

## **Artemisia Gentileschi: Judith Reimagined**

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### **Abstract**

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) was a prominent female painter in the Italian Baroque era and has been the subject of many scholarly texts throughout the years. This paper analyzes Gentileschi's Judith paintings through a social psychology lens rather than using feminist theories and psychological models of rape as has been done previously. Analysis is accomplished by looking at the paintings in a linear manner addressing the connections between Gentileschi's life and paintings, her relationships within her life, and the differences between the male and female viewpoints of the same subject. Initial research was based on the book, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, written by Mary Garrard. Further research was expanded by reading primary sources, such as the story of Judith in the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books of the Christian Old Testament, and scholarly journal articles within the fields of the biblical Judith and Gentileschi's life. After reading more on Gentileschi's life and studying psychological models that are used to explain human behavior, the direction of this research changed to focus directly on the concepts of social psychology. Through detailed visual and psychological analysis, this study provides a new interpretation of the connection of the four Judith paintings to Gentileschi's life. Context Warning: this presentation will have context that may be sensitive to some individuals, including paintings depicting violent acts and discussion of sexual assault.

**Keywords:** Artemisia Gentileschi, Judith Paintings, Psychology

### **1. Introduction**

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653), a prominent female painter in the Italian Baroque era, has been the subject of many scholarly texts since the mid-twentieth century. Many of these texts have analyzed Gentileschi's paintings by using contemporary feminist theories or psychoanalytical analyses on the concepts and effects of rape. These approaches are valid but they do not explore the cultural aspects behind the reactions and behaviors of individuals during the seventeenth century. Analysis of her life will utilize the cultural standards of being a woman and an artist in the seventeenth century to create a more appropriate analysis of her paintings. Focusing on an extensive description and analysis of Gentileschi's four main Judith paintings: *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1612-1613) (Figure 1: <http://www.artbible.info/art/large/680.html>), *Judith and her Maidservant* (1613-1614) (Figure 2: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gentileschi\\_judith1.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gentileschi_judith1.jpg)), *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620) (Figure 3: <http://www.uffizi.org/artworks/judith-and-holofernes-by-artemisia-gentileschi/>), and *Judith with her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* (1625) (Figure 4: <http://www.dia.org/object-info/0573dd3e-1079-4ce3-8262-78b0e1e68331.aspx?position=2>); this paper will show that social psychology, the interaction of the mind and environment, is more appropriate than focusing on feminist theories or psychological models.

Born in Rome, Italy, in 1593, Gentileschi was the oldest child and only daughter of Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639) and Pudentia Montone.<sup>1</sup> In her preteen years, her mother passed away; during the important years of a young female's life she was surrounded by her father and three younger brothers. She had a female neighbor, Tuzia, who was more

of a guardian and companion than mother figure during her later teens.<sup>2</sup> Her father, Orazio, was an important influence on the early development of her art career. Church rules prevented women from viewing nude males, in turn keeping women from attending the Academy of Arts. Although it was unconventional for a woman in the late seventeenth century to be an artist, her father passed on the painting skills he had acquired. Orazio used techniques associated with the Mannerist style in which artists were concerned with beauty as seen and used in intricate compositions including sophisticated, elegant figures.<sup>3</sup> Her father was part several social circles in the city of Rome, which gave Artemisia certain advantages within the community. These social circles allowed artists, poets, musicians, or scientists to explore and share ideas and techniques. One of those circles included Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio (1571-1610); her father was inspired by him and utilized similar techniques to Caravaggio in his paintings, and passed those techniques on to Artemisia. Caravaggio reintroduced a narrative emphasis by focusing on dramatic features of the story through the pose and placement of elements in in different elements of the painting.<sup>4</sup>

Artemisia supported herself as an artist; work for women of the time was typically informal and their duty was to the family. If women were painters they usually kept their subjects to portraits, still life, and domestic themed devotional pictures; Artemisia was different in that she created many biblical women and heroines.<sup>5</sup> Her sense of self as well as independence in the world of men was a crucial part of her projected image. Even though Artemisia was a female painter, she was respected within the art circles.<sup>6</sup> There would have been a small chance of Artemisia becoming a well-respected artist, without her heritage and significant events in her lifetime.



Fig. 1: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1612-13, oil on canvas, 158.8 x 125.5cm, Museo di Capodimonte, Naples, Italy



Fig. 2: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant*, 1613-14, oil on canvas, 114 x 93.5cm, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy



Fig. 3: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1620, oil on canvas, 162.5 x 199cm, Uffizi, Florence, Italy



Fig. 4: Artemisia Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant with the head of Holofernes*, 1625, oil on Canvas, 184 x 141.6 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, Michigan

## 2. Understanding Women and Rape in the Seventeenth Century

Artemisia Gentileschi could have had a different life and career in the art world but her rape and subsequent trial have to be understood as key events that changed her artistic path. In the modern world, rape has a strong connections with many differing views on both the word itself as well as its associated action. Feminists believe that we live in a rape culture where the objectification of and violent and sexual abuse of women supports our culture.<sup>7</sup> Artemisia lived in the seventeenth century rather than the twentieth and twentieth-first centuries; thus, using current perceptions on rape to analyze her paintings will not be sufficient in getting to the truth of the matter.

Rape myth acceptance is one of the perceptions that individuals have about the subject of rape. Martha Burt defines rape myths as “prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims and rapists.”<sup>8</sup> For example, a rape myth might include the idea that women who dress in extremely revealing clothing are asking to be violated. Stereotypes cause individuals in modern society to begin to blame the victim. Males are typically seen to be more dominating and instigators of the sexual acts, while females are often expected to remain passive in their role.<sup>9</sup> According to Amy Grubb and Emily Turner, victim blaming is used to minimize the actions of the rapist. Sometimes victim blaming is so prevalent in modern culture that it used in the decisions made by police or prosecutors.<sup>10</sup>

Individuals in society often believe that the victim did something to cause the rapist to perform the action. Rape myth acceptance creates a normality of rape beliefs that can hinder an understanding of the seriousness of the situation.

Rape myths are created out of the gender roles that society creates. Gender roles, the societal norms about acceptable behavior for males and females, have an impact on the extent to which individuals believe in rape myths. They are assigned during the socialization process, around the ages of two and three, which continues throughout our lives and impacts how we behave as well as the beliefs we hold of others and ourselves.<sup>11</sup> Brenda Russell and Kritin Trigg maintain that traditional gender roles also correlate strongly with sexism and social dominance. The higher the social dominance an individual feels they have, they will usually have stronger sexism ideology and gender role stereotypes.<sup>12</sup> These individuals may readily accept rape myths and are quicker to stereotype others. Contemporary scholars project many modern day perceptions of rape on Artemisia's life but in doing so they are overlooking important cultural details.

Social psychology is the approach in which where the culture is studied to understand how individuals react to different environmental situations. By studying culture there are a few key insights that allow social psychologist to explore a situation more in-depth. Paul Dimaggio suggests that we need to consider the fact "1) that people everywhere exist in social networks, in groups, in communities, and in relationships, 2) that being a person is fundamentally a social transactions, and 3) [that] social formations and psychological formations are fully interdependent, both contemporaneously and historically."<sup>13</sup> Artemisia lived during a time when social standards and communities were important and dictated how she understood her identity in the society. Identities are both biological and sociocultural produced; that is, they show past behaviors and create patterns for current or future behaviors.<sup>14</sup> The way Artemisia saw herself predicts possible behaviors, which allows us to make connections between her life and paintings.

In Artemisia Gentileschi's time, rape was not seen as modern culture interprets it today. It is important to examine the trial process through a cultural lens, in order to understand how rape was regarded and what actions were taken when it occurred. Being in her mid-teens, Artemisia was considered to be at marriageable age. Her father, Orazio, kept a close eye on her and asked a female family friend, Tuzia, to be a chaperone to protect her chastity. Tuzia helped Artemisia understand the diverse and fluctuating society in the various neighborhoods of Rome, where there were different moral and social forms of conduct.

Rape was called a "forcible deflowering" in the seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> The modern day understanding of consent is that both individuals agree to have any sexual relations. When there is no consent by one individual, than the sexual act can be called a rape. A "forcible deflowering" is different than rape since it reflects the cultural of the time. Artemisia was "deflowered" by Agostino Tassi, a business partner with her father, who was a teacher and a potential marriage partner. In Artemisia's case, Tassi comforted her with the promise of marriage, which defines the initial sexual act as a "forcible deflowering." The expectation of marriage became the reason why Artemisia continued to have sexual relations with Tassi; this arrangement was culturally acceptable.

Orazio did not find out about the sexual relationship between Artemisia and Tassi until months later. When Orazio found out, he took Tassi to court because Tassi never intended to marry her. The act of the perpetrator being taken to court, was common in the day when the male would not fulfill their duty to marriage or a dowry. Although the act of being taken to court was common practice, the social status of the female determined whether the court would take the case. The lower the social status of the female the less likely that the court would accept the conviction. Orazio was an artist with little wealth but having the title of an artist helped having the case taken by the court.<sup>16</sup>

The court had to make sure that Artemisia was "deflowered" before setting anything into motion. To prove that a female had been "deflowered," or no longer a virgin, two midwives had to check to make sure her hymen was broken and for evidence of bleeding afterwards. In Artemisia's case, the midwives confirmed that her hymen was broken but the second part was undetermined because Artemisia claimed to be menstruating at the time, only noticing the blood being redder than usual. During the trial Tassi repeatedly denied having sexual relations with her and also provided false witnesses. These witnesses provided inaccurate information to persuade the court to side with Tassi and blame Artemisia.<sup>17</sup> Tassi's actions allowed the court to bring Artemisia in to confront her rapist and to prove her truthfulness through *sibille* – a type of torture where metal rings are placed around the fingers and are tightened by strings torture the individual into telling the truth.<sup>18</sup> Artemisia's relationship with Tuzia was also affected by the trial and when questioned about her, Artemisia stated, "Regarding the disgrace and betrayal that, as I mentioned above, was perpetrated by Tuzia against me, I want to say that she [Tuzia] acted as procuress to have me deflowered by a certain Agostino Tassi, a painter."<sup>19</sup> In her chapter on Artemisia, Germaine Greer strongly argues that there is an underling tone related to psychological effects of the trial.<sup>20</sup> The manner in which Artemisia acted and portrayed herself during the trial was intended to redeem her social standing and honor as a marriageable woman.

The cultural standards of the day are crucial factors in determining Artemisia's reactions. She was Catholic and believed there was differentiation between the soul and the body. In the trial she even spoke of her body more as a material object compared to modern views that would describe it as a personal part of the individual. Another

difference from the modern view was that Gentileschi as well as other women of the time would speak in a direct manner about their bodies and sexual activities.<sup>21</sup> Even though she may have not shown any emotion, as an interpretation of the trial, and all the actions to prove her deflowering were constructed by social and cultural predecessors, I agree with Garrard that her paintings give the viewer some insight into how she felt.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. The Subject of Judith

Artemisia Gentileschi most likely painted the subject of Judith because it was a popular theme in European art, especially during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Violence and eroticism were prevalent themes of the period but the interpretation of Judith by Artemisia would still have shocked viewers.<sup>23</sup> In the first decade of the seventeenth century, her father created a painting called *Judith and Her Maidservant* (1608-1609) (Figure 5: <http://samling.nasjonalmuseet.no/no/object/NG.M.02073>), so Artemisia was familiar with the subject in her private and professional life. There is also a possibility that before or sometime during the trial Artemisia had the opportunity to see Caravaggio's *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1598-1599) (Figure 6: <http://galleriabarberini.beniculturali.it/index.php?it/114/caravaggio-giuditta-che-taglia-la-testa-a-oloferne>). The importance of seeing both of these paintings shows that Artemisia not only had a familiarity of the subject but also with the two different styles of Mannerism and Caravaggism.



Fig. 5: Orazio Gentileschi, *Judith and Her Maidservant*, 1608-09, oil on canvas, 134.6 x 157.5cm, Nasjonalgalleriet, Oslo.



Fig. 6: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Judith Slaying Holofernes*, 1598-99, oil on canvas, 145 x 195 cm, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome

Before analyzing Gentileschi's paintings there are three main interpretations of The Book of Judith to be considered: many scholars see Judith as a seductress using her feminine charms to overthrow the Assyrian general Holofernes where the end justifies the means; others perceive her as a virgin beauty showing that chastity can overcome lust, specifically the lust of Holofernes; and finally some view her as a figure of the Church representing a conquest of moral degradation and evil that is represented as Holofernes.<sup>24</sup> In my opinion, Artemisia's life relates to this third view idea of the role of Judith: her social status was defiled and she had to fight to regain that status through the trial. The story of Judith is similar to the Greek methodological pattern for a heroic adventure: departure, contest with and eventual defeat of the opponent, and a triumphant return.<sup>25</sup> Using this pattern, a connection is made to Artemisia's life; that is, she left Tassi to bring him to court, which led to a long trial, and in the end she moved on with her life in a new direction. Since Artemisia was Catholic, she would have shared the belief of embracing Judith's ancient identity as a personification of the biblical moral of strength in weakness.<sup>26</sup> Her experiences led Artemisia to create her Judith paintings, beginning with *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Naples).<sup>27</sup>

The story of Judith is part of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books. The original text was written in Greek, most likely by a Palestinian Jew. In the *First Letter of Clement of Rome*, dated to the first century CE, there is a reference to Judith, suggesting that the story was most likely created or known before that time. It was probably composed during the late second century or early first century BCE. The oldest preserved text of the story of Judith has been dated back to the third-century CE.<sup>28</sup> Within the text there are many references to well-known geographic sites along with unidentified and possibly fictional sites; which shows an extensive knowledge of Palestinian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, and Greek history and geography. Familiarity with Jewish religious customs in the first and second centuries BCE is also clearly shown in the story.<sup>29</sup> These facts indicate that the story of Judith was told throughout the centuries and was known by many.

Judith was a widow led by God to become the defender of the people of Israel. The sixteen chapters of The Book of Judith can be divided into two parts. The first part of the story tells of the military and religious struggles that began in Persia and eventually made their way to Judith's little town in Israel, Bethulia.<sup>30</sup> There was conflict between King Nebuchadnezzar's political sovereignty over all nations and God's divine sovereignty over Israel. The citizens of Bethulia eventually lost faith and believe that God has abandoned them. This is where the first part ends and the second part begins with Judith in the picture.<sup>31</sup> Part two opens with the widowed Judith who has created a plan to defeat the Assyrian army. In preparation,

She removed her sackcloth she had been wearing, took off her widow's garments, bathed her body with water, and anointed herself with precious ointment. She combed her hair, put on a tiara, and dressed herself in the festive attire that she used to wear while her husband Manasseh was living. She put sandals on her feet, and put on her anklets, bracelets, rings, earrings, and all her other jewelry. Thus she made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her.<sup>32</sup>

She and her maidservant, go into the Assyrian camp, where Judith catches the eye of Holofernes. One night Holofernes invites Judith for a lavish evening in hopes to have intercourse with her, but he drinks too much. Judith, sends everyone, including her maid, outside the tent, and uses this opportunity to cut off Holofernes' head. She puts the head in the food bag that her maid was carrying and quickly returns to Bethulia. Once the Assyrian army learns of Holofernes's fate they become so frightened they run off. The Israelites then hold Judith up as the "glory of Jerusalem" and the "great boast of Israel."<sup>33</sup> Judith cuts through the common image of widowhood and fights for her people as the "Hand of God" like many other figures in biblical texts.

#### **4. The First Judith: The Naples Judith**

Scholars have differing opinions about when Artemisia actually painted her Naples Judith (Fig. 1), but it is often discussed in conjunction with her trial. The period when she painted the Naples Judith is either before, during, or after the trial. There is general agreement among scholars that this is the first painting in which she starts to really develop her skills and moves away from emulating her father's works. Multiple scholars view this painting through modern day lenses of feminism and psychological theories, but, as I have noted earlier, this might not be an appropriate way to evaluate the work. It is likely that Artemisia's motivation for this painting was to prove herself as a skilled painter in the art world.<sup>34</sup> Since she was socially defiled by the trial, she might have wanted to show that she was talented and should be able to explore the world of art further. It is common for viewers to interpret works of art using the

labels and terminology of their own background; nonetheless, I contend that it may be more useful to look at a Gentileschi's work through her own historical context.

Artemisia Gentileschi's first Judith painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1612-1613, Naples) is designed as a vertical painting. Over the years, the painting has acquired abrasions and has been subject to harsh cleanings. The shadowed areas have deteriorating dark tones. A portion of the painting has been cut significantly on the left side, so there may have been additional elements, which have not been determined by scholars.<sup>35</sup> The part of the story being depicted is the moment of the beheading.<sup>36</sup> Using Caravaggio's technique, this painting was created as a snapshot of the event moments before the beheading was complete. Artemisia uses the technique of Caravaggio's called *chiaroscuro*, where light and dark are the main elements used, generally in high contrast; the action is brightly lit as the main focus while the dark background pushes it forward. From the left side of the painting a soft glow illuminates the figures further highlighting the subject. There is an appealing rawness to the action.<sup>37</sup> Many scholars, when analyzing Artemisia's painting call her maidservant by the name of Abra, which is incorrect. Elena Ciletti mentions that the Greek Septuagint Bible refers to the maid by several descriptive words including *abra*, which can be translated into 'maidservant.'<sup>38</sup> The three figures are closely intertwined, but at the same time each stand out individually.

Artemisia shows skill in her detailed rendering of the folds in both skin and fabric. The painting shows Judith in a blue dress and her maidservant in red. Compared to many images of more delicate women from the era, Judith and her maid are fuller in figure, providing a sense of strength and power. The two women have their sleeves pushed up, ready to perform the difficult work of beheading Holofernes.

The tops of Judith's breasts are showing, indicating her femininity and ability to seduce.<sup>39</sup> Judith's face is very calm and her gaze is on Holofernes and the work at hand. Her mouth is set in determination as her arms are outstretched holding the sword in her right hand while her left hand holds tightly onto Holofernes' hair. Judith's arms and body position seem awkward but Artemisia has taken pains to ensure that she is represented realistically.

From Judith, the viewer's eye is drawn to Holofernes, in particular his face. His eyes are open and rolled back, and his mouth is slightly open. His dull facial expression suggests that he is in shock but his body shows otherwise. His arms are extended, and it looks like he is attempting to fight back. Holofernes' left arm is hidden behind the maidservant's arms and his right arm is grabbing tightly at her dress. The rest of his body is covered by the sheets, keeping the viewer's attention on the beheading.

In Gentileschi's painting, Judith's maid has an active role in the beheading, this placement does not follow from the story which places her outside the room.<sup>40</sup> She is forcibly holding Holofernes down on the bed so Judith can do her job. She is composed, while holding Holofernes down without difficulty. Her facial expression is similar to Judith's in that her eyes focus on Holofernes and her mouth is set in determination.

In the composition, the bed takes up much of the bottom half of the image, and is shown being quickly drenched in blood. The blood contrasts with the white sheets, as a rusty red color showing gritty detail. The end of the bloody sword is difficult to distinguish from the blood on the bed sheet underneath Holofernes's head. The sword enters Holofernes's neck in a darkened area; the viewer cannot be sure how far the sword has entered due to the way the head is turned. The intensity of this painting pulls the viewer into the action possibly causing a strong response, ranging from disgust and horror to awe and wonder.

Caravaggio's earlier *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1598-1599) (Fig. 5) appears to have inspired Gentileschi to create her own Judith. Caravaggio's painting is oriented on the horizontal plane. *Chiaroscuro* is shown by having more variation in the lighting, with bright, dim, and dark areas. Caravaggio used light in his painting to bring depth to the elements and to emphasize the action.<sup>41</sup> The action occurs on a linear region across the painting similar to Artemisia's. The version it presents is a snapshot of the moment before the beheading is complete. One important element in this painting is the amount of space used. The painting draws in the viewer but the space between each figure creates a barrier between the viewer and the action. The figures are not entangled as they are in Artemisia's composition. On the far right side is Judith's maid, dressed in muted colors with a head wrap. In this case, Judith's maid is an old woman with detailed wrinkles and worn features. Her hands show the wear and tear of years of hard work. She is holding a bag open, ready to be the bearer of the decapitated head.<sup>42</sup>

Judith is dressed in a simple outfit, with a bright white blouse that covers her breasts. She looks young, perhaps teenaged, with her pale smooth skin, and she seems thinner and frailer than Artemisia's Judith. Her face has a stern look, her brow is furrowed as her eyes are focused on Holofernes. Her arms are outstretched in front of her with her right hand holding the sword and her left hand is holding Holofernes' hair tightly.

Holofernes is covered partially with his sheets. There is a distinct line where the green cover sheet ends and the white under sheet begins. He is trying to push himself up with his right hand and his left hand is grabbing tightly onto the sheets, as if he was caught trying to rise. His muscles are very pronounced face showing fear and shock. His eyes are wide open as he stares up at Judith. His mouth is open in a scream. Holofernes' head is turned at an angle, like Artemisia's Judith, the location of the sword against his neck is difficult to determine. The bright red blood gushes in

a straight stream. Behind Holofernes in the background is a red fabric that mirrors the blood on the bed. Like Artemisia's Judith, this painting also evokes strong responses from viewers.

In a consideration of the social psychological approach in this paper, the interpretation of Judith by Artemisia Gentileschi as a woman artist versus Caravaggio's as a male artist is significant, especially when one is looking at the two paintings side by side. One important distinction between the two paintings is the use of space. Gentileschi's work takes the action into the foreground, bringing the figures close together, to pull the viewer close in to the action. Caravaggio's figures are spread out, and the action is more distant. The characters of the women are also different. By putting both women in the middle of the action, Gentileschi shows more of a bond between the women. Following the argument of this paper, connecting to Gentileschi's life this shows the possible need of a female companionship; where the only one she had was with Tuzia and that connection was broken during the trial. The relationship between Judith and her maidservant in Caravaggio's painting is that of a mistress and maidservant, with no obvious bond between them. The women are dressed in finer clothing which represents the time period that Gentileschi is working in and is closer to the actual story of Judith. Gentileschi paints Judith as a somewhat older woman than Caravaggio does, and Judith's maid appears younger in Artemisia's painting. The women are dressed plainly, not as they would be at a lavish gathering. Holofernes is portrayed similarly in both paintings. It is obvious that Gentileschi took inspiration from Caravaggio's composition recasting the image in her own style; even so, she has placed aspects of her own life in her works in the role of Judith allowing us to interpret her life alongside that of Judith's. Therefore, it would make sense that this work was painted before or during the trial due to the closeness of Judith to the maid.

## 5. The Two Florence Judiths: The Pitti Judith

Artemisia's life changed rapidly after the end of the trial in October 1612. Socially she would be seen as defiled and finding a suitable marriage partner would be much more difficult for Orazio. However, one month after the trial ended, on November 29, 1612, Artemisia married Pietro Antonio di Vincenzo Stiattesi, a family friend and Florentine artist.<sup>43</sup> Rome would not have been the best place for this couple to live and work, as a result of the trial, thus they moved to Florence as soon as possible. The earliest known evidence that proves they were in Florence are records from the Accademia del Disegno, which states that they were there by November 1614. While in Florence, Artemisia developed her skills in depicting the styles that were surrounding her.<sup>44</sup> She was supported and protected by the Grand Duchess Cristina and became a thriving artist in the Medici court.<sup>45</sup> Artemisia was exposed to the high fashion of the Florentines including a type of high quality wool and silks.<sup>46</sup> These fabrics would have influenced the clothing choices in her paintings. Her next Judiths (Pitti and Uffizi) are part of the few paintings that scholars agree were painted during the second decade of the seventeenth century after the trial.<sup>47</sup>

Gentileschi's painting *Judith and Her Maidservant* (1613-1614, Pitti) (Fig. 2) a vertically composed portrait. The figures, Judith and her maidservant, fill up the whole painting, leaving little empty space. In her use of chiaroscuro, the light emanates from the left side of the painting with the brightest area shining on Judith. The painting depicts the part of the story right after the beheading of Holofernes and before the women head back to town. Judith and her maidservant are both looking off to the right side of the painting as if they have heard or seen something.

Judith, located behind her maid, has a fuller figure as noted in the previous work but appears much paler. She wears a red dress with delicately embroidered patterns. Underneath her dress is a white underdress that can be seen on her right arm. The neckline is just low enough that the tops of her breasts are seen. Her hair is put up in an elegant style with a jeweled hair piece and she wears a gold earring with a pearl. Her face is in profile looking out to the right side of the painting with her mouth slightly open. While her right arm is bent at the elbow with sword in hand, which rests on her shoulder; her left hand can be seen on Judith's maid's right shoulder out from the shadowed area. This positioning of the hand illustrates the bond between Judith and her maidservant.

Judith's maid appears with her back to the viewer. She wears a yellow sleeveless dress with a white underdress made of simpler fabric than the one worn by Judith. The fabric folds are similar to the folds in Artemisia's *Naples* Judith. The maid is wearing a head wrap covering her brown hair. Like Judith, her face looks to the right side of the painting but is covered mostly by shadow. Her left sleeve is pushed up on her extended arm where her left hand holds the basket, in which the head of Holofernes is partially visible. Within the basket and hanging below is a white cloth covered in blood. Blood also drips from the bottom of the basket. Artemisia most likely gotten her inspiration from her father Orazio Gentileschi's painting *Judith and Her Maidservant* (1608-1609) (Fig. 5).

Orazio's painting is one of the images of Judith that Artemisia had probably seen when she was younger. The figures in this painting fill up most of the center with a fair amount of darker space around them. Coming from the left side of the painting the light and shadow falls on the figures in some areas, showing that he is attempting chiaroscuro



without mastering it. Similar to Artemisia's painting, the women look to the right side as if something called their attraction. A difference is that Orazio uses brighter colors especially when observing the clothing worn by the women.

In his work, Judith, located behind her maid, appears as a young woman. She wears a jeweled sleeveless red dress with an embroidered pattern and puffs of fabric around her middle. As in Artemisia's work, she wears a white underdress with the right sleeve pushed up, the cut of the dress is low enough to reveal her breasts, her hair is put up, her face is in profile, and she is looking out to the right side of the painting. Judith's right arm holds the sword down by her side unlike Artemisia's. Like Artemisia's, Orazio shows Judith's hand her maidservant's left shoulder; nevertheless, in contrast to Artemisia's work, the hand is placed on the right shoulder. Artemisia's Judith seems more protective and on guard, emphasizing the bond between the women; Orazio's Judith seems to be more relaxed and less on guard.

The maid, with her back to the viewer, is depicted as a younger woman and appears slightly slimmer than Judith. She is dressed in a similar style to Judith, in yellow with a white underdress and a blue sleeve. Her left sleeve is only rolled up a bit. On her head is a white head wrap that shows a bit of her brown hair, going down her back and around her middle. Judith's maid's face is mostly turned, but it can be seen that she is looking off to the right of the painting. Her left arm is extended holding onto a basket in which most of Holofernes' head can be seen. The head appears to rest on a white cloth that hangs below the basket, which contrasts with the dripping blood.

Artemisia has been inspired compositionally by her father's painting but there are characteristics that show her moving into her own personal painting style. The main similarity between them is that they were striving to incorporate Caravaggist elements into their styles. Orazio's Judith has elements of Mannerism, chiaroscuro, and Caravaggism, while Artemisia's has also included the refined Florentine style. The use of space within the painting along with chiaroscuro are significant differences. Artemisia has filled the entire space of the painting with the figures pulling the viewer into the dramatic moment depicted, while Orazio has more empty space that provides a sense that Judith and her maid are farther away. Her father's Judith shows his attempts at chiaroscuro without fully mastering it. In Artemisia's more of a development of balancing out light and dark remains present in the painting. This dramatic use of light became a technique that Artemisia continued to use throughout her career.<sup>48</sup> In this way, Artemisia's Judith shows her transition into her own style by mixing the styles of Mannerism and Caravaggio. In addition, we see influences on high fashion from her time in Florence which allows us to increase our knowledge of the life of Artemisia Gentileschi through the portrayal of Judith in her works.

## 6. The Uffizi Judith

Towards the end of the second decade of the seventeenth century Artemisia had become more widely known though the art circles as her skills developed. While in Florence, Artemisia established bonds of friendship that would influence her paintings; including Cistofano Allori, Michelangelo Bunoarroti the Younger, and Galileo.<sup>49</sup> During this time she became the first female to be inducted into the Florence Academy of Arts.<sup>50</sup> All of Artemisia's paintings created during her Florence years were signed with "Lomi." This name was Orazio's paternal name with Florentine origin. Most likely Artemisia used this name as a professional move; in addition use of this name allowed her to create distance from her past and possibly her father and his work. Also Orazio's brother Aurelio Lomi was an established artist on whom Artemisia felt she could rely on for assistance.<sup>51</sup> Artemisia's Uffizi Judith was commissioned by Cosimo II de' Medici, which is further proof that she had become a respected artist.<sup>52</sup>

Color became an important part of her paintings, and she included in the outfits inspired by her experiences in Florence.<sup>53</sup> During her time in Florence Artemisia was also influenced by other Mannerist artists, which can be shown by the range of hues in her paintings.<sup>54</sup> While in Florence Artemisia also gave birth to four children, three boys and a girl.<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Cropper argues that this next painting shows a need for revenge, or the psychological effect of the rape and childbirth.<sup>56</sup> However, I argue that, in focusing on the psychological impacts, scholars are forgetting that Artemisia had been influenced by the individuals with whom she had interactions as well as the culture of Florence.

Artemisia Gentileschi's painting *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (1620, Uffizi) (Fig. 3) is composed vertically and was created about eight years after her first Judith painting. According to Keith Christiansen, the Uffizi Judith was most likely created in Gentileschi's earlier years in Florence rather than her later years.<sup>57</sup> The results of this investigation suggest that this is very unlikely since the painting has details that show the development of skills along with influences during Artemisia's time in Florence. The figures are placed around the center with a large portion that is dark or in shadow. As noted earlier, Gentileschi is using sophisticated techniques of chiaroscuro emphasizing the light coming from the left highlighting specific areas of the painting.

Judith is placed on the far right of the painting shown as having a full figure. She is wearing a tailored yellow dress with red edges on the sleeves and a white underdress. Her sleeves are pushed up as she prepares to behead Holofernes. With the neck line just low enough to show the top of her breasts. This is how she was able to get Holofernes' attention. Her hair, partly shadowed, is put up, and her head is slightly angled down suggesting her intent and preparation. Judith's eyes are focused on Holofernes and she has a determined look on her face. Her arms are extended down toward Holofernes, with her right hand holding the sword and her left hand grabbing tightly onto his hair. On her left arm is an elaborate bracelet, connecting Gentileschi to her Florentine influences and Judith's story; thus juxtaposing aspects of her life with Judith's and showing her state of mind when she painted these works and its effect on the final composition and details.

The maid is placed to the left of Judith and above Holofernes, has a full figure. Her blue dress is similar to Judith's and her sleeves are also pushed up. She wears a white head wrap, with her head tilted down. The maid's eyes are also focused on Holofernes and she has a similar expression to Judith. Judith's maid's arms are extended below her, to hold Holofernes down so that Judith can perform the beheading. Her right hand grabs Holofernes left arm, to prevent him from getting up while with allowing Judith to perform the beheading.

Holofernes lays on a bed with two mattresses and a fringed blanket. His head, arms, upper body, and legs are visible, but the rest of his body is covered in a white sheet and a red blanket. His face shows shock, with his eyes rolled back and his mouth slightly open, as his body struggles against what is happening to him. Holofernes left arm is restrained by Judith's maid hand and his right arm is underneath the maid's left arm, grabbing at her dress. His legs are braced against the bed.

Holofernes head is tilted slightly making it hard to see how far the sword has penetrated through his neck. The sword is distinct from the blood and the bed. The blood is a dark rusty red and is spraying out in thin streams. There are small dots of blood on Judith, and the blood is slowly seeping into the mattress, moving down its side.

Observing the two *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (Naples and Uffizi) paintings side by side, there are elements that stand out more than others. The blood in the two paintings, both graphic in nature, have aspects that creates a distinction. Gentileschi uses a technique in the Uffizi Judith to create a splattering of blood that gushes in all directions. David Topper states that, "The comparison shows without doubt that Gentileschi purposely introduced the splattering of blood."<sup>58</sup> Through creating a more detailed effect of the blood, I suggest that because Gentileschi was creating the painting for Cosimo II de' Medici, she wanted to display a new set of skills acquired in Florence. One of these new skills acquired could have been the inspiration to create geometric forms in the blood from Galileo's concept, the parabolic law of projectiles. This law was one of Galileo's major scientific discoveries and states that a cannonball will create a short arc until it stops where it will fall straight down. David Topper and Gillis show that when transferring the blood from Gentileschi's Uffizi Judith to graph paper, the forms have a similar path to Galileo's experiments.<sup>59</sup> Through this focus on the social aspects of her life, it becomes clear that in her later works *Artemisia* was clearly inspired by the individuals, ideas and styles that she encountered in Florence.

These two paintings demonstrate a difference from the accomplished techniques of Caravaggio. The Uffizi Judith shows that Gentileschi has gained more skills by using the shadows to enhance the dramatic impact of the surface textures of the fabrics. Christiansen notes that Gentileschi's use of rich, black glazes to create this type of shadowed effect was the closest that any artist got to Caravaggio's techniques.<sup>60</sup> Space is a key element in the two paintings. The Naples Judith pulls the viewer close into the dramatic events unfold, while the Uffizi Judith intensifies the space by enlarging it. Gentileschi created a greater definition within the painting by adding a fringed curtain behind the women, which can only be seen in strong illumination.<sup>61</sup> In making an argument for this analysis through a social psychological perspective, we can see that Gentileschi's developing skills from the influences in Florence are becomes clear in the Uffizi Judith especially when compared to the Naples Judith.

## 7. The Final Judith: The Detroit Judith

Documents show that Artemisia Gentileschi had left Florence and moved back to Rome sometime in 1620. She became one of the few painters still working in a Caravagesque style since Roman tastes had changed.<sup>62</sup> Caravaggism in Rome became more idealized and pleasingly decorative in order to portray more heroic and dignified effect or figures.<sup>63</sup> Scholars agree that this final Judith painting is one of Artemisia's greatest works of art and by far the best of showing Caravagesque Baroque. Garrard describes this Judith as having a more dramatic narrative and dynamic chiaroscuro.<sup>64</sup> Gentileschi has created her own style and has created even more elaborate details in this Judith.

Artemisia Gentileschi's last Judith painting *Judith and Her Maidservant with the Head of Holofernes* (1625, Detroit) (Fig. 4) is composed vertically. The figures take up most of the space in the painting, with shadowed areas around the

figures and the lighted areas. The light mainly comes from the candle on the left; this is the only Judith that has a visible light source. Christiansen maintains that the effect of candle light not only freezes the action but it also illuminates the space beyond the frame of the image.<sup>65</sup>

Judith, is placed in the center, is positioned as the largest element of the painting. Her head is turned to her right as if she has heard something. Part of her face is unshadowed but from what can be seen she has a calm expression. As in the earlier works, her hair is up but here she is wearing a tiara and has a pearl earring. Her yellow dress has a white underdress and, like in the previous Judith paintings, her sleeves are pushed up. An important aspect in this case, however, is that the dress has several fabric embellishments: this enhancement reflects the high quality of fabrics she was exposed to in the Medici Court. The majority of her chest is covered; this is a major difference from all of Gentileschi's other Judiths that show part of the chest and breast. Considered from a social psychological standpoint, Gentileschi may no longer feel the need to sexualized Judith. Her right hand holds tightly to the sword, which has a curved blade and a very elaborate handle. Judith's left arm is raised in front of her and her hand covers the candle. Artemisia is taking the technique of chiaroscuro, from Caravaggio, even further by shadowing part of Judith's face with her hand. Inspiration also may have come from Galileo, since the lighted area on Judith's face creates a crescent moon.<sup>66</sup>

Judith's maidservant is in the lower right corner of the painting covered mostly in shadow. Her head is tilted up to her right, also looking as if she has heard something. She wears a white head wrap that flows down her back. The blue and purple dress covers most of her chest. Her sleeves are pushed up and her arms are extended below where her hands hold a bloody cloth that she is wrapping Holofernes' head in.

The areas in shadow of the painting contain additional elements. Holofernes' head is mostly in shadow, his eyes are closed and his face has a calm expression. On the far left next to Judith is a dark green table that holds a silver candle stick, a piece of armor, and a book. These small details visual intrigue a viewer to discover other parts of the painting. Red fabric hangs down from the upper right, reflecting the bloody event that just occurred and is similar to Caravaggio's Judith.

This Judith is truly different from all the past Judith's particularly in the position of the figures. This painting, consequently, works to sum up the arguments made throughout the paper that we need to look at Gentileschi's works of Judith in a new light taking information related to her life and its effect on the changes in her work. By separating Judith and her maid, Gentileschi is literally putting the trial behind her and moving on to become an even greater artist. Records show that she was the head of her household in Rome, which means most likely she was separated from her husband.<sup>67</sup> As head of the household, Gentileschi would have to take on the roles usually held by the man, which suggests a newfound power in being a woman in the seventeenth century. The overall idea of change and growth is important to her life, since after this Judith painting, Gentileschi moves on to other subjects and places in Europe.

## 8. Conclusion

Artemisia Gentileschi became a well-respected female artist during the Italian Baroque era, when male artists were the norm. Using a social psychology approach this paper addressed cultural standards in the seventeenth century in order to analyze the Judith paintings in a new context. By looking at the culture of the seventeenth century, this paper showed Gentileschi's process of overcoming the initial trial in 1612. Through this investigation, I described and analyzed Gentileschi's paintings on a linear timeline by connecting her life event and paintings, relationships with her life, and the differences between the male and female representations of the same subject. Connections were particularly made between Judith's story and Gentileschi's life within the paintings. Judith was a strong female character who overcame a strong male character. Gentileschi may have been initially disgraced by the trial but by the time of the Detroit Judith she had completely changed her projected image. She was, by then, a strong and confident female artist who could hold up her own.

Gentileschi was able to create her own style, influenced by both Mannerism and Caravaggism and, I have argued, especially by her time in Florence. She was able to refine the technique of chiaroscuro to highlight the areas of the paintings. The details in the Detroit Judith show that Artemisia Gentileschi was able to produce significant works of art. Her story was not, however, over after the Detroit Judith; she ventured to travel to other areas in Italy and Europe and create even more elaborate and impressive works of art. This investigation has shown the value of connecting social psychology to the works of Gentileschi suggesting that we may be able to find a new interpretation by exploring routes that were not chosen by previous scholars.

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## 10. End Notes

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1At times I will be referencing Artemisia and Orazio Gentileschi by their first name to distinguish who I am talking about.

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19Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, Appendix B: Testimony of the Rape Trial of 1612, 414.

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- 26Elena Ciletti, "Gran Macchina È Bellezza: Looking at the Gentileschi Judiths," In *The Artemisia Files*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.): 65.
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