

MARY D. GARRARD, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989. Pp. 607; 24 color pl., 332 black-and-white ill.

In 1987, *The Art Bulletin* published a scholarly analysis of feminist art history in the series "State of Research" (Thalia Gouma Peterson and Patricia Matthews, "The Feminist Critique of Art History," LXIX, 1987, 326–357). Within the feminist art history community the authors discerned at least two generations whose definitions of the project differed radically. Mary D. Garrard's work was considered as representative of a first, centrist generation, active in the academy in the United States, which was contrasted with a second, theoretically and geographically defined, British generation, of which some of my writings were presented as examples.

It would be impossible to begin this review without acknowledgment of the protest this article solicited, which the journal published with a defense from the original authors. There can be no doubt that considerable theoretical diversity characterizes contemporary feminist interventions in and on cultural analysis in general, and art history in particular. It might, therefore, seem folly to invite the representative of one tradition to comment on the major oeuvre produced from within a different theoretical community. Are the results not entirely predictable? But it would be death to feminism if it were ever reducible to a set of fixed oppositions or easily defined positions, as if we could dismiss either serious scholarship or dedicated attempts to produce new and important knowledge simply because they fail some partisan methodological test. Yet mere tolerance of academic diversity is itself an inappropriate response to important feminist work, for it would suggest that there is nothing really significant at stake.

Mary D. Garrard has produced a valuable interpretation of an undoubtedly major artist of the Italian Baroque. Artemisia Gentileschi solicited little serious attention by scholars, much that was salacious and ridiculous, until the women's movement began to write upon the text of history women's desire for a quite different kind of knowledge. Mary Garrard states her purpose in terms that belie the complexity of the undertaking in which the antagonistic forces of feminism and art history strive for equal space. She writes:

Beyond her immediate seventeenth-century context, Gentileschi has, among all the pre-modern women artists, given us the most consistently original interpretations of the many traditional themes that she treated. It is my purpose in this book to give her expressive originality at least some of the full art-historical consideration that it deserves but has yet to receive [p. 3].

How can Mary Garrard achieve her ends when the monographic form, the celebration of creative innovation and originality, itself the subtext of a profoundly gendered discourse on individuality and humanity, will structurally conflict with what has to be said in order to render Artemisia Gentileschi a candidate for monographic revision? For Mary Garrard sets herself to integrate her subject by valorizing her difference. "Most consistently original treatments of traditional themes" means distinctive woman-centered renderings of the female hero, based in the experience of a woman in a male-dominated world.

"Artemisia Gentileschi" is already a figure in representation. This poses special historical and art-historical problems. Neglected, a painter of major stature without full monographic treatment, though certainly not without some serious writing and cataloguing (R. Ward Bissell, 1968; Alfred Moir, 1967; Richard Spear,

1971), she not only demands art-historical re-institution, but poses the question of why she should have been subject to notoriety accompanied by professional neglect. Garrard pulls no punches: "The conclusion is inescapable: Artemisia Gentileschi has been neglected because she was female;" (p. 4). But Gentileschi is not absent from historical record. Scarce are the documents needed for serious art-historical scholarship about her working methods, her commissions and legal transactions, how the business of painting was run in the Gentileschi family enterprise, and so forth. Yet there is a continuous discourse in which she figures for her "atrociously misdirected genius" (Mrs. Anna Jameson) and as a "lascivious and precocious girl" (Rudolf and Margot Wittkower). Another way to understand Mary Garrard's project, then, is as the invention of an alternative representation to secure a different set of connotations for the sign "Gentileschi." As opposed to "Artemisia," the victim of rape and a notorious trial, a serious artist is meant to emerge from the stern disciplines of art-historical scholarship at its most careful, subtle, and rigorous. Gentileschi is intended to signify "artist," one competent to deploy the full range of technical and iconographic resources in Baroque art to radically different ends. The problem Mary Garrard tackles is then to reconcile the demand to re-incorporate this artist within a canonical structuration called "art," individuating her within a collectively legitimated mode, with the necessity to acknowledge a specificity in her experience as a woman, which can only signify exteriority and difference from that canon.

But there is more than scholarly "truth" at stake here, saving the artist from an exaggerated "vie romancée." "If Artemisia has been ignored by writers touched with a masculinist bias, she has been warmly embraced by those fortified with a feminist sensibility" [p. 5]. There is a radically "other" model sustaining Garrard's scholarship — a model of identification clearly expressed in the most surprising of all dedications: "This book is dedicated to its subject, Artemisia Gentileschi, artist *prima inter pares*, with admiration, gratitude and affection." Through its repeated choices, its canonization of its celebrated masters and their creative potency, art history is a masculinist discourse perpetually inscribing its pattern of masculine desire. Those oeuvres, and images, and lives at odds with art history's peculiar gratifications fall not so much under banishment of neglect but the deadlier disdain of boredom. Women as artists — like Dora's mother — solicit little interest in canonical art history as artists — though, in the guise of the stereotype of femininity, the *woman artist* is perpetually figured in art-historical discourse as the essential negativity against which masculine preeminence is perpetually erected, yet never named.¹

Gentileschi's work must surely, however, confound all our formulations. The work cannot sustain the myth of inferiority and otherness; it is not a cipher of decorative or domestic triviality over which masculine genius "naturally" and effortlessly triumphs. Her paintings, especially of the Judith theme, are, figuratively, too deadly. Her representations of favored narratives of voyeurism and seduction are disrupted by awkward and resistant bodies attached to reflecting and expressive heads, such as to have solicited Kenneth Clark's profound disapproval. Furthermore, she cannot be said to have been neglected. Gentileschi figures in (admittedly peripheral) art-historical narratives in terms of an anxiety about masculine sexuality, which is obsessively displaced onto the fantastic construct of the persona "Artemisia Gentileschi," who is discerned in her own painted narratives of sex and violence.

¹ R. Parker and G. Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, London, 1981, esp. chap. 1.

The artist-woman presents a threat that is mastered by locating her as the projection of her fearful paintings. The oeuvre is both alarming because of its themes, which link death and sexuality across various vulnerable bodies (Cleopatra, Lucretia, Judith, Susanna), and challenging for the power of its execution and conception, its rhetorical drama and its proffered feminine identifications. Such is the substance of the artist as *fatal woman*, dealing a death blow to both the feminine stereotype (typified by weakness, lack of invention, etc.) and the myths of masculine creative mastery.

Garrard writes of a Gentileschi "embraced by those fortified with a feminist sensibility." The metaphoric transitions between the military and heroic connotations framed by terms of affection and feeling register a conflict in which women scholars have to do battle on behalf of misrepresented, ignored, and devalued creative work by women, while also seeking to inscribe their desire into the texts they are writing for themselves. What do feminists desire through the exercise of their scholarly gaze?

For all the necessary pleasures of identification and vicarious empowerment through our women-authored narratives of creative triumph over recalcitrant media and contradictory iconographies, we need also to acknowledge the complexities and ambivalences of femininity as a subject position. Of all artists reclaimed by feminism's rewritten canon, Gentileschi most of all solicits a nuanced and nonheroic reappraisal. Her work both stems from and rewrites socially legitimated fascinations with sexuality and violence, in ways that yearn to be re-examined as a writer like Julia Kristeva might. I am thinking here of Kristeva's analysis of women as terrorists in modern times, in which she insists that feminine subjects do not escape the psychic scarring of separation and threatened mutilation that constitutes the symbolic contract of patriarchy for all human subjects:

But when a subject is too brutally excluded from this socio-symbolic stratum; when, for example a woman feels her affective life as a woman, or her condition as social being too brutally ignored by existing discourse and power . . . she may, by counter-investing the violence she has endured, make herself a "possessed" agent of this violence in order to combat what was experienced as frustration — with arms which are disproportional, but which are not so in comparison with the subjective or more precisely narcissistic suffering from which they originate.²

The value of Kristeva's insights into a decidedly late 20th-century phenomenon lie not in that they apply directly to a Baroque painter of women in violent situations. They do, however, remind us of two important issues to bear in mind as we develop feminist analyses. We must learn to read our own symptomatic inscriptions with critical distance. We react against the violences done to women by art history by representing women artists unproblematically as "good objects" when they need instead to be studied as complex subjects — both victims and executioners in Kristeva's terms. As a corollary, the feminine subject must be recognized as being implicated in a socio-symbolic formation that can never be grasped if we only construct either victims or heroines. Feminist art history must produce its own difference vis-à-vis art history, questioning its desire to valorize triumphant femininity, which merely reflects art history's own myths of artists as compensatory heroes. With much subtlety Garrard works

with all the difficulties the feminist undertaking entails. Yet her project is frequently distorted by the unresolved and under-theorized and finally irreconcilable relations between the feminist purpose and the art-historical form to which it remains submissive. This is not to reject scholarship, but to distinguish between protocols of research and analysis and the desires these too often service.

This book rereads and reappraises Artemisia Gentileschi's work as a point of positive identification for contemporary feminists — but also as a series of texts founded in the historical moment of their production. The first chapter carefully documents Gentileschi's career pattern, periodizing her artistic production chronologically and according to location — Rome (1593-1613); Florence (1614-1620); Genoa, Venice, and Rome (1620-ca.1630); Naples (1630-ca.1638); England (1638-ca.1641), and Naples (1642-1652). Garrard establishes the oeuvre of thirty-four extant paintings and sets them in a pattern of changing style and treatment, indicating some of the effects of differing patrons and cultural milieux. Having written the artist's biography, Garrard argues that Gentileschi's defining identification in her painted themes with women's struggle against masculine dominance, demands that the artist be located in the "evolving history of feminism itself" (p. 138). Concluding one of the most important and pivotal chapters of the book, on "Historical Feminism and Female Iconography," Garrard places Gentileschi in the context of 17th-century women writers who dimly perceived buried female meanings behind the allegorical and mythological archetypal figures — often feminine in form — that were used to signify masculine values.

Yet the depth, strength, and complexity of Artemisia's artistic voice separated her categorically from other women artists of the Renaissance and Baroque era whom we presently know. And she was distinguished in an era when the modern struggle for women's social equality was taking shape, by her binding of the heroic archetype to Everywoman, and for her provision of a visual model in which mundane women might recognize themselves, from which they might draw inspiration, and through which all women — beautiful or plain, heroic or ordinary, powerful or powerless — might live vicariously in art [p. 179].

This writing registers art history's pressure to legitimate the author's own topic by establishing its value over all others. Yet a contrary movement sees the text secure the significance of Artemisia Gentileschi in her address to some generalized human experience. Typically, this is EveryMAN, but a feminist inflection gives us EveryWOMAN. Both are the product of liberal discourse, in which the actualities of inequality and difference are projected out into an imagined realm of freedom occupied by fictitious universalities. This confuses the social devaluation (racism, sexism, etc.) of the particularities of people's experience (gender, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.), with the ineradicable importance of particularity as the very basis for a genuine, heterogeneous realization of human individuality and freedom, quite different from the homogeneous Individual EveryPerson of liberal mythology.³ Feminism has of necessity revolted against liberalism

² J. Kristeva, "Woman's Time" (1979), in T. Moi, ed., *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford, 1986, 203.

³ K. Marx, "On the Jewish Question," in *Early Writings*, London, 1975, 220: "Man in his immediate reality, in civil society, is a profane being; here where he regards himself and is regarded by others as a real individual, he is an illusory phenomenon. In the state, on the other hand, where he is considered to be a species-being, he is the imaginary member of a fictitious sovereignty, he is divested of his real individual life and filled with an unreal universality."

by insisting that the specificities of being a woman matter — a black woman, a working-class woman, a lesbian, middle-aged, or disabled woman, or an older woman. Feminism, furthermore, demands that we interrogate cultural representations to understand how particularity is erased, or rather, as Edward Said has shown, how it is reformulated as a negative, a lack in relation to some postulated being, called whole and human, who is in fact highly specific, and dominant.⁴ Thus the realm of representation, in which art operates, soliciting identifications with its fictive personae and imaginary spaces, does not read as a realm of vicarious freedom or easy empowerment. Representations have concrete effects, which is not to reduce them to being a “tool of ideology,” as Garrard herself once wrote.⁵ Representation is a site of struggle around the determination of meanings and identities, available within its historically specific formations to subservience as well as to creative transformation.

There can be no doubt that the works of Artemisia Gentileschi are categorically different in the treatment of major themes around the well-established topoi of the heroic woman. This is probably because she was a woman — but the real issue we have to analyze is what that statement means if we do not believe the liberal ideal of an everywoman, there beneath the costumes of time, class, race, sexuality, age, cultural background, and so forth.⁶ Are her works specific because some supposed bedrock of gender found such powerful “expression,” or because of the ways in which, in the actual texts, she worked the materials, shifted relations between poses, gestures, traditions, to create unforeseen, troubling effects produced by her socially predicated artistic activity, in a way that theories of individual creativity so passively mystify. The difference between the two approaches can be stated starkly. Do we distill the specificities of art to arrive at the generalities of Everywoman? Or are the specificities of art the actual site of the construction and negotiation of social positions, relations, and identities we designate by the term femininity? Is art the place of social labor, i.e., creative work, or the emblem of a creative personality?

Mary Garrard’s book focuses on Artemisia Gentileschi’s heroic women: Lucretia, Cleopatra, and Judith, also including in this category the artist’s self-portrait as *The Allegory of Painting*. But most surprisingly, Susanna is also placed in this genre. The biblical story of Susanna and the Elders involves a representation of a naked woman bathing in a garden where two elderly and lecherous men spy on her, conspiring to force her to submit to them sexually. If she refuses, they plan to accuse her of adultery, a crime then punishable for women by death. Susanna refused, was thus falsely accused and condemned to death. Daniel (of leonine fame) secured her release by revealing the elders’ mendacity, and they were executed for their crime of false witness.

Garrard’s argument is that Artemisia Gentileschi’s treatment of this iconography radically changes the subject from “hard-core eroticism” and “blatant pornography” (p. 188) and “rape, imagined by artists — presumably also by their patrons and customers — as a daring and noble adventure” (p. 192). Gentileschi’s version (1610, Pommersfelden, Schloss Weissenstein, Schönborn Collection) differs: “By contrast to the cognate images, the expressive core of Gentileschi’s painting is the heroine’s plight, not the villains’ anticipated pleasure” (p. 189). What the picture means is

derived from what Garrard takes to be Gentileschi’s experience prior to making the painting. This is, as Roland Barthes pointed out, classic authorship. The artist as originator precedes and entirely defines the meaning embedded in a text. Questions about readership, i.e., who bought such paintings by Gentileschi and who wanted to look at them, are disregarded, as are those about how such images might have functioned in the varying social spaces of their production and consumption — the studio, the public room, the private apartment. In lieu of the reductionism of binary oppositions, men’s art versus women’s art, we need concrete historical work on how women negotiated the difference they lived in the concrete social relations in which gender and cultural production coincided, and how this unevenly structured the representations on which they worked.

Garrard points out that there are many interpretative traditions in which the story of Susanna and the Elders has figured. Susanna has symbolized the Church conspired against by Elders representing pagans and other opponents. She can also signify deliverance (the young Daniel cleared her name and saved her life), or could be the embodiment of a female chastity that would rather die than bring dishonor on a husband. During the Renaissance, images combining several threads of the narrative gave way to a focus on a single dramatic incident. This focus emphasized the more violent and voyeuristic elements of the theme, and provided a biblical occasion for the painting of an erotic nude. Although Garrard traces a continuing identification of Susanna with Marian purity, she suggests that by the 16th and 17th centuries this imagery had gained popularity as a secular and sensual theme for a growing class of private patrons who commissioned easel paintings.

Her laconic comment is virtually the only reference to the necessary social and ideological context in which, and for which, Gentileschi worked. Given that letters to patrons survive and that she worked for renowned collectors about whom much is already known, it should be possible to locate Gentileschi in such a context. It would throw light on a historical question of some importance — how a woman worked themes that indicate the critical transformation of religious imageries into secular topoi. Garrard’s inattention has its own effects. The change, the eroticization of representations of the female body, which must represent shifts in social, economic, and ideological power, is presented as a natural progression, an inevitable modernization as the secular replaced the religious.

The altering meanings of sacred and profane, as they inhabited and mutually contaminated each other within Western art at this moment, were a product of the struggle between the still militant Church and its revamped ideological Christianity and the emergent formations of princely, civic, monarchic, national, mercantile, and scholarly powers, which insinuated themselves onto the very bodies — women’s bodies — that figured the Church’s own ideological programs.

While trying to stabilize historically generated diversity as iconographic tradition, Garrard’s analysis serves to show the instability of meanings signified by any set of characters or any ancient text. The diversity of usages of the Susanna story merely makes clearer the need to comprehend its currency at the time at which Artemisia Gentileschi produced her image. This Garrard presents

⁴ E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, 1978.

⁵ M. D. Garrard and N. Broude, a joint review of Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *The Visual Arts: Art History in Women’s Art Journal*, iv, Fall 1983–Winter 1984, 43.

⁶ I am grateful to Heather Dawkins of the University of Leeds for her important analysis of identifications in feminist art history. See her paper, “Frogs, Monkeys and Women: Identifications across a Phantastic Body,” in R. Kendall and G. Pollock, eds., *Degas: Images of Women*, London, forthcoming, 1991.

in stark gender terms. "In art, a sexually distorted and spiritually meaningless interpretation of the theme has prevailed because most artists and patrons have been men, drawn by instinct to identify more with the villains than with the heroine" (p. 194).

Instinct can have little place in history, particularly since the meanings signified by Susanna have varied so widely. Garrard's problem arises because of the categorical separation of theological or allegorical meaning from those which seemingly are more overtly sexual. Sexuality is not perceived within a historical context, as a specific set of constructions of meaning and identities, as configurations of pleasures and bodies. If sexuality reveals itself in the tendency to reduce Susanna to an erotic nude, then we are thrown out of history and back to a bedrock of bodies, where we find a foundational difference, men with their lusts and women resisting them.

Artemisia Gentileschi's heroic Susanna is thus a figure of resistance to male sexual aggression.

Artemisia's Susanna presents us with an image rare in art, of a three-dimensional female character who is heroic in the classical sense, for in her struggle against forces ultimately beyond her control, she exhibits a spectrum of human emotions that moves us, as with Oedipus and Achilles, to pity and to awe [p. 200].

Garrard offers us both general and personal explanations for her uniquely sympathetic treatment of Susanna: the "simple fact that she is a woman," on the one hand, and, on the other, the fact that the artist was this woman, who was herself raped and repeatedly violated sexually. The book provides transcripts of the trial she underwent when her father, Orazio, brought a case against the artist, Gentileschi's teacher, Agostino Tassi, in 1612. Tassi's defence, like the Elders', was to impugn Artemisia's chastity.

This is not to insist that all art by women bears some inevitable stamp of femininity; women have been as talented as men in learning the common denominators of style and expression in specific cultures. It is, however, to suggest that the definitive assignment of sex roles in history has created fundamental differences between the sexes in their perception, experience and expectations of the world, differences that cannot help but be carried over into the creative process where they have sometimes left their tracks [p. 202].

It is here that feminisms part ways. The statement itself, that being a woman makes a difference, is a fundamental assumption of feminism, but the major problem that feminist theory has been critically working through for the last twenty years, is the level and constitution of that difference. The single most important battle has been to dislodge the mythic power of sexual difference itself, i.e., a given opposition of men versus women, be it figured as sex roles, gender stereotyping, or sexuality, as the irreducible and founding difference. Sexual difference is better to be understood as the privileged and belated figuration of a process of psychic differentiation to which all subjects must submit them-

selves as the price of acquiring identity and the means to speak it. As Jacqueline Rose has written, sexual difference becomes "the sole representative of what difference is allowed to be."⁷ As figuration, sexual difference must be perpetually produced. The field of vision is as crucial and significant a site for its inscription and equally for its perpetual crisis.⁸

From within the disciplinary formation of art history, it would be difficult to address such questions because they necessarily change the definition of the object of study. For art history that object is "art." But that same field can also be defined as a creative process that is at once a social, semiotic process of producing meaningful signs for a community of users, and a psychic process. The latter process invents, disrupts, and transgresses established systems of meaning by both conscious and unconscious renovations of the materials that the symbolic, official systems of meaning forever struggle to organize and regulate but that they must simultaneously repress. Without the sense of the conjoined though never unambiguous interplay of the social and the psychic, we are left with art history's familiars — art as the expression of an individual creator.

Garrard defines Gentileschi as different because history makes women and men different (through sex roles: she can identify with the victim against the aggressor) and because she has privileged knowledge of women's vulnerability to men. "What the painting gives us then is a reflection, not of the rape itself, but rather what one young woman felt about her own sexual vulnerability in the year 1610. It is significant that Susanna does not express the violence of rape, but the intimidating pressure of the threat of rape" (p. 208). The relevance of biography to historical and art-historical writing is currently under discussion, as historians reconsider "the death of the author" in the light of his (supposed) demise.⁹ Feminism, however, has been moving in a contrary direction, celebrating the assassination of inflated genius, but insisting that those denied the authority of agency, women, are able now at last to claim it. As Nancy Miller writes: "Because the female subject has juridically been excluded from the polis, and hence de-centered, 'disoriginated,' deinstitutionalized, etc., her relation to integrity and textuality, desire and authority, is structurally different."¹⁰ Biographical materials certainly provide significant and necessary resources for the restoration of women's authority. But there is surely a difference between careful interrogation of the elements of the archive, which include materials on a lived life, and the binding back of paintings onto the life unproblematically there for us to know, such that the paintings become the direct deposit of a life experience and our vicarious access to how it felt to live that life.

Biography, however, can never be a substitute for history. We would do well to recall Marx's famous dictum in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852), suitably edited: "Women make their own history, but they do not make just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past." Sartre, clearly influenced by the *Brumaire* when producing his historical biography of Gustave Flaubert, tried to theorize how individuals within a class, such as the bourgeoisie, came to class-consciousness. He suggests the conditions under which a child,

⁷ J. Rose, "Feminine Sexuality, Jacques Lacan and the Ecole Freudienne," in *Sexuality in the Field of Vision*, London, 1988, 66.

⁸ See J. Rose, "Feminism and the Psychic," in *ibid.*, for a clear account of a non-foundationalist, psychoanalytical theory of sexual difference and its perpetual instabilities as the condition of a feminist politics of subjectivity and representation.

⁹ J. Christie and F. Orton, "Writing the Text of a Life," *Art History*, xi, 4, 1988, 545-564.

¹⁰ N. Miller, "Changing the Subject, Authorship, Writing and the Reader," in T. de Lauretis, ed., *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies*, London, 1986, 104.

insulated from class awareness within a family group, for instance, might witness some major historical or social event and, in that momentary crystallization of the inherent antagonisms of society, be forced to see a bourgeois father “from outside,” as the object of proletarian hatred. By this conjunction of deeply personal and individual experience with major events that reveal the social, an individual might come to understand how the private person relates to and is determined by the larger social whole. In just such a way, we might read the sexual assaults inflicted on Gentileschi and the public ordeal of her subsequent trial as such a crystallizing moment of recognition of sexuality and gender power, revealing to her how a woman was placed as an object of exchange between men. To say anything at all about the significance of the rape and the trial cannot be the easy projection of its meaning for all women, but the assumption that it did have meaning for that woman within a specific historical context — the trial — which forged her encounter with her culture’s reading of her experience.¹¹

The conjunction of Artemisia Gentileschi, the subject of that set of events, and the mythical subject Susanna necessarily poses the question of why this woman could and would depart from the dominant prototypes of the theme. What space was it possible to carve out of the iconographic repertoire by the reconfiguration of the forms and bodies, colors and meanings within the canvas? Garrard’s reading of the awkward, disturbing, and still exposed body, the distressed facial expression, and the vulnerability of the woman, with the men so close and dominating, is true to what we now see. But how do we understand what we are seeing historically — if the work were so deviant, why would it have been painted, purchased, and hung? What are the conditions for its renovation/deviations other than in the positing of the artist as this woman? Are there not other readings of the same material, in which such vulnerability and anguish heighten a sadistic pleasure? Is that body’s exposure and titillation for a male viewer not as apparent as the others, there so directly in the foreground, exposed to us even while it hides itself from the prying lechers? It becomes necessary to see the picture as more than the single unified expression of the experiencing biographical subject Artemisia Gentileschi in 1610.

Such paintings are a space in which possible, contrary meanings vie with each other. While none are excluded, some may be preferred, according to the perspective of the reader within a dominant or subordinate formation. At this level, the picture does not “express.” It is a productive site, where Artemisia Gentileschi worked over existing materials and conventions, reshaping them to permit certain inflections, but without a total control of the range of meanings once the work entered other social contexts of consumption. It is possible that a deviant reading co-exists with one that would still sell the painting.

Yet we are still imagining the picture as Garrard has represented it to us in terms of a scene of rape and male-inflicted sexual violence. The contemporary viewer of the painting, knowing the story, might well have perceived it through the anticipated conclusion of the story, in which the Elders are put to death for their transgression of the laws between men regulating who enjoys the rights of looking at and possessing women’s bodies already

claimed: Thou shalt not covet another man’s wife. The late Shirley Moreno was working on the emergence of the erotic nude in painting in Venice in the 16th century, and she argued against a non-historical analysis of the nude in terms of modern conceptions of eroticism. She noted that in many of the Ovidian stories used by Titian in his cycle of paintings for Philip II of Spain, a privileged naked woman, Diana for instance, is watched by a man whose fate is subsequent death. She located the paintings within theological redefinitions of concupiscence and temptation following the Council of Trent, and in relation to concerns about marriage, class alliance, and aristocratic kinship that were threatened by *mésalliance* in a moment of socio-economic instability as class formations underwent major shifts in both Venice and Spain. Paintings, such as *Diana and Acteon* (Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland), Moreno argued, could be read as displaying the field of visual temptation while protecting the viewer against the due punishment for transgression by locating a surrogate man within the painting, who would bear the pain of death.¹² In Moreno’s historical readings, sexuality was not assumed within some universal binary opposition of men versus women. Instead, it was construed in and through diverse practices and discourses, such as theology, confession, marriage rules and rituals, as well as practices of prostitution and literary and visual erotica. Art history’s selectivity with regard to the discourses in which visual representations are formed radically deforms the historical field and invites us toward oversimplified and unified interpretations of images. It is the narrowness of art history that restricts analysis to the generalization of gender, which then undermines both the feminist and the historical account of art.

If Susanna is a puzzling female hero, Judith, one of Artemisia’s recurrent subjects, seems not so. It is these four paintings (Naples, Museo di Capodimonte; Florence, Pitti Palace and the Uffizi, and Detroit, Institute of Arts) that have tended to define the art-historical identity of Artemisia Gentileschi, the victim of rape and exponent of a vengeful fantasy. It is these works that also solicit feminist reinterpretations, where the representation of independent, autonomous female agency (p. 305) is differently appraised and clearly valued.

Garrard’s chapter on these paintings is dense with details, of the history of the theme in Western art, literature, and theology. It is also the site of major arguments and revisions about the paintings themselves, carefully read as a developing engagement on the part of the artist as she matured, her life experiences being mirrored in the developing characterizations of Judith and Abra (her maidservant and accomplice). Here one has a greater sense of the interaction of image and painter as the place of articulations and unforeseen developments, considered moves and decisive interventions, over thirteen years. Garrard locates the paintings and their carefully dramatized constructions and significant details within a complex and constantly shifting set of iconographic traditions, which are revealing — especially in the ways she relates Artemisia Gentileschi’s representations of Judith and Abra to the so tellingly different cognate story of David and Goliath. These comparisons invite us to ask how Western art has dealt with themes of violent murder, and what difference it makes who is killed and who is the killer, especially when the axis is sexual. Is

¹¹ J. P. Sartre, “Class Consciousness in Flaubert,” *Modern Occasions*, 1, 2, 1971, 379-389: “In truth, to discover social reality inside and outside oneself, merely to endure it is not enough; one must see it with the eyes of others” (p. 381).

¹² S. Moreno, “The Absolute Mistress: The Historical Construction of the Erotic in Titian’s ‘Poesie,’” MA thesis, Leeds University, 1980. At the time of her death, Shirley Moreno was preparing her doctorate on an extended study of this problem.

a woman's murder of a man the ultimate image of antisocial and illegitimate violence, as Garrard claims?¹³ She pays scant attention to the history of the popular theme in secular art — the topos of the power of women — charted by Susan L. Smith. It would be interesting to have considered why Judith was favored over the other themes within the topos, so popular in secular medieval imagery, not only Yael and Sisera, but, importantly, Samson and Delilah. What overdetermined the appeal or the possibilities of Judith in the 17th century?¹⁴

Are we looking at a secularized treatment of a once theological and moral theme? Or did such imageries always articulate undercurrents of anxiety about an inherently unstable sexual hierarchy? Could a dramatically immediate Caravaggist rendering be struggling to give vivid form to a contemporary morality tale about the world upside-down?

Through a predominantly theological terrain, Garrard tracks the paradoxes of the Judith theme, Judith at once a just tyrannicide, a paragon of chastity and strength, and a deceitful temptress, seducing Holofernes only to murder him. Garrard wants to work against the tendency to map this negative Judith onto Artemisia Gentileschi's life story, where the theme is found to echo the appalling rape she suffered. Instead, the paintings are read for the "complexity of the artist's identification with the depicted character" (p. 278), who offers "the greatest potential for self-identification." Nonetheless, the paintings are posed as "models of psychic liberation," exemplars for "imagined action upon the world" (p. 279). But Garrard concludes that, for all that these paintings may depict the most developed female heroes in art (p. 305), they still give form to the perpetual vulnerability of women:

And in this specifically delimited vulnerability lies the paintings' symbolic and their universal relevance to the experience of women. Unlike the male hero, whose power, pride in power and blindness to vulnerability are both the qualities of his greatness and the cause of his downfall . . . , the female hero is by social decree perpetually aware of her essential vulnerability. It is her obligation to adapt imaginatively to alien and repressive environments, and her ability, not to control, but to transform such environments [that] constitutes her heroism. The male viewer, perceiving the Judith and Holofernes theme from the viewpoint of Holofernes's world, sees only the subversive power of Judith; for the female viewer, the story is a metaphor for the real life of women (p. 336).

Garrard's female hero, read through these Judiths, is less exalted than the male, does not exploit the weak, survives, and copes creatively, protecting alternative values of minorities and underdogs, and thus speaks "for a broader segment of humanity." "Woman" triumphs by self-realization — and this is the text of Garrard's book. It may seem that I have paid undue attention, in a review in a scholarly art-historical journal, to the issues of feminist theorizations of representation and historical writing. But for all the apparatus of historical scholarship and its art-historical protocols, Garrard's text is a powerful statement to and about contemporary feminism. To produce the argument, however, as the text effectively does, that there is a unitary woman, or even women, one without contradiction, who is good, moral, kind,

liberal, and pro-minorities, is seriously to misrepresent today's history. Race, class, as well as gender mutually interact to generate specific femininities, divergent and antagonistic experiences, in which white middle-class women have as often a directly oppressive role vis-à-vis women of color and different socio-economic positions.

The Italian Baroque may appear to be an unlikely place to imagine issues of race and class as necessary elements within an analysis of gender. Any Christian art is, however, in perpetual dialogue by means of theological appropriation with a community defined so fatally as "Europe's Other." Both Susanna and Judith are the sites of that negotiation where heroines of Jewish histories function as allegories of Christian virtues. Where, moreover, is the analysis of how Gentileschi's paintings were placed in the changing formations of patronage between Church and prince or secular consumer of portable luxuries? And what of that growing fascination with a whitened Cleopatra, painted so often as dead or dying just at the moment that Europe cast its covetous gaze upon the continent of which she was so emblematic a queen?

Artemisia Gentileschi's work could only exist within specific socio-economic conditions expressed in patronage and commissions, business practices, and the customs of court service and private property. The challenge is to relate the transitions in iconographies of female imageries, which must surely be considered as symptoms of deeper transformations, to social relations of that emergent capitalist world of 16th- and 17th-century Italy. There, social violences were figured in displaced guises through narratives of dangerous erotic encounters incited as much by Counter-Reformation theology as regulated by its militant institutions. What were the emergent formations around kinship, marriage, sexualities, of which woman is so much the sign, which generated so many violent sexualities in the field of vision? What made possible and desirable the heightened, dramatic, insistent, and compelling representation of violence and death?

In her study of the image of the penitent Magdalen in France in the 17th century, Françoise Bardon calls for historical precision in contextualizing the "political" meanings of once mythic themes. A lengthy, iconographic pedigree is deceptive — to have survived, a theme must evolve beyond its origins, must become responsive to diverse contexts. It becomes historical, and thus Bardon argues: "From this point of view, in some way like a constellation, the penitent Magdalen in the seventeenth century, in France, is a privileged theme because it is representative of a battle of forms and sensibilities, and ultimately of a civilisation and a political system."¹⁵ Bardon does not see the varied images of the Magdalen as vagaries of individual artists. She identifies a series of negotiations between the languages and imageries of religious devotion and those of worldly pleasure, which shared a common but ambiguous terrain, Love. In their attempt to offer an accommodating penance to the worldly courtiers of Louis XIV, the Jesuits used the penitence of the Magdalen. She was a true penitent because she had so truly loved. The worldly love of the flesh and luxury, it was argued, paradoxically brought her closer to God. But, Bardon argues, the Jesuits' move was dangerous, for eventually the profane contaminated the sacred, the division between worldly and spiritual collapsed, and the world invaded the Church. Bardon notes that by the later part of the century, court beauties,

and the Development of Medieval Secular Art," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1978.

¹⁵ F. Bardon, "Le Thème de la Madeleine pénitente au XVII^e siècle en France," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, xxxi, 1968, 274.

¹³ For a brilliant analysis of the complexities of the biblical narratives of woman-man murders, see M. Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry: The Politics of Coherence in the Book of Judges*, Chicago, 1988.

¹⁴ S. L. Smith, "To Women's Wiles I Fell" in "The Power of Women Topos

led by Louis XIV's mistress, Madame de Montespan, initiated a fashion for being portrayed as the penitent Magdalen. For Bardon this final travesty exemplified the political chicaneries and compromises of Louis XIV's settlement — which eventually cost his descendants and their class allies dearly by the end of the next century. Bardon's example is introduced here to suggest that a comparably subtle and politically sensitive analysis is needed for the imageries of sexual violence as sites for social negotiation of power and meaning in 17th-century Italy. Without such a serious contextualization, it is improper to assume we can judge exactly how Artemisia Gentileschi's paintings negotiated their historically "privileged" and politically mobile subject matter.

The liberal text aims to inspire us with its imagined, deracinated freedoms, its "psychic liberations" powerfully summoning our identification through their excessively "realist" modes of signification. The dramas of Caravaggism so brilliantly deployed by Artemisia Gentileschi precisely encourage identificatory readings: this is the historically specific semiotic mechanism that defines the practice. But to what ends? If the answers are not to add 20th-century confirmation of the potency of that mechanism, they must gain distance by being grounded in the otherness that is history. Garrard has elsewhere warned that such "cynical analysis," in which art is shown never to be "socially benign" because it is so implicated in the social processes of power and pleasure, will lead us to lose the art in "art history" and subsume the discipline in historical studies.¹⁶ It may seem that this is exactly what I am advocating — but it is a misunderstanding. The issue is not art versus history, with the "history" in art history being one exclusively concerned with iconographies, styles, and artists. The issue is the need for a historical account of visual representations as productive, both as products of concrete social practices and as producers of meanings and pleasures for specified persons.¹⁷

In her book, a serious contribution to feminist scholarship, Mary Garrard perceives the charge, the oddity, and power of paintings by this 17th-century Italian woman. But she can only represent the work to herself and us in terms that persistently alienate its historical and semiotic specificity. We are returned to what Marx dubbed an "unreal universality," which even if it is called woman (assumed to be an entirely moral entity) or Gentileschi (a self-realizing figure for heroic identification) is untrue to the worlds in which we live and she worked, which offer no such comfort.

In my insistence on such historicization of the study of women artists, the reader may well feel we have lost the celebratory and positive force of Mary Garrard's affectionate admiration for Artemisia Gentileschi. Where else lie the pleasures of feminist revisions?

Gentileschi's paintings of Judith decapitating Holofernes have inspired gendered readings. Some can only see in them what they dread — a brutal act inciting anxieties about castration, dismemberment, and death. One feminist critic has totally reversed the interpretation, finding sublimated images of childbirth. I want to give the last word to Hélène Cixous, who has eloquently defined the dilemma for all women as "Castration or Decapitation." She recounts the Chinese story telling how General Sun Tse made the king's 180 wives into soldiers. When first he drills them in rows with drums, they laugh. Deeming this mutinous, the general forces

the king to agree to the punishment for mutiny, decapitation. The chief wife is duly executed, and the rest of the women then march up and down to the beat of the drum as if they had been soldiers all their lives. Cixous concludes that, "Women have no other choice than to be decapitated, and in any case the moral is that if they don't actually lose their heads by the swords, *they only keep them on condition that they lose them* — lose them, that is, to complete silence, turned into automatons."¹⁸

The significance of Gentileschi's paintings of decapitation lies only partially in their function as images, an inflection in an iconography. The point is their existence in the field of representation so powerfully dominated by the beat of men's drums, the economy of their desire. The point is the presence of this enunciation from the place of a historical femininity, offering a shift in the pattern of meanings. But this presence of a difference has to be produced. *Presence* is not expression, but a production against the semiotic grain of those structures that would "cut off her head," silence her as a woman, let woman function only as a "headless body." Gentileschi's painting can be read as a transposition of silence, threatening the man with the violence that is regularly enacted on women, showing what that violence looks like, making it visible by inverting the gender of its agents. In that shock, that disorder, that world upside-down, a woman's voice is made. As Cixous has written:

If women set themselves to transform History, it can safely be said that every aspect of history would be completely altered. Instead of being made by men, History's task would be to make woman, to produce her. And it's at this point that work by women themselves on women might be brought into play, which would benefit not only women, but all humanity.¹⁹

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PATRICIA LEIGHTEN, *Re-Ordering the Universe: Picasso and Anarchism, 1897-1914*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989. Pp. xvi + 198; 8 color pls.; 106 black-and-white ill. \$35

Bracketed by the monumental Picasso retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in 1980 and last year's more focused exhibition, "Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism," at the same institution, the last decade ushered in a new generation of scholarship on Picasso. As fresh approaches to the examination of Cubism in particular have been advanced by writers using methodologies ranging from semiotics to Marxism, Picasso studies have been immeasurably enriched, and Picasso's art has been revealed

¹⁶ See n. 5.

¹⁷ R. Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture*, London, 1980, 49.

¹⁸ H. Cixous, "Castration or Decapitation," *Signs*, vii, 1, 1981, 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.