamoci con Dio”[...].” Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 29.

⁴⁷ “Voglio entrar ancor'io in tutti I modi e non mi curo che tuo padre lo sappia, anzi havrei caro che mi ci trovasse”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 30.

way back, Agostino and his friend got off the carriage in a little square next to Sisto Bridge.

Tuzia also describes the strong attachment that Agostino felt for Artemisia. She highlights that everywhere they wanted to go, Tassi followed them. Artemisia was his only thought and most of the time he got upset if Tuzia prevented him in having a close encounter with Artemisia. In fact, Tuzia refused more than once to open her door and let him in. Tassi reacted violently because he believed that another man was with Artemisia and Tuzia was protecting her. Tuzia was so afraid of this reaction that she had to open the door and show him that nobody was inside the house⁴⁸.

Tuzia also talked about the day of the rape. Tassi entered in Artemisia's room while she was portraying one of Tuzia's sons. The latter decided to go back to her house with her children, leaving Agostino and Artemisia alone with her brothers. The inquisitors asked her if she ever saw Agostino with some scratches on his face or with some little wounds. She gave a vague answer, underlining that she saw Agostino's face full of scratches and sometimes his eyes were even livid, however she could not remind the exact moment of when he got them⁴⁹.

She continued saying that she saw Agostino and Artemisia alone in her room more than once. In some cases, she was lying in her bed naked and next to her there was him, with his clothes on. They were caught laughing to each other. Tuzia underlined that she tried to intervene in many occasions, telling her off because that behaviour was not acceptable. Artemisia's answer

⁴⁸ “Insomma Signore non si poteva dare un passo in compagnia di Artimitia che Agostino sempre non li fosse appresso, sì quando s'andava alla messa come anco quando s'andava in altri luoghi; et Agostino per così dire spiritava di Artimitia e tribulava me quando non poteva avere comodità di entrar a parlare ad Artimitia e bussava alla mia porta che delle volte recusavo di aprirli e detto Agostino diceva ch'io c'havevo introdotto qualch'uno da Artimitia e bravava di far e dir et io per paura poi gl'aprivo et anco perché si chiarisse della verità che lì non ci veniva nessuno.”. Eva Manzio; “Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 31.

⁴⁹ “Signor sì ch'io ho visto non so che volte il Signor Agostino con il mostaccio sgraffignato et alle volte con gli occhi lividi e non mi ricordo di che tempo sia stato”. Eva Manzio; “Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 32.

was extremely rude: “What do you want! Think about yourself and do not meddle in other people's business!”⁵⁰, in addition to this, the young woman tried to defend herself saying that all the things that she did with Agostino were determined by the promise of marriage of the latter⁵¹.

Tuzia confirmed of being unaware of any sexual relationship between them, also because they always denied it. She added that Agostino was the only man with who Artemisia has ever been alone. Tuzia showed this attitude of maintaining a neutral position in this situation and not take defence of anybody. She created many contradictions and raised many doubts concerning her role and friendship with Cosimo Quorli and Agostino Tassi and if this coalition defined by Artemisia, was true between them.

Tuzia, in her testimonies, focused on three different people: Orazio, Artemisia and Agostino. The neighbour described Orazio in a positive way. He was a respectful and respectable man, surrounded by lots of friends and also a lovely father, jealous of her little daughter. Moreover, their friendship was based on a mutual trust. Orazio not only encouraged this woman and Artemisia in becoming friends and spending some time together, but also asked her to accompany to her daughter wherever she needed or wanted to go.

Talking about friendships, Tuzia did not hide the one that she had with Cosimo Quorli and Agostino Tassi. The latter was even a frequent guest of the Gentileschi's because he was interested not only in Orazio's pictorial lessons, but also in Artemisia. The two used to have a strong complexity, described by Tuzia in particular in the two episodes in San Giovanni and

⁵⁰ “Che volete voi! Abbadate a voi e non v'impicciate di quel che non vi tocca!”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 32.

⁵¹ “[...]detta Artemisia m'ha risposto che ciò faceva perché gli aveva promesso di pigliarla per moglie”. Eva Manzio; “*Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro*”; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 33.

in San Paolo. It was clear that he wanted to spend most of his time alone with her, talk to her and know her better. Artemisia, on her side, never refused his advances, differently from what she told to the inquisitors before. Tassi's affection was unhealthy. He was extremely jealous, he constantly looked for her everywhere she was and he got even angry, if he could not see her and control all her moves.

Tuzia's speeches presented little incongruities. First of all, she confirmed that the day of the rape, she abandoned Artemisia with Agostino in her room, while she was painting and she did not give any explanation about it, remaining extremely detached and vague from it. With the same attitude, Tuzia mentioned having seen some signs of fight, like scratches, in Agostino's face; however, she could no remember the exact moment of when he got them. Her "betrayal" is incoherent as well she said that she saw more than once Artemisia and Agostino talking and playing in the Gentileschi's bed. The girl was naked, differently from the latter. Tuzia blamed Artemisia for what she did and what can surprise everyone is the reaction of this girl. She was rude and unaware of the consequences of her actions, differently from the way she had spoken to the inquisitor days before. In this part of her speech lies another contradiction. Tuzia confirmed that she had seen the couple on Artemisia's bed more than once. Why did she declare herself as unaware of a possible carnal relation between them?

In conclusion, Tuzia testimony showed not only a betrayal towards her friendship with Artemisia, but also towards the agreement made with Agostino. Tuzia used Artemisia's words to underline that Agostino promised her marriage. Why did she underline this aspect to the judges, knowing that it could have ruined Agostino's position? Why she did not protect and help him and consequently, respected their pact?

II.3.2 - Gian Battista Stiattei's testimony

Gian Battista Stiattei was interrogated on the 24th March in the Roman Curia 's office, the day after the last testimony of Tuzia. He was a friend of Gentileschi's, who tried to stoutly defend Artemisia from all the charges. His confession was extremely fruitful, because he revealed many details not only about Tassi 's feelings, but also the ones of the other enemy for Artemisia: Cosimo Quorli. Stiattei also brought some letters, received from the two men, which proved the veracity of his side of the story. As he underlined more than once, he had a strict friendship with them, for this reason, it was not difficult to get news confidently.

This testimony talks about three different topics: the first one, Agostino's love for Artemisia; followed by Cosimo's affection for the girl and the conclusive chapter about the strange case of the painting's theft, giving us a different point of view compared to the one of Orazio, seen in his letter to the pope. Stiattei was aware of the entire story and of the main reason behind Tassi and Tuzia's imprisonment. He also knew that his deposition could have made this story clearer and for this reason. He underlined the culpability of both Agostino Tassi and Cosimo Quorli, because they took advantage from their friendship with Orazio to organize the deflowering of the young woman. Agostino already knew this woman right from his arrival in Rome thanks to Quorli and the latter tried to let them meet in many ways. The first encounter with Cosimo's family happened in the road to Monte Cavallo, where Orazio wanted to show his last frescos. After the exposition, everybody got invited to have dinner together at Cosimo's house. In that occasion, Agostino started to know Artemisia better and through Cosimo's help, he started to frequent the Gentileschi, even when Orazio was absent. Cosimo revealed to Stiattei that Tassi took the opportunity to rape Artemisia and maintain an active

sexual relationship with her. Artemisia wanted to marry Agostino because he took her virginity. Tassi revealed him many details concerning his personal situation. He defined his relationship with Artemisia as an intricate labyrinth created by Cosimo, who became one of the major obstacle to their marriage. However, he could not stay away from Quorli because there were “bigger causes” to solve as soon as possible⁵² and Cosimo could have helped him. In order to do so, Tassi had to go back to Tuscany and after that he would have married Artemisia in order to respect the promise made to God and to his beloved Artemisia. Tassi was obsessed with Artemisia. Once Orazio wanted to arrange a marriage between his daughter and a young man known as “il Modena”, however everything was ruined by Agostino's intervention. The latter confessed that Artemisia was his property and no one else's⁵³. He was jealous of the other suitors. Unfortunately, Tassi was not the only one interested on her. Cosimo revealed that he was in love with Artemisia too⁵⁴. He considered her as an easy woman because he saw her having a sexual relationship with another man. For this reason, he tried to force her in having sex with him too, but he always failed. He did all of this, regardless Tassi's feelings for her. He also told him what he liked about these two attempts of raping her. Agostino could not rebel against Cosimo because the latter was his benefactor. Stiattei revealed that months before Artemisia's rape, Agostino had told Quorli that he had a wife in Tuscany, called Maria, met in Livorno. One day, this

⁵² “[...] Agostino hebbe che fare carnalmente con detta Artemisia e la sverginò, sì come più volte m'ha detto Agostino in confidenza. Et anco dal medesimo Cosimo più e più volte ho sentito che sia vero che detto Agostino l'habbi sverginata, et a questo proposito Cosmo molte volte s'è lassato intendere con esso me che havendola sverginata Agostino, voleva che lo sposasse. Et Agostino infinite volte reggionando con me di questa materia m'ha detto che in qualsivoglia maniera lui è obligato di sposarla ma che Cosmo guasta lui questo negotio dicendomi: “se ben il Signor Cosmo mostra di volere ch'io la sposi, nondimeno ho delle cause talmente grandi che sono in necessità di non portlo fare.”. Eva Manzio; *“Artemisia Gentileschi Lettere precedute da Atti di un processo per stupro”*; Abscondita; Milano; 2015; p. 33.

⁵³ “[...] m'ha confessato più volte essere la verità che lui non ha voluto che nessuno pretenda in quella casa, intendendo ch'artemisia fosse sua e non di altri; e dal medesimo Cosmo m'è stato detto più e più volte ch'Agostino ha guasto lui tutti li parentadi perché non voleva ch'Artemisia avesse d'havere occasione con altri che con esso lui.”. *Ibidem*, p. 39.

⁵⁴ “[...] et io, parendomi di conoscere che Cosmo ancor fosse innamorato di Artemisia”. *Ibidem*, p. 37.

woman left him for another man. Agostino was so upset, that he moved in to his brothers-in-law 's house in Rome, and raped his wife's sister, from whom he had even children. In 1611 he had been accused of incest and Cosimo, who was a papal executive, had been able to acquit him. In addition to this, few months after his moving in Rome, Tassi hired two assassins in order to kill his wife. Stiattesi underlined that he did not know the identities of those men, but he was certain that they stabbed Maria till her death and after that they came to Rome to be paid. Some letters of Tuscan merchants had confirmed this news that Tassi showed him⁵⁵⁵⁶.

Another shocking topic revealed by Stiattesi was Cosimo's pretence of being Artemisia's real father. He used to ask around if people could notice some similarities between himself and Artemisia. He was extremely convinced about his paternity because there were similarities between them, as for example their faces' shape, eyes and eyelashes. Stiattesi asked him if it was right trying to have sex with a girl who could have been her daughter. Cosimo was not worried at all because to him incest was a way to make their family bigger. Stiattesi underlined that there were other people who could confirm his version, as for example his wife Portia⁵⁷ and Cosimo's servant Dianora.

⁵⁵ “Ho dopoi saputo dal medesimo Agostino che esso ha fatto ammazzare la sua moglie e n'ho visto le litere risponsive di mercanti lucchesi, pisani e livornesi nelle quali ho tocco con manoche la moglie era stata ammazzata. E per prima alcuni mesi haveva tocco non so quante pugnalate ma non potette succedere lihomicidio. [...] Io non so chi habbi ammazzato la detta Maria ma è stata amazzata per quanto m'ha detto Agostino in Mantua [...] che saranno circa tre mesi et anco m'ha detto che quelli ch'havevano fatto il servitio erano venuti a Roma per il pagamento [...] E dette litere detto Agostino me l'ha mostrate in casa sua [...] le quali litere so anco che l'ha mostrate a Artemisia che così lei m'ha detto.”. Ibidem, p. 38.

⁵⁶ Artemisia did not know about Tassi's wife and she underlined this fact in her testimony. She said that only after months she discovered the truth about him having a wife and she immediately felt a sense of betrayal, because he always denied it and highlighted that she was the only one with who he had a sexual relationship. “[...] e perché io doppo hebbi notitia che luihaveva moglie mi dolsi seco di questo tradimento e lui sempre me l'ha negato dicendomi che non haveva moglie e sempre me l'ha confermato che altro che lui non m'haveva presa”. Ibidem, p. 20.

⁵⁷ Portia Stiattesi had been interrogated on the 16th May in the house of Santo Spirito. Her testimony went against Agostino Tassi. She confirmed her husband's confession, saying that this man was extremely interested in artemisia and in her social life. He asked her many times to meet to have a private talk. One evening, Porzia, Giovan Battista Stiattesi their son Aloisio, Artemisia and her brother Giulio decided to go to Corte Saravella. Once arrived there, Agostino was waiting for them and he immediately addressed to Artemisia in order to propose her and make sure she understood that he wanted to keep his promise. He said her: “ My lady Artemisia, you know that you have to be mine and not of

The last part of his interrogatory is about the disappearance of the famous painting of Judith, previously mentioned by Orazio in his letter to the pope. It was a painting without a committee. Artemisia decided to give it as a gift to Tassi. Quorli liked it so much that decided to forge Artemisia's assignment in his favour. Stiattesi knew about this scandal and wrote a letter to Cosimo, who had to blame himself for his action⁵⁸.

His version of facts was different from the one of Orazio. The latter accused both Agostino and Cosimo of having stolen this painting from Artemisia's hands, underlining that the painter of this work of art was himself. This act was such an incredible lack of respect for Orazio, who compared it to an attempt of killing him. In Stiattesi version, readers do not deal with a sort of personal cahoots of Tassi and Quorli, but with the real author of the painting, Artemisia, who after having finished her work, decided to give it as a present to her lover Agostino. Following Stiattesi's speech, the real thief of this painting was Cosimo, who wanted to get his revenge on Tassi's relationship with the young girl. He changed the name of the receiver with his one and hide it in order that nobody could find it. This report left readers with few unanswered questions: why did Orazio write to the pope that both the two men were culpable of the disappearance of the painting, even though he knew that it was not like this and accusing Agostino Tassi of another crime unnecessarily? Moreover, why did Orazio pretend to be considered the real author of this painting and not recognize her daughter's abilities in front of everyone, including the pope?.

anybody else's and you know that I made a promise and I want to keep it [...] if I do not marry you, may devils get into my body as much as the hair that there in my head and in my beard, for the rest of my life [...] Let's switch the rings". Artemisia was happy to hear his proposal, but few days before, she discovered that he was married to another woman, who probably was already dead. For this reason, Artemisia wanted to make sure that her wife was really dead before accepting his proposal and Tassi confirmed the death of Maria. However, he asked her to tell to everybody that he was not the man who deflowered her but it was another person's fault, who died recently. The woman refused to tell a lie, because as she underlined, he raped her in her chamber the last May. *Ibiden*, pp. 93-95).

⁵⁸ Stiattesi brought proofs for his testimony. They were made up not only of his letter of reproach towards Cosimo Quorli, but also of some sonnets written by Agostino Tassi for Artemisia, in which he showed his love for her.

II.3.3 - Agostino Tassi's testimonies

Differently from all the other people, Tassi had been interrogated in the prison of Corte Savella in five different days: the 26th March, 8th - 12th - 14th April and 11th May. He told his personal story, mentioning not only his previous life in Tuscany with his dead wife Maria Cannodoli but also the one in Rome focusing on his friendship with Cosimo Quorli, Gian Battista Stiattesi and Orazio Gentileschi. and his relationship with Artemisia. His answers concerning the last topic were denials of every accusation.

The 26th of March began his first interrogatory. He admitted that it was not his first time behind the bars. In fact, he had already been put in prison three times: the first time happened because he was accused of having had a sexual relationship with his sister-in-law Costanza. He was freed without paying any fine or reimbursement. The second time he was put in the jail of Tor di Nona for nonsense and he had been immediately released. The third time happened in Livorno. He fought with a man but, even in this case, he had been freed after few hours.

The inquisitors asked him to talk about his past and describe himself a little. Tassi was born in Rome but at the age of 12 had moved to Florence, where he had become a painter and worked for important people as the Grand Duke. When the latter died, he had moved back to Rome accompanied by his two sisters Olimpia and Clelia and helped by his sister-in-law Costanza and her husband Filippo.

Talking about his relationship with Costanza, Tassi underlines that his brother-in-law and his wife were already in Rome when he arrived there. After few days, they bought a house all together in Saint Onofrio. He kept alive this beautiful friendship with Filippo even after having been accused of incest.

The next question was about his wife's death. Agostino confirmed that she had died in Tuscany when he was already in Rome and for this reason, he could not reveal exactly when she died. He got married eight years before and used to live with Maria in Lucca, however two weeks before his departure to Rome, he had been left because she went away, after having stolen him seven or eight crowns and precious objects made of silver and gold. Only after his arrival in the “Urbe”, did he hear from his friends about her death⁵⁹.

Agostino affirmed that he has several friends in Rome, met in the pictorial cycle of Orazio Gentileschi. With the latter he had collaborated in several paintings and frescos, while he used to go out with Gian Battista Stiattesi and Cosimo Quorli. However, through the passing of time his friendship with Gentileschi and Stiattesi ended because they were thieves who betrayed him. Tassi borrowed them a big sum of money months ago, but they have never give it back, avoiding him every time they could.

In his second testimony released the 6th of April, Tassi described Stiattesi as a different person, compared to the one previously seen: a womanizer, who loved deflowering virgins and being surrounded by several women. He had got pregnant a 50-year-old woman and a son had been born. Stiattesi's passion brought him to ask to Agostino to write for him sonnets. Once Gian Battista organised an encounter between Tassi and one of his neighbours, known as “ *la Bernascona*”, in order to thank him for his help. Stiattesi's main interest has always been Artemisia. They were madly in love with each other and had strong sexual relationship⁶⁰. Agostino defended himself by

⁵⁹ In his testimony Tassi gave the names of his friends: Signor Bonaventura Mattia, Giovanni Segni; others warned him about it but he did not remembered their names. *Ibidem*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ “[...] e m'ha anco detto ch'era innamorato della figliola del Gentileschi, e lei di lui, e che si fottevano insieme, [...] in offitio ha sverginato zitelle et impregnato donne, che impregnò anco una donna quasi di 50 anni, e n'ha un figliolo”. *Ibidem*, p. 51.

saying that he tried to dissuade Stiattesi more than once and blamed him for his actions, because he did not respect his strong friendship with Orazio Gentileschi. Unfortunately, his interventions were useless because Stiattesi kept going to Artemisia's house and staying with her.

Even Tassi used to go to the Gentileschi's house as well. However his reasons were different: he had to teach to Artemisia the concepts of perspective. This commitment explained his presence there even when Orazio was absent. However, he never talked to her or remained with her alone, because there were always her brothers or Tuzia with them. Tassi added that the neighbour had to look after Orazio's "wild" daughter and her "wicked life". In fact as he revealed in his third interrogatory, the girl used to have inappropriate behaviours. During one evening, Artemisia, who believed that her father went to Quorli's house for a dinner, invited the painter called Geronimo Modenese at her house. What she did not know, was that her father was sticking around to control her. When he saw that a man got inside his house, he asked Agostino to come there immediately because he needed his support to beat him with a stick. Orazio discovered that it was two years since Geronimo had been having a sexual relationship with her daughter. Speechless and dishonoured, accused Artemisia of being a "whore" and a "hopeless case"⁶¹. Agostino described in a generic way even other people who used to visit the young girl: "One of them was a tall young man and red stubble, dressed with long silk clothes."⁶². Once, he discovered them together, hugged one with the other; Artemisia prayed him not to tell this to her father.

⁶¹ "[...] questo suo dire che la sua figlia faceva cattiva vita voleva infierire ch'era una puttana e che non sapeva come si far a rimediarci". Ibidem, p. 55.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 59.

Tassi used to blame Tuzia even for allowing people like them, to get inside the house and not preventing Artemisia's flirts. He saw Artemisia with Tuzia only twice: the first time they were walking in the “*Corso*” street and the second time was in San Onofrio. He denied having met them inside the church, but once, Orazio warned him that Tuzia and Artemisia were going to San Giovanni's church and suspected that there was another reason behind their trip. He asked Tassi to check on them. When the latter arrived there, Artemisia had been able to get away from Tuzia. Agostino intervened and approached her, until they reached together the church of Santa Maria Maggiore and then he went back to Monte Cavallo to finish his fresco. It was not the first time that he had to intervene, because Tuzia often did not follow Artemisia everywhere she wanted to go.

He had also to explain was his presence in the carriage that was leading Tuzia, her children, Artemisia and her brothers to San Paolo. Agostino justifies himself saying that because of Orazio's lack of trust on Tuzia, he had to look after all the group. However, he was not alone, in fact, one of his friends, Antonio “the mason” went with him.

Tassi confirmed that he followed Artemisia out of the carriage and stayed with her until they reached the church, however they were not alone, because her brothers and his friend Antonio accompanied them. He tried to discuss with the young lady about her behaviour. Artemisia's explication was the typical one of a frustrated woman. In fact, she complained about being considered by her father as a substituted of her mother. Artemisia was left alone by her father most of the time, with no money to survive and also had to find a way to take care of all her brothers⁶³.

⁶³ “Che vuoi che ci faccia, m'ha condotto qui mio padre così, la prima cosa perchè lui stette una volta venti dì pregione e mi lasciò in necessità di una pagnotta e l'altra perché lui vuole usar meco a punto come se li fosse moglie”. *Ibiden*, p. 65.

In the testimony of the 14th April, he talked about a marriage between Artemisia and Geronimo Modenese that had never been celebrated. Tassi reported that Orazio was organizing it and he helped him to make sure that nothing could go wrong. Unfortunately, Modenese raised an issue: he heard about the negative reputation of the girl and in one of their dialogues, he called her “whore” because it was said that she had sex with many other people before him⁶⁴. Orazio was desperate and he asked Tassi to save that marriage talking with Modenese and changing his mind. Agostino tried to dissuade the young man, talking about the beautiful memories he collected with Artemisia. At the beginning, Tassi succeeded but the marriage failed anyway, because one day, Modenese caught Artemisia disrespecting him. In fact, because he did not totally trust her, he asked his friends to control her house, in particular all her moves and visitors. Unfortunately, in that house, the chaos ruled.

On The 11th May 1612 the judges required another short interrogatory, because Tassi version was incompatible with all the other ones. The rapist constantly denied any sexual relationship with Artemisia: “I never knew her carnally”⁶⁵.

II.3.4 - Two “false” testimonies: Antonio Mazzantino and Nicolò Bedino

Antonio Mazzantino was interrogated twice: on the 8th and 9th of June in the prison of Corte Savella. The previous night of his interrogatory, he visited Tassi, who explained him that it was Orazio's fault if he had been put in jail. However, Mazzantino swore that they never discussed it further.

⁶⁴ “[...] detto giovane mi disse che era stato benissimo informato che Artemitia era una puttana. [...] lui lo sapeva benissimo che lei era una puttana, che c'haveva havuto a fare non solo lui ma sapeva che c'havevano anco havuto a che fare con molti altri”. Ibidem, p. 67.

⁶⁵ “[...] perchè io non ho mai havuto che trattare con lei carnalmente”. Ibidem, p. 76.

In the past year, he had the chance to go to Tassi's house twice and spend some time with him, indeed, he never improved his friendship with Orazio. In fact the only thing that he could say about the family of the latter, was that he had three sons and a daughter, whose name could not remember even because he never met her. After that he immediately contradicted himself saying: “ I want to tell the truth because once, I saw the daughter of the Gentileschis in her room with other women ”⁶⁶.

The next day, he added other details about this complicated case, which were in contrast not only one with the other, but also with the ones revealed by Tassi days before. The first question was about the episode happened in the road to San Paolo. He said that he was with Agostino and the latter invited him to go to the Gentileschis' house. When they were approaching there, they saw the carriage leaving and Agostino stopped it to get inside. Mazzantino entered the carriage as well. In it, there were the three sons of Orazio and four women, including Artemisia, Tuzia and one of her daughters. At first he declared: “Nobody got out of the carriage, until we arrived in San Paolo and we went out all together”⁶⁷. However, he immediately changed his version of facts, saying that few minutes before their arrival, Artemisia and Agostino got out of the carriage and he followed them. The inquisitors asked him why they did this, but Mazzantino did not have an answer for that and concluded his speech saying that they came back all together, but Agostino and him stopped next to the Sisto bridge.

He confirmed that he knew Artemisia before this episode. In fact, he saw her for the first time, at one of her house's windows. He was standing outside with Agostino, because they were waiting for Orazio to have dinner out together.

⁶⁶ “ Io voglio dire la verità perché io ho visto la figliola di detto Gentileschi un giorno in camera dove c'erano altre donne”. *Ibidem*, p. 71.

⁶⁷ “Non uscì mai nessuno di carrozza sino a che non arrivammo a San Paolo dove uscimmo tutti insieme”. *Ibidem*, p. 73.

In conclusion, he did not know if Artemisia and Tassi had other possibilities to remain alone, or if the man was in love with her, because the latter never talked about women or about his personal feelings.

The 8th of June, Nicolò Bedino willingly showed up in the Curia's offices to testify on behalf of Agostino Tassi, sustaining his innocence and accusing Artemisia of having had affairs with several men. He began his speech, saying that he knew both Orazio and Agostino. In fact, for three years, he lived next to the Gentileschis and worked as Orazio's boy. Tassi, instead, was a long time friend and also his private teacher. He described the latter as "an honourable and rich man"⁶⁸, who went round with respectable men.

The inquisitors asked him questions regarding Artemisia. Bedino told them that he often saw her having strange attitudes. An example was that he caught Artemisia with many letters from unknown senders. The young woman could not write a word and for this reason she often asked him or even her brothers to pick them up. This uncomfortable situation brought him to leave the Gentileschis. Another negative attitude were her flirts with three different men, with who she probably had a sexual relationship. They were: Geronimo Modenese, a painter dressed with long clothes called Antigenio and Francesco Scarpellino, who confessed him that sometimes he took her by the hand and accompanied her in her room⁶⁹.

⁶⁸ "[...] uomo onorato e di buona condizione". Ibidem, p. 106.

⁶⁹ After Bedino's deposition, the court decided to interrogate him other times, in order to verify if he was telling the truth or not, in particular about who had been his real employer between Orazio or Agostino. This assessment was fundamental because in the first case, it would have acquitted Tassi, and consequently, Artemisia would have been considered a non virgin even before the rape. Lot of people, friends of both painters, were requested in the tribunal in order to verify the two versions of the story. Among them, Agostino's step sister, Olimpia de Bargellis, testified against her own brother, saying that he was capable of committing abhorrent things. Moreover, she added that Orazio had been fundamental to free Agostino from all the accuses that the latter received in 1611, when he had been denounced of incest with his sister-in-law. Between the two painters there was a strong friendship based on mutual trust. This also sustained Orazio's statements, who declared that his house's doors were always opened for both Quorli and Tassi. Another painter, friend of the Gentileschis, Carlo Saraceni, declared that Artemisia was always segregated in her house, also because her father was extremely jealous. All these details given to the judges, brought them to reconsider all the

II.3.5 - The two confrontations

Agostino Tassi vs Artemisia Gentileschi

On the 14th of May, Tassi was again called to testify his version of facts, because the latter did not satisfy the judges. However, this time he had to be confronted with Artemisia. This confrontation was characterized a cruel physical torture of the young woman, known as “*la Tortura della Sibilla*”⁷⁰. Artemisia ran the risk of losing her fingers and her career as painter. Elizabeth Cohen said that forcing her to this kind of torture was the only mean through which the judges could trust again a non-virgin like her⁷¹.

Before this encounter, Tassi and Artemisia both confirmed their previous reports, underlining their innocence and that they were ready for a direct confrontation. The woman had to sign a trial record in order to meet and talk to Tassi. The latter began accusing her of having had several flirts with different men and for this reason her house swarmed with people. He gave the names of two men, with who Artemisia apparently had a sexual relationship: Francesco Scarpellino and Pasquinio da Fiorenza. Tassi concluded his speech saying that he never stole a painting from her father; on the contrary, he tried to maintain a certain distance from their house, because he had already been involved in many other fights.

Artemisia had to reply under torture. During those endless minutes, she showed a ring, saying that it was the love token,

testimonies not only of Tassi's and Bedino's, who declared himself ready for a physical torture (happened in the 29th of October 1612), to prove that he was telling the truth; but also of the ones of all the other people who tried to slander the Gentileschis. Among them, there were the landlord Luca Finocchi, the painter Michelangelo Vestri and the neighbour of Orazio, Costanza Ceuli.

⁷⁰ The “*Torture of the Sybil*” was a well-know instrument of torture. Michael Kerrigan, in his book called “*The instruments of torture*”, described how it worked . He said that it provided the torsion of both thumbs, through a rope, which was tangled up in the form of a slipknot. In other cases, there was the possibility of putting other ropes and ornaments around all the other fingers, the two temples and the forehead. Every single rope was pulled with violence. It was an alternative of another torture, the crushing. Michael Kerrigan; “*Instruments of torture*”; Amber Books; Reprint edition; 2016; p. 59.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Cohen; *The trial of Artemisia Gentileschi: A Rape as History*; Sixteen Century Journal; 2000; p. 49.

which Tassi gave her as a promise of their future marriage⁷². In conclusion, she explained that Scarpellino and Pasquino were two family friends, who used to come at her house to meet Orazio and attend the pictorial circle. The first one had only sixteen years old and preferred her brothers' company instead of hers. The second one came at her house only once. She was seven years old and he never tried to touch her. In addition to this, she confirmed that she could barely read so, she never possessed letters coming from several men.

In conclusion, she highlighted again that she waited an entire year before denouncing him in the tribunal, because she hoped to become his wife and waited him to propose. However, when she heard that he was already married to another woman⁷³, she decided to give up on their relationship and feeling heartbroken, she needed to ask for a punishment.

Agostino Tassi vs Giovan Battista Stiattesi

The day after the previous confrontation, the 15th of May, Tassi had to talk with Giovan Battista Stiattesi. The latter started talking about their encounter, during which Tassi confessed his love for Artemisia. He regretted having deflowered her, because he had been teased by Quorli who guaranteed him that she was already a non – virgin. Only after, he realized the truth and the consequences that derived from it.

He added another important detail about Agostino's obsessed love for Artemisia. In the evening of the 1st May, Stiattesi, his wife Portia, his son Luisio, Artemisia and her brother Giulio went to Corte Savella. Once there, in the presence of Giovan Battista and Portia, Agostino apologized her because he did not keep the promise he made her and affirmed that he

⁷² “Questo è l'anello che tu mi dai et queste sono le promesse”. *Ibidem*, p. 81.

⁷³ “Io speravo di havervi per marito ma adesso non lo spero perchè so che havete moglie [...]”. *Ibidem*, p. 83.

was ready to marry her. He took her hand and gave her a ring. Artemisia was not convinced of his proposal and asked him if he was married to another woman. Tassi confirmed her that his wife was already dead, but he asked her a favour: she had to blame Cosimo Quorli of having raped her. He was already dead, so any negative consequences would have happened to them⁷⁴. Artemisia refused.

Tassi called Stiattesi “a forger and a liar”⁷⁵, who was trying to take a personal revenge on him. He denied every accused, even when Giam Battista showed to all the people present there all the letters that he already brought the day of his first report as physical proof of his accusations.

II.3.6 - The judgement

The trial continued for a few months; the court needed to verify all the witnesses' depositions. In fact, as Elizabeth Cohen highlights “Trials are multivocal, shaped by the conventional formalities of legal language and practice and by the diversity of the speakers' political, social and cultural positions”⁷⁶, so it was not easy to understand who was lying or who was telling the truth.

The 27th of November 1612, Agostino Tassi was condemned for having raped Artemisia Gentileschi, corrupted some witnesses and slandered Orazio Gentileschi. The judge Gerolamo Felice gave him the chance of choosing between two different punishments: five years of forced labour or exile from Rome. Tassi chose the latter.

⁷⁴ “Buttatela almeno addosso a qualch'un altro et dite che qualch'un altro vi ha sverginate, dite che sia stato Cosimo che in ogni modo è morto”. Ibiden, p. 90.

⁷⁵ “un falsario e un busiardo”. Ibiden, p. 92.

⁷⁶ Ibiden, p. 56.

II.4 - The “unconscious” feminism of Artemisia Gentileschi

The case of Artemisia creates a strong connection between her art and life and the topic of feminism. Obviously, it was premature to talk about female power and victory against the patriarchal society in the period in which this woman lived. Artemisia's story is extremely difficult to analyse from this point of view; her life hardly changed after the rape and the trial, which, as Elizabeth Cohen said, “were put at the centre of her identity and achievements”⁷⁷. Artemisia was able to reconstruct her new self: she moved to Florence, got married, had several children and even extramarital relationships. Moreover, this woman created her personal fame and was required by the most powerful European men, not because she had been raped and used it to act like a victim, but because she was extremely talented. She absorbed the pictorial abilities of Caravaggio, as for example the theatrical scenes, the strong use of the chiaroscuro and the attention to all the particulars in order to “give life” to famous religious and classical scenes. Her fame depended not on her past, but on her chameleonic capacities. However, we cannot totally exclude her past from her works: she was possibly influenced by her personal story and used it as an inspiration to better define and paint scenes, connected with the themes of female domination and destruction of a negative male power, drawn from classical and religious examples. She probably used her negative experience and memories to transform them into her art and personal style.

The four following examples betray this likely connection between this woman and the protagonists of her paintings.

The choice of these four paintings is based primarily on the period of their creation, after the trial; secondly, on the subject depicted and the instant in which they are “acting” in front of

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, p.56.

the public's eyes; thirdly, on the elements that are constantly repeated in all of them, defining the personal style of Artemisia.

II.4.1 - Judith slaying Holofernes

Artemisia's collection is characterized by a repertoire full of religious, classical and allegorical figures. Most of them had been recreated after years, showing her stylistic change and improvements. One of the main subject, depicted several times, was Judith. One of the most famous scenes, in which she is the undisputed protagonist, is called *Judith slaying Holofernes* (4). It was depicted in 1612-1613, few months after the conclusion of the trial and was reposed years later (1620), showing a different style, which was no more extremely connected with the one of Caravaggio, proving that she found her personal artistic path, refining the previous one.



(4)

Since 1612, her art had become more dramatical, dark and anxious. She depicted this scene four times; three of them, including this one, were similar to the famous painting of Caravaggio *Judith beheading Holofernes* (5).



(5)

Caravaggio's naturalistic style is characterized by dark, dramatic atmospheres, obtained by the way of the interplay of lights and shades, which defined all the reactions of the characters in this violent scene.

Artemisia augmented theatricality through a different disposition of the characters in this dark room. While Caravaggio had constructed the scene horizontally, Artemisia begins in the upper part of the painting with the maid, who helps Judith, trying to hold on Holofernes, while she is slaying him. The maid's hands cross not only with the one of the victim, who desperately tries to resist and fights to escape from that mortal female net, but also with of Judith's. The heroine shows coldness: she is emotionless, completely detached from the horrible spectacle that she is creating. She prevents the blood from ruining her precious clothes by moving out of the way a bit.

Artemisia focused all her painting into just one moment, which lasts only few seconds. It is a crucial situation, in which Holofernes' life is on the line. He is not completely dead or

completely alive; he is suffering and his soul is abandoning his body. This increases the presence of violence in the entire scene. The tension is intensified by his grimace of pain and the blood, which drips on the white blankets.

This violence recalls in a way the one that Artemisia experienced. Obviously in her case, nobody died, but the position of the bodies was inverted. Artemisia underlined that Tassi had forced her to lie down on her bed, and thus she could not move and find a way to free herself from Tassi's weight and strength. She was trapped; nobody could help her, and she could not scream. She knew how it was to be in Holofernes' position, condemned to death, which for Artemisia was more a "social" one, due to her loss of her hymen. There lies a possible connection between Judith's act and Artemisia's probable internal vengeance against Tassi. This painting could also be a silent impulse of the artist, who knew that painting is the only way through which she could talk in a patriarchal and misogynistic society.

In her paintings she was relatively free to share her personal desires, connected to situations that had never happened in that moment of her past. One of them is the concept of female help and support. In this painting, it is represented by the secondary character of the maid, who actively intervened in the murder. Her behaviour was in contrast with Tuzia's. Elizabeth Cohen said that this betrayal had been more destabilizing for Artemisia, than the one received by Tassi⁷⁸.

The young painter reposed this topic in another famous painting: *Judith with her maid*.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p.67.

II.4.2. - Judith with her maid

In this image (6), depicted years later (1618-1619), the public perceives again the topic of female help, which started in the previous work. In fact, Holofernes is already dead and his head had been put inside a casket that Abra, Judith's maid, has to cover carefully with a blanket soaked with blood. They have to sneak out of the tent and go back to Bethulia, without being seen or captured by Holofernes' guards.



(6)

This scene evokes tension and fear. The maid confirms her loyalty to this woman, even from a physical point of view. The two women are both looking at the right part of the painting, because probably they have heard a noise. The maid does not abandon her mistress; she waits for Judith's order. There are signs of the precedent fight: the sword that the protagonist has to hide and one lock of her hair, which falls from the beautiful and accurate hairstyle, seen even in the precedent painting.

II.4.3 - Giaele and Sisara

Another representation that shows another vengeance against a man is called *Giaele and Sisara* (7), made two years later in 1620. This story, as the one of Judith, is a religious one and derives from the Old Testament. Sisara, the general of Canaan's king, was oppressing the Israelites. However, during a fight, he lost against Barac, an Israelite soldier. Sisara escaped, trying to find asylum in Eber's house. The latter was considered his king's ally. Giaele, Eber's wife, welcomed him in her tent and gave him some milk. After that, Sisara fell asleep and Giaele stuck a picket in his temple, killing him immediately. When the Israelite army, who was searching for Sisara desperately, came to Eber's village and Giaele proudly showed the body of the dead man.

This story recalls Judith. These two women were able to free their population from dangerous men. Both planned to kill their enemies, ambushing them through their beauty and kindness. The two murders are both extremely violent and cruel. Artemisia shows again another female vengeance, based on Caravaggio's naturalism, theatricality and chiaroscuro. Artemisia created a calm and almost idyllic atmosphere.



(7)

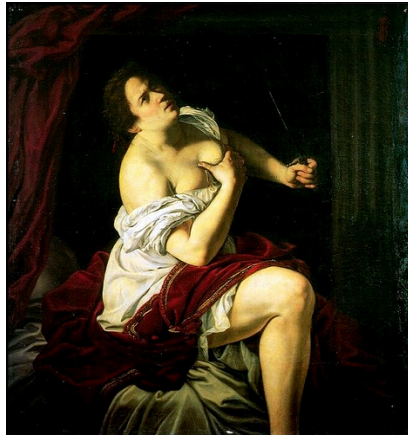
The warrior is depicted in a position of restful sleep, unaware of what is going to happen to him. It seems that he wanted especially to lean on Giaeles womb. The latter reminds us of Judith. She is wearing the same gold dress and her hairstyle is ruined too; some locks are placed on her shoulder. Even in this case, what strikes the public is the coldness of this woman, who probably does not know the seriousness of her action; moreover, it seems like this is an everyday act, which puts her at her ease. This strong light that hits her from the upper part of the painting and is cast the public on the murder weapon in her hands underlines her beauty.

II.4.4 - Lucrezia Scalini

The last painting chosen (8) is famous, not only for its composition, but also for its subject. Lucrezia had been a protagonist of one of Titus Livius' stories. She became famous because she killed herself after having been raped by an Etruscan king's son. Losing her virginity was such a big dishonour for her, that dying was the only solution to free her from all her inner pain. Her last words (*"it's better being dead than being dishonoured"*) became a sort of epitaph. Her story marked her as a martyr and example for all the women of the following centuries. Obviously, her myth had been reshaped according to the culture, the economical sensibility and the politics of the period considered. She was used as an example to sustain different topics as for example the murder of a tyrant, the value of suicide and the passion of rich people and prelates for naked women.

In Artemisia's painting, Lucrezia is usually represented bare-breasted, symbol of the female kindness. She became a representation of virtue, chastity and control of one's own sexuality, because she tried to defend and save what remained of

her honour. Artemisia found also a proper inspiration in her story.



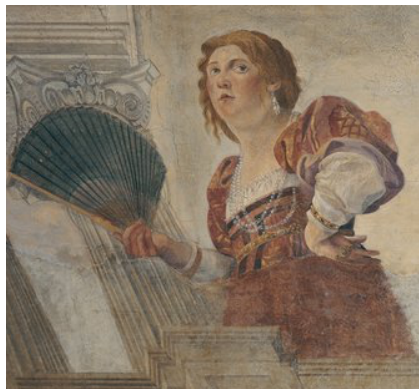
(8)

In 1621, Gentileschi depicted a moment of big pathos. Lucrezia is going to commit suicide. Her body is emerging from the darkness, enlightened by a strong light coming from the left part of the painting. Artemisia had been able to make the public focus not on the subject of the work of art, but rather on what is going to happen.

This is another definition of female power, connected with the memories of the dark past of the author of the painting. The rape is the main element shared by Artemisia and Lucrezia, but the way they use strength and power is totally different. The first one suffered in many ways during the trial: she had been betrayed by different people and friends, and physically tortured; however, she proved through her works of art, that she could start a new life and became a respected and desired artist all around Europe. She never considered suicide as an option to restore an inner peace, differently from Lucrezia. Could it be that Artemisia had become the “new Lucrezia” in the eyes of the public, because of the decisions she took and the strength she showed?.

II.4.5 - Self-portrait

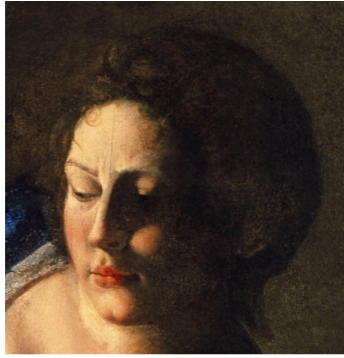
One of the main and recurring characteristics in all her works is the self-portrait. It is a fundamental detail, because in a way it highlights and reinforces this connection between Artemisia and her works. As it was said in a precedent paragraph, the painter used to be a beautiful robust young woman. Orazio Gentileschi gave us an idea of how his daughter was in his fresco “*Concerto musicale con Apollo e le muse*”(1). In order to see if we are dealing with real self-portraits or not, we should compare the foreground of each protagonists depicted by Artemisia with other portraits of the young girl realized by other artists.



Artemisia Gentileschi, detail from the fresco “*Concerto musicale con Apollo e le muse*” O. Gentileschi – A. Tassi, Palazzo Pallavicini – Rospignoli, 1611-1612. (1)



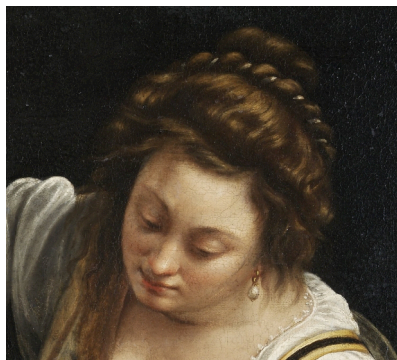
Portrait of Artemisia Gentileschi Simon Vouet, Private collection, 1623-1626. (9)



Particular of the painting *Judith slaying Holofernes*, A. Gentileschi, 1612-1613. (4)



Particular of the painting *Judith with her maid*, A. Gentileschi, 1618-1619. (6)



Particular of the painting *Giaele and Sisara*, A. Gentileschi, 1620. (7)



Particular of the painting *Lucrezia*, A. Gentileschi, 1621. (8)

It is not difficult to see that all the women shared the same physical characteristics: a bun with braids and curly locks; chubby cheeks; hair that turned into light brown colour on the basis of the power of the light; brown eyes, double chin. In the works *Judith with her maid* (6) and *Giaele and Sisara* (7), the two women share the same earring. After this long list of common elements, the question that springs to one's mind is "who is this girl; was she an unknown woman with an interesting physical appearance, who Artemisia used as a model or did she portrait herself?"

Looking at Orazio's work (1) and the one of Vouet, there are no doubts that those of Artemisia are self-portraits. In fact, all the previous physical characteristics are present even in these two paintings. In addition to this, the way the woman is dressed in these two representations reminds us of Artemisia's *Judith*, *Giaele* and her many other paintings, which are most of the cases allegories⁷⁹.

Why did Artemisia depict herself in the guise of well-known women, who had suffered from male assault and use different form of violence to find real freedom? It is an open question. Many interpretations are possible. The most likely one

⁷⁹ Other important paintings of Artemisia Gentileschi: "*Self-portrait with lute*" (1615); "*Self-portrait as allegory of painting*" (1630); "*The penitent Magdalene*" (1630).

could be that the most reliable model of female body that she could have immediately at hand, was the one that she knew better: herself. Another interpretation, is that all the paintings made a few years after her rape and the trial, representing female victims of the male power, were a means through which she could create a dialogue with the public, based on impossible revenges and cries for help. Painting was the only cure for her soul. Arguably, she never thought of becoming a feminist heroin and even a martyr; she just wanted to grow up as female painter.

For this reason this chapter is called “*the modern Judith*”, because as the classical Judith beheaded Holofernes, a wrong and violent man, a menace of her city Bethulia; Artemisia beheaded the patriarchal society twice: not only did she demonstrate her innocence during the trial, she also became a famous independent female painter.

III

Rape cases in England –

Margaret Knowsley & Suzan More

By the late seventeenth-century, English Church courts had to deal with several cases that were brought up by women who had been victims of male violence. At that time, a defamation suit was in general characterised by men, who played the role of the plaintiff and women who were the defendant. On the contrary, in church courts, women used to dominate in both roles. The example of York's church court shows that the female presence as plaintiffs doubled that of men, while their role as defendants was anyway higher than the male one. As the two tables show, in York women dominated over the 75% as plaintiffs and almost 60% as defendants.

Gender of plaintiffs in York church courts⁸⁰:

Gender	No. of plaintiffs	Percentage (%)
Male	45	33.3
Female	90	66.7
Total	135	100

Gender of defendants in York church courts⁸¹:

Gender	No. of defendants	Percentage (%)
Male	60	44.4
Female	75	55.6
Total	135	100

⁸⁰Steve Hindle, "The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in early modern England", *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 9, No.3, 1994, pp. 391-419, p. 41.

⁸¹*Ibidem*, pp. 391-419, p. 41.

In most cases, the female counterpart used to lose their judicial battles; as Robert Shoemaker underlined, “female stereotypes encouraged women to settle disputes in court as violence was deemed unfeminine”⁸². They were aware of the difficulties in challenging men in courts and they had to choose their battle carefully. Their motivation of bringing their rapist to court was connected with the effects of reputation and patriarchy. Reputation was the most important aspect for women because it played a substantial role in being or not accepted in the community. Moreover, male and female reputation differed considerably: in the first case, it derived more from a wealthy occupation and commercial honesty; in the second one, it depended more on women's conduct. There was also a difference in the treatments, on the basis of the sexual accusation received: women were easily vilified for all their actions; obliged to prove their innocence, only in few occasions, they were able to ruin male reputation. Charges against women were rare but at the same time effective because those proofs had to be highly detailed. They also needed the support of other witnesses, in particular other men, not only to be believed but also to convince the society to accept their version of facts.

When a woman was classified as a “whore”, it was a way to demote not only her but also her family to the lowest level of society. That term attacked directly both her purity and public conduct.

As Bodden shows, statistics revealed that the 91% of the cases in York were defamations for sexual slander or sexual assault.

82 M. C. Bodden, “Language as the Site of Revolt in medieval and Early Modern England, Speaking as Woman”, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 59.

Subject cases in York church courts⁸³:

Case Type	No. of cases	Percentage (%)
Sexual Slander/Character	123	91.1
Parentage	3	2.2
Witchcraft	2	1.5
Undefined	7	5.2
Total	135	100

In this city and in London, female defamation suit increased after the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In this chapter, I will focus on two different rape cases that happened in York and London. They are two opposed examples of two women, Margaret Knowsley and Suzan More who, victims of the same violence, reacted in a different way and reached a different ending. The first one will be unfairly condemned to physical punishment, even though all the evidence was against her rapist; the second girl was instead not only to defend herself publicly even through the support neighbours and respectable men, but also to change her fate from being a dishonoured woman to a respectable one.

III .1 - Margaret Knowsley

The case of Margaret Knowsley was the most infamous case of defamation in York. It emphasised the patriarchal power and the strong protection that men received a priori in cases like this. Before the trial, Knowsley did not have a good reputation. All the people of the city had already classified her as a “prettyface” woman; she was known for the miscarriage of an illegitimate child years before the unpleasant situation in which she was. She had a husband and multiple children. Her family lived a life of poverty and hardship. Margaret worked as servant for many families and important men. Her husband insisted that she started working for a clergyman of Nantwich called Stephen Jerome. She did not appreciate certain reactions of the latter,

83 Steve Hindle, “The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in early modern England”, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 9, No.3, 1994, pp. 391-419, p. 42.

which were extremely inappropriate. For this reason, Knowsley revealed to her close friend and cousin Alice Powell and her neighbour Margaret Howard that Jerome assaulted her twice in the summer and in the autumn of 1625. She explained that the clergyman solicited her sexual favours several times and in a variety of ways: “when she brought rushes into his bed chamber; at the stile behind the church; on her doorstep; while she did the laundry”⁸⁴. She also refused all his gifts. This rejection made the man more frustrated and reckless; consequently, he began to threaten her.

However, the woman did not want this case to become a public scandal and for this reason; she chose to reveal the incident only in confidential. Unfortunately her “friends” spread the voices and Jerome accused her of false gossiping. Knowsley tried to retract her allegations in 1626, but the local magistrates wanted to blame her, rather than the minister, for the scandal caused. The trial began in 1627, during which judicial failure was perceived in many different ways. Firstly, the oaths of other testimonies were not required. Secondly, witnesses were all examined in Knowsley’s absence. The woman’s petition disadvantaged her because it constantly referred to her body, her sexuality and this evoked for the judges a major source of male anxiety: the “dependence of men’s identity on women’s sexual honor”⁸⁵. Knowsley was “confident, eloquent and forceful in her claims whereas Jerome stayed entirely silent”⁸⁶. She was able to underline the different knowledge and sexual position of the woman in that society and also accused the judges of being corrupted men, who advantaged Jerome. The Nantwich judges were “all unimpeachable judicial authority that corroborated

84 *Ibidem*, pp. 391-419, p. 392.

85 M. C. Bodden, “Language as the Site of Revolt in medieval and Early Modern England, Speaking as Woman”, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 59.

86 Steve Hindle, “The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in early modern England”, *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 9, No.3, 1994, pp. 391-419, p. 399.

Knowsley's version of events"⁸⁷; moreover, they were all clergymen and so, colleagues of Jerome. For this reason, it was extremely difficult that they could destroy the reputation of a man belonging to their social class. Even though there was no proof against her and no witness laid charges against her, the latter asked compassion from the judges, but instead "she was sentenced to shaming and corporal punishment on the following three market days. First, she was to be whipped through Nantwich at the cart's tail; second, she was to stand 'on high in the open market' for two hours 'in the cage with papers on her behind and before containing the inscription "for unjustly slandering Mr Jerome a preacher of God's word"'"; third, she was to be carted through the town with papers."⁸⁸.

As Helen Harrington declares, Nantwich magistrates talked also with the first employer in Newcastle of the clergyman. The latter had been dismissed from the previous church in St Nicholas because of a similar behaviour: "he had solicited the favours of a married woman"⁸⁹. However, there was a different ending for the latter, because her husband caught him in this unacceptable behaviour and denounced him to the court. The involvement of a husband was crucial because it gave credibility to the woman's description of facts. Knowsley's case, instead, proposed a different situation, in which the victim was alone and her husband was not present in those moments of physical assault; consequently, the woman was exposed to every punishment the judges could think of. A woman could prove her innocence only through the support of a man.

87 M. C. Bodden, "Language as the Site of Revolt in medieval and Early Modern England, Speaking as Woman", Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 60.

88 Steve Hindle, "The shaming of Margaret Knowsley: gossip, gender and the experience of authority in early modern England", *Continuity and Change*, Vol. 9, No.3, 1994, pp. 391-419, p.405.

89 Helen Harrington, *Honours Dissertation, Gender and 'Crimes of Speech' in Seventeenth Century York*, BA Hons History, 2015, <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/media/7245193/helen-harrington-gender-and-crimes-of-speech-in-seventeenth-century-york.pdf>, p. 14.

This punishment was the treatment that every woman received if she had spoken about sexual assaults in public. It was a warning to other women to not repeat the same mistake. People perceived a different message after having seen her punishment: a woman accusing a man of rape or attempted rape was not usually believed and had to face a punishment for all her accusations. For this reason, a private vengeance was better than speaking about the incident and the victimization. In those cases, silence was the only way in a society that wanted to punish female speech and also situations of sexual violence.

As J. M. Beattie underlined, “most incidents of physical abuse and violent conflict were ignored or revenged privately, or at least settled without an appeal to the courts”⁹⁰. Moreover, those cases in which there was no injury or death of the victim were “massively underreported”⁹¹. The ones that were characterized by tangible evidence as a dead body or the loss of limb, “would have been prosecuted at the higher rate than many cases of rape because of an apparent lack of physical evidence (i. e. bruises, cuts, torn clothing, etc.)”⁹². In the crimes in which the victims were not beaten or the clothing torn, private resolution was the best option rather than the publication of the violation of a woman’s chastity.

Knowsley’s case reveals that this woman was scared about bringing publicly out her story with Jerome. Her gossip was only a simple reaction to the social narrow-mindedness that prevented her to defend herself. In addition to this, gossip was part of the female stereotype, because women were defined as “incessant blabbers who spent their lives chattering and sharing secrets”⁹³. For this reason, the court did not give importance to

90 Lee A. Ritscher, “The Semiotics of Rape in Renaissance English Literature - Berkeley Insight in Linguistics and Semiotics”, Peter Lang, 2009, p. 28.

91 Ibidem, p.28.

92 Ibidem, p.28.

93 M. C. Bodden, “Language as the Site of Revolt in medieval and Early Modern England, Speaking as Woman”, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 62.

Jerome's previous encounters and convicted the girl with no evidence.

III.2 - Susan More

Men took advantage of their power and rights to punish women. The latter had to be careful in the way they presented themselves in the court, talked about their body and sexuality and how they resorted the law to defend themselves. If a woman accused and denounced a man publicly, she did not only challenge him and his authority, but also renewed this challenge bringing him to court on a defamation suit. In many cases the law enforcement in England was represented by the parish power. In many cases, the church, the power, the community and the law governed women and turned many female arguments, putting them in the culprit's position. Even in this case there was an exception to the rule: Suzan More. This woman intervened in the case of two noble men, John Scale and the well-known Shakespeare's printer Thomas Creede, denouncing the latter of having raped her and also other women, without facing any financial or legal consequences.

The rapist, Thomas Creede, was known at that time for being Shakespeare's printer. More's deposition brought to the light his dark secret of having raped many servants without facing any financial or legal consequences. Susan More was 25 when she worked as point-maker for a bookseller, Randall Birke, and his wife, Anne Birke. Thomas Creede's business brought him to easily attend the Birke's house. His visits were characterised by several attempts of chattering her up and convincing her to go out for a drink with him. More always refused. In order to take his own revenge, Creede at first asked to Mrs. Birke to accompany her to the tavern and drink something together with him. In midsummer, the two women went to the Sun Tavern in Aldersgate Street, where the man

offered them so much wine that More got “drunk and sick”⁹⁴. Creed took advantage of her, bringing her to the chamber of an alehouse. The young girl laid down on a bed to sleep and the man raped her. From that moment, she always refused any other encounter with him and the man got angrier day after day, so that “he would sett others sometimes taverne boyes and sometimes the boyes of the forenamed widow Grimes to stand in front of the Birke’s house, barring her progress and beckoning her to go to the tavern”.⁹⁵ The external help from one of his flirts, the widow Grimes, was fundamental to give him the chance to know More carnally again at the widow’s house.

There, Creede used to rape and bother even other women. Once, More had been even able of saving the life of the servant Blanche Howell. More saw her coming from Randall Birkes’ house, but she “perceyved she had byn drinking wine”⁹⁶ because her face was red. At this point, the judges also heard the deposition of Ms. Howell, who confirmed that she spent some time drinking with Mr. Creede, who proposed her to join him at goodwife Grimes house, but More had been able not to let her go.

Another woman had been victim of Creede’s sexual advances. More explained that the first time she went to the tavern with them, he bragged that if Mrs. Birke would have made “a pynt more [...] he could have don what he had would with her”⁹⁷. Mrs. Birke herself confirmed her version and explained to the judges some Creede’s advances⁹⁸.

This situation got worse for More when she discovered of being pregnant. She advised Creede about the baby and he

94 “*Women, Legal Discourse, Interpretative Maneuvres and Negotiating Safety*”, Mary C. Boddern, Marquette University USA, pp.297-326.

95 *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

96 *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

97 *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

98 Once he told her that she “had a sweet pair of lips, and if she were a good wench she would let him have some part with her husband”, *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

immediately turned churlish. He refused her and their baby because months before, he asked her to leave her job at the Birke's house, but she never obey him. If she had listened to him, he would have provided her all the things that she needed. He concluded by saying: "Goe seek you another ffather to your child of your will for I meane not to ffather it. [...] I will shift it of well enoughe and my wife will helpe to cleare me of this matter and to shift it of us as she hathe shifted me of suche matters as this is before now"⁹⁹.

The Birkes knew about the girl's pregnancy and for this reason, they organised a meeting with the Creedes in a tavern to talk about it. More was there too and her rapist threatened her in front of everyone. Mrs. Creede believed More and asked her to accept ten shillings, take the Cambridge Carriers cart and leave the city to deliver her baby¹⁰⁰. More had to deliver her baby soon and that journey was too dangerous for them. For this reason, she remained in London with no house or a job. For days she lived in the streets, until she met a poor woman in Gravell Lane, who offered her to stay at her warehouse but she did have no food and water. More accepted anyway. Few days later, she was found by Mrs. Birke who helped her with the delivery¹⁰¹.

More's deposition was characterised by the limits of the language that every woman would have had in describing her rape or the attempted one and the sexual body in legal terms. Speech about this crime was restricted from a semantic point of view, because of the use of a particular language and prepared declarations that the jury wanted to hear in order to be convinced about the innocence of the woman. It was also

99 Ibidem pp.297-326.

100 An unwed woman carted out of town was a practice of many villages and towns that gave them the chance to delivery their sons. Moreover, It was wintertime, classified as the coldest ever seen in the last 30 years of the seventeen century. That year, the ice split the trees, birds and animals died. The freezing of the Thames blocked any chance of importing food from the other countries and caused the critical food shortage and the raise of its price.

¹⁰¹ Mrs. Birke asked to two friends of her to make More stay at their house and provided a midwife who would help her with the delivery.

modified and influenced by the law, the male subjectivity and the social and political practices of dominant interests.

Those narratives had to be considered legal ones, during which “a woman defined a reality about rape and its meaning, which was at the time conditioned by available languages”¹⁰². Only in the early seventeenth century did rape start to count as sex crime. Previously, the law did not consider those cases as a real crime even if violence was present, and classified it as a property crime because the woman was perceived as a property of a man. A case was classified as rape only if there was the “carnaliter cognovit” (carnally knew) and the penetration was considered an offense against property. This change of perspective and categorisation shifted the focus onto the victim’s resistance, morality and state of mind. As Gowing underlines, “the more rape was understood as sexual, the harder it was to believe women”¹⁰³ and consequently their reputation changed.

All the judges were male, who took down the testimony of the witnesses and recorded judicial decisions and orders.

More’s speech brought important linguistic consequences. It could have caused a social and political exclusion of the woman. Yet, it was considered a tool to understand the female role in the rape and whether the girl followed her desires, giving her own consent or not. Mary Bodden tries to define the narrative of those victims. First of all, she underlines that all those stories used to have one thing in common: passivity in their self-defence. Women described themselves as condescending to their rapists and persuaded to fall in the darkness and uncleanness of

102 Walker, Garthine, “Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England”, *Gender & History*, 10/1 (1998).

103 Gowing Laura, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003, 92.

temptation, with the consequence of becoming “weak, repentant, defiled”¹⁰⁴. As Walker Garthine underlines, the blame and dishonour deriving from this situation were “feminised in ways that made sexual language an inappropriate medium through which to report a rape”¹⁰⁵. From a male perspective, language was a female accomplice¹⁰⁶; while from a female one, it could easily become their major enemy, capable of destroying their life in a community in few seconds. In fact, arguing aggressively and fighting for personal freedom and rights was considered unfeminine and put the victim in the condition of not being believed. Showing a passive approach was the only way women had “to remove any trace of accountability”¹⁰⁷. In order to do so, they had to use some rhetorical strategies in those legal discourses, such as not reacting too aggressively towards her rapist and not showing any kind of personal interest and feeling towards him, but on the contrary, the disgust was more appreciated because it added truthfulness in her words and story. These strategies were so easily used that in the end, what judges could see in a court was not a real woman, but only a law puppet with no proper identity.

More was an exception to this rule. In the first part of her interrogatory, she misrecognized the legal passive role of women, which established that they could “barely own their own bodies”; if men raped them, it happened because women were persuaded “beyond the limits of sexual consent” into sex¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹. Three pages out of five released by the deposition

104 “*Women, Legal Discourse, Interpretative Maneuvres and Negotiating Safety*”, Mary C. Boddern, Marquette University USA, pp.297-326.

105 *Ibidem*, pp.297-326.

106 From a Christian point of view, the history of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden gave a bad reputation to women, because not only Eve heard the devil’s advice and believed that breaking the rule would not have brought negative consequences, but, in particular, she used her beauty and her speech to convince Adam in eating the apple. From the Middle Ages, women were considered servants of Satan and were rappresented in the many works next to the serpent. This belief became a plague for them and was one of the main explanations of why they could not express themselves freely and were considered the weak link of the society.

107 *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

108 *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

109 *Ibidem* pp.297-326.

focused on the moment of rape, which happened after Creede offered her so much wine until she got terribly drunk and was not able to control herself anymore. From a legal perspective, this type of sexual violence happened without any willing consent of the victim.

More stressed in particular not only that she had been enticed by the man and his several harassments but also how determined she was in not meeting him in the days after the sexual violence. This misrecognition was induced by More's disasters that had happened in her life: first of all, she was seduced by Creede through alcohol; then she got pregnant and left alone by her rapist when she needed his help; she lost her job and tried to survive day after day, knowing that this story ruined her reputation, in fact many people called her as Creede's "whore"¹¹⁰; and she received public humiliation from her rapist and his wife.

The girl, who was under oath, described her working history. She had had four masters in a period of five years with no incidents. One of them wanted to help her due to the conditions in which she was living, offering her a large amount of money but she refused.

This case was prosecuted by John Scale under the cause of the ecclesiastical order. Scales had been able to procure a warrant bringing Creede in front of Sir Stephen Soame, the major of London and member of the House of Commons, in order to hear his version before More's. The latter feared about being disadvantaged by the Creede and "by the historically rooted cultural narratives in their favor"¹¹¹.

110 Even though More showed an ingledibly strengthness, she was vulnerable to morality as all the other rape victims. Probably this woman developed a consciousness of injustice, due to the fact that social circumstances did not give to people like her the right to voice these type of injuries.

111 "*Women, Legal Discourse, Interpretative Maneuvres and Negotiating Safety*", Mary C. Boddern, Marquette University USA, pp.297-326.

More was able to construct a coherent profile, organizing all the fragments of her past, through a perfect recollection of them. Another point in her favour was that she never asked for money even though she was starving in the streets and had no safe place in which she could deliver her baby. The support from the Birke's, Scales and Soame's towards More's story implied a positive vision of this woman as a good citizen.

Creede's behaviour was classified as sexually scandalous and criminal. He did not only pay a group of men to stalk her, but also threatened her if she did not do what he asked her: "(Mr. Creede) persuaded her [...] to clere him of his incontinentie with her [...] and to save his credit he sometimes speaking her fayre sometimes threatening her that he would have her to Bridewell [...]"¹¹². The latter was a house of correction, a punishment used against women who had children out of wedlock. Once there, women were separated from their babies, who were left in a parish. In the region of Essex, women were punished differently: they were publicly whipped till their backs were bloody. Moreover, the Bridewell Court Minute Books reveal that from 1565 to 1606 those women had also to follow a particular dress code in order to make sure that every person could immediately understand their guilt.

All the other women's depositions were fundamental in order to understand Creede's aggressive mistreatment of women. Anne Birkes described the moment in which she and Mrs. Creede were accompanying Suzan More in Bishopsgate and the latter told them all the affairs that Mr. Creede used to have at widow Grimes' house: "[...] he used to have other women besides her there, as namely one from Lamberth, another that had a great belly, and a third that was there in the same widow Grimes' house but she being grown now something old

112 Ibidem pp.297-326.

she said that he had told her that he cared not for her now”¹¹³. John Scales and other eight witnesses of the community decided to prosecute him for bastardy.

In More’s deposition, resistance is present everywhere. She resisted more than once Creede’s several attempts in drinking wine together to spend the night with him and his stratagems in blaming her pregnancy on Mr. Birke; she also resisted the pressure for bringing suit against Creede. In her description of facts, she stressed more than once on the uncivilized and irrational nature of this man, in particular when she dwelled on her pregnancy and his attempt in denying any relationship with their baby and also how he insisted on her leaving her job at the Birkes’ house.

This girl showed another form of resistance: she was able to preserve her own self as a good worker and citizen, without sinking into prostitution, (which in the majority of cases happened to many single mothers), she also resisted common cultural narratives. Her integrity and humility was extremely appreciated by the judges and all the other members of the community, who subverted the conclusion of this rape case in the court, with the punishment of the rapist and the acceptance and defence of the victim within the community.

These two stories show that in these situations women had to overcome many obstacles and most of them ended up like Margaret Knowsley: not be believed and punished for a crime that they had not committed. As we have previously seen, judges were reluctant in believing that a woman could be innocent and for this reason, if she wanted to be trusted, she had to arm herself with at least few witnesses, who could confirm her version of facts. Even in this case, sexual difference was

113 Ibidem pp.297-326.

important because a male witness was more appreciated than a female one and he could immediately free the victim from all the accusations and put the judges in the condition of punishing the rapist through a fine or several months in prison. The lack of witnesses has been one of the main cause of the unfair Margaret Knowsley's punishment and the turning point in Susan More's story.

In the first case, Knowsley had many obstacles to destroy: the first one was her reputation, already negative before the beginning of the trial. In fact, she was a beautiful woman who miscarried an illegitimate child years before. The two elements combined together, put the judges in a condition of believing that she was a loose woman, who would do anything to clean her reputation and destroy the one of an important clergyman. Moreover, the identity of Stephen Jerome was another obstacle for her: because she was accusing a clergyman in a church court, so a colleague of the judges and for this reason, considered innocent right from the start.

The last obstacle that she met was having spread unconsciously a gossip. Gossiping was not appreciated, especially if it was about certain topics as sexual violence.

For all these reasons, the fact of being a good worker, having tried to resist her rapist and refused all his gifts were not enough for the judges, to believe her, listen to any witnesses' version of facts and ended punishing her physically, even though there were no proofs against her.

Susan More's story was completely the opposite considering the precedent one. In fact, she had a clean record: her work and code of behaviour were supported mostly by the entire community. She was a hard worker who had a beautiful relationship with her owners. She was raped in an unconscious state by her rapist, who had been caught days after in the same situation with many other people, who witnessed against him in

the court. Her speech has been another important element of her strength: she did not hide the fact that she was a single mother and she also presented herself and all the other women as sexually driven and morally frail human beings, victims of male morally superiority. More demonstrated that she probably comprehended not only her own innocence but also the one of all the other raped women.

IV

Philomela and Lucrece: literary exemplum of forced silence

In early modern England, being a woman still meant being associated to the religious figure of Eve, the first female sinner, who had turned Adam into a spotted soul. This connection had a strong impact on men's minds and became a heavy burden for women; Eve's example was used several times as a similitude or a metaphor to define them as an evil presence in the society and a bad temptation for men's soul. Men created stereotypes such as the fact that they were stronger and more intelligent than women to define their superiority towards the female counterpart in terms of sex, social and political power and knowledge. This explains why women occupied the lowest part of the social hierarchy, together with slaves and homeless people, the outcasts of the community. Moreover, women were forced to follow the rules of a society that deprived them of every right and equality, and denied their ability to express themselves freely.

In this chapter, I will stress in particular on the female fight against such forced silence. I will analyse this concept from a general perspective and then I will focus in particular on two raped women in literature, Philomela and Lucretia, and their use in the main instrument of early modern English women's revolt; writing. The act of expressing a thought and making statements could be interpreted as a female necessity to declare publicly what she never had the chance to say not only to the other sex, but also to the other women. It became an instrument of a self-propaganda that aimed to create a common female reaction

against their every-day life situation; moreover, it was used to arise fear into men's mind and heart: even though women could not speak, they could challenge them through the power of written words to show all their inner strength.

VI.1 - Early modern English Philomelas: Jane Anger, Aemilia Layner and Mary Wroth

One of the well-known female fighters against this forced silence was Jane Anger. There are no biographical news about her life. Her *JANE ANGER her Protection for Women* gave her the chance of being recognised as the first female voice that got access to the sphere of pamphlet written in the 16th century. Her work was written in 1588 and published the following year in England, as an explicit response to a misogynistic work by Thomas Orwin called *Boke his Surfeit in love*, which had not survived. In order to analyse this pamphlet, I would like to start from one of her final poems, *Eiusdem as Lectorem*. It presents to the public her emotional state and opinions about men and their unreasonable behaviours towards women. Anger also expresses her desire for a female reaction in order to regain a power and be able to break that forced silence.

Eiusdem ad Lectorem,
de Authore.¹¹⁴

Though, sharpe the seede, by Anger sowen,
we all (almost) confesse:
And hard his hap we aye account,
who Anger doth possesse:
Yet haplesse shalt thou (Reader) reape,
such fruit from ANGERS soile,
As may thee please, and ANGER ease
from long and wearie toile
Whose paines were tooke for thy behoofe,
to till that cloddye ground,

¹¹⁴ Jane Anger, *Jane Anger her Protection for Women. To defend them against the scandalous reportes of a late Surfeiting Lover, and all other like Venerians that complaine so to bee overcloyed with womens kindnesse*, London, Printed by Richard Jones, and Thomas Orwin. 1589.

Where scarce no place, free from disgrace,
of female Sex, was found.
If ought offend, which she doth send,
impute it to her moode.
For ANGERS rage must that asswage,
as wel is understoode
If to delight, ought come in sight,
then deeme it for the best.
So you your wil, may well fulfill,
and she have her request.

FINIS

This poem is characterized by the dominant metaphor of the sowing, used to describe herself as an angry writer who wants to publish an invective against men. She begins by underlining that in order to create a work that will impress the public and define her interiority, she must behave as a farmer in his field. It is empty at the beginning, but then, thanks to his patience and hard work, he will be able to sow it and obtain blooming plants and tasty fruits. Her pamphlet has been the result of a long sowing of words on a white page. However, she underlines that these words are sharp because they had to show how angry she is against the other sex. This writing is the mirror of her interiority: this aspect is enhanced by the fact that she constantly plays with her surname to express her rage throughout the poem¹¹⁵. An example has to be found in the fifth and sixth verses: “yet haplesse shalt thou (Reader) reape, / such fruit from ANGERS soile”¹¹⁶. Here she seems to be aware that the future readers of this pamphlet will be especially men, and she wants to warn them that the content will be disappointing because it was not written to elevate them, but on the contrary to despise them.

¹¹⁵ Susan Gushee O’Malley underlines that that nowadays there are many contradictory opinions about Jane Anger’s identity. In fact, some critics believe that in the reality, her name was just a pseudonym through which a man tried to talk about women and defend them against this misogynistic society. In other cases, it is believed that she existed because her surname was common in certain parts of England as for example in Berkshire, Cambridge, Cornwall and Essex. However, there are such little information about her life that is impossible to find an answer to this dilemma. Susan Gushee O’Malley, *Defences of women: Jane Anger, Rachel Speght, Ester Sowerham and Constantia Munda*, Routledge, 1995, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ Jane Anger, *Eiusdem ad Lectorem, de Authore - Jane Anger her Protection for Women. To defend them against the scandalous reportes of a late Surfeiting Lover, and all other like Venerians that complaine so to bee overcloyed with womens kindnessse*, London, Printed by Richard Jones, and Thomas Orwin. 1589, vv.5-6.

This woman transmits strength, courage and pride to female readers because she is not scared of facing men: in the first verse, she underlines that she is the sender of the poem, “though, sharpe the seede, by Anger sowen”¹¹⁷. She is talking not only about and for herself: she is presenting a common female problem and source of discomfort to the other sex. It is a precious chance to hear for once from both the parts, which she does not want to waste. She is also aware that probably men will criticise her and use censorship to destroy her hard work. However, she does not care about it because what counts is to “asswage”¹¹⁸ her pain and rage through her writing, which is the only means available.

Her pamphlet is here presented as “a long and wearie toile”¹¹⁹. These adjectives underline the effort that she made to make sure that the public could perceive her true self, her rage and her need to let off steam; she meant to be sure that she wrote every single injustice that women have to bear every single day and to send a clear message to all the people that would have read her work.

After that, she describes the topic of her pamphlet: “paines were tooke for thy behoofe” and “disgrace of female Sex”¹²⁰. In both cases, Jane Anger directs her attention to men, accusing them of using women to satisfy their appetite and necessities and consequently making them suffer a different kind of pain: Anger does not cite only physical pain but also the psychological one. Both of them are dangerous because men are able to destroy the virtue, the dignity and the social position of a woman through sexual violence and lies. What is worse is that, men destroy women just because of their needs. This underlines that men do not care about the other sex, which is presented here just as an object to be thrown away once used. For all these

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, v.1.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, v. 15.

¹¹⁹ Jane Anger, “*Jane Anger, her Protection for Women.*”, Richard Jones and Thomas Orwin, 1589, p. 1.

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

reasons, the author presents her need to offend the male readers, because, as she will highlight in her pamphlet, they take women for granted; they constantly offend the female sex that cannot find a way to react, because men silenced them in many ways believing that women will never find a way to revolt and speak. Anger now has the chance to take her revenge and shout out loud “her moode”¹²¹.

The end of this poem highlights her second aim: being heard in particular by the other sex to explain her necessities and requests. Writing becomes fundamental for a woman because in a world where she is always silenced, it becomes a hope through which she can try to communicate. From this perspective, writing somehow reminds us of the same importance that tapestry had for Philomela. Layner is a modern Philomela and this pamphlet is her tapestry in which she describes women’s condition and the change it deserves.

Anger made it clear right from the preface that her work was written in response to *The Book of Surfeit in Love*, considered a misogynistic book. To Jane Anger, it is just a tangled web of lies used to ruin women’s reputation and create false stereotypes in order to define male superiority¹²². She spots male incoherence linked with the fact that they are trying to destroy something that at the same time excite them: why should they ruin people who make them feel good? Jane Anger addresses these questions to two different group of people: “Gentle women of England” and “All Women in general”¹²³.

In the first case, the adjective “gentle” does not refer to an economical condition and a high social position, being gentle is a characteristic typical of all the female sex (in particular, English women), which has a noble soul by nature. It is used as

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, p.1.

¹²² This pamphlet begins saying: “*To defend them against the / SCANDALOUS REPORTES of a late Surfeiting lover*”. Capital letters are a sign of the author’s fierceness against Orwin. It seems as if she was shouting those words to highlight her state of mind. Jane Anger, “*Jane Anger, her Protection for Women*.”, Richard Jones and Thomas Orwin, 1589, p. 1.

¹²³ *Ibidem*, pp. 1-2.

a unifying factor. This condition is in contrast with the “diseased persons”¹²⁴ with whom Anger wants to discuss about the “plaintifes wrongs”¹²⁵ that define the female everyday life. The word “diseased” indicates not only Anger’s rage but also the fact that men’s mind deforms the real facts. Anger underlines that it produces always false accusations to blame women as it happened to the “faithful Deianira”¹²⁶, who was the victim of lies of Nessus and only in the end discovered the truth¹²⁷. Jane tries to advice women: not to trust men’s fidelity so easily. For this reason, man is metaphorically compared to a “ravenous fox”¹²⁸ in the way it reacts towards a goose. The fox is well-known for being a thief and clever animal that lures its prey to kill it. Anger uses another metaphor to highlight this male characteristic: they are like “a glass of dissembling water”¹²⁹. Man’s face is compared to something that constantly changes and never presents itself in the same way. They are instable, false. They have different identities used to deceive women, who “are too credulous”¹³⁰. Gossip is a typical action of men, who Anger defines as a “divelish practice”¹³¹ that nobody has ever punished. They use their false tongues to “abuse and slander”¹³² women. Gossip was generally considered more a female practice, but Anger’s words twist the facts to demonstrate that the real evil creature is man. If men have a

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

¹²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

¹²⁷ Deianira is a mythological Greek figure who married a Eracle, Zeus’ son. During their moving to Thessallia, they approached to a river and did not know how to overcome it. The centaurus Nessus saw them and approached them. He presents himself as the boat man of the river. The couple trusted him but after having reached the other bank, Nessus kidnapped Deianira. Eracle used one of his arrows to hurt him to death and succeed. Before dying, Nessus told Deianira that she had to keep his magical blood in a small bottle and verse it in Eracle’s armour, because in that way she would have prevent him in looking at other women. Once arrived in Thessallia, Deianira feared that the princess Iole could take her husband away from her and for this reason, she followed the centaurus’ instructions. This story did not have an happy ending because once Eracle wore his armour, he burn to death.

¹²⁸ *Ibidem*, p.6.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 2.

¹³² These two words show clearly her adversity towards men and gives a strong idea of female sufferance. *Ibis*, p. 2.

diseased mind, the one of women is “just”¹³³, correct, clean, not mischievous. She concludes this dedication in asking to her English female readers to take part to this revolt with her: “I hope you rather shew yourselves defendants of the defenders title, than complaints of the plaintifes wrong”¹³⁴. Moreover, she clarifies her aim in this situation: “committing your protection, and my selfe, to the protection of your selves, and the judgement of the cause to the censures of your just mindses”¹³⁵.

The second dedication is referred to a larger group of women (“To all women in general”¹³⁶). Anger recognizes that forced silence was a common negative condition and wants to become the defender of every single humiliated woman on earth. Again, Anger makes an invitation to the large public: “assist me in defence of my willingness, which shall make me rest at your commandes”¹³⁷. She makes clear that she does not only need their sustain, but she also wants to defend them and searches for their approval.

She begins with by saying that even though women are strongly criticized, they are essential for men because of two different reasons: they are fundamental for their survival and are important for their writings. Men demonstrated of being incapable of expressing their feelings in their works; since their imagination is restricted to few arguments, they feel the need to use their rhetoric to despise women in order to create something new. However, they tend to judge the causes of women’s inexistent malice; the result is that women perceive while reading those works is that men are talking about a subject that they cannot master, only starting to be repetitive. Moreover, they seem to be so self-confident because “they suppose that there is not one amongst us who can or dare reprove their

¹³³ Ibidem, 1589, p. 1.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, 1589, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Ibidem, p. 1.

¹³⁶ Ibidem, p.1.

¹³⁷ Ibidem, p. 2.

slanders and false reproches”¹³⁸. Anger recognizes to herself the power of playing their same game. She shows not only that she received a classical education¹³⁹, but also that she exploits a typical male form of writing, the pamphlet, to give them a female answer and refute their beliefs through reproaches and reproves.

To Anger, men who write about female conditions are like cocks that are fighting each other to define their male sexual prowess¹⁴⁰. Their writings are the way through which men repay women after all the attentions and kindness the latter gave them. Thomas Orwin’s work is the best example of how men dispraise women without being well-informed about them. She uses irony in order to criticize him and indirectly show her superiority. She underlines that both sexes want to come in contact with novelties. However, in many cases, as for example in *The Book in Surfeiting Love*, male writings concerning women are not satisfying as they seem, and are in fact boring¹⁴¹. In this book, the style is perfect but the content is false and impure; because of this reason, the entire work is not interesting: “Neither did the ending there of lesse please me then the beginning, for I was so carried away with the conceit of the Gent. As that I was quite out of the booke before I thought I had bene in the midst there of: so pithie were his sentences, so pure his words, and so pleasing his style.”¹⁴². Men’s style changes on the basis of the topic described; they are cocky and use pure words when they talk about themselves, while when they focus on women, they use their folly and dispraise words to destroy female reputation.

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹³⁹ Jane Anger uses more than one proverb in Latin language to describe certain situations, as for example “Mulier est hominis confusio” and refers to classical philosophers and mythological exemplum to describe men’s behaviours as for example the story of Deianira, Menalaus, Plato and Hesiodus.

¹⁴⁰ “[...] which conceites have already made them cockes and wolde make themselves among themselves bee thought to be of the game”, *Ibis*, p. 2.

¹⁴¹ “[...] because as well women as men are desirous of novelties, I willing lie read over” Jane Anger, “*Jane Anger, her Protection for Women*.”, Richard Jones and Thomas Orwin, 1589, p. 3.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 3.

Jane Anger tries to reverse all the social belief about women. Firstly, if women are so dangerous as they are depicted, she cannot understand why all virtues have always been recognized only as female goddesses. An example is Fidelity, associated to a woman and not to a man because it “could not be in them men”¹⁴³, as if it is not part of his inner nature. Woman becomes a synonym of virtue and men should only be proud of her, but instead, they are classified as evil creatures.

Other interesting aspects are scholarship and intelligence. Men always consider themselves as the only sex that deserves their knowledge’s implement. On the contrary, Anger underlines that women can be as educated as men; in fact, her pamphlet is a concrete example of a perfect female education. Moreover, women have another ability: distinguish good things from the evil ones. For this last reason, there is a huge difference in the way one sex loves the other. In fact, “she loveth man for his virtues, & hateth him for his vices”¹⁴⁴. Anger quotes the classical figure of Hesiodus, who recognises that women care so much about their men that they could even give their lives. Men, instead, are at first attracted by women’s virtues, but they are not actually in love with their women. Once married, they start to feel the need of ruin them. They do not know the difference between good and evil and because they are “spur blind”¹⁴⁵, they choose the latter and do not feel guilty for the pain caused. “Our good towards them is the destruction of ourselves, we being well formed, are by them foully deformed”¹⁴⁶. As this sentence shows, male physical violence makes women look ugly and their beauty and tenderness are belittled. Woman is reduced into an object used to release and alleviate men’s pain. This is the beginning of the forced submission to men, that causes only pain as Anger describes: “We languish when they laugh, we lie

¹⁴³ Ibidem, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 5.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 5.

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 5.

sighing when they sit singing, and sit sobbing when they lie slugging and sleeping”¹⁴⁷. This sentence focuses on two different aspects: the validity of female submission to men and its concrete realisation through physical violence.

In the first case, Anger uses religion to refute the degradation of women. She overturns the image of Eve into a positive exemplum. Jane does not deny the fact that she is guilty, because the request of eating the apple came from her¹⁴⁸. However, she was also the first one of the couple to apologize for what happened and recognized immediately the evil in what she and Adam had done. Moreover, the creation of the first woman overturns and destroys male belief about the inferiority of women. Adam was created from a “drosse and filthy clay”¹⁴⁹. God decided to create Eve to purify him from the dusting dust. She was born with a great responsibility. Anger is indirectly highlighting that the woman is God’s privileged creature. She also refers to the figure of the Virgin Mary not only because she was the first person who believed in God, but also because she gave birth to His son. The woman has another important duty and responsibility: the survival of human kind. Without her, men cannot exist.

Male violence is instead presented as the reaction of a scared person. It is possible that man is aware that woman is stronger and capable of reacting towards certain situations; so, for this reason, the only way to contain her is using violence. Throughout the pamphlet, Anger uses several haunting images to talk about violence. Men are compared to “ravenous haukes, who doe not only seize upon us, but devour us”¹⁵⁰. The verb “devour” suggests perfectly the idea of destruction of female

¹⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 6.

¹⁴⁸ She admits that there is equality between the two sexes “none is good but God, and therefore women are ill”. No distinction is made and this aspect should have applied every single day in every aspect of life Ibis, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Ibidem, p. 4.

sex. It is a kind of violence that culminates with a murder; and gives no hope.

In another part of her work, Anger compares this violent connection between man and woman to a “wilde boar” that is hunted by the “tame hounds”¹⁵¹. What is difficult to understand in this case is how to identify who plays which role. Following common logic, woman suffers from male violence; so, she should be the boar, while the men are the hounds, ready to attack the prey. However, following Anger’s reasoning, these roles should be overturned. She makes it clear also through the choice of the two adjectives. Man is instinctive, aggressive, violent like the “wilde” boar, while women are “tame”, controlled, submissive. Moreover, the author wants women to react fight for their rights and transform themselves into predators. They should also behave like a Viper; which “stormeth when his taile is trooden on, & away not we fret when al our bodie is a footstole to their wildenst”¹⁵².

There is another strong metaphor about the delicate topic of rape. The uncontrollable violence of men expresses itself in the sexual act too. “The Tyger is robbed of her young ones, she is ranging abroad, but men rob women of their honour undeservedly under their noses”¹⁵³. The woman is compared to a violent animal, the tiger; however, this connection highlights that even the wildest being can suffer, especially if it loses something very important. The tiger and the woman are both victims of a mean act of a robbery. In the first case, the animal loses its puppies when it is not near them to intervene and fight to protect them. In the second case, women are robbed of one of the most precious things they possess, their virginity; they are not able to calm their rapist down or to react and stop him. Virginity is extremely important for women because, as Jane

¹⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 5.

¹⁵² Ibidem, p. 5.

¹⁵³ Ibidem, p. 5.

underlines, it makes women virtuous and courteous; it is the manifesto of true love.

Rape cases are the best examples of forced silence. As we have seen, women in court had to prove that they had suffered from sexual violence by way of their own words and their bodies (torn garments, bloods, injuries). However, as Donatella Pallotti underlines, “in order to be successful, an appeal has to include several exact repetitions of the account, each time addressed to a different audience. The inner act of violence is thus turned into a public spectacle, its victim into an actor-playing both herself and the self she is expected to be – whose ability to perform according to a script determines the success of the legal appeal. The *Lavves Resolutions* describes and prescribes a code of conduct that serves not only to make an act of violence known but also to construct the reality of an act that has taken place “offstage”; in doing so, however, the actuality of rape itself is irremediably effaced¹⁵⁴. Sometimes words were not enough to save a woman: her own words could become a trap and put her in a condition of being prosecuted for gossip and defamation. Men, on the contrary, were considered in most of cases as not guilty and even released without trial. Only few of them were convicted and hanged.

This female condition in which they had to transform their speech and follow social rules in order to be heard and believed by the judges or be punished without a reason or concrete proofs against her, is perceived as an injustice and a forced silence. Aemilia Lanyer and Mary Wroth have been inspired by this concept of female forced silence. They both have used in their writings the well-known mythologic figure of Philomela to carry on modern and revolutionary ideas about female fight against their misogynistic society. As they highlight through their metaphorical language, the early modern woman should start to

¹⁵⁴ Donatella Pallotti, “A most detestable crime” *Representations of Rape in the Popular Press of Early Modern England*, LEA -Lingue e letterature d’Oriente e d’Occidente, vol. 1, n. 1 (2012), pp. 287-302.

overcome her present state of mutilated and humiliated Philomela to become a beautiful nightingale that through its songs, will be able to scream its emotions, thoughts and state of mind and be sure to be heard by men. Philomela becomes a revolutionary image for these revolutionary female writers. The writings of Layner and Wroth remind us of the well-known tapestry that reunited the two sisters, allowed their revolt against Tereus and their following metamorphosis into different birds. These early modern works will sign a female tentative of gaining power to revolt against their society. The language of weaving is a form of resistance of male tyranny¹⁵⁵. “Weaving” derives from the Latin word “textere”. The latter can be translated in the current English language as “text”. It seems to contain in its roots the need to convey a written message.

Aemilia Lanyer and Mary Wroth may be considered two revolutionary Philomelas for many different reasons. Both claim their own status as early modern female writers who write about subjects which were considered exclusively male. Wroth wrote sonnets, while Lanyer wrote about religion to obtain female freedom, be heard and claim a precise identity. As Purkiss underlines, “[w]omen were not excluded from these spaces, but were often seen as marginal or out of place in them. Women could speak, but their speech was not authoritative and might be read as an indecorum which signified sexual looseness or availability; women could write, but publication might be read as transgressive, too open, and this uncontrolled or disorderly”¹⁵⁶. In addition to this, these two women remind us of Jane Anger in the way they both rebuild conventional hypotheses about women subordination to men, overturn the

¹⁵⁵ Other well-known mythological women used the language of tapestry to communicate their stories. Arachne weaves episodes of rape perpetrated by the gods on mortals. Penelope used her tapestry to resist the advances of the enemies. Helen weaves the story of the Trojan war, which results from her rape.

¹⁵⁶ Diane Purkiss, *Renaissance Women: Elizabeth Cary and Aemilia Lanyer*. Pickering and Chatto Publishers. 1994, p. 8.

authority's gender and sovereignty's notions and revise patriarchal conventions.

Aemilia Lanyer can be arguably considered as one of the strongest feminist voices of her age. She created the identity of a woman poet and she never apologized for doing so. She was establish a literary subculture where women could write for other women and women could read female writings. One of Lanyer's purposes was "to celebrate and legitimize women's roles as both writers and readers"¹⁵⁷.

She chose to write about religion, because she strictly believed that women have all the rights to talk about matters of faith. Her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* begins with a devotional poem to "the Queens most Excellent Majestie", where she discussed the importance of women for men. The female role is again associated to the Virgin Mary because she gave birth to Christ and was the root of our salvation¹⁵⁸. The figure of a female ruler became a positive exemplum to all women to believe more in themselves and fight for their rights.

Philomela appears twice in Lanyer's poem called *The description of Cooke-ham*, a melancholic praise of the duchesses Margaret Clifford and her daughter Anne Clifford, who hosted her in the summer of 1611 at their mansion in Cook-ham. Summer is over, and the three women have to go back to the city for the winter; Lanyer is in pain because she has to say goodbye not only to the house's owners, considered grace holders, but also to this place, where she has rediscovered her writer's inspiration in the middle of silence and contemplation. The topic of memory is present everywhere in the poem and highlights not only the poet's personal motivation in writing this eulogy; but also her fear of not remembering this beautiful place, which has been an important inspiration for her, and the

¹⁵⁷ Bennet Lyn, *Women writing of Divinest things: Rethoric and the Poetry of Rembroke, Wroth and Lanyer*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 2004, p. 174.

¹⁵⁸ In *Pamphilia*, Mary Wroth defines this maternal bound through the mythological figure of Cupid, who is put under the power of his mother, Venus. It is used to highlight the positive and healing nature of material comfort.

women who hosted her. Layner hopes to retain some “sweet memories”, “which will not turn again”¹⁵⁹. One of them describes the strong faith of Mrs. Clifford, who often isolated herself in this landscape to meditate and pray: “in these sweet woods how often did you walk, / with Christ and his Apostles there to talk; / Placing his Holy Writ in some fair tree / to meditate what you therein did see”¹⁶⁰. Layner fears also to lose her friendship and the chance to spend other quality time with the noble woman as well, because the latter had a positive impact on the poet and her spirit¹⁶¹.

Here, the feelings are fundamental and divide the poem in two different sections: the first one (vv. 1-123) is characterized by positive thoughts connected to the arrival at the mansion. It is spring time and everything is flowering. The way in which the landscape is described, becomes the mirror of the poet's soul and shares her feelings. In this first part, there is long description of this beautiful landscape (vv.19-74), which has been personified into a living creature that in many ways interacts with the owner during her walks. An example can be found in these verses: “The trees with the leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad, / Embraced each other, seeming to be glad, / Turning themselves to beauteous Canopies, / To shade the bright sun from your brighter eyes; / The crystal steams with silver spangles graced, / While by the glorious sun they were embraced;”¹⁶². Here, the trees are “romantically” collaborating (“embrace”) to protect one of the duchesses from the rays of the sun. The act of hugging does not only remind us of a human action; it also it transmits realism in the way the lights' transmission through the leaves is described. The whole landscape transmits peace and joy of life.

¹⁵⁹ Aemilia Lanyer, *The description of Cooke-ham*, vv. 117-118.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, vv. 81-84

¹⁶¹ “Oh what delight did my weak spirits find / In those pure parts of her well framed mind. / And yet it grieves me that I cannot / Near to her, whose virtues did agree / With those fair ornaments of outward beauty, / Which did enforce from all both love and duty”. *Ibidem* vv. 197-103.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, vv. 23-28.

In the following verses, Philomela is introduced for the first time: “The little birds in chirping notes did sing, / To entertain both you and that sweet spring. / And Philomela with her sundry lays, / Both you and that delightful place did praise.¹⁶³”. Here, the natural interaction with the woman happens thanks to the singing of the birds, which are happy to see her back at the mansion and chirp to entertain her. From this chorus on it is possible to listen clearly to a particular song, the one of the Philomela. This mythological figure is not present in the form of a human being; she has already been transformed into a nightingale, the typical spring animal that through its song introduces the new season’s arrival. In this case, her chirping has also another metaphorical explanation: Philomela is communicating her feelings to Mrs. Clifford, sweetly screaming her happiness to be able to praise at least her and the flowering landscape. She has taken her voice back and her singing is as clear as human words. Philomela is also used to express the way Lanyer sees herself: she is writing this poem to praise Mrs. Clifford in order to gain her respect and count on her future help and protection to become a well-known writer accepted by the misogynistic society and be remembered in the posterity, as she underlines in the last verses of the poem:

“This last farewell to Cooke-ham here I give, / When I am dead thy name in this may live, / Wherein I have performed her noble hest / Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast, / And ever shall, so long as life remains, / Trying my life to her by those rich chains.”¹⁶⁴.

The author seems to be aware of the difficulties of being a woman and fighting for her rights to become independent and express herself in that society. Lanyer wants to change her personal reality and believes in herself and in the powers of words. This explains also why she decided to present herself

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, vv. 29-32.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, vv. 210-215.

through the image of Philomela as nightingale, instead of the mutilated human one, unable to express herself through her own words. Moreover, this mythological figure gives her the strength to express her own opinion about her society.

“Unconstant Fortune, thou art most to blame, / Who casts us down into so low a frame / Where our great friends we cannot daily see, / So great a difference is there in degree. / Many are placed in those orbs of state, / Partners in honour, so ordained by Fate, / Nearer in show, yet farther off in love, / In which, the lowest always are above. / But whither am I carried in conceit, / My wit too weak to conster of the great. / Why not? Although we are but born of earth, / We may behold the heavens, despising death; And loving heaven that is so far above, / May in the end vouchsafe us entire love.”¹⁶⁵.

Lanyer explains that she fears losing the protection of Mrs. Clifford because both occupy different social positions and so the contacts between them are rare. To her, these “orbs” are a useless human invention that should not exist because every person, man or woman, rich or poor, is born in “the same ground”. It seems as if a human being’s life should be based only on freedom and happiness; in order to achieve this, it would be fundamental to change social virtues.

The second part of the poem (vv. 124-215) can be considered the negative reflection of the previous one. It presents to the readers not only the change of the situation after the autumn’s arrival and the consequent departure of the two noble women from this place back to the city, described as a “sad dismay”¹⁶⁶, but also the landscape’s and poet’s reactions after their leaving. Lanyer begins this section saying, “I must tell the grief you did conceive / At their departure, when they went away”¹⁶⁷. It seems as if she feels a burden in her soul that she needs to remove. Nature co-participates again to the woman’s

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, vv. 103-116.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, v.130.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, vv.128-29.

inner situation because the flowers wither and the trees start to die because of the two women's abandon:

“The trees that were so glorious in our view, / Forsook both flowers and fruits, when once they knew / Of our depart, their very leaves did wither, / Changing their colors as they grew together. / But when they saw this had no power to stay you, / They often wept, though, speechless, could not pray you, / Letting their tears in your fair bosoms fall, As if they said, Why will ye leave us all?”¹⁶⁸.

Leaves are described as human tears that are falling on the women's bodies. They are perceived as the only instrument through which they try to communicate their own sorrow to stop the owners from leaving this place, and yet they fail. Lanyer's work becomes a mediation between nature and the owner of this place: the poet is aware that they are not understanding each other; however, her attempt is useless because she will not be able to stop the two women from leaving Cook-ham.

The birds are also trying to express their own disapproval through their silence and sad songs. In the following passage, Philomela is still present and her chirping full of sorrow is clearly understood by the poet:

“Those pretty birds that wonted were to sing, / Now neither sing, nor chip, nor use their wing, / But with their tender feet on some bare spray, / Warble forth sorrow, and their own dismay. / Fair Philomela leaves her mournful ditty, / Drowned in deep sleep, yet can produce no pity.”¹⁶⁹.

The mythological figure is silenced again. Her suffering is so painful that she is not able to sing beautiful songs anymore and the new season obliges her to accept hibernation. She can be seen again as a self-representation of the poet who, in this case, fears to lose her voice in this society and also the support of Mrs. Clifford to be recognized as a female poet. The fact that any single natural element is not able to communicate with this woman can be interpreted as another personal fear of not having

¹⁶⁸ Aemilia Lanyer, *The description of Cooke-ham*, vv. 133-140.

¹⁶⁹ Aemilia Lanyer, *The description of Cooke-ham*, vv. 190-195.

been able to clearly express her personal needs during the summer time with her writing, and consequently, not having been understood by future protector¹⁷⁰. All the whole place seems to enact a metamorphosis of Layner's feelings. When she joined Cook-ham with Mrs. Clifford, she knew that she was going to spend some quality time with this noble woman, who could have changed her social importance and role. In order to present her inner joy to the readers, she uses all these natural images of blossoming, colours and life to give a concrete definition of how much powerful it was. The same technique is used in the second part of the poem, where the farewell produces sorrow and fears that could have been described only through negative and desolated images of a dying nature during autumn time.

Mary Wroth wrote the first sonnet sequence in English by a woman in 1621¹⁷¹. This statement is implying that even in this case, we are dealing with a new speaking voice that was different from the typical male one. As it happened with Jane Anger and Aemilia Lanyer, Wroth needed to fight against male oppression and forced silence. In order to do this, she used emancipatory terms and revised well-known literary figures as support to her argumentations.

Her work "The countess of Montgomery's Urania" was a strong challenge in which love and emotion were perceived from the perspective of a woman. Moreover, her use of the characters and their perspectives were totally different from those of male writers; it was the concrete expression of her battle in this society and of her feelings which were shared by many women in her society: "Wroth evoke [s] strong female ties to personified figures from 'Night' to 'Fortune' to the mythic

¹⁷⁰ Another mythological figure that is not able to react to Mrs. Clifford leaving is Echo, who will stop reply to her as an attempt to stop her. Unfortunately, even in this cases the natural language is not understood from human ears and the two women leave the mansion, without considering the destruction that they causes to that place. "Delightful Echo wanted to reply, / To our last words, did now for sorrow die", *Ibis* vv. 204-205.

¹⁷¹ Naomi Miller J, "Changing the subject: Mary Wroth and figurations of Gender in Early Modern England", the University Press of Kentucky, 1996, p. 1.

‘Philomeale’, specifically to counteract the perennial absence of the male Petrarchan lover”¹⁷². Her writing, however, was so innovative that it was considered inappropriate and sanctioned: the members of King James’ court censored and withdrew her work six months after its publication.

“The Countess of Montgomery’s *Urania*” is a prose romance divided in two volumes. The first was published in 1621; while the second one remained unpublished during Wroth’s life. It presents the political and dramatic adventures of several imaginary noble families. Even though it contains more than hundred characters, it focuses on the relationship between the Queen Pamphilia and the Emperor Amphilanthus. It has been arguably said that they were connected to Wroth’s person events. These two characters were used to describe Wroth’s relationship with William Herbert: Pamphilia and Amphilanthus were first cousins, as were Wroth and Herbert were and for this reason; they both have to hide they relationships. In the novel, Pamphilia meets the Queen of Naples, the mother of Amphilanthus, who approves their relationship. This was a hint connected to the writer’s hope of the acceptance of her love story by her aunt Mary Sidney, the countess of Pembroke. Another point that the two couples have in common is the appearance of the two children. In the first case, Pamphilia and Amphilanthus have two illegitimate children, Andromaco and Faire Design, while, in the second case, Wroth had two natural children with Hebert called Katherine and William.

At the end of this volume, there are several sonnets that are part of a collection called “Pamphilia to Amphilanthus”. It is organised in four sections: the first one is composed of fifty-five poems where Pamphilia talks about her feelings towards her lover. In the following section there are several songs and ten poems where the woman defines her jealousy and all her doubts. In the end, feeling guilty, she asks for Cupid’s forgiveness and

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 195.

promises him a “crown of sonnets”. The latter is composed of fourteen sonnets that define the third section. The fourth one has eight sonnets where Pamphilia understands her sufferance; describes it in a sombre tone and tries to use her feelings to understand the inner emotions of human beings.

In the second section, there is the third song “Come merry Spring delight us”, where we can find an interesting link to the figure of Philomela. It is presented to the public as a hymn to the spring, the blossoming not only of the natural world but also of Pamphilia’s feelings, who is openly talking about her love for Amphilanthus and this association between the season and pleasures seems to be a constant reality.

Come merry spring delight vs
for winter long did spite vs
in pleasure still perfeuer,
thy beauties ending neuer,
 spring, and growe
 lasting foe
wth ioyes increafing euer;

Lett colde from hence bee banisht
till hopes from mee bee vanisht,
butt blefs thy dainties growing
in fullnes freely flowing
 fweet birds fmg
 for the spring
all mirthe is now beestowing;

Philomeale in this arbour
makes now her louing harbour
yett of her state complaining
her notes in mildnes straining
 w^{ch} though fweet
 yett doe meete
her former luckles payning ;

In all the three stanzas, the semantic field of springtime prevails and transmits to the readers a sense of peace, happiness and change. This last concept hides the writer's will of encouraging women in disrupting their own existence and fighting for themselves to gain power, rights and social importance. This change is metaphorically evoked in two different ways: the arrival of spring time and Philomela.

The first case shows an evident contrast between Spring and Winter. Wroth refers to the latter as a period to forget, because it froze life and feelings and defines her contemporary period as being made of sufferance and submission for early modern women. This critic against society can be found in the second verse of the first stanza, where Wroth says: "for winter long did spite us". The complement "*Us*" seems to be the poet's tentative of getting a hold of women, who were aware of female sufferance and could better understand her metaphorical speech and need. For this reason, this poem seems to be a liberating scream that represents the first step to embrace this important change and move forward something positive, full of beauty, pleasure and mirth.

The second strong metaphorical image of change is represented by Philomela. Wroth use of this mythological figure is similar to Lanyer's for many reasons. First of all, she is introduced as a nightingale. The metamorphosis has already happened and Philomela is not a mutilated woman anymore: she got her voice back to explain to the world her story and thoughts. In the second stanza there is a general reference to a flock of birds which are introducing the spring through their songs: "sweet birds sing / for the spring / all mirthe is now bestowing". It is the same way through which Lanyer introduced Philomela. She described at first the flock present in the garden's mansion and between them, Lanyer recognized

Philomela's sing, which was particular and delighting¹⁷³. In this poem, Wroth separates Philomela from the rest of the flock, not only describing her perched on an arbour; but also, physically because Mary dedicates to her the last stanza of the poem. Philomela is on an *arbour*, singing some notes that seems beautiful, but in the reality, these are a concrete explanation of her state of mind. In fact, she is finally able to tell everyone what happened to her, "her former luckles paying", and why she is now a bird and not a human being any more. Even though women seem beautiful, sweet creatures, this does not mean that they should be also considered defenceless victims of male violence. To Wroth, women are stronger than they think they are; Philomela is a concrete example that should become an inspiration for them. She demonstrates how powerful the language can be: if used cleverly, it could become an important instrument of self-defence.

This strong association between Philomela and a hoped future female rebellion is presented twice in another minor story of this work, which is about the relationship between the daughter of a Sicilian duke called Limena and her lover Perissus, the heir of the king of Sicily. The two are walking in the middle of a forest. This episode somehow reminds of Lanier's work because it is springtime and the landscapes is personified with a living creature called "Silvana", who wants to communicate with the two protagonists, in particular with Limena with whom it shares both happiness and pain. Silvana uses the beautiful songs of the nightingale to express her feelings. Philomela is again present under the shape of a bird that has been able to regain the chance to speak freely about her sad past. This choice underlines again the fact that Wroth does not accept the female condition in early modern society as a

¹⁷³ "Those pretty birds that wonted were to sing, / Now neither sing, nor chip, nor use their wing, / But with their tender feet on some bare spray, / Warble forth sorrow, and their own dismay. / Fair Philomela leaves her mournful ditty, / Drowned in deep sleep, yet can produce no pity", Aemilia Lanier, *The description of Cooke-ham*, vv. 190-195.

tortured and raped Philomela, but she is hoping for a metamorphosis that can change the state of things. It is also a clear message of how women should abandon their past to transform their present to fight for a better future.

The “sweet music”¹⁷⁴ of Philomela creates a strong connection with Limena’s feelings, who declares: “a senseless bee / Of my felt paines, as is that pleasant Tree, / Of the sweet musique, thou deare Byrd does make, /who I imagine doth my woes partake.”¹⁷⁵. This melody has a positive power because it is an outburst of her feelings, which are explained to the world. This causes happiness in Limena’s heart because hearing Philomela’s song makes her feel better and gives her the proper motivation to talk about her personal situation.

However, the woman makes clear that there is still a big difference between them Philomela learnt how to talk and express herself freely to the world, while Limena does not know how to do it: “Thy grieffe thou utter’st, mine I utter not. / Yet thus at last we may agree in one, / I moure for what still is, what is gone”¹⁷⁶. It is arguably possible that Mary Wroth is associating herself to the nightingale because her work is presented to the readers as Philomela’s song and it shows her will of talking and fight against injustices; while Limena probably represents all those women who have to learn how to react and defend themselves.

Wroth is aware that to convince her male readers was extremely difficult. The figure of Perissus is used twice to express what men should say and do when they hear a woman talking and express her own opinions. In this passage, it is not only Limena who is able to hear and understand what Philomela is saying, but even the male counterpart is bewitched by the beautiful symphony that is filling the air. Wroth writes: “Perissus protested that he never had heard any like them, and in

¹⁷⁴ Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, Women Writers Project, University of Boston.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

so saying, he did right to them, and her who knew when she did well, and would be unwilling to lose the due unto her selfe, which he gave her, swearing he never heard any thing finelier worded [...]"¹⁷⁷. This man approaches differently a speaking woman: he respects her speech, which is made of "finelier worded". He does not interrupt her; on the contrary, he wants her to continue talking. This story goes on with another episode in which Perissus is the one who, after having dinner with his lover, listens again to the beautiful song of the nightingale; he is the first one who brings Limena out of the mansion to listen to Philomela in silence till they fall asleep cradled by the sweet melody of the bird¹⁷⁸. Perissus is extremely interested in Philomela's story. Women are precious beings: everything they do and say is precious as well and men should learn how to treat them better and consider them like a precious fragile thing that should not be ruined through their useless violence.

Comparing Philomela's character in Lanyer with Mary Wroth, in both cases she becomes the instrument and metaphor of a personal battle against the other sex. Lanyer focuses more on her personal condition as a female writer, who wants to become as important as the male ones, even though she is aware of how difficult it will be if she loses the help of a noble woman. In the second case, Mary Wroth uses Philomela more as a general example of a female reaction towards male injustices. Both see themselves as nightingales and want to be considered as examples for the female sex to promote a common fight against male submission. Women can win and gain their own freedom and their own voice to speak about their necessities loudly and freely.

¹⁷⁷ Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Women Writers Project, University of Boston.

¹⁷⁸ "After supper he would needs [...] goe walke into a Garden to heare the Nightingale, I obeyed with as much willingnesse as he desired, and so calling the Lady, my friend, with us, we passed away the time till night calld us to rest [...]." Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, Women Writers Project, University of Boston.

Philomela is also quoted in an anonymous ballad written in 1628-1629 to describe yet another type of social forced silence: the pain of an innocent victim of rape. *A New ballad, intituled, A warning to youth, shewing the lewd life of a merchants sonne of London* was written to show to the public a real-life case that was an example of one of the female constant fight against the misogynistic society. This work presents two different points of view: the story and the economical fall of the young rapist and the “lovely Dame”¹⁷⁹’s pain and her reaction to this injustice.

The first part begins with a long flashback (vv.1-30), where the author summarises the rapist’s past. The latter was the son of a rich merchant, who decided to leave his son all his lands and money, hoping that he would have followed his own steps. Unfortunately, this young man led a life of filthy lechery, drunkenness and gluttony that caused his “fatal overthrow”¹⁸⁰ and misery. When his father died, he lost mostly all his heritage and because he was aware that repentance was useless, he decided to make a change in his life. He sold all his lands to travel in many countries and spend his night with different women. Once in Holland, he was walking in “Anwerpe streets”¹⁸¹, when he saw this beautiful young lady, who was the daughter of a widow and was known for her “good report and fame”¹⁸². In the poem, she is personified as a beautiful purple rose, a flower that represents not only of beauty but also of delicacy, a frailty that could be easily destroyed¹⁸³.

In the young man’s soul, a strong desire of gaining her virginity starts to grow. He tries to distract himself with other women but it is not enough to “satisfie his lustfull eye”¹⁸⁴. After

¹⁷⁹ Unknown writer, *A New ballad, intituled, A warning to youth, shewing the lewd life of a merchants sonne of London*, v. 74.

¹⁸⁰ Unknown writer, *A New ballad, intituled, A warning to youth, shewing the lewd life of a merchants sonne of London*, v. 19.

¹⁸¹ *Ibidem*, v. 73.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, v. 76.

¹⁸³ “Her beauty like the Purple rose, / so glistered in his eye, / That ravisht with the same, he cravd / her secret company”, *Ibidem* vv. 77-80.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, v. 83.

a hundred days, he loses totally his own control and has found a way to deflower the woman. He forces her to drink wine and when she was too drunk to make no resistance, he rapes her. His action is compared to an evil act and if he succeeded was just because he received the aid of Satan. This is an indirect attack to all the men like him, who take advantage of their victims' moment of weakness to use their violence and cause them pain. The fact that his action has been supported by Satan implied that male minds are corrupted; they see and interpret things in the wrong way, acting like beasts¹⁸⁵.

From this moment of the ballad, the author focuses on the female point of view. The woman loses in few seconds her virginity that she had preserved for twenty years "with great severity"¹⁸⁶ and discovers that she got pregnant: "When she recovered her lost sence/ and knew of her defame, / In pining grief, she languisht long, / like Philomela by night"¹⁸⁷. For the first time, we can see the mythological figure considered in her human, silenced and mutilated condition to describe the reaction and the feelings of a raped victim. There is no other better example than Philomela because both of women share pain, violence, loss of virginity and social honour. However, their reaction is totally different. In the first case, Philomela is able to react thanks to her tapestry and the final metamorphosis into a nightingale; in the second case, this unknown young woman's life ends in tragedy. In fact, this pregnancy followed by a sense of dishonour, shame and exclusion, leads her to self-destruction and the death of her child. In order to kill the little creature, she drinks lots of wine, "drinking up her burning Wine, / she yielded up her breath, by which likewise the unborne Babe, / was scalded unto

¹⁸⁵ "A hundred dayes he wholly spent,/ as many nights in vaine, / As many angels he consumd, / Her maiden-head to gaine./ But nothing he prevaild at all, / until that Satans aid, / And cursed counsell helping him, / for to deflowre this maid. /For like a lustfull Lecher he, / found such convenient time, / That he inforced her to drink, till she was drunk with wine, / And being overcharged with wine, as Maidens heads be weake: / He ravisht her there, when that she could no resistance make." *Ibidem*, vv.85-101.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, v. 105.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, v. 112-115.

death.”¹⁸⁸. The story of this young woman reminds us of another mythological figure that is associated to rape too: Lucretia, the Roman matron. Both of them commit suicide, after having understood how much the social reality changed after having been raped and how they could not regain their lost honour. Moreover, another common element is the way in which they commit suicide; in the first case, Lucretia uses the same knife through which her rapist, Tarquin, menaced her before ravish her; this young woman instead kills first her child and consequently, reduces her lucidity and consciousness through the wine to commit suicide, the instrument used by her rapist to distract her before his attack.

VI.2 - Lucretia the Roman Matron

Lucretia has been considered as another interesting literary example of forced silence connected to her disgrace. What differs between Philomela and Lucrece’s silence is their reaction towards rape. The first case, Philomela’s tongue was mutilated after the sexual aggression by her rapist to prevent her from telling her sister about what had happened. She was able to find another way to express herself again through her tapestry and her following metamorphosis. Lucrece’s case is quite different. Even though she was raped, she was never fiercely silenced by her attacker; the morning after the assault, Tarquin left her alone in her room, giving her the chance to tell her family what happened. So, the communication of her pain and feelings to her family was successful; however, after that, she committed suicide, which The latter could be interpreted as a sort of self-forced silence that showed the woman’s psychological frailty.

As we have seen in Philomela’s case, even Lucrece’s rape has been a point of reference of many artists in the early modern period. A naked woman in a white bed, a man over her body,

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, vv.221-225.

armed with a knife, the fear of being raped and ruined by a stranger, the uncontrollable will of possessing the other: these are the traits of this well-known rape scene, which has been narrated and revisited by many writers and painters during the centuries. Tintoretto's version of this part of the story is a good start to introduce her character and all the contrastive reactions towards her personal situation and her decision to kill herself after having been "polluted" by Tarquin.



Titian, *Tarquin and Lucretia*, C.1570

This image is a mixture of contrasts, violence and expressivity, which have been intensified through an expert use of light and darkness. Tarquin is threatening to kill Lucretia if she refuses to submit herself to him. Behind them, there is a minor character, the servant, who will be able to escape. Tarquin is holding back the curtains, probably because he has heard some noises.

This painting is characterised principally by shadows, which are created by a light that comes from the top left of the scene and showers everything. This light separates the woman from the men, even though they are physically connected to one another thanks to the strong dynamism of their limbs and the power of their gazes. This woman is completely hit by the strong light. All her body is pale almost as white as her pillows. She becomes a physical representation of a pure light that in few seconds will be darkened by Tarquin's violence. Instead, the rapist, brings darkness, fear and craziness in that room. He is a dark character not only physically because of his skin, which reminds us of the racial opposition of the story (Tarquin was Etruscan, while Lucretia was a noble Roman woman). The shadow follows him from his behind, covering almost the entire setting, and it also falls across his face. Only few parts of his body are touched by the light: his back, his red beard and his reddish clothes, which point to his temperament. The light is used by Tintoretto also focus on important details: the tear on Lucretia's face, her jewellery, in particular her wedding ring on her left hand, the only part of her body that touches her attacker, and Tarquin's dagger.

As Ian Donaldson underlines, the knife played an important role in Lucretia's story because it appeared in three important turning points: first, it was used by Tarquin as instrument of menace; second, the woman commits suicide through it and in the end, Brutus swears upon the same knife to drive the Tarquins away from Rome.

Another important difference, which characterises not only this painting but also many other representations of this scene, as for example Artemisia Gentileschi's *Tarquin and Lucretia*, is the total nudity of the woman, which is in contrast with the dressed male character. Firstly, her nudity was used also in all the representations of her suicide, adding a sense of solitude and

depression to the woman. Many artists of the Renaissance saw her not as a model of virtue “but as a woman who has sought out Tarquin as a lover and killed herself after being rejected or abandoned by him”¹⁸⁹. For this reason, nudity showed a lack of sympathy. Yet her nakedness was used not only to show her beauty, but also her innocence and vulnerability.

Another interesting interpretation of the clothed and unclothed woman was connected to the contrast between the unfallen and the fallen woman. A naked Lucretia was also seen as a person who had lost everything, in particular her reputation and her marriage. The rape deletes any chance to regain her clothes and forces Lucretia to show everybody her newly polluted body.

Lucretia’s story and in particular her suicide, split the public opinion in two, trying to find an answer to these questions: Why did she kill herself? Was it really necessary? Should she be considered as a pre-Christian martyr or should she not be excused for what she did?

IV. 2 Lucrece’s story from a moral perspective

There was a huge difference between the concept of female and male guilty in Christian and in Roman society. In the first case, the concept of marriage was sacred: adultery put both the spouses under a death penalty. In Roman society, illicit sex was instead seen as a sort of transferred pollution. The woman’s family thought to have been contaminated by her adultery and by the child that had been born after this assault. For this reason, the law tended to punish only the adulterous women and their husbands had to kill them. The male infidelity through sexual relationships with servants of both sexes was instead accepted, without being fined or being classified as immoral people.

¹⁸⁹ Ian Donaldson, *The rape of Lucretia – a myth and its transformations*, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1982, p. 15.

Moreover, this society considered the woman culpable a priori and people did not make any difference between a rape case or an adultery one, because they believed that in both cases, consensual or not, the female body was submitted to a form of pollution¹⁹⁰.

Lucretia's case was complicated because it raised many questions about her story. Why should a young victim of rape, whose moral conduct has always been clean and perfect, decide to kill herself? Many writers and artists tried to transform her in a positive exemplum of sufferance and respect of the family and of the marriage. Livy's narration was important from this point of view because he made Lucretia admit in front of everyone that she was not guilty: only her body has been violated, while her mind had remained innocent. However, after the rape, the woman had to reveal everything because she felt a strong sense of pain and guilt that brought her to receive her punishment in front of everyone. She was so helpless that no words of comfort coming from the men around her could save her. Through the passing of time, her death was perceived on one hand as sign of moral perfectionism, her ultimate sign of virtue and innocence and, on the other hand, as a case of moral fallibility.

Tarquin was the only guilty person: he had dishonoured Lucretia, who had suffered more for this physical assault than for death itself. Moreover, her suicide was perceived as a sign of freedom, a chosen liberty that in the following centuries, was interpreted as a metaphor of Rome's freedom from the Tarquins' tyranny. This story reminded all men and women of the importance of certain values that sometimes could cost a person's life. Her situation made clear not only why people started to perceive suicide as a positive value, but at the same time the importance that rape could have in the Roman society.

¹⁹⁰ From that condition, the stoning was introduced as the best punishment for unfaithful and dishonoured women.

According to Charles, the woman was put in a serious situation because she was forced to consent to rape; there was also a slave that could testify against her. Suicide was an instrument used to “restore a lost image of former virtue”¹⁹¹; to destroy part of her past and be remembered as the virtuous wife of Collatinus. In the early Christianity, this condition brought people to believe that this suicide was similar to a religious sacrifice and to consider her as a pre-martyr of Christendom. Emulating her martyrdom was a subject of particular interest to the church; many women acted like Lucretia because that was the solution to their problems. Donaldson describes the story of the matron Sophronia: “when approached by the Emperor’s men, [she] asked for few minutes’ privacy so that she might adorn herself suitably to meet the Emperor; when she did not reappear, the men entered in the room and found her “with a dagger in her breast”¹⁹².

Dante was one of the many writers who quoted the story of Lucretia for her suicide. She was put in the limbo with other pre-Christian positive examples: “Vidi quel Bruto che cacciò Tarquinio, Lucrezia, Iulia, Marzia e Corniglia;”¹⁹³. In many occasions, Lucretia was compared to the crucified Christ. Marcantonio Raimondi’s Lucretia is caught in the moment before her suicide. Here the position of the woman can be arguably associated with Christ in the moment of his crucifixion.

¹⁹¹ Ian Donaldson, *The rape of Lucretia – a myth and its transformations*, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1982, p. 25.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*, p. 26.

¹⁹³ “That Brutus I beheld, Who Tarquin chased, Lucretia, Cato’s wife Marcia, with Julia and Cornelia there; [...]”, Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy canto IV*, vv.124-126.



Lucretia, Raimondi Marcantonio, c. 1511-1512

As Donaldson underlines, the early fathers of Christian church never actually claimed that a woman's honour was more important than her life. For this reason, suicide was not the best way to restore the lost innocence. Moreover, it was difficult to create a connection between this pagan Roman matron and a Christian God in whom she had never believed. Her story could be read thus from a negative point of view and her suicide gained a different nuance. The major representative of this negative side was St. Augustine, who commented on Lucretia's death and her moral behaviour in the "*De Civitate Dei*". This work is divided in two sections: the first one is a defence of Christianity; the second section focuses on contemporary socio-political problems.

In the first book, Augustine talks about the rape using Lucretia as a bad example that Christian women had not to emulate because her suicide was not necessary: she declared that in the moment of the sexual assault, she was aware that her mind

and soul were detached from her body and so she was not culpable at all. For this reason, St. Augustine did not understand her decision to renounce her life and commit a serious crime. He highlights his thesis from chapter 16 to 20, saying that if a woman underwent this type of violence, she would have lost her body's integrity and her virginity but not her chastity, because in those cases only one person of the couple commits this crime. "Let this, therefore, in the first place, be laid down as an unassailable position, that the virtue which makes the life good has its throne in the soul, and thence rules the members of the body, which becomes holy in virtue of the holiness of the will; [...] nothing that another person does with the body, or upon the body, is any fault of the person who suffers it"¹⁹⁴.

Augustine says that everything we do during the day put us in a condition of hurting and ruining our body; some activities produce not only pain but also pleasure, as for example sexual relationship. However, in those latter cases, we can consider an action sinful only when our mind agrees with our body.

The following chapter, the number seventeen ("*The suicide is always culpable*"), introduces Augustine's point of view about the value of this action for the entire Christian community. He underlines that there is no reason that could bring people to kill themselves; in the Holy Bible there is no passage that says that God is merciful towards them. On the contrary, the suicide victim is firstly a homicide against himself, who acted against his own faith. "And consequently, even if some of these virgins killed themselves to avoid such disgrace, who that has any human feeling would refuse to forgive them? [...] For if it is not lawful to take the law into our own hands, and slay even a guilty person, whose death no public sentence has warranted, then certainly he who kills himself is a homicide, and so much the guiltier of his own death, as he

¹⁹⁴ Sia dunque fermamente stabilito che la virtù morale della coscienza impera alle membra del corpo e che il corpo diviene santo per l'attitudine di un volere del santo. [...] ogni azione, che un altro compie mediante il corpo o nel corpo, se non si può evitare senza peccato proprio non è imputabile a chi la subisce. Sant'Agostino, La città di Dio, paragrafo XVI.

was more innocent of that offence for which he doomed himself to die.”¹⁹⁵.

Augustine judges Lucretia as an innocent chaste woman, because she belongs to the group of sexual victims, who tried to fight against their aggressor and never accepted that carnal union. Her soul was still pure after the rape, while only her body could have been defined contaminated. Lucretia became culpable after having committed suicide.

Augustine gave a possible explanation about her decision and behaviour: Lucretia was overwhelmed by her secret passion for Tarquin that brought her to secretly give her own consent to the rape; having recognized her culpability, she decided to kill herself, believing that it would have been the only way to atone for her sins. Thus, if this latter situation was true, she had died culpable and adulterous. For Augustine, Lucretia should have reacted as many other Christian women, who continued to live their lives being aware of their spiritual chastity and facing the negative consequences of the rape.

In the end, he calls also that the Holy law considers the act of killing a person or oneself a mortal sin: who kills himself, kills a person.

IV.3 Lucretia in 16th and 17th century English and American literature

Lucretia aroused the interest of many English writers and poets, who, influenced by this debate about the innocence or the culpability of this woman, gave their own personal interpretation of the story and reveal which side they took. I decided to analyse four examples of how the character of Lucrece is presented to

¹⁹⁵ E perciò quale umano sentimento non si vorrebbe perdonare alle donne che si uccisero per non subire violenza?[...] Se infatti non è lecito per private potere uccidere sia pure un colpevole poiché nessuna legge concede tale autorizzazione, certamente anche il suicida è omicida e tanto più colpevole quanto è più incolpevole nei confronti della motivazione per cui ha pensato di uccidersi. Sant’Agostino, La città di Dio, paragrafo XVII.

the public and how she is consequently used in those texts. This repertoire is composed by: William Shakespeare, Anne Bradstreet and Margaret Cavendish. This gave me the chance to analyse this subject from the point of view of both sexes and find common traits about their description of the woman and their personal position in this debate.

William Shakespeare wrote about Lucretia in his poem published in 1594, *The Rape of Lucrece*. Right from the start, he bases his work on the opposition between the male protagonist Tarquin defined as “lust-breathed”, a man “borne by the trustless wings of false desire” and the female one, “Lucrece the chaste”¹⁹⁶. These two epithets already defined the position of the author in this debate, because he clarifies the innocence of Lucretia and recognises all the culpability of the carnal act, described subsequently to the male counterpart. Shakespeare underlines that in this dramatic story, Collatinus, Lucrece’s husband had to live with the regret of having used his virtuous wife as a badge of honour in front of the man who would destroy his marriage.

Shakespeare has recreated through descriptions, dialogues and inner monologues the contrast of lightness and darkness seen previously in Titian’s *Tarquin and Lucrece*. His work is based on this clear distinction between the woman, who is “the fair and fiery-pointed sun”¹⁹⁷, a strong source of light thanks to her pale skin and her golden “threads”; and Tarquin, the moon, who represents darkness not only because he acts only in the cold and black night, accompanied by the howl of the wolfs and the calls of the owls, but also because he is able to extinguish the woman’s light. Shakespeare describes their eclipse through the eyes of the moon, which is totally amazed by the beauty of the sleeping star:

¹⁹⁶ *Shakespeare’s poems*, Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen, The Arden Shakespeare (2007), pp. 237-238.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 270.

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,
Cozening the pillow of a lawful kiss;
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;
Between whose hills her head entombed is;
Where like a virtuous monument she lies,
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes.

Without the bed her other fair hand was,
On the green coverlet, whose perfect white
Showed like an April daisy on the grass,
With pearly sweat resembling dew of night.
Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheathed their light,
And canopied in darkness sweetly lay
Till they might open to adorn the day.

Her hair like golden threads played with her breath
O modest wantons, wanton modesty!
Showing life's triumph in the map of death,
And death's dim look in life's mortality.
Each in her sleep themselves so beautify
As if between them twain there were no strife,
But that life lived in death, and death in life.

Her breasts like ivory globes circled with blue,
A pair of maiden worlds unconquerèd,
Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew,
And him by oath they truly honourèd.
These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred,
Who like a foul usurper went about
From this fair throne to heave the owner out.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 271-273.

This section reveals some of the most important topics of the poem. First of all, the first four stanzas are used to describe, through the eyes of Tarquin, the female protagonist, who is caught sleeping in her bed. Every stanza begins by focusing on a particular part of her body that attracted men's attention, emphasised through the use of powerful images or rhetorical figures like the personification, similitude and metaphor. There appears a beautiful woman that recalls the Italian angel-like woman ("angelicata") as Beatrice was for Dante or as Laura for Petrarca. She is a human being who is not only incredibly beautiful, but also a woman who spreads her innocence, beauty and purity to all the things that surrounds her or that she touches. One example of this is in the second stanza where Shakespeare uses a similitude to compare the candid skin of Lucrece's hand, which stands out against the green blanket that is wrapping her, to a daisy in a green lawn: "Without the bed her other fair hand was, / On the green coverlet, whose perfect white/ Showed like an April daisy on the grass,"¹⁹⁹. In the same stanza, Shakespeare focuses his attention on another female element, the eyes, which are compared to an African flower, the Marigold, known for its colourful petals. Due to the fact that the girl is sleeping, her eyes are closed like those flowers that have to wait the daylight to shine together with the sun to fill the world of light and life²⁰⁰.

Tarquin, in his section, alludes twice to the purity of Lucrece, when he dwells on her sleeping position and her breast. In the first case, he compares the woman to a "virtuous monument"²⁰¹. The female virtue here has a central role for both the protagonists. It attracts the enemy and increases his will to steal it from Lucrece and contaminate her with his polluted lust. It also will be the woman's only regret of; its absence will cause

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem, pg. 271, vv 393-396.

²⁰⁰ Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheathed their light, / And canopied in darkness sweetly lay / Till they might open to adorn the day. Ibidem, p.271, vv 397-399.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, pg. 271, v 391.

her suicide. Moreover, the idea of comparing Lucretia to an important public image, the monument, confirms the fact that the female protagonist has to be considered a good example for all the women, who have to remain virtuous before and during their marriage.

Her breast is composed of precious “worlds unconquered”²⁰². This last word underlines again her virtue, exceptionality and inaccessibility. Only Tarquin is able to see and touch illegally something that no other man had the privilege to admire.

This text presents another topic of this poem, which goes in contrast with the previous one: the lascivious Tarquin.

What could he see but mightily he noted?
What did he note but strongly he desired?
What he beheld, on that he firmly doted,
And in his will his willful eye he tired.
With more than admiration he admired
Her azure veins, her alabaster skin,
Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin.

As the grim lion fawneth o’er his prey
Sharp hunger by the conquest satisfied,
So o’er this sleeping soul doth Tarquin stay,
His rage of lust by gazing qualified;²⁰³

Shakespeare focuses his attention on physical details, images and rhetorical figures that describe Tarquin’s obsession for the woman. We are witnessing here his contemplation of Lucrece, before his assault. One physical element that is often exalted in a negative way is his eyes. At the end of the first

²⁰² *Ibidem*, pg. 274, v. 399.

²⁰³ *Ibidem*, p. 274-276.

stanza, Lucretia is admired through his “lewd unhallowed eyes”²⁰⁴, which in the fifth one, are defined as “wilful”²⁰⁵. Tarquin is always reconnected to the topic of passion, lust, and limitless appetite. To him, his eyes are the most powerful instrument that can determine all his actions.

Before entering in Lucretia’s chamber, Tarquin presents his thoughts to the public. His inner monologues are interesting because they show his internal debate, his uncertainties and fears. Tarquins knows that raping this girl will cause him negative consequences, as for example the loss of his throne and power; he hesitates in many cases because he does not know if Lucretia is worth all these future losses. Behind this well-known name, there is a frail human being who is fighting with his inner self to find a solution to his problem; whether to follow his lust or his mind.

Here, pale with fear, he doth premeditate
The dangers of his loathsome enterprise,
And in his inward mind he doth debate
What following sorrow may on this arise.
Then, looking scornfully, he doth despise
His naked armour of still-slaughtered lust,
And justly thus controls his thoughts unjust:²⁰⁶

Tarquin is not just a soulless, lustful man; we can read his mind to better understand his needs and find an explanation to his desires and actions. This inner fight ends when he orders to his mind to stop growing anxious; from that moment on, his heart will follow only his eyes, the instrument that shows him his prize: her beauty.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, p.271, v.393.

²⁰⁵ Ibidem, p.273, v. 408.

²⁰⁶ Ibidem, pp. 254-255.

'Then, childish fear, avaunt! debating, die!
Respect and reason, wait on wrinkled age!
My heart shall never countermand mine eye:
Sad pause and deep regard beseem the sage;
My part is youth, and beats these from the stage:
Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize;
Then who fears sinking where such treasure lies?'²⁰⁷

In addition to this, once having tried to silence his negative thoughts, Tarquin admits that what is going to happen will never be accepted by his pagan god and all his prayers will be “unfruitful” because he will be heard anymore. “I must deflower”²⁰⁸: Tarquin reveals that this is more than a simple desire, it is a personal aim that he has to achieve. Even the power of gods is not enough to stop his desires and this causes the break between this man and his religion. The consequence of this removal will be the creation of a new and personal belief, whose gods are Love and Fortune, the only ones that can understand his mind and support his choice:

'Then Love and Fortune be my gods, my guide!
My will is back'd with resolution:
Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried;
The blackest sin is clear'd with absolution;
Against love's fire fear's frost hath dissolution.
The eye of heaven is out, and misty night
Covers the shame that follows sweet delight'²⁰⁹.

A third element present in this poem, which defines the relationship between the two protagonists, is represented by the

²⁰⁷ Ibidem, pp. 261-262.

²⁰⁸ Ibidem, p. 268.

²⁰⁹ Ibidem, p. 268.

language of hunting that puts Tarquin and Lucretia in the respective roles of hunter and prey. Titian's painting puts the king's son in an aggressive, dominant position; Shakespeare does something compassable by using rhetorical figures and images. Tarquin is compared to dangerous animals, while, on the contrary, Lucrece is associated to weak, innocent creatures. An example is to be found at the beginning of the sixth stanza, where he is compared to a grim lion that is over its prey. The same moment is described through another natural scene; a dove (Lucretia) that is sleeping peacefully and a "night-owl" (Tarquin), which is waiting to catch it²¹⁰. Another image that is present throughout the poem is the one of the wolf Tarquin and the lamb Lucrece. In the scene of the sexual violence, Shakespeare creates an association between the attack of the predator and Tarquin's rape: "The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries, / Till with her own white fleece her voice controlled / Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold."²¹¹.

The inner monologue of Lucretia about "this false night's abuses"²¹² occupies most of the second half of the poem. The Shakespearean concept of female guilty could be an answer to Augustine's doubt without questioning her innocence. In one passage she explains clearly why she feels guilty about this assault, even though her soul, differently from her body, remained untouched and pure. Her remorse depends on having been used as an object for the entertainment of another man, which brought her to destroy her honour and promise made to Collatinus.

'Yet am I guilty of thy honour's wrack;
 Yet for thy honour did I entertain him.
 Coming from thee, I could not put him back,
 For it had been dishonour to disdain him.

²¹⁰ "The dove sleeps fast that this night-owl will catch", *Ibidem*, p. 269.

²¹¹ *Ibidem*, p.295.

²¹² *Ibidem*, p. 324.

Besides, of weariness he did complain him,
And talked of virtue: O, unlooked-for evil,
When virtue is profaned in such a devil!²¹³

Lucrece takes everything out on the public. She needs some comfort, even though she knows that nobody will answer her desperate cry. She expresses her hate towards the man who deflowered her. In the previous stanza, she compares Tarquin to a devil. Lucretia always refers to him as a contaminating creature that survives only attaching itself to another living being. In the following stanza, Shakespeare uses the anaphora not only to compare Tarquin to vile and horrible elements but also to underline the female rejection towards him and her incapacity of understanding his past action.

‘Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud?
Or hateful cuckoos hatch in sparrows’ nests?
Or toads infect fair founts with venom mud?
Or tyrant folly lurk in gentle breasts?
Or kings be breakers of their own behests? [...]’²¹⁴

Lucretia suffers from Tarquin’s pollution, she knows that he had already contaminated her body and for this reason, she does not want to “poison” Collatinus with her disdain, which causes her so much pain. Even though only her body has been ruined definitely by the king’s son, we gradually witness the destruction of Lucretia’s mind and soul to such an extent that she starts to rave. Firstly, she feels empathy towards a painting that she is contemplating in her room, which represents the fall and sack of Troy. The woman compares her physical and

²¹³ Ibidem, p. 307.

²¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 308.

internal destruction to the ancient city, which is burning into the flames, after having been raided by the enemies:

‘Her house is sacked, her quiet interrupted,
Her mansion battered by the enemy,
Her sacred temple spotted, spoiled, corrupted,
Grossly engirt with daring infamy.’²¹⁵

Only after that does Lucretia decide to commit suicide, perceived as the only way to restore a previous equilibrium. However, as the woman underlines, her act of making “some hole”²¹⁶ in her polluted body should not be blamed because she wants to remove her “troubled soul”²¹⁷ from her refused flesh.

Is the fact of considering herself a sexual instrument of Tarquin’s entertainment the only reason for her suicide? Shakespeare alludes to another possible fear, which Augustine already considered: a future pregnancy. During Lucrece’s monologue, she pronounces the sentence: “This bastard graff shall never come to growth”²¹⁸. The way she refers to this “graff”, which is extremely confident; so, probably Lucretia knows that she is even carrying an illegitimate child, born from a sexual violence. She knows that this baby could bring disgrace to her marriage and her future family with Collatinus. That baby represents a living pollution and she cannot cause other sufferance to her beloved husband.

At the end of the story, this woman transforms herself in a “poor broken glass”²¹⁹. This image perfectly describes this character, Lucretia is not broken physically because of Tarquin’s rape, which took away an important part of herself; but it also

²¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p.331.

²¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p.331, v. 416.

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p.332.

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p.323.

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p.375.

represents public self-destruction and then suicide; as well as the degradation of her pure soul into a corrupted one.

The writer Anne Bradstreet, in “The Tenth Muse”, a collection of poems published in 1650, also refers to the story of Lucretia and Tarquin. This collection was written to convey the writer’s feelings concerning religion and her family. The following text “Tarquinius Superbus, the last Roman King” is an extract of the section “The Roman Monarchy”, which is about the fall of several kings from the past.

“Tarquin the proud, from manners called so,
Sate on the Throne, when he had slaine his foe;
Sextus his Son, doth most unworthily
Lucretia force, mirroure of chastety;
She loathed so the fact, she loath’d her life,
And shed her guiltlesse blood, with guilty knife.
Her Husband sore incens’d, to quit this wrong,
With Junius Brutus rose, and being strong,
The Tarquins they from Rome with speed expell,
In banishment perpetuall, to dwell;
The Government they change, a new one bring,
And people sweare, ne’re to accept of King.
The end of the Roman Monarchy, being the fourth and last.”²²⁰

In this poem, five different characters are presented to the readers: Tarquinius Superbus, the king of Tarquins; his son Tarquinius Sextus; Lucretia; Collatinus and Junius Brutus. The first two represent the concept of violence, because both are caught after having committed serious crimes. Tarquinius Superbus is sitting proudly on his throne, after having killed an enemy in a cruel way: “he had slaine a foe”. His son has

²²⁰ Tarquinius Superbus, the last Roman King, Bradstreet Anne, The Tenth Muse, 1650. Poem taken from the site of Women Writers Project.

committed another kind of violence, which is double: he did not only force himself on a chaste woman, but he also destroyed her psychologically and led her to kill herself. Bradstreet seems to give at first a positive interpretation of Lucrece; the woman is described through the epithet “mirror of chastity”. Moreover in the sixth verse, “And shed her guiltlesse blood, with guilty knife”, when Lucretia commits suicide, her blood is defined “guiltless”. This adjective recovers both the Shakespearean and the Augustinian points of view concerning the innocence of Lucrece, which remained untouched, even though the woman was raped, because in those situations, only one person of the couple is really guilty and in this case it is the male counterpart. However, what is not clear is the way in which the poetess uses the word “guilty knife” to describe the weapon. It could have a double interpretation: being a personified instrument that attacks the innocent woman; or as an indirect reproach for Lucrece’s decision to kill herself. In the first case, shifting the focus on the knife and giving it life, could have been as an attempt at the woman’s soul clean from the suicide crime’s stain and let the public perceive her death as unintended as possible. In the second case, it could be interpreted as the retrieval of Augustine’s accusation against the woman suicide was unnecessary and condemnable by God and the entire Christian community. This latter explanation is intensified by the following verse: “Her husband, sore incensed to quit this wrong”. It does not only imply that Collatinus feels guilty about what happened to his wife; but it also underlines that her reaction was unnecessary and “wrong”. The only real hero that emerges in this story is Junius Brutus, because he respects the last request of Lucretia (to take revenge on the Tarquins), and he also frees Roman people from their dictator and allows the birth a new government: the first Roman Republic.

This poem creates a sort of connection between the freedom of the female protagonist and the one of Rome. This link is

perceived as indissoluble because only through the suicide of Lucretia there could have been the naissance of the Roman Republic. In conclusion, Bradstreet seems to confirm Augustine's point of view: Lucretia was a pure and innocent woman even after having been raped by Tarquin, because she never gave her own consent to him. For this reason, she should not have given up on herself and her family but she should have dealt with this reality, believing that it was not her fault at all.

In "Duchess of Newcastle – The world's Olio", published in 1655, Margaret Cavendish wrote a paragraph about Lucrece:

"The onely true and honest Wife was Lucretia, for she killed her self to save her Husbands Honour, although it was her Husbands fault that caused her Ravishment; for it was not her admittance to entice Men, but her Husbands foolish and rash admittance, to bring Men to be tempted: for it was her Husbands Praises that kindled, and her Beauty that inflamed the Ravisher. But that Man is worthy to be Horned, that is not contented to enjoy the Virtues of his Wife to himself."²²¹

This text is more a strong accusation against Collatinus than being a defence for Lucretia's reaction towards her suicide. Right from the start the woman is classified as a "true and honest wife", two qualities that every woman should have in order to maintain alive her promise made in front of God. To Cavendish Lucrece is a heroine because her death is defined as a sacrifice made to save her husband's honour from the future disgraces that her rape would have brought to his life. Lucretia did not commit suicide because she was thinking not about herself, but about her family and its future. It is an act that must not be condemned. Cavendish continues to defend Lucretia, underlining that the real culpable who has to blame himself for

²²¹ Margaret Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio LIB II. Part III*, pg. 132.

the rest of his life about what happened is Collatinus. His boasting around about his wife's values without even caring about the future consequences put her in her ravisher's possession. Like Anne Bradstreet, Cavendish does not sympathize towards Collatinus' pain; she defines him as a "horned" man who enjoyed himself revealing his wife's virtues and this loss is the correct punishment to better appreciate what he destroyed. This female protection is a clear reaction to this debate. Margaret Cavendish does not hide her need to protect the image of Lucretia. She sympathises with this woman and almost sanctifies her as a positive image to emulate.

In conclusion, these three reactions towards this debate show clearly that in most of cases, Lucretia was a positive figure that writers wanted to understand and protect. All of them provide her the role of a chaste and virtuous woman, who did not lose the qualities of a good and respectable wife, even though she was violently deprived of her virtue. Her suicide remains a sensitive issue: Christian faith and moral concerns prevented many people from accepting completely her decision and forgiving her for not having fought for her life.

Conclusion

The aim of my thesis was to study some of the women who have been forgotten through the passing of time and have not been able to tell their own story about the sexual violence received or were forced to change their version of facts following certain rhetorical rules. For these reasons, their only instrument of self-defence, their voice, was reduced or was taken away from them.

As the previous chapters have highlighted, a woman, who denounced a man of having raped her, was rarely protected or believed; because the jury did not know if she was telling the truth or was lying to obtain a substantial dowry and searching for a better life. On the contrary, in a vast majority of cases the charges were dropped because judges tended to consider the social class of the rapist and of the victim. The latter was usually a servant or a peasant, so she was considered inferior compared to her rapist, who was a noble man or a middle-class man. For this reason, judges did not want to ruin his reputation by putting him in prison, making him marry the girl or paying her a specific amount of money.

Even though the period analysed was overwhelmingly against women, there have been some cases of victims who have been able to react, transforming themselves into a little nightingale to show the power of their voice and their inner strength. On the other hand, there have been cases of women who have been silenced as if they were an early modern mutilated Philomela, or have decided to renounce to fight for themselves, because they knew that they would have lost this battle right from the start, as it had happened to Lucretia.

In the first case, there have been several nightingales both in Italy and in England. Cecilia, Camilla and Artemisia could be

considered as the main examples of a positive female reaction against social injustice. Cecilia decided not to follow the rhetorical rules imposed by the early modern society to explain what happened the day of her rape. For this reason, her version turned out to be totally different from her mother's one. This was an act of courage through which she showed that she was not afraid of swimming against the tide: she wanted to express herself freely and not being considered her mother's pawn.

Camilla's version of facts was not consistent with the social rules. In fact, she revealed in her narration all her feelings for the man accused of having raped her. In this way, she dropped all the charges and went through bouts of critique that would have destroyed her life and reputation.

Artemisia's case reminds us of the Philomela story. In fact, she firstly was heard only twice in a year in jail and in court to express her own feelings, but her narration was not enough to be believed and more than once her rapist tried to blame her. For this reason, she can somehow be compared to the mutilated Philomela. Her metamorphosis started with her paintings that reveal concretely to the public her feelings a raped woman. In this case, art had the same importance that the tapestry had for Philomela, through which she had the chance to contact her sister Procne. Her paintings give Artemisia the chance to become a beautiful nightingale, that was free to talk about her feelings. Moreover, she became a successful painter in Italy and abroad and in this way; she gained her own economic independence and the chance to provide a good life for her and for her daughter. Artemisia showed that women could play an important role in that society even though it was not an easy path.

Susan More, Jane Anger, Aemilia Lanyer and Mary Wroth could be perceived as English nightingales who have been able to fight in different ways to defend women and their rights.

Susan More's case is another example of how a woman has been able to publicly challenge the authorities to highlight how her rapist's position was indefensible, because he took advantage of her in a moment of weakness. Moreover, she concretely proved of being an honest and a strong person because she was not only a hard worker but she also carried on her pregnancy refusing any help. Her actions and words defined her metamorphosis into an independent woman.

Jane Anger, Aemilia Lanyer and Mary Wroth could be considered little nightingales as well because they used their writings to express their own opinions and challenge their society, criticizing most of all the common beliefs that belittled the female role and its importance. These three women used two different male instruments: the pamphlet and the sonnet to attack the other sex and demonstrate that women could receive their same education and be even better than them. They strictly believed in female power that could change against the state of things. In Lanyer's and Wroth's works, the nightingale may represent the female poet herself, who is aware of the difficulties in taking up this career as a woman and hopes to be heard and understood by men.

These rape cases showed even women defeated by the society and faced several injustices like the mutilated Philomela and Lucretia. Olimpia, Margaret Knowlsey and the unknown rape victim of the ballad called "A New ballad, intituled, A warning to youth, shewing the lewd life of a merchants sonne of London", are concrete example of a life destroyed by the misogynistic society's decisions. Olimpia hoped to be believed by the judges, describing in details through the rhetorical language her double rape, and to receive a dowry to repair the damage received. However, all the proofs collected and her version of the story were not considered by the judges, who did not only give her the amount of money requested but they also

put the girl in prison. This is an Italian example of forced silence and of a “mutilated” woman.

Margaret Knowsley’s case is another clear demonstration of how the society tended to protect men, even though there were proofs only against the latter. Her rapist was a clergyman and a colleague of the judges, so this woman knew that it was impossible to win this case. Judges used gossip as an excuse to punish her and protect her rapist. She reminds us of the mutilated Philomela because she was strongly silenced by the society and received a physical punishment for having tried to defame a priest.

The last example is more connected to the image of Lucretia because both committed suicide after having tried to talk about the sexual violence received. It is a case of a forced self-silence that is perceived as the only way through which they could find an inner peace in a world that was not ready to understand and defend them.

This thesis presents a past reality that is not so different from the present one. Unfortunately, even though many centuries have passed and feminist fights have been won, our media give us news of at least one rape case per week, where the woman is killed or hurt and her rapist is not strongly punished for what he did. We are still living in a misogynistic world, which does not totally defend us.

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Riassunto in lingua italiana

Questa tesi fa parte del Women Writers Project. Esso è progetto a lungo termine, promosso dalla Northeastern University of Boston, che ha l'obiettivo di far conoscere a professori, studenti e a tutti i lettori in generale, il mondo della scrittura femminile. L'Università di Padova ha deciso di aderirvi, creando un gruppo di lavoro formato al momento da quattro studenti che tramite la propria ricerca di tesi, dovranno utilizzare i testi forniti dall'università americana per approfondire un tema scelto dal professore italiano. In questo caso, l'obiettivo comune è quello di parlare dell'eccellenza femminile nel periodo tra gli ultimi trent'anni del 1500 e i primi trent'anni del 1600, creando un paragone tra la realtà italiana e quella inglese dell'epoca.

Il mio lavoro verte su una particolare tipologia di eccellenza che è legata a un tema ancora molto odierno e purtroppo non sempre considerato: la violenza femminile. Il mio obiettivo è non solo prestare la mia voce a donne che non hanno avuto l'occasione di parlare o che non sono state comprese ma anche di far conoscere coloro che hanno reagito contro la società misogina che imponeva loro il silenzio e causava loro sofferenze.

Essere una donna all'epoca significava seguire regole che imponevano uno stile di vita ben preciso a cui ella non poteva ribellarsi. La donna non aveva scelte e non poteva permettersi di intervenire perché era la parte maschile della società che parlava per lei. Uno degli elementi che decidevano il suo futuro e l'accettazione nella comunità era la sua virginità. Quest'ultima costituiva un valore importantissimo che concretamente definiva la fedeltà della ragazza al futuro marito e alla famiglia. Senza di essa, ella finiva quasi sempre coll'essere rinnegata da entrambe le parti e la società le toglieva tutti i pochi diritti di cui godeva prima. Purtroppo lo stesso destino veniva riservato anche a coloro che venivano violentemente private di questo dono e quasi sempre non c'era possibilità di rimediare alla perdita. Infatti, la società tendeva sempre a considerare la donna colpevole a priori, perché discendente da Eva, la prima vera peccatrice che portò Adamo a mangiare il frutto proibito. Per questo motivo, nei tribunali, la versione dei fatti della donna era sempre messa in discussione e gli interrogatori del presunto stupratore e dei testimoni erano considerati fondamentali per capire se ella aveva davvero subito violenza o se stava trovando una scusa da cui poter beneficiare una ricca dote o un matrimonio. Inoltre per poter essere creduta, i giudici spesso chiedevano a un'ostetrica di verificare lo stato della ragazza. Purtroppo questo controllo non era sempre utile perché passava talmente tanto tempo da quando era avvenuta la violenza, che ogni traccia fisica come graffi, sangue e lividi erano già spariti e le ostetriche facevano fatica a capire quanto tempo fosse passato dallo stupro subito. Un altro aspetto importante che poteva salvare le donne di fronte ai giudici, era

esporre il caso seguendo un discorso che la società aveva preparato per loro. Esso prevedeva che la vittima sottolineasse che era stato l'uomo a saltarle addosso ferendola profondamente. La descrizione in dettagli dava più realismo alla denuncia. Inoltre, molte donne accusavano i loro stupratori anche di averle raggirate con promesse che poi non avevano mantenuto, come una somma di denaro o una richiesta di matrimonio. Molti dei casi analizzati in entrambi i paesi presentano una conclusione poco felice perché nonostante fossero state raccolte prove sufficienti per condannare l'uomo, la giuria decise di proteggere comunque la reputazione di quest'ultimo e punire ingiustamente la donna.

Allo stesso tempo, ci sono stati casi eccezionali in cui la vittima è riuscita a reagire e riappropriarsi dei propri diritti e della propria reputazione. Molte di queste hanno dimostrato con i fatti che meritavano giustizia e che lottare contro le ingiustizie fosse possibile, nonostante il loro sesso.

Questo lavoro descrive in quattro capitoli, diversi casi di stupro avvenuti sia in Italia che nell'Inghilterra premoderna, descrivendo le diverse reazioni delle vittime e classificandole in due categorie rappresentate da due figure letterarie molto conosciute per lo stupro subito: Filomela e Lucrezia, la matrona romana. La prima è riuscita a superare l'ingiustizia della mutilazione e del conseguente silenzio forzato, grazie alla sua metamorfosi in un usignolo, che con il suo canto annuncia l'arrivo di un cambiamento. La seconda invece, si è auto imposta il silenzio forzato con il suicidio. Quasi nessuna donna analizzata in questi capitoli è arrivata a prendere questa scelta, ma la decisione di Lucrezia è stata interpretata come una sottomissione delle vittime di stupro alle ingiustizie e alla consapevolezza di essere incapaci di cambiare il proprio destino.

1- Rape cases in the Venetian and Roman courts

In questo primo capitolo, sono stati descritti una serie di casi avvenuti nelle città italiane Venezia e Roma. Per quanto riguarda la parte relativa alla realtà veneziana, vengono raccontate tutte le tipologie di stupro che sono state inserite nei registri di uno dei corpi legislativi più importanti dell'epoca, gli Avogadori. Tali casi sono stati divisi sulla base della classe sociale degli stupratori e delle loro vittime e anche dell'età di quest'ultime. Nonostante sia difficile crederlo, i nobili erano coloro a commettere più violenze sulle donne, perché essendo ricchi e potenti, godevano anche di una forte protezione da parte della società e dei giudici. In pochi casi erano puniti e quando questo succedeva, era perché era stato commesso un reato particolarmente grave e troppe prove lo avevano incastrato. Generalmente tali punizioni venivano decise sulla base della classe di appartenenza dello stupratore. Un nobile veniva punito più con multe salate che con un periodo in prigione, perché a differenza di un popolano, poteva permettersi di pagare una cauzione. Ci sono stati casi in cui, se lo stupro era stato considerato grave, il nobile veniva punito sia con una multa molto salata che con un

anno minimo di prigionia. Queste punizioni severe accadevano soprattutto se la vittima era una “puella”, cioè una bambina che non aveva ancora avuto il primo ciclo mestruale e aveva comunque subito violenza sessuale. In altri casi vi erano punizioni minori se la vittima era una suora e ancora meno se la donna era sposata o vedova.

Per la parte romana invece, vi sono diversi esempi di casi che hanno sconvolto i tribunali dell'epoca, sottolineando come fosse molto difficile per i giudici credere alle parole di una donna che si proferiva vittima di stupro, soprattutto poi se ella non aveva prove sufficienti per dimostrarsi tale.

Questi casi si dividono in tre categorie: vittima passiva, donna cosciente della propria condizione e stupro basato sull'amore e sull'attrazione.

Nel primo caso per vittima passiva, si intende l'incapacità della donna di poter vincere contro le ingiustizie della società. La storia di Olimpia ne è un esempio. Questa ragazza non ricevette nessuna dote nonostante la sua storia fosse stata raccontata esattamente come i giudici volevano e tutte le prove fossero contro il suo stupratore, un uomo nobile. In questo caso, la povertà della donna non l'ha salvata e l'ha condotta ad un periodo di carcere per aver “ingiustamente” accusato un suo superiore di un atto simile.

La seconda tipologia invece riguarda donne che hanno usato un linguaggio diverso per affrontare la questione in tribunale e far valere la propria posizione. Cecilia era stata condotta di fronte ai giudici da sua madre, la quale una volta saputo che sua figlia aveva perso la verginità, la costrinse a raccontare che fosse stata vittima di stupro per rimediare alla sua perdita e guadagnare del denaro. Una volta datole la parola, Cecilia si ribella e racconta come i fatti si sono svolti e sottolineò che il rapporto sessuale con quell'uomo era voluto, perché dipendeva da una promessa che però non venne rispettata. La ragazza perse la causa e tornò a mani vuote.

Camilla è invece un esempio della terza tipologia. Anche lei si ribellò alla versione della madre, ma aggiunse un aspetto che fece decadere l'accusa di stupro e la conseguente reputazione della ragazza. Infatti quest'ultima si dichiarò innamorata e attratta dall'uomo. I sentimenti non dovevano essere presenti nella versione spiegata ai giudici, perché sottolineavano un attaccamento della donna all'uomo e di conseguenza non si poteva parlare di violenza sessuale ma di rapporto consenziente.

2- Artemisia Gentileschi – “The modern Judith”

L'intero secondo capitolo invece focalizza su un caso di stupro a Roma che ha visto come protagonista la pittrice Artemisia Gentileschi. Quest'ultima riuscì a vincere la causa, non solo perché ebbe modo di descrivere precisamente quello che le successe, utilizzando la retorica richiesta e avendo l'aiuto di numerosi testimoni, ma questa sventura divenne presto la sua benedizione. Infatti, le prime opere dipinte dopo lo stupro, che la identificarono come prima grande pittrice italiana, raccontano di storie bibliche e mitologiche di donne stuprate come Lucrezia o di eroine che hanno trovato la forza di difendersi da uomini violenti, come Giuditta, a cui lei ha prestato il suo volto. Artemisia ha dato vita ad un femminismo inconscio perché i suoi quadri mostrano la forza di questa donna che a fronte di uno stupro e un matrimonio fallito, ha saputo raccontarsi, diventare una pittrice molto apprezzata in tutta Europa e crescere da sola una figlia.

3- Rape cases in England – Margareth Knowsley & Susan More

Il terzo capitolo invece ha come protagoniste due donne inglesi, Margaret Knowsley e Susan More, che hanno subito violenza sessuale, ma la conclusione dei loro casi ebbe due risvolti completamente diversi. Infatti la prima vittima, Margaret Knowsley, moglie e madre di tre figli, venne stuprata da uno dei tanti signori per cui lavorava come donna delle pulizie. Questo padrone era un prete e collega dei giudici che avrebbero dovuto giudicare il caso di questa donna. Nonostante le testimonianze raccolte e i dettagli con cui veniva raccontato l'accaduto, i giudici difesero lo stupratore e punirono pesantemente la donna con l'accusa di aver fatto del gossip, e cioè di aver fatto circolare la voce sul suo accaduto, senza essersi rivolta in prima istanza alla corte.

Susan More invece ricorda molto Artemisia per la forza con cui ha saputo affrontare il dramma dello stupro di fronte ai giudici. Il padrone per cui lavorava la violentò dopo averla fatta ubriacare e la mise incinta. Ella perse il suo lavoro anche nelle altre case delle famiglie per cui prestava servizio e rifiutò ogni aiuto dalle persone che la vedevano vagare in pieno inverno, privata non solo di dimora ma anche di cibo e di acqua, con cui avrebbe potuto sopravvivere per mettere al mondo suo figlio. La sua retorica, le testimonianze e la sua buona reputazione hanno salvato questa donna da possibili ingiuste accuse e punizioni.

4- Philomela and Lucrece: literary exemplum of forced silence

L'ultimo capitolo invece riguarda principalmente la reazione femminile delle scrittrici inglesi che hanno usato Filomela come metafora della loro condizione interiore di donna che voleva ottenere importanza nella società e far sentire la propria voce ad un pubblico misogino e maschilista, come Jane Anger, Aemilia Lanyer e Mary Wroth. Margareth Cavendish e Anne Bradstreet hanno

commentato e difeso la scelta di Lucrezia nel volersi suicidare sottolineando che anche se è stato compiuto un atto impuro, esso però era scusabile perché non era riuscita psicologicamente a sopportare di essere stata trattata come oggetto per curare le frustrazioni di un uomo che non amava. Questa loro visione è stata accostata a quella Shakespeariana espressa nell'opera "The rape of Lucrece" e opposta alla reazione di Sant'Agostino, che invece condannava questa donna come impura non tanto per considerarsi violata ma per aver rifiutato il dono della vita, senza prima aver lottato per redimersi.

Queste donne che hanno saputo affrontare tutti questi ostacoli per farsi ascoltare e difendersi all'interno di questa società rappresentano un'eccellenza. La forza interiore che hanno dimostrato non solo nel vincere le cause in tribunale, nel pagare ingiustamente certe accuse ma anche nell'usare quadri e opere letterarie per comunicare la loro storia e i loro pensieri, è una ricchezza enorme per tutte le donne di oggi che devono prendere spunto da queste eccellenze per lottare per sé stesse e imparare ad amarsi.

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