

VOULA LAMBROPOULOU

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ITALIAN PAINTINGS OF THE RENAISSANCE*

The pictorial subjects produced by artistic imagination combined with humanitarian culture saw things, on the one hand, as they are in nature and, on the other hand, as symbols throughout history. The painter touches on the eidological problem as regards its essence and its relationship with poetry and reality.

The miracle of Renaissance painting¹ depicted 'stories' capable of instructing, surprising or pleasing the eye. Sometimes, the student and the viewer may experience together the aesthetic emotion and feel the lyricism, the humanistic approach or the singular mental vitality stimulated by viewing works of art.

The relevant essays in the rich catalogue of Italian Renaissance paintings are innumerable. Apart from published articles, an attempt was made to list certain subjects, such as ancient patterns, modern, lyrical, religious, symbolic ones, and portraits etc. In this way, scholarly writings, profound manuals and comprehensive catalogues came to light.

Violence - even if embellished - abductions, kidnappings, torments

* The subject is a report (enriched and supplemented) read at the 2nd International Convention entitled *ART AND SOCIETY (ARTE E SOCIETÀ)* in Florence in September 1986, with the special theme of *THE WOMAN IN ART*.

1. The period of Italian history we call the Renaissance includes the 15th century (the *Quattrocento*), the 16th century (the *Cinquecento*) and part of the 17th century. Three phases of artistic development are assigned to this period: the early Renaissance (1410/20-1500), the High or classical Renaissance (1500-1527, the year of the 'Pillage of Rome') and the late Renaissance or Mannerism (1530-1630). The 14th century (the *Trecento*), despite its inconsistent tendencies, prepared the way for the Renaissance. It was the century of Dante, Giotto and Petrarch. This phase which preceded the developments is called First-Renaissance. The above divisions of time are those that prevailed after much dispute. These periods of time must be regarded as flexible.

that praise the faith of sacred women are common subjects in Art. The Erotic Escapades of Zeus is a very common theme used by artists which conceals an act of cruel violence expressed phantasmagorically, contemptuously, triumphantly, with excess grandeur, splendour and awe. Thus, the 'divine' violence, opposed by nothing, is covered by the extravagant beauty of the masterly paintings which embellish the brutality of the abduction, the audacity of the kidnapper, the strength of the rapist, the tragic character and weakness of the victim, the inevitable submission of the woman - considered as compliance to the abductor. The horror is concealed by brilliance, colours, tones, luxury, phantasmagoria, natural phenomena. In addition, the rich Greek and Roman mythology provides unlimited inspiration to the artists. The ancient rhemes reveal the general cultural tendencies of the Renaissance. On the one hand, the ruins, plentiful in classical Italy, and on the other hand, the revival of ancient writers, thanks to the humanists, defined the historical phenomenon named by the Italians themselves as 'Rinascimento dell'antichità'. In those days, the artists had such respect for Ancient Times that in every myth and every creation they sought a hidden truth and an infallible rule.

Our subject cannot be covered entirely in this article. We shall deal with some typical works of art created by artists during the Renaissance, many of which are considered masterpieces in world art. They are inspired by violence used on some woman, either by a god or a mythical figure or by another woman, or they have to do with her death from the torture she suffered by order of some powerful male, or with the cruelty of a man which drove her to commit suicide.

In all these cases, the hypocritical mentality and the wonderful artistic rendering surpass the thought that a drama is unfolding before the spectator's eyes. The expression of admiration and delight on seeing similar works continues to be the most important aspect and nobody is horrified nor even feels compassion for Io who is being raped, Europa who is insidiously, tragically and violently abducted, Lucretia who is murdered, Saint Catherine who is beheaded or the pregnant Callisto who is hit by an arrow. The painting ensures admiration and does not allow any other emotion, not even melancholy.

The *Abduction of Deianira*² by Pollaiuolo is an example that illustrates and reminds us of the violence against women. The Centaurs

2. Around 1473. Oil-painting on cloth 0.54 × 0.80m. New Haven, Yale University, Art Gallery, James Jackson Jarves Collection.

become kidnappers, rapists and are violent towards women. This behaviour stems from their relationship with Hades.

In Apollodorus' *Library* (2, 6, 6), we read that the Centaur Nessus was, like Charon, a «ferryman» and the river where he first practised his profession was in Hades. Nessus is also given the role of ferryman by Dante in *Hell* (canto 12).

According to the ancient myth, Heracles and his wife Deianira, while on their way from Kalidona to Trachis, found themselves by the foaming river Evenus. The Centaur Nessus put Deianira on his back to take her to the opposite side, but did not take long in revealing his carnal lust and wanted to rape her. Heracles shot and killed him with an arrow.

This incident was not unknown in Medieval³ mythography and painting. In Pollaiuolo's painting, the naked form of Deianira when found, was covered with colour, probably due to the preaching of Savonarola or to a later manifestation of prudery. Perhaps they thought the woman would be provocative even on canvas.

Heracles, the husband who kills for honour, shows a myological structure owing to precise anatomical study. The persistence of the artist seems to render all the sequences of the form. The figure of Heracles is characterised by both its slenderness and its flexibility, something «between swordsmanship and running».

Deianira is presented more elegantly - as is more suited to the female body and to bring out a contrast with the developed myological structure of the Centaur - and with a form according to the ways of the Florentine School (egg-shaped face, cylindrical arms). The vast landscape with the high horizon was inspired by the nature of Tuscany (valley of Arno). The winding river runs through it and the painter concerns himself with details: vegetation, texture of the land, foaming ripples on the water. The landscape is alive with miniature notes and with the dancing dark and light tones. From this, we have the impression of a lack of continuity and vibration, which is due to the subject, but which becomes so different from the geometrical representations of his contemporary painters.

The Flemish realism borders on the classical-like idealism, or the

3. The work of Philostratus the Elder, as well as of the Younger, Greek original published in Venice in 1503 by Aldo Mannoutio. Translated into Italian by Dimitrios Moschos for Isabella d'Este, the Duchess of Mantua, in approx. 1510. It is possible that Pollaiuolo knew the *Images*. The Abduction of Deianira and *The Murder of Centaur Nessus* had been depicted in an ancient (real or imaginary) painting described by Philostratus the Younger (300 A.D.) in his *Images*, 16, 1-3, Nessus Loeb Class. bil. 1931, p. 360-2.

imitation of ancient patterns, forcing us to pinpoint from the start the two trends, the first of which expresses the spirit of the North and the second the spirit of the Mediterranean, that confronted each other many times during the Italian Renaissance.

The naked figure of the woman, totally abandoned in the muscular arms of Nessus and unable to make the slightest movement, stretches out her arms to Heracles. She is asking for help. Her cries are not heard. Below flow the red rushing waters of the Evenus, separating her from the man. Heracles comes to her rescue with the help of his arrow which kills the abductor. The dishonour is expiated by murder and blood. Penance comes forth and expiation is achieved. Thus, the husband's honour and esteem is restored.

I do not believe that violence is being punished, but the carnal lust and deceit of the other man, of some other man. The husband deals out a punishment for what belongs to him.

The greatest part of our theme is composed of works belonging to the cycle called *The Erotic Escapades of Zeus* and not to «The Violence of Zeus» or «Zeus' Rapes» or «Zeus's Abductions» or even «Zeus the Almighty». The only abduction mentioned is that of Europa. Perhaps the deeds of the almighty god make up a whole story.

Italians of course are fond of love affairs and beautiful women. However, beyond the plump, soft, shining female bodies, did it ever cross the mind of any artist that they are inhabited by a soul? Why such lifeless beauty? One would have expected that the horror of Zeus's violence and the deceitful ways in which he manages to break down a woman's resistance to his lust and domination would have inspired some sensitive artist to illustrate his disgust. Quite the opposite!

This most favourite theme amongst the most distinguished paintings of the Renaissance vividly depicts the extreme compliance of the woman in this 'beautiful' natural act in such a way that sensuality and elation are emphasised by the colours, the shapes and the brightness of the picture. In Correggio's painting, *Danaë*⁵ looks on the unexpected appear-

4. It has been validly claimed that the Pollaiuolo brothers were familiar with ancient pottery-painting from findings in the Etruscan necropolis and that the linear character of their designs was due to this. See F.R. Shapley, *A Student of Ancient Ceramics, Antonio Pollaiuolo*, Art Bulletin, II, 1919, p. 78-86 and A. Chastel, *Art et Humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent de Magnifique*, Paris 1959, p' 63-71.

5. *Danaë*, 1531. Oil-painting on cloth, 1.61 × 1.93m. Galleria Borghese, Rome. Vasari (*Vite*, 1568, mentions that the painting with «Leda» were in the Museum in West Berlin and adds that the two paintings had been painted by Correggio for the

ance of God with veneration. She is ready to receive the goldbearing cloud. Delicate body, pearly paleness, rosy tints, dark glints and an «imperceptible rustle» compose the incident that takes place in an enclosed room. Brushstrokes erase and caress the shape. The widest imagination cannot conceive the deception in the rape of the princess. The memory of the rape is something that has faded since the myth had first been created and it is the last thing that interest us or rather it holds no interest and annoys us if we are reminded of it.

But in Correggio's paintings showing Io and Leda⁶ the cruelty of Zeus «transforms» the face of the woman-receiver into one of inexpressible and her body into a demure coquettish posture. The softness and harmony of the shapes and colours leave the spectator no room to think about what happened, to recall the woman's position. One could say that seeing the divine beauty offers up the gratitude which from the deeds of Zeus, his *Erotic Escapades*, gave the painter the incentive to create this work of art.

The woman is perhaps Mother-Earth or the personification of nudity. She is creation itself or life itself. Or perhaps she personifies man's lust to overcome mortality and be linked with God.

Correggio's motive for painting similar paintings (Danaë, Antiope, Io, Leda) was either the order of the Duke of Mantoua or his own sensuality which finally found the chance to reveal itself in the plump female bodies after so many religious paintings. Berrenson⁷ points out that no other painter *was fated to devote himself to the expression of a woman's charm* as Correggio did. His painting *Danaë* was inspired by the ancient myth. The myth had inspired poets and artists in Ancient Times and the figure of Acrisius's daughter can be found in several red vases and frescos in Pompeii. Apollodorus (*Library* 2, 4, 1) tells us that Acrisius,

Duke of Mantua, Frederic II Godsega, who had ordered a series of paintings on the erotic escapades of Zeus, with the intention of giving them to the Emperor Charles V as a gift. The reason for this artistic portrayal was perhaps the sensual disposition of the artist.

6. This subject often reappears in the paintings of the Quattrocento. The mural by Andrea Montenia on the ceiling of the Camera degli Sposi in the Duke's palace in Mantua (approx. 1473) is of a corresponding theme, as is a historicist manuscript to be found in Paris, National Library ms. fr. 301 fol. 34v see I. Sez nec, *La survi-vance des dieux antiques*, London 1940. English translation, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, New York 1943. (New York 1961).

7. B. Berenson, *Les peintres italiens de la Renaissance*, p. 201. See A. Venturi, *Il Correggio*, Roma 1926, Mostra del Correggio, Catalogo, Parma 1935.

the King of Argos, was told by the oracle that he would be killed by his grandson. Out of fear he locked his unmarried daughter in a copper room. But Zeus transformed himself into golden rain and «entered» her through the ceiling. Verkeyen⁸ writes: *the soft texture of the shapes, the shiver of the skin, the transparency of the shades emphasize the moving rhythm of the bodies. This effect is achieved mainly through the handling of the chiaroscuro. His penumbra penetrates the mass, dampening and softening the outlines... the painter's technique supports his poetry: the brush-stroke erases its trace by caressing the shape and makes the colours melt into one another like wax on a fire.*

Tiziano, Tintoretto, Primatisio, Veronese and his pupils were also inspired by the myth of Danaë.

Apart from Danaë, the theme of Leda is among the favourite topics of the Renaissance. The leading artist of the High Renaissance, the creator of the new style, as Leonardo da Vinci is regarded, preserved the symmetrical compositions that he had been taught and applied the laws of optics in painting so as to bequeath to us, among other things, the visual tokens of *Leda with the Swan*.

1. *Leda and the Swan*⁹. The composition of the painting belongs to the type of «Leda Kneeling». It is a baroque-type of sensuous woman who, according to historians of art, symbolises fertility with her plump curves. She reminds us of the Aphrodites of Greek Baroque and heralds the obese beauties of Rubens. The landscape with its aquatic plants suggests a riverside location, perhaps the banks of the Evrotas. The swan's neck towards which Leda leans her head resembles a phallic symbol.

2. *Leda and the Swan*. This composition is similar to the previous one, the difference being that here Leda is leaning her head away from the swan's beak which is almost touching her ear. Also the greenery towards which Leda reaches her right hand is different. The fledglings and the eggshells are more conspicuous.

3. *Leda without the Swan*¹⁰. A small sketch showing Leda without

8. Egon Verkeyen, «Correggio's Amori di Giovi», *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* xxix, 1966, p. 160-92.

9. The study by Leonardo da Vinci on the external morphology and complete physiology of man is very interesting. See E. Panofsky, *L'œuvre d'art et ses significations*, Paris 1969, p. 115 etc.

10. See K. Clark, *Leonardo and the Antique*, p. 21. Also the article «Leonardo da Vinci» in the *Encyclopædia of World Art* IX, 216. K. Clark considers da Vinci's creative work as an *allegory of child-bearing* and observes that the sketch bears a close relationship to anatomic drawings in which he studies the human physiology of reproduction.

the swan belongs to the type of «Leda Kneeling». In this variation —the effect of violence is there, without the rapist-swan— her right arm lies across her body as in the type of «Leda Standing». The swan is missing, in its place there is an infant which Leda-Mother-Earth is touching with both hands. Her right knee is touching the ground, while her left leg is bent almost at a right angle, in a stressed contrapposto. Her head is shown bent slightly to her right shoulder, facing the viewer. Her body is plump but graceful.

In grammar we used to say that nouns denote a property, quality or quantity. Violence is a quality of the male genus, a property of the male sex and the quantity depends on the time it is carried out and the extent of a man's power. So there is no misunderstanding, there is also violence inspired by a woman yet not carried out by her but by a man (as in the case of Salome against John the Baptist). We shall deal with this subject some other time.

When we speak of cruelty as an act, our mind centres on some male, be it god or mortal, or an authority represented by men. The raw or embellished, unfair, undisguised or masked, fatal, hideous, bloody, tragic, expiatory, deadly violence against women does not end here. We shall examine two more themes. Violence against woman by another woman — even a goddess — but also violence inflicted by a woman on herself.

Paolo Veronese *The Suicide of Lucretia* (1583-84. Oil on canvas 109×90cm. From the collection of Leopoldo Guilielmo). The figure appears out of pitch darkness and is illuminated by a mysterious light which emphasises the shades of the skin, the blond braids adorned with jewellery, the blouse that has slipped off the shoulders and the olive-green shawl that keeps the dagger out of the determined woman's sight.

The perfection of the painting with its cold, dull colours, probably used to show the sorrow caused by the hideous act, is impressively conveyed. All is aimed at showing the figure of the heroin in a vivid way and not at putting emphasis on the act itself. Lucretia, gloomy and sad, with her pearl necklaces and valuable bracelets, is looking down towards the left so that the bow-shape formed by her shoulders completes the wide arch of her arms. This masterpiece of Veronese, done during his last years, was attributed to Paolo Farinati before the contemporary art historians reconstructed the final phase of the Venetian artist's career.

The Renaissance woman removes her clothes, but not her jewellery or her furs (Susanna, Elene Fourman, and as we saw, Lucretia commit suicide but even then are not separated from their fancy diamonds and

pearls). The sensual beauties are usually the wives, mistresses or queens of the artist's time.

One incident from the circle of Artemis¹¹ had as its tragic heroine a companion of the goddess' named Callisto. The word Callisti or Most Beautiful, as Artemis was called, is thus as a proper noun¹². Apollodorus (*Library* III, 8. 2) says that Callisto was one of the Nymphs who escorted Artemis, a hunter who wore the same tunic as the goddess. She had promised to remain a virgin. Different narrators have given her different fathers: Nycteus, Kykteus, Lycaon. These may all have many symbolic meanings.

Callisto herself had many different names: Millets (Hyginous, *Fabulae* A' 2,1), or Themisto (Stefanus Byzantius, *Lexicogr.* word Arcadian), a form of Themis or «justice». A comedy writer says that Zeus seduced her when Callisto had taken on the appearance of Artemis (Ovidius, *Metam.* II. 209 and *Fasti* II. 155) and this myth shows violence, deceit and incest.

In ancient stories Artemis had of course the appearance of a bear and Zeus coupled with Callisto when he too had taken on the form of a male bear (Eur. *Hecuba* 375). Callisto reached Zeus' bed in the form of an animal.

In later variations we read that Artemis learnt of her companion's pregnancy while the Nymphs were bathing and angrily changed her into a bear or killed her for her sin. Finally Callisto reached the heavens as the «Great Bear» (Eratosthenus, *Catasterismi* 1).

Callisto had promised to remain a virgin like her mistress but did not keep her word. One must be acquainted with the spirit of classical mythology to understand the many themes presented to one and inspired by Ancient Times, when one studies the paintings of the Renaissance and especially of the Italian Renaissance.

11. Tiziano, *Artemis and Callisto*, approx. 1568, oil-painting on canvas (cut around) 1.83×2m. Perhaps it was one of the paintings on «legends» given by Tiziano to the Emperor Maximilian II in 1568.

12. See Hyg. *Fabulae* 140, Phoebe was the mother of Leto. Artemis is: 'Αγνή, 'Εξαγιζουσα, Δελή, 'Ανέγγιχτη. See also Herondas II, 98 and Diod. Sic. II, 47, 2. In Minor Asia was adored like Μεγάλη Ἄρτεμις. She was Παρθένος, like Hestia and Athena and she had given the grand oath of Gods. In Ephesus was 'Εφεσία, Λαμπαδηφόρος, Κρησία, Φαεσφόρος, Πολύμναστος, μεγίστη θεά, 'Εφέσου ἄνασσα, μαινάδα, θνάδα, φοιβάδα, λυσσάδα. Her priestess had the names μελλίεραι, ἱέραι, παριέραι, ἱεροποιοί. Artemis was a goddess of war and peace, protector of married women, of light, and flowers. See V. Lambropoulou, *Female dances in Ancient Greece*, v. II, Athens 1992, p. 61. Also see the article «Diana» in *Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines*.

Before and after Tiziano, the painter who according to E. Delacroix, approached more than anyone else the spirit of Antiquity, we often find paintings with Callisto as their subject. Ovid describes with particular emotion in *Metamorphoses* (I, 63, 65), the story of this young lady startled by the pursuit and cruelty of the goddess of hunting, the Mistress of Animals and Plants.

The subject is beautifully presented in paintings on pottery. The fact that the sly Greek god approaches the girl sleeping peacefully in the forest with of course the appearance of the exquisite Artemis and seduces her with his kisses and funny games is an aspect that cannot be shown. Art also deprives us of the struggle between the brave Artemis who uses violence and Callisto who defends herself to the very end. The great artists of the Italian Renaissance preferred to paint the revelation of Callisto and her pregnancy, her surprise and her fear which makes her faint, all at the sacred spring.

In this particular case, the artist is interested in painting mainly beautiful naked figures in motion. In the background, he placed the leading lady of this tragic comedy, the pregnant Nymph whose veil is violently pulled away from her. In another painting by Vecchio, today in the Prado Museum in Madrid, the artist places the defensive Callisto in the background and at the front a group of plump, chubby women with white skin. The whole scene is incomprehensible without knowledge of the mythological subject.

The scene may be thought to be separated into two unequal parts by a modern fountain built with a tripod base, a basin and a statue above. Below flow the waters in which the Nymph Callisto used to bathe. On the right, Artemis, haughty, in shades of ivory, naked, superior, dominates the scene, and like a victorious judge-goddess holds a staff as a symbol of authority. Elaborate hairstyle and pearl earrings. She is surrounded by both naked and dressed companions, who are at the same time surprised and scared. One of them is retuning or preparing for hunting. But what the others have 'caught' is unforeseen.

On the left, the rest of Artemis' escorts are literally dragging the sinful Callisto like a sacrificial animal to abandon her to the mercy of the goddess who points out her swollen belly. The weakness and the power. The violent anger of the goddess and the exhausted young woman suffering all the cruel punishment make up the often repeated theme that the guardians of womens' purity are the women themselves who fiercely keep watch, ready to punish any acts of disobedience on the part of the younger ones that are out of the ordinary.

In all societies, other women are the cruel guardians of tradition. And these women show no mercy.

The painting, today found in Vienna, is a copy with variations of the work *Artemis surprises the guilty Callisto* painted by Tiziano for Philip II and which can be found today in the National Gallery in Edinburgh. Perhaps some assistant made an exact copy of the sketch of the other composition but some details were changed during completion.

Tiziano had not yet developed the «impressionistic» technique which was to surprise his contemporaries. Therefore we must examine how the artist interpreted space, how he formed the figures and how he handled colour and light. Tiziano managed to create ample space, not with the geometric perspective known to us from the Florentines, but with the purely artistic means we meet in Bellini and Giorgione. The space opens up and moves away due to the grading and vibration of the tones and the delicate relationship between the levels under the influence of the atmosphere. The idyllic scene does not disturb the main narration as the tone has been moderated. The landscape itself has a soul.

The godliness (and the nakedness) of queen Artemis is also emphasized by the red cloth which unfolds like a screen, a curtain, over the head of the goddess in a totally unrealistic way. There is a chromatic balance¹³ and the folds in the dress of the Nymph who is behind the goddess do not lack imagination. Thus the colour in the picture takes on a special energy independent of the truthfulness of the scene, creating a language unknown in the previous century, when colour was simply used to cover the design. In his further artistic production, Tiziano was to perfect his technique to give a more direct sense of space and to interweave his figures with the environment¹⁴.

Violence can also be wonderfully illustrated — as in real life — in the eyes, indicated in an intense look which expresses hidden violence in a particular way.

Violence can also be expressed by the intense irony and arrogance of a figure, even by the position of one man's body towards that of another man who is in an inferior position, either due to lack of muscular or social power, or because he is of different genus, sex, colour, beauty, appearance, origin, age, profession or wealth. In art, the superior position

13. Max Dvorak, *Geschichte der italienischen Kunst im Zeitalter der Renaissance*, 2 volumes, München 1927-28.

14. The development of Tiziano's technique was pointed out by L. Dolce, *Dialogo di pittura*, 1557 and G. Vasari, *Vite* 1568 and M. Boschini, *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, Venice 1674.

over the weaker one can be shown with the use of colours, luxurious clothes, facial expression, the position of the person shown. All these are so expressive that whole pages written by a great classical writer could not succeed in imprinting it on the mind or shocking the mind and soul of he who sees them. Victor Hugo and Fyodor Dostoyevsky would have used a lot of ink to describe as much as Giorgio da Castelfranco, the so-called Giorgione, conveys to us in his painting *The Storm*¹⁵.

The beauty, the aesthetics of Renaissance art would not easily allow scenes showing a man being violent to a woman. Metaphorically, of course, but dynamically and vividly, it shows previous and present violence. One such painting is *The Storm*.

If the viewer doesn't only see the masterly composition of the painting but goes deeper to sense the meaning of the work, he will weep at the violence before him. The «grief» of the lonely female figure will echo to the innermost part of his soul and terrify him.

The work is one of Giorgione's most significant. Even though the birth of the child is over in the scene of a woman who delivered her child alone, the tragedy and grief caused by such an event is sustained.

The picture portrays on the right a half-naked woman sitting on the ground breast-feeding her newborn child, abandoned one could say in an unseen corner of the forest — although it becomes visible — in front of a tree trunk out in the open with a background of wild and mellifluous lines. The soft bow-shape of her body half-covered by the angular folds of a piece of cloth emits a pale glimmer of light. The position of the naked figure suggests total abandonment.

The artist brings into his work his emotion and grief at the sight of a helpless creature surrounded by the storm of creation and the whirlwind of sentiment. The softness in the lines of the relaxed body develops in the «cry» of nature.

The different intensities of shade on the weary body in the diffuse light increase the emotive power of the young mother. The idealisation of the face is obvious. Giorgione did not follow any intellectual system, but surrendered himself to the emotions caused by gazing at the natural world. Here lies the source of his charm. Giorgione represents a different type of sensitivity in art from that of the Florentines and expresses the new period of Renaissance culture.

Beyond the river which has a true and an allegorical meaning, on the right hand side of the painting, a hunter (according to others, a sol-

15. Giorgione, *The Storm*, 1506. Oil-painting. Gallerie dell'Accademia. Venice.

dier), a symbol of violence and domination, leaning nonchalantly on a javelin, gazes ironically at the woman, or maybe triumphantly — the hunting went well! The contrast between the self-confident man — Giorgione excessively emphasized his genital organs beneath his luxurious tunic — and the sleeping town justifies the characterization of the painting as *the first work in Western art to express a mental state*. It is also the first painting to have as its main theme the «sinful love» of the artist's contemporaries and not the personified and mythologised love of the gods and the immortals of Ancient Times or the deified love of Ecclesiastical History. High up in the middle of the painting, a flash of lightning strikes the town and heads somehow, we could say, towards the man. The personal style of the artist can mainly be seen in the formation with the soft intensities of shade in the light (formation different from that of Leonardo da Vinci which is based on design and chiaroscuro). The warmth of the emotion is expressed with colour, the artist's «mother-tongue».

The allegorical meaning of the painting was stressed by Edgar Wind¹⁶. Outside the city, away from decent society, hidden deep in the forest, a woman gives birth alone. Her figure portrays complete desertion, her face expresses bitterness, resignation, devastation, indifference.

The wild nature, the desolation of the landscape, the sleeping city, the strong man and the weakness of the woman who is separated from him by the river are expressed allegorically. It is one of the most dramatic paintings of the Renaissance. The artist, the illegitimate son of a nobleman, created this picture full of allegorical meanings as a token of respect to his mother. Many critics even say that the naked young woman has the features of the artist's mother¹⁷.

The man's gaze contemptuously turned towards the exhausted young motherly figure express violence in all its greatness. Successful and effective violence. Violence which will exist and grow in the offspring, in the soul of that child. It begins with a silent cry and ends perhaps in a hot flow of expression, like a volcano erupting. It is a burning flame, a fire sometimes destructive and sometimes creative, but which devastates and vacates in the same way.

Giorgione was a great artist who «made music»¹⁸ while painting. His

16. See bibliography.

17. See Voula Lambropoulou, *Pregnancy and Birth in Art*, Athens 1984, p. 42. E. Wind, *Giorgione's...*, p. 50.

18. See L. Venturi, *Giorgione*, Roma 1954. P. Zampetti, *Giorgione e i Giorgioneschi*, Venezia 1955.

landscapes, some of the most beautiful works in Renaissance art, are brought to life by the fascinating emotions of inexplicable grief and mystery. The figures are sweet, nostalgic, gentle and lyrical. Yvon Deladre observes: *For the first time, the figures become one with the landscape, which is no longer decoration at the back of the picture. The eye rests on the warm light which enfolds both creatures and things in the same caress. Never before has the humanitarian concept of nature's beauty been more charmingly portrayed.*

Finally, it would be a serious omission not to say a few words on another artistic theme of the Renaissance, the portrayal of the torment of holy women.

Here we should not expect to see any kind of torture, as occurs in murals, painting, miniatures and other types of Medieval and Byzantine art. Nothing to remind us of scenes of torment and punishment and have as its sole topic the life of a saint. In an urban society, which worships luxury and a good life, the wealthy leaders and kings, the patrons of artists, did not want to think, to speculate or even more to grieve.

The most common theme is St. Catherine with the wheel of torture, the only proof we have of the violence used against her by the Roman Emperor because of her faith, her wisdom and her honesty.

Rafaello's «St. Catherine of Alexandria»¹⁹ is one of the many master-

19. P. G. Migne, v. 116, pp. 275-302, the old list of martyrs, of the Symeon Translator, 10th century. See C. Hardwick, *An historical Inquiry touching st Catherina of Alexandria*, Cambridge 1849. It is worth to examine the hymn and the troparion of Saint Catherina:

Μετέστης πρὸς θαλάμους φωτοειδεῖς
 νυμφικῆς κοσμουμένη στολίσμασι,
 παρθενικὴν ἔχουσα λαμπάδα τῇ δεξιᾷ
 τῇ δὲ ἑτέρᾳ φέρουσα
 τὴν ἀποτμηθεῖσαν σου κεφαλὴν,
 καὶ νῦν, παρισταμένη
 Χριστῷ τῷ σὺ Νυμφίῳ
 τοὺς σὲ ὑμνοῦντας περιφροῦρησον.

.....

Τὴν πανεύφημον Νύμφην Χριστοῦ ὑμνήσωμεν
 Αἰκατερίνην τὴν θεῖαν καὶ πολιοῦχον Σινᾶ
 τὴν βοήθειαν ἡμῶν καὶ ἀντίληπιν,
 ὅτι ἐφίμωσε λαμπρῶς τοὺς κομφοὺς τῶν ἀσεβῶν
 τοῦ πνεύματος τῇ μαχαίρᾳ
 καὶ ὡς Μάρτυς Κυρίου στεφθεῖσα
 αἰτεῖται πᾶσι τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.

In the West, people learnt of St. Catherine from the Crusaders. The School of Philosophy in Paris declared her to be a patron saint and soon pieces in the National Gallery in London (71 × 54). It is a painting which represents the peak of the great Italian artist's career.

The face and eyes of the Saint are looking up to the left at a bright, heavenly cloud with flaming rays of divine origin which reach the halo surrounding her beautiful tied back hair. Merriment, holiness and endurance flow from the presence of the Saint in sharp contrast to the soft turquoise of the sky. With one hand she is holding her bright red garment lined with soft yellow which covers her left shoulder and reaches to the ground. Her body is leaning on the wheel of torture. Light green dress with deep folds and grey brushstrokes. In the background, a river-side town.

The right hand of the Saint is before her breast in a movement showing peace, distress, endurance. On the opposite side, sharp spikes on the wheel reminds us of the cruelty of her torture. It is the only thing that makes us think of the violence against a beautiful wise woman which led to her death.

Tine²⁰ saw in Raphael *the unique blessing of double education which, after showing him Christian innocence and purity, made him feel paganistic strength and joy.*

Catherine «holy omniscient martyr» «earned» her torture firstly because she was omniscient and secondly because she was «beautiful of face». According to differing legends, she was born in Alexandria and was taught all the wisdom of her time. She knew Greek and Latin philology, foreign languages, philosophy, rhetoric and was generally admired. When drawn to Christianity, she became a fervent preacher and with her eloquence persuaded many heathens to become Christians.

Eusebius, the ecclesiastical writer of the 4th century, talks (*Eccles. Histor.* 8, 14) of a solemn, eminent Alexandrian woman who repelled Maximinus's licentious proposals and was punished by the confiscation of her property.

According to tradition, Catherine was imprisoned by King Maximinus or Maxentius and endured adversity and hardship with admiration and patience. Finally the day of her martyrdom came and she suffered hideous torture. After being whipped, she was put on a wheel, a machine with sharp spikes operated by rope and pulleys. But by the grace of

20. H. Taine, *La Philosophie de l'art*, vol. I, Paris 1865 (Greek trans. A. Agathonikos, Athens 1910).

God, it broke and then the Emperor ordered her decapitation (approx. 305 or 307 A.D.).

she came to be regarded as the patron saint of philosophical studies and education.

Apart from icons of her in Sinai and the Byzantine Museum (by Victor) there are icons of her in Padua at St. George's Church, in Rome at St. Clement's Church, in Naples at St. Kiara's Church, in Leipzig at St. Paul's Church etc.

However, what must be stressed here is that it was a favourite theme for the most famous of Renaissance painters who depicted scenes of her life. Such painters are Correggio, one of whom's paintings is now in the Louvre; Veronese, a painting of his is in St. Catherine's in Venice; Raphael²¹ in the National Gallery in London; Luini; Cranach etc.

St. Catherine is usually pictured with the broken wheel, a blood-stained sword as a symbol of her torture²², a book as a symbol of her wisdom, a palm branch as a symbol of victory, a crown as a symbol of triumph or with a ring which, according to tradition, was offered to her by the Virgin Mary on behalf of Jesus or by the young Christ himself as a token of their spiritual betrothal.

During the Middle Ages, in the West, St. Catherine often appears as a model of virginity and wisdom in the 'miracle plays', that is, the religious plays which were so popular among all the social classes of the time.

Our topic is very large, not only regarding this time but in its recurrence throughout eternity. The works are numerous and renowned. We have referred to some as examples. As we said before, the subject cannot be exhausted in this article. Words can never describe violence, abduction, rape, abandonment, debilitation, torture and... a woman's destiny.

21. See Renée Dubos, *Giovanni Santi, peintre et Chroniqueur à Urbin, au XV^e siècle*, Bordeaux 1971.

22. See A. Palluchini, *Beronesse*, Bergamo 1953, republication Milano 1968. C. Gould, *National Gallery... The Sixteenth Century Venetian School*, London 1959.