

Titian, Poetics and the Performance of Masculinity

by

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B.A. Double Major in Italian and Hispanic Studies,
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Supervisory Committee

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Abstract

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By studying several paintings by Venetian artist Tiziano Vicelio, better known as Titian, this thesis explores how the Venetian painter's works resisted the encroaching arrival of a masculine identity and reflected on the ramifications inherent in its performance. I will provide evidence that the contemporary discourses and/or criticisms of artistic production that informed Titian's style allow us to situate his feminized male within both the historical framework of sixteenth-century Venice, and the delicate negotiation of gender that was taking place at the same time. This thesis also situates Titian's works within contemporary literary acknowledgements about the fluidity of gender.

I will begin by examining Titian's painting of *David and Goliath* in the church of Santo Spirito in Venice, as a prelude to my main analysis of the whole cycle. Next I will study his painting of *Tarquin and Lucretia*, concluding with an evaluation of his enigmatic *Il Bravo*. I will argue that, using the metaphorical power of contrast in his paintings Titian was highlighting the violent nature of masculinity and the tragic consequences of its performance, while simultaneously offering the image of the feminized male as an exemplar.

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Introduction

In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman...it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine”.¹ She also argues “the passivity that is the essential characteristic of the ‘feminine’ woman is...a destiny imposed upon her by her teachers and by society.”² Could the same not be said of the dominant characteristics of masculinity expected from a man? According to Jacques Lacan, “the principle of masculinity rests on the necessary repression of female aspects of the subject’s potential for bisexuality – and introduces conflict into the opposition of masculine and feminine.”³ As human beings we are endowed with the power of reason, and thus possess the conscious ability to repress such aspects, offering the possibility of gender as performance. In fact, it has also been suggested that gender is “anxiously reproduced daily so as to ensure that it continues to appear natural.”⁴ This principle corresponds to Judith Butler’s theories on the fictitiousness of gender⁵ and the theory that gender is “conditioned by the rewards and punishments associated with gender conformity and deviance.”⁶ Known as social learning theory, it remains “the most widely used perspective guiding empirical research into the psychology of gender.”⁷

¹ Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*, Trans. P. Green. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 295.

² *Ibid.*, 307.

³ Joan W Scott. ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.’ *American Historical Review*, Vol 91, No.5 (Dec, 1986): 1053-1075, (p. 1056).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1053

⁵ Judith Butler. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 21

⁶ Janet Sayers. *Sexual Contradiction: Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Feminism*,

As the preceding theories indicate, masculinity as a social construct has, in fact, been well documented,^{8,9} but where it has existed, the scholarship most often concentrates on recent history. Taking the arguments of Butler and Lacan as my starting point, this thesis examines how masculinity was negotiated in Renaissance Venice. More specifically, by studying three key works of Venetian artist Tiziano Vicellio, better known as Titian, my research explores how the Venetian painter's art can be seen as refuting traditional expressions of intensely virile masculinity, incorporating effeminacy in the idealized male figure. Though there has been much academic study devoted to the construction of gender in the sixteenth century, most of it has been dedicated to feminist scholarship and the development of femininity, often ignoring masculinity, even if unintentionally. As such, this thesis will shed some light on the larger historical and social forces that have shaped our ideas of masculine gender and identity, and the role that art has played in that construction.

In his book *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, Michael Rocke, for instance, has revealed that over the centuries there has been a fashioning of masculine gender and identity through the constant and conscious manipulation of mannerism, dress and language, creating a conventionally defined standard for masculinity: “the dominant virile image expected of adult males.”¹⁰

(New York: Tavistock Publications, 1986), p. 10

⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁸ J. Mitchell, ‘On the Differences Between Men and Women’, *New Society*. 52.917 (1980): 234-35, (p. 234).

⁹ D. G. Perry, and L. Bussey. ‘The Social Learning Theory of Sex Differences: Imitation is Alive and Well’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 37 (1979): 1699-712.

¹⁰ Michael Rocke. *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and male Culture in Renaissance Florence*, (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 106.

Historians, such as Roche, have called attention to the powerful rhetorical function of male sexuality and sodomy in relation to both politics and homosocial relations. As Roche has articulated in his article, ‘Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy’, late fifteenth-century Italy was fraught with gender ambiguity, with Dominican priest Girolamo Savonarola proclaiming: “Young lads have been made into women. But that’s not all: fathers are like daughters, brothers like sisters. There is no distinction between the sexes or anything else anymore.”¹¹ In fact, Savonarola was one of the many to campaign for reform. Consequently, magistracies like the Office of the Night were introduced as a way of policing sodomy, introducing a socio-political aspect to gender. As Roche suggests, the imposition of constraints in an attempt to control gender divergence “indicates an awareness that gender identity was not a natural or fixed quality but was constructed and malleable, and as such it needed to be adequately shaped, reinforced and defended.”¹²

According to Michel Foucault, however, whose scholarship explores the ways in which past and present power relations are engendered, “where there is power there is also resistance.”¹³ Correspondingly, Roche’s study continues to provide evidence that gender and sexual identity remained a highly contested terrain.¹⁴ While other scholars, such as Guido Ruggiero, have also looked to law and court practice to demonstrate how the dominant ideology of gender roles and masculine identity continued to be subverted,

¹¹ Michael Roche, ‘Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy’, *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, (London: Longham, 1998), p. 150.

¹² *Ibid*

¹³ Michel Foucault. *The History of Sexuality*, vol. I: *An Introduction*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 95.

¹⁴ Roche, ‘Sexual Culture’, p. 165.

few, however, have addressed this in art. In order to address this imbalance, in this thesis I explore these complex dialogic processes in the realm of art, and specifically in the works of Venetian painter Tiziano Vecelio, better known as Titian. By studying Titian's paintings of *David and Goliath*, *Tarquin and Lucretia* and *Il Bravo*, three images that explore the merits of the feminized male, my research outlines how Titian's art depicts a radically different expression of idealized masculinity, one that can be interpreted as repudiating previous models of masculinity that were experienced as violent and oppressive, in favour of a more natural representation.

To better understand the distinctive representations of the male figures in Titian's art, it will help to consider the uniqueness of Venetian society. Historically, Venice has always been known for its liberal ways and high degree of social tolerance.¹⁵ This sentiment extended to a forbearance of homosexuality, and while it has been maintained that homosexual identity always remained a subculture, it became a well-entrenched part of Venetian life at all social levels.¹⁶ Though the notion of masculinity existed in disparate forms throughout Europe, it was in Venice that it remained at its most indeterminate with foreigners delighting in deriding the city's compromised masculinity.¹⁷ Given the liberal toleration that defined Venetian sensibilities, perhaps Venice had the most to lose with the encroaching arrival of a defined masculinity. As a result, I believe that the anxieties that focused on the construction of masculinity are both reflected and developed in the art of Titian, arguably Venice's most celebrated artist.

¹⁵ James S. Grubb, "When Myths Lose Power: Four Decades of Venetian Historiography". *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Mar., 1986), p. 43.

¹⁶ Guido Ruggiero. *Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 145.

¹⁷ Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, p. 120

In fact, art is often seen as an extension of the beliefs and convictions of the society to which it belongs. As an example, perhaps the most studied example of gender ambiguity in Italian Renaissance art involves a predecessor to Michelangelo's famous statue, Donatello's *David*. As Adrian Randolph has pointed out, the lack of specificity of gender in the *David* has intrigued scholars for decades, provoking many to view the inherent eroticism of the statue as a reflection of Donatello's own sexual identity. Though Randolph cautions the reader against such libidinal interpretations, he does acknowledge that the statue's androgyny is too conspicuous to be overlooked. Careful of the pitfalls involved in linking particular representational modes with political trends,¹⁸ rather than aligning the production of the statue with political currents of the period, which would implicate Donatello as playing a role in the conspiracy, Randolph's reading explores the audience's response to such a statue, emphasizing with ambivalence the power of the statue to, at once, invite and reject the male gaze.¹⁹ As Randolph acknowledges, though clearly a deviation from the scriptural representation of the youth, Donatello's *David* acted as a political persona representing the daunting challenges faced by the republic of Florence.²⁰ While other scholars agree that it is a dangerous undertaking to relate development in the arts to political events, many agree that there does appear to be a fairly sound basis for doing so during this period.²¹ Correspondingly, in this thesis I demonstrate that the gender ambiguity of Titian's male figures in the three paintings I have studied also reflect the political climate during the period, that of the

¹⁸ Randolph, Adrian Randolph, Adrian. *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in 15th Century Florence*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 173.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 192.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 153.

²¹ Charles Seymour, *Michelangelo's David*, Pittsburgh, 1967, p. 13

Venetian republic, one that promoted a reputation for tolerance and included a reverence for the feminized male.

If Titian's works can be seen as evidence of the manipulation of gender that was taking place, by exalting the feminized male while simultaneously refuting attempts to construct a masculine identity, perhaps similar negotiations were taking place in other milieu. In fact, literature played a central role in the way ideas about gender were disseminated in the sixteenth century. In Venice, the literary field was dominated by two figures: Pietro Aretino and Ludovico Ariosto. In 1525 Pietro Aretino, tired of the deceit and pretence of the Roman court under the Medici Popes, fled Rome for Venice, which he believed was the embodiment of fairness and virtue. For Aretino, Rome and Venice were direct antipodes, with the former epitomized by the tyranny, sycophancy, and hypocrisy of the papal court, and the latter by freedom and democracy.²² In 1534, Aretino expressed his concerns in his first comedy, *La Cortigiana*, which he addressed to the Great Cardinal of Trent. Essentially a derision of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*, which prescribes advice on how to become the perfect courtier, Aretino's comedy reveals the performative nature of the self-made man's attempts to achieve this aristocratic position. Aretino's version, in which Messer Maco, a Sieneese gentleman, is instructed on how to deceive and flatter in order to become first Duke, then a Cardinal, and win the hand of the lady he loves, in one of history's first examples of the attempts of the self-made man to achieve courtier status. Another character named Rosso, servant to Parabolano, is all too aware of the important role costume plays in the way a person is

²² Raymond B. Waddington. *Aretino's Satyr: Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth-Century Literature and Art*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 9.

received by society. By insisting that ‘il porgli in mano de le buone robe importa il tutto’²³, or ‘to have in hand beautiful clothes means everything’, Rosso proves that clothes are ultimately what make the Renaissance man. Even the character of Togna, in a blatant display of gender reversal, is able to transform herself into a man simply by donning the clothes of an adult male.²⁴ Through the character of Valerio, Aretino praises Venice as the archetype of truth and liberty and exposes the fallacious character of the self-made man, calling into question the notion of masculine identity.

If Aretino’s concerns with gender are a good indication of the dialogue on masculine identity that was taking place at the time, then literary giant Ludovico Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, arguably one of the most popular poems of the Renaissance secures the significance of the debate about masculinity. In her discussion of Astolfo and Jocondo in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, Valeria Finucci confirms that in the epic poem, masculinity is portrayed as ‘a masquerade theatrically staged for the sake of other men’²⁵. Similarly, Ita MacCarthy’s article, ‘Marfisa and Gender Performance in *Orlando*

²³Pietro Aretino. *La cortigiana*, *Tutte le commedie*, ed. G.B. De Sanctis (Milan, 1968), p. 159.

²⁴ Ibid., See Togna’s lament at not having been born a man, in which she acknowledges the performative quality of manliness by imploring, “perché non sono io uomo, come paio in questi panni?”, p. 205.

²⁵ Valeria Finucci. *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*, (London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 170. As the title suggests, Finucci’s book considers the performative qualities of masculinity in Renaissance Italy. Particularly interesting is her examination of masculinity as a response to castration anxiety. As the characters in all three of Titian’s Old Testament series in the Santo Spirito can be seen as responding to the demands of the Father, one could potentially draw similar conclusions about their fears of emasculation.

Furioso recognizes the poem's deliberate inquiry into gender identity at the time.²⁶ Her study concentrates on the character of Marfisa, a woman who rejects the constraints of society and dons armour to become a female warrior who vows to kill three Christian kings in battle.²⁷ By emphasizing Marfisa's violent nature, or *fierezza*, Ariosto criticizes the role of violence, authority and tyranny in Renaissance society, and relegates them to the world of men.²⁸ Similarly, the subplot of the poem examines the torrid love affair between Bradamante and Ruggiero, a descendant of Alexander the Great, whose beauty is completely feminized, in contrast to his beloved who, like Marfisa, is 'a woman fortified with masculine strength and nerve'.²⁹ Using gender ambiguity to great literary effect, Ariosto's epic poem proposes that gendered roles are distinct from biology and can be acquired by costume and performativity.³⁰

As David Rosand points out, the relationship between Ariosto and Titian was legendary in the sixteenth century, and is documented by at least two portraits, one of which was designed for the frontispiece of the third edition of the book, published in 1532.³¹ In his *Dialogo della pittura*, Ludovico Dolce developed the relationship further

²⁶ Ita MacCarthy. Marfisa and Gender Performance in the *Orlando Furioso*, *Italian Studies*, Volume 60, No. 2, (Autumn, 2005), pp. 178-195, (p. 180)

²⁷ Ibid, p. 180.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 184.

²⁹ Frederika H. Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: Femmina, Mascolo, Grazia', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1. (Mar., 2000), pp. 51-67, p. 60.

³⁰ MacCarthy, 'Marfisa and Gender', p.188.

³¹ David Rosand. 'Ut Pictor Poeta: Meaning in Titian's Poesie', *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, Literary and Art History. (Spring, 1972), pp. 527-546, (p. 530). Like Puttfarken's book, Rosand's article is paramount to appreciating the influence of poetics on Titian's work. By addressing the recommendation by humanists that "the painter associate with men of letters, poets and orators, through whom he might be introduced to literary culture of antiquity" (See p. 528), Rosand establishes the origins of the painter's affinity for poetry, translating *ut pictura poesis* into *ut pictor poeta* as a creative

by equating the comparison between poetry and painting to the correspondence between Ariosto and Titian.³² The strong relationship between Titian and Ariosto, and the infamy of Ariosto's poem, suggest that Titian must have been familiar with the writer's literary response to masculinity as a construct. In fact, in his *Life of Titian*, Carlo Ridolfi confirms that Ariosto conferred with the painter about the details of his poem as he composed it, including the descriptions of its many characters,³³ and while this doesn't substantiate collaboration between the two masters, it ascertains Titian's familiarity with the concepts behind Ariosto's composition. Correspondingly, Frederika Jacobs points out the resemblance between Titian's *Adonis* and Ariosto's Ruggiero, highlighting Dolce's description of Adonis as 'graceful and elegant in every part' and Ruggiero's 'supplely shaped shoulders and breast and movement filled with grace'³⁴.

The episodes in literary history described above demarcate a precise moment in the early modern period when emerging ideals of masculine identity were being contested and subverted. As James Grubb has argued, sixteenth-century Venice was known for being extremely open-minded and tolerant,³⁵ with masculinity that was anything but well

challenge taken on by countless artists, Titian in particular. Rosand also recognizes the legendary relationship between Titian and Ariosto.

³² Thomas Puttfarcken. *Titian & Tragic Painting: Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 14.

³³ Carlo Ridolfi. 'The Life of Titian Vecellio from Cadore, Painter and Knight', *The Life of Titian by Carlo Ridolfi*, ed. by Julia Conaway Bondella, Peter Bondella, Bruce Cole, and Jody Robin Shiffman, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, pg. 55-146, pg. 71.

³⁴ Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo', p. 60.

³⁵ James S Grubb, "When Myths Lose Power: Four Decades of Venetian Historiography", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Mar., 1986), p. 43-94, (p. 45)

defined.³⁶ It is therefore not totally unexpected that the details of Aretino's satirical comedy and Ariosto's poem confirm that notions of masculinity were being negotiated at many levels in Venetian society at the time. What I find surprising, however, is that many scholars have overlooked a similar concern in the works of Titian, particularly given the profound relationship that existed between the artist and these key literary figures. In fact, in sixteenth-century Venetian circles one might consider Aretino, Ariosto and Titian to be the 'Holy Trinity' of cultural icons. As such, this thesis attempts to situate Titian's work within the literary acknowledgements about the fluidity of gender.

While the literature of the time can be seen as evidence of the debate about gender, the cultural opposition of gender ideals was also played out in art criticism of the period. In an arena that sought to provide a rational foundation for art appreciation and defend regional trends, art criticism, as Frederika Jacobs asserts, positioned Venetian stylistic sensibilities in opposition to those of Florence.³⁷ In an attempt to reproduce perfect beauty, or *la perfetta bellezza*, artists bestowed upon the human figure a certain *non so che*, or *grazia*, that can be described in part as 'an indeterminacy of gender that results from a conflation of masculine and feminine qualities'.³⁸ Derived to some extent from the sexual ambiguity of the ancient sculpture *Hermaphrodite Sleeping*, based on Ovid's myth of Hermaphroditus,³⁹ what defined perfection in beauty was assimilated differently by artists from Venice and Florence, and was strongly rooted in the *paragone*

³⁶ Michael Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 104.

³⁷ Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo', p. 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

between painting and sculpture. As a sculptor, Michelangelo, the most masculine of artists, was hailed by Vasari as the apogee of artistic achievement, and was so fond of musculature that he even endowed women with it. For Michelangelo, sculpture was far superior to painting, which he considered woman's art. As a result, according to Philip Sohm, in late sixteenth-century art theory, oil painting was frequently gendered as feminine, and assigned 'inherent formal properties traditionally deemed to be feminine'⁴⁰, a consequence that had widespread implications. To support his argument, Michelangelo turned to Flemish painting, known for its appeal by means of its colour, an ornamental attribute that appealed to women.⁴¹ This feminine Flemish quality, it was claimed, was transmitted to Venice by Antonello da Messina and nurtured by Venetian painters, Titian included.⁴² Hence, contrary to Florentine views on art, Venetian and Flemish painting were perceived as tainted with femininity. In defence of Venetian painting, however, Ludovico Dolce, referred to the quintessentially feminine *vaghezza* and *non so che* in Firenzuola's *Dialogue*, proclaiming that for a painting to be desirable from the spectator's point of view, in a man there should be something of a woman, adding that an audience of self-consciously stylish cognoscenti appreciated the formal complexities and paradoxical play offered by such paintings⁴³. He also argued that a delicate body ought to take precedence over a muscular one because a tender and delicate nude is naturally

⁴⁰ Philip L. Sohm, 'Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 4. (Winter, 1995), pp. 759-808, (p. 781-82). See also, Erin Campbell's article on 'The gendered *paragone* in late sixteenth-century art theory: Francesco Bocchi and Jacopo Pontormo's S. Lorenzo frescoes', *Word & Image*, vol. 16, no. 3, (July-September, 2000), pp. 227-235, (p. 231).

⁴¹ Sohm, 'Gendered Style', p. 781.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 785.

⁴³ Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo', p. 59.

more pleasing to the eye⁴⁴. Consequently, Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura*, though derived in part from previous scholarship by Leone Battista Alberti, Baldassare Castiglione and ancient Roman scholars, offered guidance to painters who were specifically Venetian, casting Venetian style as soft and effeminate, with a greater potential for gender ambiguity.

To see how this difference in gender was played out artistically, consider the following paintings. As Jacobs confirms, Titian's *Venus and Adonis*, and Michelangelo's *Venus Reclining with Cupid* both present figures whose gender is ambiguous⁴⁵ with one significant distinction. While Michelangelo's *Venus* is praised for being masculinely feminine, what is particularly striking about Titian's painting is his portrayal of *Adonis* as femininely masculine. In Dolce's praise of the painting, he describes Adonis as having 'a particular graceful beauty which, partaking of the feminine, does not however detract from its masculinity'.⁴⁶ As a result, Adonis's gender ambiguity is interpreted by a contemporary writer as the source of its appeal.

As the aforementioned example points out, the work of scholars such as Jacobs and Sohm acknowledge the cultural conflict between the two regions and the role of art theory and criticism in gendering the arts, with oil painting frequently gendered as feminine in contrast to the more masculine medium of sculpture (Sohm, *Malvasia*, 781). Unfortunately, these scholars have not sufficiently explored the social implications of

⁴⁴ Ludovico Dolce, 'Dialogo della pittura', in Mark W. Roskill's *Dolce's "Aretino" and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, (New York: New York University Press, 1968), pp. 84-196, (p. 143).

⁴⁵ Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo', p. 59.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

such a discourse and the way it became an arena for the debate on masculinity as a construct, a lacuna that I seek to fill here.

In the following thesis I will provide evidence that the contemporary discourses and/or criticisms of artistic production that informed Titian's style allow us to situate his feminized male within both the socio-historical framework of sixteenth-century Venice, and the delicate negotiation of gender that was taking place at the same time. To do this I flesh out the very history of art and its criticism that positioned Venetian stylistic sensibilities in opposition to those of Florence.⁴⁷ I delve deep into the artistic rivalry of the sixteenth century and the opposition that existed between Michelangelo and Titian, a disparity that is best understood through the *paragone* that existed between painting and sculpture, igniting a rivalry that was to evolve between Venice and Florence. As a result, many Venetian painters were well versed in the derision of classical ideals, particularly when it came to the *paragone* between painting and sculpture.

While scholars have typically focused on Titian's construction of femininity,⁴⁸ scant attention has been paid to how his art contributes to the construction, maintenance and negotiation of masculinity in Italy at a time when gender identities were highly contested. Moreover, scholarship has tended to force his art into a binary opposition of male-female. For example, Rona Goffen, in her study of Michelangelo's *Leda and the Swan* and Titian's *Danae*, casts Michelangelo's *disegno* as masculine and Titian's *colorito* as feminine. As I demonstrate, the situation was much more complicated than

⁴⁷ Fredrika H. Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: Femmina, Masculo, Grazia', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1. (Mar., 2000), pg. 60.

⁴⁸ Rona Goffen, *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, edited by Rona Goffen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1-22, (p. 4).

this and, in a re-examination of the art criticism of the period, in particular the *paragone* debate, I will argue that in Titian's art we find a more ambiguously constituted sexuality, which both reflected and shaped the negotiation of shifting and contingent concepts of masculinity in a city dominated by his artistic production.

I will begin by developing prevailing theories on the *paragone* that existed between painting and sculpture, which ignited a rivalry that was to evolve between Venice and Florence. Connected to the *paragone* between painting and sculpture is the concept of *ut pictura poesis*, an analogy between painting and poetry, strongly allied to the mind's image forming capacity and the power of painting to make absent things available for the imagination.⁴⁹ Though *ut pictura poesis* was used throughout Italy to support painting's claim as a legitimate liberal art, the concept was negotiated differently in disparate regions of Italy. While Florentine artists and critics defended *ut pictura poesis*, by incorporating ideas from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to conclude that "art is produced when from many notions of experience, a single, universal judgment is formed with regard to like objects"⁵⁰, Venetians, on the other hand, resisted such claims, insisting that Nature was superior to art. As my analysis will reveal, while Titian acknowledged the Florentine adherence to the Aristotelian principle of extracting the universal in nature, he adopted the poetic concept of *ut pictura poesis* for its ideal capacity to reveal the truth, a feature that could be used to expose the fallacious convictions of their Florentine neighbours to the south, and celebrate the many virtues of the feminized male.

My thesis will open with an evaluation of Titian's painting of *David and Goliath* in

⁴⁹ Puttfarcken, *Tragic Painting*, p. 31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 34

the church of Santo Spirito in Venice, as a prelude to my main analysis of the whole cycle. I will demonstrate that through the adoption of the concept of *ut pictura poesis*, the power of visual rhetoric in Titian's painting can be interpreted as a resistance to contemporary constructions of masculinity and simultaneously restores religious meaning to an image that, in other regions of Italy, had strayed from scriptural authenticity. Next I will study Titian's painting of *Tarquin and Lucretia*, modeled after Ovid's rendition of the legendary tale. I will concentrate on the double bind theory and principles of narcissism to demonstrate how gender is represented as independent of physiological and biological determinants. Drawing on the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, as well as the similarities between Ovid's account and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, my work in this chapter will reveal how Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia* works to expose the dangers of a masculine performance. In my final chapter I will assess Titian's enigmatic *Il Bravo*. I will reveal how the use of colour and contrast in Titian's *Il Bravo* extol the values of the feminized male. For all three paintings analyzed in this thesis, I will show how the metaphorical power of contrast in Titian's paintings highlights the violent nature of masculinity and the tragic consequences of its performance, while recurrently offering the image of the feminized male as an exemplar. As such, my study helps to uncover the crisis that existed in masculinity during this period, or at the very least, the recognizable problem in its representation.

Chapter 1: Titian's David and Goliath and The Santo Spirito Cycle

In this chapter I examine Titian's painting of *David and Goliath*, which he composed for the Santo Spirito church in Isola, followed by an analysis of the entire cycle he devised for the cathedral, which include a painting of *Cain and Abel* and *Abraham Sacrificing Isaac*. The paintings, created in Titian's post-Roman years, provide an intimate look into the artist's perspective after his visit to central Italy, where he was able to see first hand how the emerging ideas about masculine identity were being negotiated in central Italian art.

Why Masculinity?

Having established ample evidence that verifies the concern about the performativity of masculinity in Italy at the time, it is worth reviewing some of the questions that are central to my argument before I analyze the cycle of religious paintings Titian composed for the Santo Spirito church in Isola. Why would matters of gender identity be so important to this particular period in Renaissance history, and why does Venice figure so prominently? The answer can be found in the culture war between Venice and its rival state of Florence, embedded in the conjunction between Venetian libertarianism and sovereignty. Renaissance Italy has a well-documented history of homosexual behaviour. In his article *Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy*, an insightful look into the sexuality of Renaissance Italian culture, Michael Rocke highlights the predilection of Italians for sodomy and sexual deviance that played an important role in the cultural construction of masculine identity.

Though the notion of masculinity existed in disparate forms throughout Europe, as I have already mentioned, it was in Venice that it remained at its most indeterminate, with foreigners deriding the city's compromised masculinity.⁵¹ Similar vilifications were made against Florentine manhood, resulting in measures taken by both republics to defend their masculine sense of self. As Michael Rocke points out, this denigration evoked a deep anxiety about the ways in which masculine identity was being shaped, highlighting its very fluidity.⁵² According to Rocke, masculine identity was shaped by men's sexual comportment, where 'standards and expectations with regard to male sexual behaviour were generally more flexible than those applied to women'⁵³. As such, masculinity was identified solely with the dominant sexual role, relegating the subordinate position in sex between men as feminine, or effeminate. As a result, Florence took drastic measures to obliterate sodomy in an effort to defend its manhood,⁵⁴ while the Venetian Republic was seen as being more lenient.⁵⁵ Known for its high degree of tolerance Venice was often designated an 'island of delight in a world made brutal'⁵⁶, and was considered a haven for homosexual activity, with a well-established underground subculture in existence by the fifteenth century.⁵⁷ As Guido Ruggiero points out, the homosexual subculture became such a well-entrenched part of Venetian life at all social

⁵¹ Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, p. 120.

⁵² Michael Rocke. 'Gender and Sexual Culture in Renaissance Italy', *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, (New York: Addison Wesley Longman Inc, 1998), pp. 150-170, (p. 150).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ James S Grubb. 'When Myths Lose Power: Four Decades of Venetian Historiography', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Mar., 1986), pp. 43-94, (p. 45).

⁵⁷ Guido Ruggiero. *Boundaries of Eros: Sex, Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 135.

levels that it was only struck down by the considerably more mundane Napoleon almost four hundred years later.⁵⁸ What this suggests is a tolerance by Venetians that was quite divergent from their Florentine counterparts, a tolerance that can only be understood by virtue of their libertine ways, and an acceptance for both aberrant gender as well as sexuality.

If we now revisit Titian's portrayal of the figure of Adonis, it has been argued that the fusion of feminine and masculine qualities of the figure of Adonis, reflects the discourse on masculinity that was being negotiated at the time, a prospect that warrants serious investigation. In order to investigate further the dynamics of this possibility, I will begin by examining Titian's painting of *David and Goliath* [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/01b/4david.jpg>] in the church of Santo Spirito in Venice, as a prelude to my main analysis of the whole cycle. I will argue that the metaphorical power of contrast in Titian's painting of *David and Goliath* highlights the violent nature of masculinity, while simultaneously drawing attention to the tragic consequences of its performance, and proffering the feminized male as a better role model.

To better understand the contrast between the hyper-masculinity of Goliath and the hermaphroditic appeal of David it is helpful to consider that Titian's depiction is but one of three ceiling paintings in the Santo Spirito church in Isola, all of which possess a similar collocation of colour, size, age and muscularity. Like his *David and Goliath*, Titian's *Cain Killing Abel* [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/01b/4cain.jpg>] and *Sacrifice of Isaac* [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/01b/4isaac.jpg>] employ an

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 145.

almost identical use of contrast, juxtaposing the shadowy muscular renditions of Cain and Abraham with the vibrant innocence of the figures of Abel and Isaac. Though my investigation will concentrate on the painting of *David and Goliath*, being the central focus of the cycle, I will later analyze *Cain Killing Abel* and the *Sacrifice of Isaac* to demonstrate how these three paintings could have worked together to caution the devout sixteenth century Venetian spectator on the consequences that result from an affected overemphasis of masculinity.

Titian's painting of *David and Goliath* in the Santo Spirito church in Venice is unlike any other representation of the fabled encounter between the two men. While most representations focus on the heroic figure of David, arguably, in Titian's portrayal of the scene it is Goliath's mammoth body and large severed head that take priority, emphasizing the overall violence of the confrontation. Titian not only exaggerated their difference in size, but in his version David is portrayed in the act of prayer, a representation that is without precedent in art.⁵⁹ Moreover, with his soft voluptuous flesh and his flowing bright green draperies David is feminized to the point that one may even presume he is a woman. As if to accentuate the androgyny of the figure even further, Titian has obscured the youths face from view, with his right arm raised to meet his left in a gesture of thanks. By preventing the viewer from seeing David's face, the literal reading of the scriptural account that David 'had beautiful eyes' (1 Samuel 1, 12),⁶⁰ is avoided, a distinction adopted by Donatello in his bronze *David*. Clearly a deviation

⁵⁹ Madlyn Kahr, 'Titian's Old Testament Cycle', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 29. (1966), pp. 193-205, (p. 196).

⁶⁰ Edward J. Olsowski. 'Prophecy and Prolepsis in Donatello's Marble "David"', *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 18, No. 36. (1997), pp. 63-79, (p. 72).

from conventional representations of the legend, the image provokes several questions. Given the prominence of Goliath's huge torso and the realism of his dismembered head, usually allotted far less importance, why would Titian have obscured David's face from the viewer's memory? More importantly, how do we account for the dramatic dichotomy Titian establishes between the two figures?

The Artist as Poet

The answer, I propose, lies in the concept of *ut pictura poesis*, an analogy between painting and poetry, most evident in the works of Titian who 'conceived of his compositions as poetry in paint'.⁶¹ At this point it is worth reviewing some of the key developments that gave *ut pictura poesis* its momentum. Reestablished in the fifteenth century as a way of asserting the fundamental affinity between the two arts,⁶² *ut pictura poesis* was strongly allied to the mind's image-forming capacity and the 'power of painting to make absent things present for the imagination'.⁶³ As a result of the new interest in visual and verbal rhetoric, artists in general in the Renaissance came to engage the spectator more immediately through their art.⁶⁴ The relationship between poetry and painting has existed since classical times but experienced a Renaissance in the fifteenth century. Derived from the humanists' renewed interest in ancient texts during the Renaissance, *ut pictura poesis* was used throughout Italy to support painting's claim as an authentic liberal art, an assertion that was legitimized in different ways by both Florence

⁶¹Rosand. 'Ut Pictor Poeta', p. 533.

⁶² Thomas Puttfarcken. *Tragic Painting* p. 28.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 31. For fourteenth-century antecedents to this tradition, see C. Jean Campbell, *The Commonwealth of Nature Art and Poetic Community in the Age of Dante* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2009).

⁶⁴ Ostowski, 'Prophecy', p. 73.

and Venice. As early as 1456, Bartolomeo Fazio, in his *De viris illustribus* recognized that ‘painters and poets share a talent, an *ingenium*, to represent the properties of their subjects as they exist in reality’.⁶⁵ Established as a way of asserting the fundamental affinity between the two arts,⁶⁶ *ut pictura poesis* was developed further by Cennino Cennini who, earlier in the fifteenth century, recognized that the analogy between painting and poetry was sustained in *ingegno*, which incorporated *fantasia* and *imitatio*, and was derived in part from Aristotle’s claims that ‘*fantasia* was an indispensable part of rational thought’.⁶⁷ While fifteenth-century discussions about painting and poetry focused primarily on the writings of Horace, the revival of Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s Poetics in the sixteenth-century presented contradictory theories that soon developed into an enmity between Platonic idealism and Aristotelian naturalism.⁶⁸ While at first painters and poets revered the power of *ingenium*, or ingenuity, for its ability to represent real life or fantasy, Neo-Platonists later condemned the artifice of *fantasia* and *imitatio*. As a result, the humanist’s *fantasia* was transformed, and slowly lost its authority. Thus it was that the relationship between painting and poetry stood at a crossroads, and consequently the concept of *ut pictura poesis* was negotiated differently in disparate regions of Italy.

In keeping with the idealistic quality of Plato’s philosophy, Florentine artists and critics defended *ut pictura poesis*, by incorporating ideas from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* to conclude that ‘art is produced when from many notions of experience, a single, universal

⁶⁵ Puttfarken, ‘Tragic Painting’, p. 32.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁸ Robert Williams. *Art, Theory and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne*. (Cambridge: 1997), p. 20.

judgment is formed with regard to like objects'.⁶⁹ Venetians, on the other hand, resisted such claims, insisting that Nature was superior to art. Consequently Venetian artists were seen as mere imitators of nature.⁷⁰ Giorgio Vasari located Aristotle's universal truths in paintings most distinguished feature, *disegno*. Though Venetians accepted *disegno* as the most important quality of artistic achievement, they retained *ingegno* as paramount to successful design, and embraced *fantasia* as *ingegno*'s accomplice. For Venetians, the importance of *ingegno* resided in its usefulness, or *utilità*, for painting, like poetry not only had the ability to capture the rich and abundant beauty of nature, but also had the ability to be useful, to enlighten, and to benefit mankind.⁷¹ This heuristic quality is best expressed in the work of Venetian painter and art writer Paolo Pino, who confirms, in his *Dialogo della Pittura*, that 'painting is, in fact, poetry, an invention that makes visible that which is not'.⁷² While Florentines, like Vasari, however, adopted an idealistic approach to art as improving upon nature, a representation of nature's intentions,⁷³ Venetians, like Ludovico Dolce, believed that art should consist of the whole spectrum of appearances as they appeared in the natural world.⁷⁴ In other words, what Venetians disregarded, or what the Florentines esteemed, was the fact that painting should depict the universal in art.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Puttfarcken, 'Tragic Painting', p. 47.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁷² Paolo Pino. *Dialogo di pittura*. (Venice: 1548), pg. 115 "la pittura è propria poesia, cioè invenzione, la qual fa apparere quello che non è."

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Textual Aberration

In order to appreciate fully the importance of *ut pictura poesis*, Titian's *David and Goliath* is better understood if we follow John Shearman's lead, which asserts that, when interpreting art, 'it is in what is happening that the deeper meaning lies'.⁷⁶ He calls for an increased 'awareness of code in reading works of art from the distant sixteenth century'.⁷⁷ To address Shearman's first request, we must consider the subject matter of Titian's painting: the Biblical legend of David and Goliath. As I have already mentioned, Titian's representation of David kneeling in prayer after his victory over Goliath is a deviation from conventional standards. As Anne Rudolff Stanton's discussion of medieval Psalter imagery suggests, images of David were used early on as a way of engendering roles for male and female readers. For example, Psalters intended for men, such as the one for Henry of Bolingbroke, highlight the militaristic nature of David's reign.⁷⁸ What of more contemporary examples, like Donatello's bronze *David*, who, sword in hand, steps on the foot of his victim in triumph? Or the heroic and virile youth presented in Michelangelo's statue? In Florence, David was exploited as a symbol for the pride and power of the Florentine Republic, for like David, who was able to conquer the giant Goliath despite his slightness of stature, so too was fifteenth-century Florence able to overcome tyranny, and resist repeated attempts by more powerful rival states to conquer the city.⁷⁹ In her article, 'Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith* as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence', Sarah

⁷⁶ John Shearman. *Only Connect: Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 8.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Anne Rudolff Stanton. 'The Psalter of Isabelle, Queen of England, 1308-1330: Isabella as Audience', *Word & Image*, vol. 18:1, (January-March 2002), pp. 1-27, (p. 15).

⁷⁹ Laurie Schneider, 'Donatello's Bronze David', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 55, No. 2. (Jun. 1973), pp. 213-216, (p. 215).

Blake McHam acknowledges the motivation behind the commissioning of Donatello's *David* as tyrant slayer and savior of the people, as 'symbolically inverting the growing chorus of accusations that the Medici had become tyrants who had sucked all the real power out of the city's republican institutions'.⁸⁰ She also recognizes the way the statue broke the mould of previous representations of the youth in order to emphasize a new political role for David as a defender of Florence by revealing his left leg and removing the scroll traditionally used to identify David as a prophet.⁸¹ Clearly a deviation from the biblical account, this political function was also achieved by the emphasis on the physical act of decapitation, despite the fact that Goliath's death at the hands of the youth could only have been achieved with the help of God.⁸² Adrian Randolph's more recent assessment of the statue suggests that Donatello's *David* is distanced from the foundational biblical text, emphasizing the youth's own triumph over Goliath.⁸³ Similarly, Michelangelo's massive statue, whose eyes stare threateningly at his opponent, was meant for public display in the courtyard outside the *Palazzo della Signoria* and was even commissioned by the civic government authorities⁸⁴ - essentially a propaganda piece that celebrated the strength of the Republic, as well as the classicism of the Renaissance, this time relying on muscle for the power of persuasion. As in Donatello's depiction of the encounter, in Titian's painting, Goliath is already dead. The 'what is happening' to which Shearman refers, however, is that, for the first time, David, rather than flaunting the glorious achievement of his masculine aggression, praises God as the

⁸⁰ Sarah Blake McHam. 'Donatello's Bronze *David* and *Judith* as Metaphors of Medici Rule in Florence', *Art Bulletin*, Volume 83, (March 2001), No. 1, pp. 31-43, (p. 32).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸³ Adrian Randolph, p. 150.

⁸⁴ McHam, 'Donatello's Bronze *David*', p. 4.

true conqueror, a representation more in line with scripture. This sentiment is also conveyed by Marco Boschini in his *Carta del navegar pittoresco*, in which he identifies the hero in Titian's painting in the Santo Spirito as 'that dear David, so gracious, who renders the glory of the victory to God'.⁸⁵ As David acknowledges in scripture, 'all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear (Samuel 17, 47)'.⁸⁶ In stark contrast to the hyper-masculine figure of Goliath, who, despite his ostentatious display of rugged strength and muscularity, remains defeated regardless of his powerful sword, a graceful and pious David knows he can rely on God, and not brutality, to emerge victorious. In fact, as if to purge David of any thread of violence, Titian has fittingly re-placed the sword, with which David beheaded Goliath, next to its rightful owner. What, you may ask, has any of this got to do with masculinity?

The Power of Images

As we have already seen, one need only consider the literature of the period to appreciate how debates about masculinity were a contemporary preoccupation. But would contemporary viewers be able to establish a similar connection on Titian's *David and Goliath*? Definitely, if we consider the painting in the context of David Freedberg's *Power of Images*, a fundamental contribution to appreciating the effects of images on the viewer. In his first chapter, Freedberg discusses Giovanni Dominici's images of Jesus

⁸⁵ Marco Boschini, *La carta del navegar pittoresco*, a cura di Anna Palluncchini. (Venezia: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale. 1966), p. 189, "quel caro David sì gracioso, che laude rende a Dio dela Vitoria."

⁸⁶ Richard Cocks. 'Titian's Santo Spirito Ceiling: An Alternative Reconstruction', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 113, No. 825, Venetian Painting. (Dec., 1971), pp. 734-735. In Cocks's article, he proposes that Titian's painting of David and Goliath was inspired by the claims that David made before the battle: "and all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with the sword and spear". This is important in determining the anti-violent sentiment adopted by Titian.

and the Baptist, whose harmonious representations served as exemplars for children who mirror themselves in such pictures. As Freedberg acknowledges ‘the importance lies in the overall assumption of the effectiveness of images – to the extent that they have the potential to affect even (or perhaps especially) the youngest of viewers, and affect them not just emotionally, but in ways that have long-term behavioural consequences’.⁸⁷

Could Titian’s paintings in the Spirito Santo have also served to mediate exemplary male behaviour?

Violence was on the rise in Venice during this period, and there were growing concerns about dissidence.⁸⁸ This is confirmed in Giovanni Scarabello’s article ‘Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo’.⁸⁹ In fact, as Stanley Chojnacki contends, the impertinence of delinquent young males was a serious problem in the sixteenth-century Venetian Republic, and many measures were taken in an attempt to persuade them against misbehaviour, particularly given the heightened participation of youths in governmental jurisdiction.⁹⁰ Although *David and Goliath* is by far the most prominent image Titian created for the Santo Spirito church in Venice, it will be remembered that it was flanked on either side by two other works which constitute vital components of the code articulated through the cycle: *Cain and Abel*, and *The Sacrifice of Isaac*. For the remainder of my investigation, I will

⁸⁷ David Freedberg. *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 5.

⁸⁸ Una Roman D’Elia. *The Poetics of Titian’s Religious Paintings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 68.

⁸⁹ Giovanni Scarabello. ‘Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo’, *Tiziano e Venezia*, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1980).

⁹⁰ Stanley Chojnacki, ‘Political Adulthood in Fifteenth-Century Venice’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. p1, No. 4, (Oct., 1986), pp. 719-810, (p. 793).

consider each of these sacred narrative paintings, all of which deal with violent behaviour.

While preceding artists tended to avoid the depiction of violence, particularly on altarpieces, where much calmer scenes were usually installed, Titian's literary friends defended the use of violence for its ethical value, and endorsed the use of violent imagery if it could be morally useful.⁹¹ For example, Aretino combined popular violence with rhetoric in his religious poems,⁹² a fact that positions the use of violence within a religious setting, and brings us back to Titian's allegiance to art as poetry. In fact, popular notions of tragedy as an elevated and violent form were already familiar, from earlier sources such as Horace's *Ars poetica*.⁹³ As Shearman has noted about Titian's *St. Peter Martyr Altarpiece*, the artist 'uses rhetorical selection, emphasis and visual hyperbole...in the same way that a writer would in composing an epic or a tragedy'.⁹⁴ In his study of Aretino's literature, Raymond Waddington draws attention to how Titian's *poesie* served as memory images in Venetian society.⁹⁵ Owing to Dolce's translation into Italian of Johannes Romberch's *Congestorium artificiosae memorie* in 1520, the interest in mnemonics was rendered accessible through a familiarity with Titian's art, which could delight and excite the memory.⁹⁶ According to scholars on gender, symbolism or metaphor can be used to affirm, reverse, support or reject notions of gender as it is

⁹¹ D'Elia, *Titian's Religious Paintings*, see pages 56, 58 and 74.

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 63

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 58

⁹⁴ *Ibid*.

⁹⁵ Waddington, 'Aretino's Satyr', p. 62.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63

constructed in an individual's sociological setting,⁹⁷ and religious symbols are one of the ways in which such a commentary is made.⁹⁸ Are Titian's works as conversant with the symbolic use of violence within sacred narrative as a means of questioning the way gender was being socially constructed, and if so, how?

Gendered Meaning in a Religious Setting

The importance of rhetoric and metaphor to visual memory is also highlighted in Peter Parshall's article 'The Art of Memory and the Passion'. In his essay, Parshall emphasizes the use of opposing elements, like the juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness,⁹⁹ as a means of provoking contemplation and fixing meaning in the mind of the spectator. This kind of contrast is certainly a prominent feature in Titian's paintings at Santo Spirito, where all three works collocate the violent movement and exaggerated musculature of an adult male figure, with a more delicate, and therefore less threatening, adolescent. In the case of *Cain and Abel*, it is important to note that, while the figure of Abel does possess a certain muscularity, it is the more natural musculature of an adolescent in good physical condition, in contrast to his brother Cain, who appears ominously larger and might even be bearded, though it is hard to tell through the shadow. A similar effect is also achieved through the distinct contrast of colour. In *David and Goliath*, the dark frame of the picture that encompasses Goliath is placed side by side with David's figure, illuminated by the heavens. Similarly, the shadowy depiction of

⁹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum. 'Introduction: The Complexity of Symbols', *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. by Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Peter Parshall. 'The Art of Memory and the Passion'. *Art Bulletin*, vol.81, no. 3, (Sept. 1999), pp.456-72, (p. 459).

Abraham's face and right arm, holding the sacrificial blade, are sharply contrasted to the light that casts its rays upon the buttocks of tender Isaac, and the gentle arm of God's angel, sent to prevent Abraham from slaying his own son. Finally, Cain's sinister-shaded body, set against a gloomy backdrop of billowing black clouds, is juxtaposed with Abel's boyish figure, lit from the side, as the quintessential martyr of mankind. In fact, the figures in each of Titian's paintings for the Santo Spirito church embody an antithesis that, according to David Summers, 'was a major form of rhetorical, or poetic, and, in the Renaissance, of pictorial ornament'.¹⁰⁰ A strong proponent of the artistic benefits of antithesis, Leonardo da Vinci confirmed that the use of antithesis translated well into the realm of visual representation since it was able to be both pleasing and persuasive.¹⁰¹ Based on Cicero's development of the ideas of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the edifying appeal of antithesis lay in 'the ease with which contraries were remembered and their kinship with the terms of logical argument'.¹⁰² Furthermore, David Rosand acknowledges Titian's use of symbolism and his re-use of other fourteenth-century traditions, as well as new forms of visual expression, such as metaphor, and specifically assigns such a structure to 'artists capable of realizing fully the potential of poetry'.¹⁰³ Perhaps more importantly, is the inherent capacity of light and dark, which Titian used to transform poetic metaphor into visible reality, or word into image.¹⁰⁴

The similarities between the youths in Titian's paintings are striking, extending to

¹⁰⁰ David Summers, 'Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art'. *Art Bulletin*, vol. 59, no. 3, (Sept. 1977), pp.336-361, (p. 339).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Rosand, David. 'Titian's Light as Form and Symbol', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Mar., 1975), pp. 58-64, (p. 63).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

their resemblance to the figure of Christ in images of Christ's Passion that, as Parshall also asserts, reminds the viewer of the brutality of Christ's oppressors. Moreover, in a society that esteemed Christ as the Redeemer, the images of passivity associated with the Passion were fixed in the minds of the faithful and consequently admired.¹⁰⁵ Both the contrast of light and colour, and the youths in Titian's three paintings in the Santo Spirito cycle offer a comparable correlation between violence and a performed masculinity, where passivity is favorable, and immorality is located in the transgressions of the aggressors.¹⁰⁶ In fact, there is a strong correlation between Christ and each of the passive figures in Titian's three paintings. Abel, who also remains faceless, could be seen to represent Christ as a blameless target for violence. In a similar fashion, the figure of Isaac acknowledges Christ's innocence, and while his face is in full view, it lacks all individuality. As such, Titian's exclusion of David's face can be understood as deliberate, where like that of Christ, to follow Parshall's example, David's 'face is generic, the face of all faces, which is also to say the face of no man'¹⁰⁷, thereby freeing the spectator from the constraints of masculine performance through what Parshall refers to as a 'process of self-reflection, self-recognition, and finally self knowledge'.¹⁰⁸

This analogy also works well within the religio-political environment of the paintings, which allows the spectators, most probably devout Christian churchgoers, to engage in a spiritual discourse with the paintings. As Summers points out, St. Augustine was instrumental in incorporating antithesis into Christian ideology, acknowledging its

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 469.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

power to account for the existence of evil in the universe,¹⁰⁹ an idea that can be successfully applied to Titian's paintings in the Santo Spirito. Through the antithetical use of contrast, Titian's three paintings demarcate a division between the malevolent behavior of the muscular figures and the more peaceful nature of the youthful androgyne. Even the weapons used by the hyper-masculine figures in the paintings are used to promote this dichotomy of gender even further. As Whitney Davis suggests, even the elements of a representation that do not depict a sex can be gendered.¹¹⁰ In each of the paintings, it is the muscular figure that is in possession of the weapon used to incite violence: in *Cain and Abel* it is the club that Cain holds ready to bear down on his victim; in the *Sacrifice of Isaac* it is the knife with which Abraham is prepared to slaughter his son; in *David and Goliath* it is Goliath's own sword used to sever the giant's head from its body that Titian wisely returns to its rightful owner, visually dissociating the youth from the bloody deed for the eyes of the spectator.

Pietro Aretino saw meaning in form and metaphor, and attributed enormous rhetorical power to Titian's pictures,¹¹¹ where *maraviglia* and *stupore* prepared the viewer for ardent contemplation.¹¹² Just as the peaceful expression of Christ's face in Titian's *Ecce Homo* had the power to purge the viewer of hate and rancor,¹¹³ so too can his painting of *David and Goliath* free the devout Christian viewer from the violence inherent in the performance of masculinity, by presenting them with a gentle alternative

¹⁰⁹ Summers, 'Contrapposto', p. 350.

¹¹⁰ Whitney Davis, p. 226.

¹¹¹ Norman E. Land. *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art*, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 136.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

in the form of David who yields only to his faith to resolve problems. If, as Adrian Randolph suggests, Donatello's *David* functioned both politically and socially by resisting the male gaze – thus discouraging homosexual encounters through the performative quality of the statue that depicts an innocent adolescent triumphant over the advances of an older male by stepping on his severed head – so too could Titian's Old Testament cycle function in a religious setting that could instruct about the dangers of violence, proffering the tragic consequences endured by three men who sought to prove their manliness through violent acts. Caroline Walker Bynum claims that, in religious tradition, it has been agreed 'men gain authority from the fact that the source of ultimate value is often described in anthropomorphic images as Father or King'¹¹⁴. As David was later to become the King of Israel, his androgynous figure can only be seen as an archetype for peaceful reverence over violent aggression, or pious beauty over masculine brutality.

The ideas expressed by James Saslow, in his book, *The Rape of Ganymede: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, are helpful to understanding Titian's *David and Goliath*. Of particular importance is how the representation of a hermaphroditic figure as an androgynous being who transcends sexual longing serves to free the figure from the negative overtones normally associated with the effeminate male.¹¹⁵ As David is triumphant despite his androgynous physique, Titian's depiction of the youth also challenges the Renaissance conviction that effeminacy corresponds to a shortfall in

¹¹⁴ Bynum, 'Complexity of Symbols', p. 1.

¹¹⁵ James Salsow. 'Corregio at Mantua: Libertinism and Gender Ambiguity in Northern Italy', *The Rape of Ganymede: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 85.

attributes like courage and self-confidence normally associated with the masculine realm.¹¹⁶

Artistic Enmity in Late Renaissance Italy

I would now like to reconsider another key dimension of Titian's Santo Spirito paintings as an element of my analysis: the rivalry between Michelangelo and Titian. As Frederika Jacobs acknowledges, the competition between the two artists ought to be seen as more than a disagreement about the importance of *colorito* over *disegno*, and must include issues of gender.¹¹⁷ If we return to the debate over the correlation between poetry and painting for a moment, we will recall how Florentines reconciled Plato's disdain for poetry and painting with Aristotle's idea that poetry presents us with general truths,¹¹⁸ as a way of satisfying Plato's idealism. According to Plato, however, 'the only activity worthy of the free man was the search for truth'¹¹⁹, a concept that, I believe, was fundamental to Venetian sensibilities. Though the Venetians acknowledged the Florentine adherence to the Aristotelian universal, they adopted the poetic use of metaphor as an essential component of their *ingegno* used to expose the fallacious convictions of their Florentine neighbours to the south. How can this difference of opinion be used to piece together Titian's engagement with the contemporary discourse on masculine identity?

The answer may be found in the rivalry between Venetian artists like Titian, and their Florentine adversaries, like Michelangelo. For Vasari, Michelangelo was the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo', p. 57.

¹¹⁸ Williams, *Art, Theory and Culture*, p. 34.

¹¹⁹ Puttfarcken, *Tragic Painting*, p. 42.

apogee of artistic achievement and his painted figures remained ‘the most perfect and well-proportioned compositions of the human body’.¹²⁰ Vasari believed that Michelangelo achieved such a self-sufficient perfection through the study of human sculpture.¹²¹ As such, Michelangelo was praised for his close observation of Ancient art, while Venetian artists were criticized for imitating directly from life.¹²² This criticism, and Titian’s response to it, I believe, is also at the heart of understanding Titian’s depiction of *David and Goliath*.

The parallels between Michelangelo’s style and Titian’s portrayal of his figures in the Old Testament cycle of the Santo Spirito are striking, particularly in the muscular figures of Goliath, Cain and Abraham. According to Madlyn Kahr, from the drama, turbulence, and the Michelangelesque muscular display, ‘it is clear that for these three paintings, Titian adopted the features on which Florentine art prided itself as superior to Venetian painting’.¹²³ Similarly, in comparing Titian’s paintings in Spirito Santo to Pordenone’s handling of the same subject matter, Friedlaender confirms that ‘it is obvious that Pordenone’s adoption of Michelangelo’s plastic force served as a catalyst for Titian’s extraordinary display of power’, though he admits that Titian’s treatment is ‘far more violent and powerful’.¹²⁴ Even Rona Goffen, perhaps the greatest proponent for the rivalry that existed between the two artists, is sometimes unclear about Titian’s intentions. Though his motives may seem obvious in the spirit of competition, as Goffen

¹²⁰ Puttfarcken, ‘Tragic Painting’, p. 48.

¹²¹ Williams, *Art, Theory and Culture*, p. 38.

¹²² Land, ‘The Viewer as Poet’, p. 169.

¹²³ Kahr, ‘Old Testament’, p. 204.

¹²⁴ Walter Friedlaender, ‘Titian and Pordenone’, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 1. (Mar., 1965), pp. 118-121, (p. 119).

suggests, the cycle at Santo Spirito in Isola could have been derived from the drawings left behind by Vasari, who was originally given the commission but later had to forfeit in order to return to Florence. I find it strange that, given her insistence of the rivalrous context between the two men, Goffen would propose that the Venetian artist might have been appropriating the ideas of another Florentine rival, Vasari. I also find it difficult to support Thomas Puttfarcken's assessment of the artist, which undermines Titian's engagement in the *paragone* with Michelangelo, seeing the relationship between the two artists as one that helped develop Titian's style.¹²⁵ Since the rivalry that existed between Florence and Venice was already firmly established by Titian's time, can we genuinely accept that Titian was trying to show off his versatility and, as Kahr puts it, 'meet the challenge of Central Italian painting that confronted him at this moment?'¹²⁶ This would not only be misguided, but it would also fail to recognize the fine intellect Titian possessed.

In fact, I would argue that Titian's contrast of the two figures is strongly reminiscent of a similar relationship being negotiated at the time, that of Eros and Anteros. Based on an analogy between Petrarchan poetry and painting that reconfigures masculine social relations in the Renaissance, Stephen Campbell's study positions the androgynous male of sixteenth century Italian painting as a poetic construct that articulates unconventional visual constructions of desired masculinity.¹²⁷ Despite what

¹²⁵ Puttfarcken, *Tragic Painting*, p. 98.

¹²⁶ Kahr, 'Old Testament', p. 193.

¹²⁷ Stephen J Campbell. 'Eros in the Flesh: Petrarchan Desire, the Embodied Eros, and Male Beauty in Italian Art', 1500–1540, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35.3, (Fall 2005), pp. 629-662, (p. 632). Campbell's article provides an analogy between Petrarchan poetry and painting that reconfigures masculine social relations in the

one might expect, Anteros was not the antithesis of Eros, but rather represented a divine, or noble love as opposed to the erotic love of Eros fame. While Eros reflected the violence and disquiet in the world, the androgynous Anteros was considered ‘the god of virtuous rationality primarily constituted in sexual renunciation over Eros, his demonic alter-ego, who presides over the sphere of luxury and vice’.¹²⁸ According to Campbell, the conflict between Eros and Anteros is central to understanding the literary competition between male authors, where Eros/Anteros described not only erotic discord but also extended to relationships in the homosocial sphere. In the context of *ut pictor poesis* then, where the painter and poet are one and the same, this competition between authors could certainly have been translated to one between artists. In fact, as Campbell points out, the relationship between Eros and Anteros offers a powerful discourse on gender that positions artists of the feminized male in a relationship of resistance to Michelangelo and Pontormo.¹²⁹

Given that Dolce responded in fervent defense of Titian in a bid for the supremacy of the Venetian school over the Florentine Academy, could we expect anything less from the artist himself? Not if we consider that the paintings for Santo Spirito were produced after Titian’s visit to Rome. Though originally thought to have been painted in the early 1540s, it has recently been determined that the paintings were

Renaissance, and speaks to the “new visual constructions of desirable masculinity” (632). Though his work is confined to gendered objects of desire, and the relationship between Eros and Anteros, it offers a powerful discourse on gender, that positions Bronzino and Titian in a relationship of resistance to artists like Michelangelo and Pontormo.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 638.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 652.

executed in Titian's post-Roman years.¹³⁰ In Rome, the artist would have been confronted with the art of Michelangelo himself, and though it is impossible to know the depth of Titian's thoughts about the Florentine's art, he must have become acquainted with the *terribilità* for which Michelangelo was famous. As Puttfarcken points out, the concept of *terribilità* was strongly tied to its awe-inspiring and fear-inducing power, and denotes the technical mastery of Michelangelo's muscular figures in particular,¹³¹ which Dolce was later to refer to as 'the most fearsome and complicated type of nude'.¹³² As the rivalry between Venice and Florence already existed, it is difficult to imagine how this would not translate into a competition between Venetian and Florentine painters. Seen in this light, Titian could have been responding to the universal quality of the *terribilità* of Michelangelo's muscular figures.

According to contemporary Venetian critic Ludovico Dolce, 'one should not believe that there is only one perfect form to paint; this is because the complexities of men and spirits are many, and as such appear in various manifestations, each according to their own inclination'.¹³³ Let us revisit the philosophical debate of the period one last time. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, antithetical qualities such as stable/mutable, determinate/indeterminate and good/evil are gender specific, or male/female.¹³⁴ By celebrating the feminized male, as he did in his praise of Titian's *Adonis*, Dolce rejected

¹³⁰ Puttfarcken, *Tragic Painting*, p. 101.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹³³ Ludovico Dolce. 'Dialogo della pittura di M. Lodovico Dolce, intitolato l'Aretino', *Scritti d'arte del cinquecento I*, a cura di Paola Barrochi. (Milano: Valdonega. 1971), p. 300, "non è da credere che ci sia una sola forma del perfetto dipingere; anzi, perché le complessioni degli uomini e gli umori sono diversi, così ne nascono diverse maniere e ciascuno segue quella a cui è inchinato naturalmente."

¹³⁴ Sohm, 'Gendered Style', p. 767.

the Aristotelian tradition of universals, and ‘employed a strategy of inversion by transforming a traditional defect into a virtue’.¹³⁵ This is precisely what Titian’s representation of an effeminate David recognizes. In order to be considered heroic or virtuous in the eyes of God, one needn’t adopt a masculine performance. In fact, as the hyper-masculine figures in his paintings in the Santo Spirito suggest, the performance of masculinity often results in quite the opposite, and is more aligned with violence than the peaceful Christian ways of the Venetian Republic, also known as *La Serenissima*. As Raymond Waddington acknowledges in his book *Aretino’s Satyr*, ‘it has been argued that Titian reinvented womankind, valorizing female sexuality and sympathetically projecting the full complexity of human nature, the mix of feminine and masculine qualities in any individual’.¹³⁶ Arguably, Titian can be said to have reinvented mankind as well, or at least conceived of a different way to address the contemporary debate on masculinity through the potent prototypes being deployed in religious imagery.

Although the use of Michelangelesque muscularity is seldom encountered in Titian’s work, as it turns out, the artist’s religious paintings for Santo Spirito are not the only examples. At around the same time, Titian also produced a series of four mythological paintings for the imperial court at Augsburg known simply as *The Four Great Sinners* [View images on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/09/01sisyph.jpg> and <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/09/02tityus.jpg>] Another cycle of confirmed *poesie*, the set draws on four tragic figures from classical mythology: Tityus, Sisyphus, Ixion and Tantalus. In mythology, Tityus was punished for attempting to rape Leto, mother of the twins Apollo

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 773.

¹³⁶ Waddington, *Aretino’s Satyr*, p. 10.

and Artemis. He was punished by being splayed out in Hades and tortured for eternity by two vultures that fed on his liver. Like Goliath who took pleasure in his daily challenges that resulted in a slain soldier, Sisyphus was known for his violent nature and the delight he took in killing travelers and guests. Ironically, the figure is also connected to circumstances of rape, for which he was punished by having to roll a huge boulder up a hill. Unfortunately for Sisyphus, the boulder would always escape his clutches and roll to the bottom of the hill, forcing him to begin all over again. Like Cain of biblical lore, Ixion was exiled and forced to live as an outlaw for having murdered his father-in-law Deioneus. As such, Ixion is recognized as the first man guilty of slaying a family member in Greek mythology. In the last example, Tantalus was well known for having cut up his son Pelops, boiling him, and serving him up as food for the gods. This is highly reminiscent of the biblical account of Abraham who was prepared to carry out sacrifice of Isaac, had an angel not intervened. The correlation between these two sets of paintings combined with that fact that they are virtually Titian's only other paintings depicting the hyper-masculine male figure, is striking. Undeniably, in these works, the attribute of violence is assigned to the muscular male figure.

Though Rona Goffen may have been mistaken about Titian's motives, she does, however, recognize the performative quality of the paintings. In her own words, Goffen insists:

Titian terrorizes the beholder, however, not only with the sheer physical weight of the massive bodies that fall on our heads but with the violent causative act. The blow that strikes Abel seems also to strike at us; the head and pointing hand of Goliath seem to implicate us in his fate. Even

Abraham's sword, were it not for the angels restraining the blow, would seem to fall on us while striking Isaac's neck.¹³⁷

From Goffen's description it is the hyper-masculine figures in these paintings that are in the act of performing. In her discussion of Titian's *Danae*, on the other hand, Goffen places Titian's work in a position of subversive refutation of Michelangelo's *Leda* and *Venus*, which are masculinized by their sculptural *disegno*, insisting that 'the Florentines' figuration of masculine *disegno* become the Venetians' exaltation of female sensuality by means of feminine *colorito*'.¹³⁸ She even acknowledges Titian's regendering of the masculine Jupiter as 'disembodied and dissolved into feminine matter'.¹³⁹ What Goffen may have overlooked is a similar situation in Titian's *David and Goliath*, which situates the feminized male, rather than just *colorito*, in opposition to Michelangelo's masculine *disegno*.

As my investigation has illustrated, religious symbols have the ability to possess multiple meanings. If nothing else, by challenging and disrupting traditional assumptions and practices, and searching for rifts in the hetero-normative conventions of the representation of *David and Goliath*, my research offers the possibility of an alternative interpretation of Titian's work at a pivotal moment in his career. At the

¹³⁷ Rona Goffen. *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian*, Singapore: Yale University Press, 2002, p. 329. While Goffen's work confirms Titian's poetic inclinations, as well as the metaphorical power of Titian as Apelles reincarnate, her study of the *Venus of Urbino* also establishes Titian's anticlassical position, as demonstrated in his complete transformation of classical pose of the ancient *Venus Pudica*. This is important in my discussion of how the work derides Florentine practices. Furthermore, Goffen suggests the *Venus* could be a portrait of the male artist's fears about himself and his own masculinity. See p.16.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

beginning of this chapter, I spoke of *ut pictura poesis* as a mnemonic tool in relation to painting's power to make absent things present. In terms of the image's power on memory and Titian's contrast of colour, light and exaggerated musculature, what would the devout Renaissance viewer have taken with them after seeing the paintings in the Santo Spirito? First and foremost in my mind would be the association between violence and a more rugged musculature, creating a dynamic connection between the masculine and the barbaric to be explored by the spectator. Though the murderous nature of Goliath and Cain are perhaps most obvious, the slaughter of Isaac, had Abraham been successful, would have been equally brutal. Second, would be the connection between the shadowy, exaggerated muscularity and the ramifications of such a performance. Goliath's perpetual interest in waging war with whoever was willing to fight him, ended in his own tragic death. Likewise, Cain's savage homicide resulted in his eternal banishment. Finally, Abraham's butchering of Isaac would have resulted in the loss of his own son, had God not interceded. As Bynum suggests, traditional symbols can acquire new meanings and often have revolutionary consequences, particularly when they are manipulated to reinforce social values.¹⁴⁰ In the context of sixteenth-century Venice then, with its peaceful myth of *La Serenissima*, the message would have been clear. The paintings depicted were Old Testament scenes, in which masculine figures relied on might over reason to solve problems. Unlike their Florentine counterparts, who distorted biblical accounts for their own political advancement, Venetians preferred to remain faithful to scripture and esteemed peace as a more appropriate role model in their struggle to maintain cultural supremacy, and in the case of Titian's *David and Goliath*, such

¹⁴⁰ Bynum, 'Complexity of Symbols', p. 16.

values were reinforced by the painting's use of the feminized male as an exemplar. As such, the images become synonymous with words of caution, visual articulations of the dangers inherent in violent confrontations.

One last look at Titian's *David and Goliath* proffers another possibility. Though Goliath was a giant, his enormous head is not only conspicuous, but his face is painted with such detail that it gives the impression of a portrait. In fact, with his high, prominent brow, receding hairline and protuberant nose, Goliath's face bears a striking resemblance to that of Giorgio Vasari, in one of his self-portraits [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/v/vasari/selfport.jpg>]. If, as Charles Hope suggests, Titian's paintings for Santo Spirito were completed not in the early 1540s, but rather after the artists sojourn in Rome,¹⁴¹ they would have been conceived subsequent to his visit to Florence, which he made on his return trip to Venice, and after the first edition of the *Vite* was published. Having already established himself as one of the period's great artists, and having met, on several occasions, Vasari, who would have been quite familiar with his art, Titian must have felt slighted that he was not included among Vasari's chosen few. Though most of the artists mentioned in the first edition of the *Vite* were already dead, Titian must have wondered why Vasari would have decided to include Michelangelo and not him. If Vasari's oversight was enough to fuel a rivalrous fire, provoking Dolce to write his harsh criticism of Florentine art, surely Titian would also have had reason to respond, especially given the high stakes during the Renaissance in vying for patrons. In Florence he would have seen Michelangelo's *David*, in all its glorious musculature, as a symbol of power to his central Italian rivals. While in Rome he may have sketched Vasari in one of

¹⁴¹ Puttfarcken, *Tragic Painting*, p. 101.

their many meetings, and with the wounds of Vasari's neglect still freshly salted, substituting Vasari's face for the head of Goliath would have been an apposite gesture. As such, Venice, represented by the feminized David, would have emerged victorious over the Florentine adversary portrayed in the guise of the bully Goliath. Though it is impossible to know if this was actually Titian's intention, one thing is certain. In the battle for cultural supremacy of late Renaissance Italy that set state against state, and artists against artist, anything was possible.

Chapter 2: Titian's Tarquin and Lucretia

While Titian's *David and Goliath* can be viewed as presenting the feminized male as an exemplar, the next painting I will discuss offers a different spin on the masculine debate, but one no less concerned with masculinity as performative. In fact, one of the most compelling works to address masculinity as a cultural construct is Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia* [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/08b/6tarquin.jpg>], produced for his loyal patron Philip II of Spain in 1570, and a painting the artist himself described as “an invention involving greater labour and artifice than anything, perhaps, that I have produced for many years”. The source of inspiration for the painting is the Roman legend of Sextus Tarquinius and is derived from either Livy's or Ovid's version of the tale, though most historians agree it is more faithful to Ovid's rendition.¹⁴²

In the story, Tarquin, overcome with a lustful passion to possess Lucretia – the wife of a fellow warrior, Collatinus – returns to Lucretia's chamber to have his way with her, threatening to kill her and one of her slaves and place their bodies alongside each other as if they were lovers, if she were not to comply. If we follow John Shearman's example once more, we will see that it is in “what is happening” in the painting that reveals the deeper meaning. In his painting, Titian depicts the precise moment in which Tarquin is in the process of forcing Lucretia to have sex with him. As such, this work explores the performative nature of masculinity through the dramatic use of light and

¹⁴² David Jaffé. *Titian*, edited by David Jaffé with contributions from Nicholas Perry, Caroline Campbell and Amara Bradley. (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 164

colour, and a dynamic reversal of gender identities, juxtaposing them to accentuate their fluid nature.

By demonstrating how Titian's painting illustrates the fluidity of gender as something shifting and indeterminate, I will uncover that, contrary to contemporary opinion, exemplary virtues such as courage and self-restraint were not specific to one gender, nor were the harmful characteristics like corruption and sexual transgression. To understand how Titian's painting works, first we must understand how this gender reversal is achieved. Let's begin with the figure of Lucretia and consider how she is masculinised.

Femininely Masculine

Though Titian's rendition of Lucretia does contribute to her masculinisation, he needed little help in the matter because several aspects of the poem already achieve this for him. Although in Ovid's poem, Lucretia is portrayed as both soft and delicate and a devoted wife, anxious for the return of her husband, there are aspects of her character that could be taken as masculine.

Titian's contribution to Lucretia's masculinisation is found in her bodily movements and gestures. As Rona Goffen has pointed out, Titian was not the first to portray Lucretia in a masculine way. Fellow Venetian Lorenzo Lotto painted Lucretia in the guise of masculinity forty years earlier in 1532, though as Goffen points out in her assessment of Lotto's picture, Lucretia's masculinity owes a great deal to the fact that

Lucretia was a woman of manly virtue.¹⁴³ In fact, ancient authors were known to have praised courageous women such as Lucretia as masculine, due entirely to her willingness to die rather than live without honour.¹⁴⁴

This may be better understood if we read Lucretia's actions through the veil of the double bind theory, which Edward Muir uses, in his article 'The Double Binds of Manly Revenge in Renaissance Italy', to explain the notion that masculine identity must be sustained through violence and the protection of honour.¹⁴⁵ According to the theory, a double bind is experienced in conflicts when an individual is faced with three unfavourable injunctions, forcing an individual to react with panic or rage.¹⁴⁶ As a sixteenth-century example, Muir offers the case of Soldoniero, an honourable man whose brother Frederico is murdered. After suffering this first unfavourable injunction, the man is faced with two new injunctions, equally unfavourable. The man could do nothing and rely on the justice of the courts, in which case he will lose his honour, possibly making him a target in future assaults, or, he can take the law into his own hands and retaliate violently against the offender, safeguarding his honour but making him vulnerable to arrest and possible execution. As Muir's analysis attests, public displays of violence and physical risk were preferred among men in Renaissance Italy, proving themselves loyal, honourable and manly in their struggle with other men. In Lucretia's case the initial injunction is obvious: she is violently raped by Tarquin. She is then faced with the two

¹⁴³ Rona Goffen, 'Lotto's Lucretia', *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 52, No. 3 (Autumn, 1999), p. 776.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 760.

¹⁴⁵ Edward Muir, 'The Double Binds of Manly Revenge in Renaissance Italy', *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*, Richard Trexler, ed. (N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994), p. 66

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 70.

other unpleasant options, the second and third injunctions. Firstly, she can do nothing and leave the decision to the courts, though according to Roman law a father could legally kill an adulteress.¹⁴⁷ Since, as a woman, physical retaliation is not an alternative, her second option would be to kill herself rather than providing her husband or her father with the opportunity to accuse her of the crime, preventing their right to punish her for the misdeed.¹⁴⁸ Clearly, like the Venetian man responding vengefully to an attack in order to preserve his honourable reputation, Lucretia, too, was responding as any respectable man would, highlighting her masculine virtue through her willingness to die rather than live without honour. Like Judith, who has also been described in masculine rhetoric because of her slaying of Holofernes, Lucretia takes up the masculine weapon, but to kill herself instead of her enemy.¹⁴⁹ That the sword was considered masculine is confirmed by Lorenzo Valla in his treatise *De voluptate*, in which he reflects on Lucretia's suicide, remarking "you turned a sword unnatural for women, not against him but against yourself".¹⁵⁰ As Goffen attests, even her dying affirmation - that no unchaste woman shall live if she follows her example - can be considered masculine.¹⁵¹ If, as Cristelle Baskins asserts in her article 'Corporeal Authority in the Speaking Picture: The Representation of Lucretia in Tuscan Domestic Painting', it was understood in the Renaissance, that "women should believe that they have achieved the glory of eloquence

¹⁴⁷ A. G. Lee, 'Ovid's 'Lucretia'', *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 22, No. 66 (Oct., 1953), p. 742

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Cristelle Baskins, 'Corporeal Authority in the Speaking Picture: The Representation of Lucretia in Tuscan Domestic Painting', *Tuscan Domestic Painting In Richard Trexler (eds), Gender Rhetorics*, pp. 187-206 (bookchapter)1994, p. 195

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁵¹ Goffen, 'Lotto's Lucretia', p. 750.

if they honor themselves with the outstanding ornament of silence”,¹⁵² surely the power of Lucretia’s confident speech can only be characterized as anomalous,¹⁵³ but unquestionably masculine in its aberrance.

For those not entirely familiar with the masculinity inherent in Lucretia’s character, Titian provides some visual clues as to her manliness. Unlike many other contemporary depictions of virtuous women, Titian portrays Lucretia as masculine by having her repel her assaulter in a forceful and vigorous manner. As Goffen asserts in her assessment of Lotto’s Lucretia, such assertive and threatening actions were described as *gagliardo* in the Renaissance and were considered inherently masculine.¹⁵⁴ The signs of distress in contortionist twists of Lucretia’s figure are unmistakable.¹⁵⁵ As Sylvia Ferino Pagden agrees, with Lucretia’s right leg against Tarquin’s knee, and her left arm against his chest, her gestures are clearly about resistance.¹⁵⁶ As Celso explains in Firenzuola’s *On the Beauty of Women*, *leggadria*, the quality that best characterizes women, is best described as “moving, behaving and using thus the whole person as also the individual members, with grace, modesty, gentleness, measure, elegance, in such a way that no movement, no action, shall be without moderation”.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, according to Florentine biographer and historian Filippo Baldinucci, *leggiadria* denotes “a certain way of carrying the body, so light and agile that the figure appears to move but

¹⁵² Baskins, ‘Corporeal Authority’, p. 189.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 192.

¹⁵⁴ Goffen, ‘Lotto’s Lucretia’, p. 747.

¹⁵⁵ Jaffé, p. 164.

¹⁵⁶ Silvia Ferino Pagden, ‘Tarquin and Lucretia’, *Late Titian*, edited by Silvia Ferino Pagden, (Venice: Marsilio Edotori, 2008), p. 216.

¹⁵⁷ Agnolo Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. Translated and Edited by Konrad Eisenbichler and Jacqueline Murray, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1992), p. 749.

have no weight.”¹⁵⁸ In her struggle to resist Tarquin’s advances it is doubtful that Titian’s Lucretia could be described with the femininity of *leggiadria* that reflects grace, elegance and charm. Like Lotto’s portrait, the masculine *gagliardo* movements of Titian’s Lucretia are necessary to declare and defend her female chastity and honour.¹⁵⁹

Further masculinisation of Lucretia is achieved in part by the angle Titian chose for the scene. By situating Tarquin just over the figure of Lucretia, the left arm used in defense against her attacker conveniently shields her breasts from the viewer. Even though they are implicit, the absence of her breasts detracts from her femininity. To take it one step further, I would even suggest that the protuberance of white sheets that Titian places between Lucretia’s legs, strategically distancing her vagina from Tarquin’s knee, acts symbolically as sign of Lucretia’s virility. As Patricia Simons confirms, codpieces were increasingly popular in depictions of male portraits as bodily declarations of determined virility.¹⁶⁰ Prevalent among artists like Bronzino, whose portrait of Guidobaldo II della Rovere reveals a protruding red codpiece as an “unabashed statement of his virility and masculinity”,¹⁶¹ Titian, too, was no stranger to their effectiveness and often used them in his own portraits on men. Undoubtedly meant as an extension of Lucretia’s own body, since Tarquin’s genital area is too far away for it to have been meant for him, Titian provides Lucretia with a metaphorical reminder of her masculinity.

¹⁵⁸ Sharon Fermor. ‘Poetry in Motion: Beauty and Movement in the Renaissance Conception of *leggiadria*’. *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, eds. Francis Ames Lewis and Mary Rogers, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1988), p. 129.

¹⁵⁹ Goffen, ‘Lotto’s Lucretia’, p. 763.

¹⁶⁰ Patricia Simons, ‘Alert and Erect: Masculinity in Some Italian Renaissance Portraits of Fathers and Sons’, *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*, Richard Trexler, ed. N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1994, p. 170.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 171.

For anyone not convinced of the manner in which the figure of Lucretia is masculinised in Titian's painting, consider this last testimony. Though Michael Jaffe's description of Titian's Lucretia baring her teeth as a further sign of distress may be justified, it also gives voice to an otherwise silent figure. As Cristelle Baskins confirms in her article, many artists of the Renaissance, like Botticelli and Filippino Lippi chose compositions of the legend that centered on the corpse of Lucretia, allowing other figures, like Brutus, or even Tarquin, to speak for her in the pictorial narrative. Unlike these examples, Titian's Lucretia, with her mouth open as if to cry out for help, or pray to God for assistance, is given her own voice for the first time. The fact that she is open-mouthed, and bares her teeth, assures her innocence, betraying the paradox of Barbaro's silent feminine eloquence.¹⁶² As such, while I would have to agree with Thomas Puttfarcken, who contends that "what Titian's picture forces upon the male viewer is the purgation of lust, catharsis as it was understood in the sixteenth-century",¹⁶³ it also frees Lucretia from any doubts about her own culpability. Comparable to the female voice used by Aretino in the disparagement of men,¹⁶⁴ I think it is safe to say that Titian's painting of Tarquin and Lucretia depicts women sympathetically, by presenting the viewer with an occasion where a woman possesses virtues that completely outshine those of a man.

Ten years after Titian conceived of the painting, Lucretia's masculinity was confirmed by poet Torquato Tasso, in 1582, in his treatise *Discorso della virtù femminile*

¹⁶² Thomas Puttfarcken. *Titian & Tragic Painting: Aristotle's Poetics and the Rise of the Modern Artist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 190.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, 193.

¹⁶⁴ Rona Goffen, *Titian's Venus of Urbino*, edited by Rona Goffen, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 10.

e donnesca, in which he concludes that women born of imperial or heroic blood, like Lucretia, possess “the masculine virtues of their glorious ancestors [le virili virtù di tutti I suoi gloriosi antecessori].”¹⁶⁵

Masculinely Feminine

In order to delineate the way Tarquin is feminized in Titian’s painting, we must revisit Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. In fact, there is a striking similarity between Titian’s Tarquin and the characters of Astolfo and Jocondo in Ariosto’s epic poem. Given the renowned relationship between Titian and Ariosto, and the fact that *Orlando Furioso* was so popular that the story was, sung, recited, memorized and staged throughout the sixteenth-century, with sales surpassing those of the Holy Bible,¹⁶⁶ Titian must have been very familiar with the story of Astolfo and Jocondo. In *Orlando Furioso* both Astolfo and Jocondo are cuckolded men who have first-handedly discovered their wives in bed with other men. As a consequence, the two men avow to roam the countryside exercising their sexual prowess and “inflicting on one thousand men what has been inflicted on them.”¹⁶⁷ In the end the episode confirms “maleness is tied to a genital sexuality that requires women’s faithfulness for confirmation of its adequacy.”¹⁶⁸ To understand the parallels between this story and that of Tarquin and Lucretia, we need only consider the original context of the legend that drove Tarquin to possess Lucretia in the first place. In Ovid’s original narrative, the decision to visit the wives of fellow soldiers begins when an

¹⁶⁵ Fredrika H. Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997, pg. 11

¹⁶⁶ Valeria Finucci. *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance*, (London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 167.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 163.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 165.

argument arises in the tent of Sextus Tarquin between several members of the Roman forces about the merits of each of their wives. On the suggestion of Lucretia's husband, Collatine, the men decide to visit their wives, to witness first hand, the virtues of their spouses. After chancing on Tarquin's wife partaking in a *commissatio*?, or nocturnal carouse, a situation considered "a scandalous breach of antique Roman etiquette",¹⁶⁹ they later spy on Collatine's wife Lucretia, only to find her in a place traditionally appointed to a Roman mistress, spinning wool in what can only be considered a traditional domestic scene. Lingering a moment, as if to pay homage to such a virtuous woman, the men then overhear her tender and emotional speech that petitions for her husband's safe return. Next to Lucretia, Tarquin's own wife must have seemed disloyal and perfidious. In fact, Lucretia appeared as a woman so devoted, that even fellow soldier Tibullus, prays to be able to come upon his own wife, Delia, unexpectedly while she is thus occupied.¹⁷⁰ Like Astolfo and Jocondo in *Orlando Furioso* then, given the untrustworthiness of his wife, surely Tarquin must have felt somehow sexually inadequate in the company of his peers. That Tarquin's wife may have even been unfaithful is inferred since, as Lee points out, Roman women were not permitted access to wine and so she must have sweet-talked the chief-steward of the household to open up the wine cellar.¹⁷¹ His ego crushed, and driven by the inner pressure to perform, Tarquin rapes Lucretia in an attempt to restore his own virility. As such, Tarquin's rape of Lucretia, like Astolfo and Jocondo's sexual escapades with one thousand women, can only be seen as the desire to cuckold other men for the

¹⁶⁹ Lee, 'Ovid', p. 110

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

sake of reestablishing some sexual worth for himself.¹⁷² Consequently, Tarquin's actions can be understood as staging his virility for the sake of other men. According to Jacques Lacan, such virile displays in men appear as feminine, and in the early modern period as well, similar sexual expenditures were linked to emasculation.¹⁷³ Tarquin is therefore feminized by virtue of his need to affirm his masculinity through the guise of his sexual accomplishments, a "masquerade theatrically staged for the sake of other men".¹⁷⁴ As we shall see, this disregard for Lucretia, and his estimation of sexuality as purely a means to his own ends is characteristic of his own narcissism.¹⁷⁵

Consistent with the feminisation of Tarquin through his sexual overindulgence is the similarity between Tarquin and ancient female characters caught up in comparable unrestrained acts of passion. For Ovid, the origin of Tarquin's guilty obsession with Lucretia has its roots in Book 3 of the *Argonautica*, in which Medea broods over the image of Jason as it appears in her imagination.¹⁷⁶ Furthermore, Tarquin's lust for Lucretia has also been compared to Virgil's account of the arousal of Dido's love for Aeneas.¹⁷⁷ The most striking resemblance, however, is between Tarquin and the character of Echo in Ovid's own tale of the Narcissus-Echo myth. Like Echo, who hunts Narcissus after being convinced, upon seeing him just once, of her love for him, so too does Tarquin pursue the fantasy image of Lucretia that he has created in his own mind.

¹⁷² Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*, p. 169.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170. As the title suggests, Finucci's book considers the performative qualities of masculinity in Renaissance Italy. Particularly interesting is her examination of masculinity as a response to castration anxiety.

¹⁷⁵ Sigmund Freud, 'On Narcissism: An Introduction', *The Complete Psychological Works Sigmund Freud*, Translated and edited by James Strachey, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 73-105, (p. 78).

¹⁷⁶ Lee, 'Ovid', p. 112.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

Similarly, both Tarquin and Echo act out of a sense of entitlement, as if they deserve what they want despite the fact that their sexual advances are not reciprocated.¹⁷⁸

Arguably, Echo's narcissistic behavior is considered to be even more pathological than that of Narcissus, as is that of Tarquin as we shall soon see. Ironically, in Ovid's account of the tale of Echo and Narcissus, Narcissus even interprets Echo's sexual onslaught as rape.¹⁷⁹ In fact, the overall structure of narcissism may be defined by Cesiphus, the father of Narcissus, whose own rape of Liriope in Ovid's tale is the result of problems with the archetypal, masculine realm.¹⁸⁰ Another important detail is that sexual excess is also identified as a feminine quality in Ovid's story of Echo and Narcissus, when both Teresias and Jupiter concur that women have more sexual pleasure than men.¹⁸¹

In an unprecedented move in art Tarquin is feminized further in Titian's painting by being portrayed as the ancient Roman hero in exquisitely detailed contemporary dress. Many scholars have commented on the elevated status of Tarquin's clothes, and the elegant detail of his silk, gold-embroidered brocade and trousers, though to my knowledge none have recognized the concern Tarquin has disclosed for his dress, particularly the way his clothes are accentuated by placing him next to Lucretia's nakedness, and that he felt that dress was important despite the fact that he entered Lucretia's room at night with the intention of raping her, not winning a beauty contest. In *Orlando Furioso* too, Astolfo and Jocondo show a similar preoccupation with their physical appearance. In fact, as Valeria Finucci explains, in her book *The Manly*

¹⁷⁸ Maryanne Hannan, 'A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of Ovid's Myth of Narcissus and Echo', *Psychoanalytic Review* (1963), 79:4 (1992: Winter), pp.555- 574, (p. 564).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

¹⁸⁰ Nathan Schwartz-Salant. *Narcissism and Character Formation: The Psychology of Narcissistic Character Disorders*, (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1982), p. 78.

¹⁸¹ Hannan, 'Ovid's Myth of Narcissus', p. 556.

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Jocondo's obsession with clothing to enhance his appearance, believing that a handsome cloak will improve a man's looks, can only be described as narcissistic.¹⁸² Furthermore, there is the question of Tarquin's own attractiveness. As Puttfarken attests, and I am inclined to agree, Tarquin's face, rather than being marred, or otherwise disfigured to detract from him his good looks, is otherwise calm and handsome, and what Philip Fehl has even referred to as "pretty".¹⁸³ While good external features were often thought to reflect an internal moral goodness, male beauty was not a characterization consistent with masculinity in Renaissance Italy.¹⁸⁴ Like Astolfo and Jocondo, Titian portrays the antagonist of his painting as "just as feminized and narcissistically centered on physical attributes as woman is traditionally made to be".¹⁸⁵ In fact, narcissism has long been associated with effeminacy in men, particularly given that the aim and satisfaction obtained from a narcissistic object-choice is to be loved.¹⁸⁶ With such a self-centered longing to be desired, which Freud hypothesized only women to retain, Tarquin's desire for Lucretia is a narcissistic response that expresses his own indulgence in finding himself exclusively loved.¹⁸⁷ As such, Lucretia's rape can be seen as nothing more than a narcissistic rage for having been sexually disgraced.¹⁸⁸

While defining the feminine aspects associated with male narcissism is a complicated matter, one far beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth considering the

¹⁸² Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*, p. 169.

¹⁸³ Puttfarken, *Tragic painting*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁴ Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*, p. 171.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 166

¹⁸⁶ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 98.

¹⁸⁷ Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*, p. 175.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 177.

following brief synopsis. In normal libidinal development the first autoerotic sexual satisfactions are experienced in connection with persons who are concerned with the care and protection of the individual, such as the mother.¹⁸⁹ In the narcissistic individual, on the other hand, the love-object is not the mother but their own selves.¹⁹⁰ According to Freud such individuals are unable to relinquish the narcissistic perfection of their childhood selves. As such, they grow up seeking to recover their youthful selves, a self that, like Narcissus, points to an undefined sexual identity.¹⁹¹ Narcissus' own androgyny then is attached to his being pursued by both girls and young men, a fact that is only highlighted further by Ovid's own choice of words, when he has Narcissus refer to himself as a *puer*, denoting a boy lover in Roman sexual vocabulary.¹⁹²

Tarquin is therefore feminized through the psychological loss of his phallus, resulting in castration anxiety. Since, as Finucci points out, castration anxiety "allows the individual to cancel the female threat by getting reassurance through the image of the other as same",¹⁹³ Tarquin, intimidated by his own emasculation, is compelled to rape Lucretia to remove personal doubts about his own sexuality. In accordance with the notion of castration anxiety, one might even suggest that Tarquin's fears of emasculation are expressed to an even greater extent by the large knife he holds in his right hand, a stand-in for the phallus of which he has been deprived.

¹⁸⁹ Freud, 'On Narcissism', p. 88.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Hannan, 'Ovid's Myth of Narcissus', p. 560.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*, p. 182.

Contemporary Ideals

It has been suggested that Titian may have derived inspiration for his painting from the engravings of German artist Heinrich Aldegrever, whose prints of the subject were readily available to Titian in Venice.¹⁹⁴ In these works both Lucretia and Tarquin are naked, and their exaggerated musculature would certainly have provoked a response from Titian in the context of the paragone between painting and sculpture, given the Venetian affinity for figural renditions that relied more on nature than ancient statues as a model. As Jaffe and Groen have pointed out, however, an example that would have been a more immediate influence is the 1547 etching by French artist Leon Davent, which not only shows Tarquin fully clothed, forcing his knee in between Lucretia's legs, but also includes a manservant scrutinizing the scene from behind a curtain.¹⁹⁵ Given the similarities between the two works, there is little cause to disagree with Jaffe and Groen that Devant's depiction served as a prototype for Titian's painting, but there are still several differences that must be accounted for, differences, I would argue, that were crucial to Titian's engagement with gender as social construct.

The first, and most obvious difference between the two depictions is the clothing worn by Tarquin. While Devant's print is true to the legend, showing Tarquin in traditional Roman dress, Titian portrays Tarquin in refined contemporary dress, a modern day representation denoting his elevated social standing. Why would Titian have chosen

¹⁹⁴ Michael Jaffe and Karin Groen, 'Titian's 'Tarquin and Lucretia' in the Fitzwilliam', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 129, No. 1008 (Mar., 1987), p. 163

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

to put a contemporary spin on this ancient tale? Violence was on the rise in Venice during this period, and there were growing concerns about dissidence.¹⁹⁶ This is confirmed in Giovanni Scarabello's article 'Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo'. Given that Scarabello also argues for the prominence of rape in Venice during the period, it is easier to see how Titian would have been preoccupied with the subject, especially considering that the large majority of the perpetrators were of noble status.¹⁹⁷ In this way, his painting of Tarquin would follow Aretino's example of Rosso, in *La Cortigiana*, who is imprudently convinced that the clothing he wears will make him a better man. As such the figure of Tarquin would serve as a reminder that the clothes definitely do not make the man.

At this point it is worth noting a major difference between Titian's representation of the legend and the conventional Florentine depictions of the Renaissance. As Baskins had pointed out, Florentine examples draw attention to the contradictory nature of Lucretia's character, inspired by Saint Augustine who felt her suicide created a dilemma.¹⁹⁸ According to Saint Augustine, "if you acquit her of adultery, you aggravate the charge of suicide; and there is no escape from the following dilemma: if she was

¹⁹⁶ Una Roman D'Elia. *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 68.

¹⁹⁷ Giovanni Scarabello. 'Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo', *Tiziano e Venezia*, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1980), "Un quadro di tal fatta segnala che i gruppi economicamente e socialmente più attivi, i quali non hanno tuttavia attinto alla stabilizzazione mediante una riconosciuta ed adeguata connotazione della loro valenza sociale, sono i più interessati alle manifestazioni di violenza sessuale. Assieme ad essi i nobili, i quali, nelle fattispecie considerate, mostrano come un bisogno di cogliere, anche oltre i limiti della legge, ogni gratificazione cui possa suggestionare la raggiunta totalità del potere politico concentrato nelle loro mani."

¹⁹⁸ Baskins, 'Corporeal Authority', p. 192.

adulterous, why is she praised? If chaste, why did she kill herself?”¹⁹⁹ As a result most Florentine depictions conflated Lucretia’s innocence and guilt.²⁰⁰ By clothing her in contemporary dress in pictorial representation of the story in Florence, the images of Lucretia serve as the primary focus in domestic pictures intended to both commend and censure Lucretia’s feminine fortitude.²⁰¹ Examples of these include Botticelli’s large *spalliera* and Filippino Lippi’s smaller *cassone*.²⁰² Unlike the Florentine illustrations, however, in Titian’s painting it is Tarquin who is given contemporary dress, highlighting him as the figure to be learned from. Faced with the Florentine examples of how the self-made man can create a self-image through mere performance, laid out explicitly in Castiglione’s *Il Cortigiano*, the figure of Tarquin represents alternative pictorial advice that cautions the viewer on the performative nature of masculine authority. As such, Titian’s painting amounts to the same counsel conveyed in Ariosto’s poem, which suggests that “masculinity may be other than what it is made to stand for in culture, and that virility – notwithstanding the satyriasis displayed – does not per se guarantee male power.”²⁰³ This is even more appropriate considering how Tarquin’s attempt to redeem his virility through the act of rape, in effect, dissolved any power the Roman soldier might have had, and in the end Sextus Tarquinius died in exile and his rape of Lucretia ensured the demise of the Tarquin monarchy. As such, the risks of femininity, characterized by weakness and wanton promiscuity, were equally applicable to men.

¹⁹⁹ Lee, ‘Ovid’, p. 109.

²⁰⁰ Baskins, ‘Corporeal Authority’, p. 199.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 194.

²⁰³ Finucci, *Manly Masquerade*, p. 165.

The other significant difference between Titian's painting and the Devant etching is the servant witnessing the rape. In both the print and the canvas there is a manservant who holds up the folds of the parted bed curtains. Though in the etching, his nonchalance suggests that he may be one of Tarquin's own guards, making sure the coast is clear, a more accepted option for Titian's painting is that he represents the servant whom Tarquin threatened to kill should Lucretia decide not to submit to his advances,²⁰⁴ an assessment that works better with the etching. In Devant's example the servant is definitely a grown man, made apparent by his height and moustache. In Titian's painting, however, the servant observing the scene furtively is a little boy. He hardly reaches Tarquin's waist in height and his entire left forearm is approximately the same size as the hand holding Tarquin's dagger. While it has been intimated that in Titian's painting "the viewer hardly notices the startled servant drawing back the curtain, who has often been incorrectly identified as a voyeur within the picture and thus a mirror-image of the viewer,"²⁰⁵ I strongly disagree. Though the figure of the boy is obscured in darkness, he is no less present. On the contrary, I believe his youthful stage of maturity made his presence all the more powerful to the Renaissance viewer. If, as Puttfarken contends, the tragic violence of the scene was so great as to persuade the beholder to transform lust into compassion, surely the presence of the youth would have encouraged this further. The viewer must have been compelled to shield the eyes of the innocent young boy from witnessing so oppressive an incident. Given Titian's concerns over violence of the period, and the fact that in Venice the majority of the violence was being perpetrated by young men, the youth could also represent Titian's fears that too many adolescent men

²⁰⁴ Puttfarken, *Tragic Painting*, p. 191.

²⁰⁵ Pagden, *Late Titian*, p. 218

were learning their bad habits from their fathers, or other older men who acted as role models. However, regardless of who the figure in the background is supposed to be, in both representations the presence of another person watching the rape represents the audience needed by Tarquin to fulfill his narcissistic dream and restore his masculinity by performing for the sake of others.

The reversal of gender roles is further emphasized in Titian's painting through his extraordinary use of colour. David Rosand has skillfully articulated the role of light in the art of Titian.²⁰⁶ Lucretia is forcefully reclined on the clean white sheets of her bed, with folds of the ivory bed linen wrapped around her left thigh and, as I already mentioned above, gathered in a mass in front of her vagina. The colour white denoted purity ensuring Lucretia's innocence. This is contrasted with the bright red of Tarquin's breeches and crimson stockings. While in the Renaissance the colour red was analogous with violence, it was also associated with sexual passion and prostitution, signifying the unrestrained sexual indulgence associated with the female sex. In fact, red is the colour customarily used for the clothing in Renaissance depictions of Mary Magdalene.

Jill Dunkerton confirms that contrary to the subdued palette customary in Titian's late paintings, the artist spent a great deal of effort to ensure the contrasting colours of Tarquin's bright red clothing and Lucretia's white sheets were notably brilliant.²⁰⁷ Aside from the juxtaposition of the two colours, intended to highlight the character and gender differences between the two figures, Titian was careful to set the red against large areas

²⁰⁶ David Rosand. 'Titian's Light as Form and Symbol', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Mar., 1975), pp. 58-64, (p. 58).

²⁰⁷ Jill Dunkerton, 'Titian's Painting Technique', *Titian*, edited by David Jaffé with contributions from Nicholas Perry, Caroline Campbell and Amara Bradley. (London: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 56.

of green glazes, avoiding any use of blue that would detract from the vibrancy of Tarquin's vermillion attire.²⁰⁸ As a detailed analysis with X-radiography has revealed, Titian also overlapped his colours to obtain the striking quality of his brushwork. Consistent with the remarkable precision used by the artist to create the painting, it is no surprise that Titian himself referred to the work as "an invention involving greater labour and artifice than anything perhaps that I have produced in years."²⁰⁹ As Palma il Giovane suggested, the use of colour in Titian's Tarquin and Lucretia "served as a bed or foundation for what he wished to express and upon which he would then build."²¹⁰

Correspondingly, this brings us back to the concept of *ut pictura poesis* and how Titian was questioning the performative nature of masculinity through a visible poetry that made written rhetoric accessible to the mind. Since masculinity had yet to be defined, particularly the way it is today, it was discussed metaphorically by Italian Renaissance writers like Aretino and Ariosto. In keeping with poetry's metaphorical ambition to make absent things present for the imagination, Ariosto's Astolfo and Jocondo, and Ovid's Tarquin are merely representative of anxieties about masculinity, and through *ut pictura poesis* Titian's art transformed poetic metaphor into paint, giving visible form to literary metaphor.²¹¹ As such, the Renaissance viewer would have engaged with the symbolic meaning carried in the contrasts of colour and gender in the painting and appreciate that Titian's art was presenting them with an instance in which a woman possesses virtues that far outshine those of a man.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Jaffé and Groen, *Titian*, p. 164.

²¹¹ Rosand, 63.

But while the painting highlights the fluidity of gender by portraying a masculinised female and a feminized male, I would argue that the masculinisation of Lucretia, draws even more attention to the feminization of Tarquin. Given the concerns about the instability of masculinity in the period, made manifest in Savonarola's fears over the existing gender ambiguity, as expressed in Michael Rocke's study of gender in the Renaissance, surely Ariosto's poem would have provided a contemporary example of how the shifting nature of gender existed in ancient times as well, and often revolved around performance. As Rona Goffen admits, the subjugation of women was an indisputable part of sixteenth-century Italian society,²¹² but although many of Titian's works have often been characterized as supporting women, clearly Titian's *Tarquin and Lucretia* also represents a deterrent for anyone intent on using performance to promote his own masculinity.

²¹² Goffen, *Venus of Urbino*, p. 15.

Chapter 3: Gender Constructs in Titian's *Il Bravo*: The Triumph of the Feminized Male

So far we have looked at two paintings that reflect the performative nature of masculinity in two different arenas. In Titian's *David and Goliath*, the dynamic resides in the relationship between two men, while in *Tarquin and Lucretia* the performance takes place in an encounter between a man and a woman. In this chapter we will revisit masculinity as it relates to a conflict between two men, to see if any correlation can be drawn between the three works.

A Visual Hypothesis

At first glance, Titian's painting of *Il Bravo* [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/08/06bravo.jpg>] reveals nothing more than the confrontation between two men. Though a dynamic image of tense conflict, were it not for the presence of fashionable clothing contemporary to the artist's period, the painting might even represent one of the many scenes of a documented conflict from the pages of Roman history that were so revered at the time, due to the humanists' renewed interest in ancient texts during the Renaissance.

Unlike his paintings of *David and Goliath* and *Tarquin and Lucretia*, derived from scriptural and Ovidian accounts respectively, Titian's *Il Bravo* has no definitive textual association. As we shall see, the source of the subject has more than one possibility and the name of the painting offers no indication. As such, it is useful to take John Shearman's example once more and concentrate on what is happening in the painting.

Ergo, to begin I will rely on descriptive techniques alone, refraining from resolving any broader methodological concerns such as iconographic influences, provenance or stylistic considerations, until the evidence of the painting itself has been explored as objectively as possible.

The image consists of two figures. On the right, is the figure of a man, discernable by his short hairstyle, and the beard and stubble that cover his cheek. His collar-length hair is dark brown, quite coarse and a little dishevelled. His face turns away from the plane of the picture, slightly out of profile, and consequently has been painted in shadow. As a result, it is difficult to distinguish his facial features with any accuracy, though he does exude a certain ruggedness, and one might even consider him somewhat handsome. The base of his neck, on the other hand, is lit from behind, accentuating several large furrows. He wears a bright red costume, with folds and pleats that bunch together with the bending of his left arm, which is stretched behind his back, concealing a round-handled object that he grips with his left hand, also furrowed. On top of the red outfit he sports a hard, shiny breastplate that has been painted predominantly in dark paint tones, with lighter shades used to highlight a series of demarcations that traverse it. He grips the collar of another person with his right hand. On the left, the figure of what appears to be a young man turns away from the dark background, into the plane of the viewer, revealing a smooth, seemingly unblemished, face. The artist has used flesh tones that range from light peach on the forehead and chin to darker pink on the cheek and nose and red on the lips. He has piercing brown eyes, and his small mouth is slightly ajar. He has long, blond, curly locks of hair, adorned with a garland of interwoven vine tendrils, and wears a simple, soft blue garment with white frills at the collar. Though the image is

quite dark, it is possible to discern that below his left arm, his right hand grips the helve of a sword, or weapon of a similar kind. The scene is illuminated from a light source to the right of the viewer, though out of sight, accentuating both the assailant's attire and the face of his target. Otherwise, much of the painting, including the entire background, remains in shadowy darkness, which adds an air of mystery to the painting. While the tenebrous quality of the scene may have been the intention of the artist, it may also be the result of the quality of the image.

Through the masterful application of *chiaroscuro*, the artist has created a scene that is highly crepuscular in nature, making it impossible to discern what has transpired before the depicted moment, or what will occur in the future. As such, the overall mood of the painting imbues discomfort, and is wrought with uncertainty. Each of the figures firmly grips what seems to be a weapon of some sort, also generating an unquestionable disquiet. Furthermore, the artist's strategic use of light and shadow highlight the unsettled nature of the blond man's face, adding to the tension of the scene.

From a detailed description alone, it is possible to deduce some valuable information about the image. Arguably, the man on the right is dressed in armour, and could be a soldier intent on apprehending a criminal, seizing him by the collar to prevent a possible escape. Though certainly a convincing argument, this scenario also provokes several questions. First, if the man with his back to us were a soldier, why would he hide his weapon behind his back? Furthermore, given the festive wreath in the blond man's hair, presumably, he is either going to, or returning from, a celebration of some sort. If he were a criminal or fugitive, would he have been so bold as to appear in public? I think

not. In fact, the surprised look on the blond man's face seems to suggest that the confrontation was totally unexpected.

On the other hand, perhaps the most obvious attribute of the painting, from the viewer's point of view, is the use of contrast. Through the use of *chiaroscuro*, an artistic term used to describe the contrast between light and dark that was derived from Renaissance drawing on coloured paper, the artist juxtaposes the dark, aggressive facial features of the assailant, with the gentle, more effeminate features of the victim. Immediately, then, it is possible to establish some correlation between the painting and the notion of masculinity. Further evidence of this can be found in the collocation of the delicate foliage crowning the victim's golden tresses, with the armour plate that covers his assailant, often associated with the manly ideals of war. Moreover, the logistics of the scene give several indications as to the painting's function. From the way the victim turns his head towards his assailant, who has grabbed him from behind, it is clear that he was caught unawares. The dark background, and overall shortage of light in the picture, indicates that the event takes place at night. This also suggests that the victim did not see his assailant prior to the encounter. To me, such a scenario places the victim in a position of vulnerability but also highlights the moral weakness of the assailant who is unable to confront his opponent face to face. This sentiment is provoked further by the assailant's deliberate concealment of his weapon during the confrontation.

The crown of foliage on the blond figure's head is strongly reminiscent of the Crown of Thorns worn by the figure of Christ before his crucifixion. In fact, many New Testament accounts of the event also include the figures of soldiers who lead Jesus

forcibly to execution. By charging the painting with such an air of mystery, could Titian have been deliberately making an allusion to such religious imagery, and if so, why?

To begin, I will consider the commonly accepted explanation for the painting, even if, as Charles Hope has pointed out, it is not entirely convincing.²¹³ Derived from seventeenth-century descriptions by art biographer and painter, Carlo Ridolfi, there is evidence that the painting may represent an episode from Plutarch's *Life of Marius*. According to Ridolfi, the aggressor's name is Caius Lucius, a soldier who makes homosexual advances upon Trebonius. In Plutarch's account, the youth resisted, killed his would-be violator, and was subsequently garlanded as a hero, despite the fact that Caius Lucius was the relative of Marius, then emperor of Rome.²¹⁴ Even if this were the painter's intentions, however, most scholars agree that when conceiving his painting, Titian was looking back to his master, Giorgione, who also portrayed the scene fifteen years earlier in his *Trebonius Importuned by Caius Lucius*.²¹⁵ Unlike his young apprentice, Giorgione contrasted a handsome youth with the ugly character of his aggressive captain, resulting in a scene that is anything but homoerotic. I am not so sure the same can be said of Titian's version. In his painting, Titian has portrayed both figures as attractive, relying instead on moral contrast to accentuate the opposition, a contrast that resides in the juxtaposition of the masculine features of the assailant and feminine attributes of his victim.

²¹³ Charles Hope. *Titian*, (London: Jupiter Books, 1980), p.180.

²¹⁴ Paul Joannides, *Titian to 1518: The Assumption of Genius*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 248.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

The Power of Contrast

Though I may be able to differentiate between what may be considered masculine or feminine in our more progressive society of the present day, would it be anachronistic to conceive that the Renaissance viewer would have been able to draw a similar conclusion? Not if we consider the painting in the context of Peter Parshall's, *The Art of Memory and the Passion*, which highlights the importance of rhetoric and metaphor to visual memory in the early Renaissance. In his essay, Parshall emphasizes the use of opposing elements, such as the juxtaposition of beauty and ugliness, as a means of provoking contemplation and fixing meaning in the mind of the spectator.²¹⁶ As I have already demonstrated, such a contrast is a prominent feature of Titian's work, where he collocates the violent assault of the dark masculine male figure with the more delicate, emasculated figure of the fair haired male caught unprepared. A similar effect is also achieved through his use of chiaroscuro. In fact, David Rosand acknowledges Titian's concern with the dramatic potential of light and dark, a tool he used to transform poetic metaphor into visible reality.²¹⁷

Christ as Metaphor

The powerful contrasts Titian creates in this painting reflect Parshall's assertion that "a structure of meaning built of polar oppositions is a structure built for clarity."²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Peter Parshall. 'The Art of Memory and the Passion'. *Art Bulletin*, vol.81, no. 3, (Sept. 1999), pp.456-72, (p. 459).

²¹⁷ David Rosand. 'Titian's Light as Form and Symbol', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 1. (Mar., 1975), pp. 58-64, (p. 64).

²¹⁸ Parshall, 'Art of Memory', 468.

As an example, Parshall offers the images of the figure of the suffering Christ. Familiar to most Renaissance viewers, images of Christ's Passion were striking reminders of the atrocities that were committed on the Son of God by the state. Paintings, such as Cima da Conigliano's *Christ Crowned with Thorns* [view image on-line at:

<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/giovanni-battista-cima-da-conegliano-christ-crowned-with-thorns>] from the same period, were objects of devotion, whose primary function was to

stimulate memory of the brutality of Christ's death. As such, according to Parshall, the abominable actions of the Roman soldiers, performed in an attempt to dissolve Christ's authority, in effect, restore it. Inherent to the practice of establishing a visual

memory scheme is the use of symbols, or other motifs powerful enough to lodge themselves into the mind of the viewers.²¹⁹ For images of Christ's Passion, this included

the crown of thorns and his purple robe. Metaphorically, the circlet of thorns worn by Christ became a symbol of kingship that was adopted by future generations to represent sovereignty, hence the phrase "“crown” of thorns”. Similarly, the purple cloak, that the

Roman soldiers forced Christ to wear, became synonymous with royalty. In a society that revered Christ as their Savior, the images of passivity associated with the Passion were ingrained in the minds of the faithful and consequently admired.²²⁰ As I have

already mentioned, there is a strong correlation between Christ and the blond figure in Titian's painting, where his crown of vine tendrils recalls the crown of thorns worn by Christ. Moreover, the colour of the man's sleeve, which appears blue to my eyes, could be ascribed to the quality of the image. As the colour purple is obtained from mixing blue and red pigment, it is entirely possible that the blouse may have originally been

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 461.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 463.

purple, as blue is the more lasting of the two pigments. A similar effect is observed in Cima da Conigliano's painting. As Parshall contends, the use of this kind of imagery offered "a kind of parallel as resolved formulations of an essentially abstract idea."²²¹ In the case of Titian's painting, I would argue that this abstract idea was masculinity. Similar to the Passion of the Christ, Titian's *Il Bravo* affirms that "beauty resides in passive resistance, and abjectness resides in the evidence of suffering."²²² The parallels between Titian's painting of *Il Bravo* and images of Christ's Passion are compelling. As Rosand admits, artists like Titian were "able to realize the expressive possibilities inherent in the imagery of theological literature, reversing the process, as it were, and transforming poetic metaphor back into a visible reality."²²³

The feminization of Christ's body is often considered one of the most distinctive features of late medieval devotional imagery.²²⁴ According to Karma Lochrie, in her essay, *Mystical Act, Queer Tendencies*, "the feminized body of Christ is made legible almost exclusively (and safely) as a nonsexual maternal body."²²⁵ Though Lochrie suggests that Christ's androgyny offered multiple ways of interpreting his image that may have satisfied same-sex desire, she also admits that such an asexual construction emphasized the union of the soul, as opposed to a physical association.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 462.

²²² *Ibid.*, 465.

²²³ Rosand, 'Titian's Light', 64.

²²⁴ Karma Lochrie. 'Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies' *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken and James Schultz, eds., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 187.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

Similar ideas are also taken up by James Saslow in his book *The Rape of Ganymede: Homosexuality in Art and Society*. As Saslow indicates, one incentive for the representation of an androgynous figure was to promote an “alternative ideal of an androgynous being who transcends sexual longing”²²⁶. Such a depiction would free the figure from the ridicule and comic exploitation normally associated with the effeminate male, whose deficiency in masculinity was liable to the scornful suspicion that he might act in a passive role in sodomy with another man.²²⁷ If we take Ridolfi’s assessment as true, in the case of *Il Bravo*, the fact that Trebonius kills his assailant actually restores him of “those virile qualities like bravery necessary to the ultimate masculine role of warrior,”²²⁸ despite his effeminate appearance.

Having established a correlation between the androgynous blond male in Titian’s painting of *Il Bravo* and the feminized features of ideal figures such as Christ, it is now time to address another point that is key to understanding my interpretation of the image, one that will also help contextualize the piece. Why would Titian’s work reflect such a preoccupation with issues about masculinity? Once more, one need only be reminded of literature of the period to appreciate the important weight given to contemporary debates about masculinity. As we have already seen, the characters in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* provide considerable evidence that gendered roles are independent of biological sex and can be acquired by costume and performance alone.²²⁹ Given the evidence of the strong

²²⁶ James Salsow. ‘Corregio at Mantua: Libertinism and Gender Ambiguity in Northern Italy’, *The Rape of Ganymede: Homosexuality in Art and Society*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 85.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 188.

relationship between Titian and Ariosto, and the fame of Ariosto's poem, suggesting that Titian must have been familiar with the writer's literary response to masculinity as a construct, could Titian's painting not also be seen to address similar concerns?

Contemporary Concerns

There is evidence of similar considerations in another one of his famous paintings, *Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino* [view image on-line at: <http://www.wga.hu/art/t/tiziano/10/3/2rovere1.jpg>]. In this painting, Titian has depicted the duke in full-length armour, standing in a niche, rather like an ancient statue, complete with helmet, and other paraphernalia intended to boast his lineage and personal power.²³⁰ According to a letter written to Francesco Maria's agent in Venice, at one point the duke became concerned about the safety of the breastplate he had loaned to Titian as a model for the portrait.²³¹ This confirms that the armour was a more important study for the painting than the face of the duke himself. In other words, the costume is what makes the man. In fact, in his comments on the portrait, Titian's good friend Pietro Aretino, an Italian poet and playwright known for his sardonic slurs, praised it for the polish of the metal for which the duke wished to be remembered.²³² According to Harry Berger, Jr., in his article 'Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture', though the duke may have intended to represent himself as the ideal military commander, Titian's rendition of the man falls a little short.²³³ As Berger confirms, what "is dramatized

²³⁰ Hope, *Titian*, 227.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*, 228.

²³³ Harry Berger, Jr. 'Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture', *Representations*, No. 46. (Spring, 1994), pp. 87-120, (p. 112).

instead is the desire and the effort of self-representation.”²³⁴ As a result, what appears as a shortcoming in the artist’s portrayal of Francesco Maria, may be interpreted as a subversive act that resists the adulation anticipated by such a form of rhetoric.²³⁵ What does all this have to do with Titian’s painting of *Il Bravo*? If, as Ridolfi suggested, the man in the cuirass in Titian’s painting is, in fact, the homosexual Caius Lucius, it is entirely possible that Titian has represented him in such an overtly masculine manner in order to reveal the pretense of such a performance. Despite his armored attire, his manly beard, and his macho aggression, he is still the homosexual, whereas the opposite is true for his feminized victim.

Another contemporary concern that is blatantly reflected in his painting is violence. As Giovanni Scarabello suggests, in his article ‘Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo’, violence was on the rise in Venice during this period, and there were growing concerns about dissidence. While his study, as the title suggests, deals with sexual deviance in Venice, Scarabello acknowledges that it was the incidence of violent acts, like rape, that were responded to by authorities. One of the most famous episodes, recorded by Marino Sanudo, recounts an encounter similar to the one depicted in *Il Bravo*, in which “Bernardino Correr, overtaken with lust, hurled himself one night on the beautiful youth Vittore Foscari, cut off his trousers, and violently used him in the street like a woman.”²³⁶ As a result,

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ Giovanni Scarabello. ‘Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo’, *Tiziano e Venezia*, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1980), p. 82, “un Bernardino Correr, uomo rotto ad ogni libidine, si avventa di notte sul bellissimo

authorities became increasingly vigilant in preventing homosexual encounters, enforcing severe penalties on those who engaged in acts of sodomy. Correr, himself, was later decapitated. While I believe Titian's painting may have been a response to this incident, I do not think Titian meant to condemn homosexuality. His good friend Pietro Aretino, after all, was renowned for his persistent same-sex encounters.²³⁷ What the work was most likely responding to, however, was the violence of the period. While preceding artists tended to avoid the depiction of violence,²³⁸ Titian's writer friends defended the use of violence for its ethical value, and endorsed the use of violent imagery if it could be morally useful.²³⁹ Seen in this light, Titian's painting becomes an appeal for less barbarity when fulfilling sexual desire rather than a denunciation of the homosexual liaison.

While up to now my analysis has relied on the most commonly accepted interpretation of the painting, there exist other theories. Given the powerful likeness of the blond figure in *Il Bravo* to the figure of Bacchus in several of Titian's other works, it has also been suggested that the episode represents Pentheus, King of Thebes, arresting Bacchus in an attempt to take a stand against the orgiastic cult. Pentheus was cruelly punished for his deed. Though this interpretation is a complete deviation from the one suggested by Ridolfi, the result is the same. Pentheus, "whose manly ideals consist of

giovane Vettore Foscari, gli taglia le brache e gli usa per strada violenza come una donzella."

²³⁷ Saslow, *Rape of Ganymede*, 72.

²³⁸ Una Roman D'Elia. *The Poetics of Titian's Religious Paintings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 56.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

wars, weapons and armor”²⁴⁰ emerges as the villain unlike the feminized Bacchus whose sensual passivity and unconformity were defended by the people of Thebes.

If nothing else, my interpretation challenges traditional assumptions of the painting, which many agree are wrought with uncertainty.²⁴¹ Unfortunately there is little known about the original patron of the painting, nor can we be sure of the original setting in which it was displayed. As such, we will probably never know the artist’s true intentions. On the other hand, we do know, from the literature of the period, that notions of masculinity were being negotiated at the time. With this in mind, my evaluation of the painting becomes more persuasive. According to the most recognized assessment of the painting, the figure supplied with the masculine features is the homosexual making unwanted advances on a feminized male who heroically defends himself against his assailant despite his shortcomings. By portraying the true hero stripped of his masculine guise, Titian acknowledges that a masculine performance isn’t always successful. In fact, with its nonviolent reputation as *La Serenissima*, Venetians esteemed peace as a more appropriate role model in their struggle to negotiate libertinism, and in the case of Titian’s *Il Bravo*, the feminized male can be seen as an exemplar to reinforce social values.

²⁴⁰ Norbert Wolf, *I, Titian* (New York: Prestel, 2006), p. 186

²⁴¹ Joannides, *Titian to 1518*, 248. See also my previous footnote 9 where Charles Hope concurs with Joannides.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to convey how in Titian's paintings gendered behaviour can be regarded as fluid, as men were accorded a certain degree of masculine and feminine behaviours, to be adjusted to particular circumstances and particular cultural contexts.²⁴² Within this fluidity of gender resides the feminized male, an idealized figure whose chivalric qualities remind us that an honourable male can exist without traditional expressions of virile masculinity. In *Orlando Furioso*, this is perhaps best demonstrated through the character of Medoro one of the finest examples of the idealized feminized male in 16th-century Italian literature. In the Medoro and Cloridano episode, Medoro is revered as a "model of virtue for the Renaissance Courtier"²⁴³, through his fidelity, constant love, and daring example as a strong and capable soldier. With his handsome face, pleasing grace, and Petrarchan locks of gold, Medoro's beauty is also purposely described in purely feminine terms. Though he is an adolescent pagan, the author idealizes his chivalric sense of decorum despite the fact that he is a Saracen. In fact, Ariosto portrays the Saracen invaders, particularly Medoro, in mostly favourable terms.²⁴⁴ The hero also enjoys the love of both men and women, and while Ariosto is careful never to explicitly reveal Medoro's homosexual relationship with Cloridano, it is often implicitly implied through the couple's fraternal acclamations of lover for each

²⁴² Constance Jordan, 'Writing Beyond the *Querelle*: Gender and History in *Orlando Furioso*', *Renaissance Transactions: Ariosto and Tasso*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 295-317, (p. 297).

²⁴³ Wiley Feinstein, 'Ariosto's Parodic Rewriting of Virgil in the Episode of Cloridano and Medoro', *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Jan., 1990), pp. 17-34, (p. 27).

²⁴⁴ Daniel Rolfs, 'Sleep, Dreams and Insomnia in the *Orlando Furioso*', *Italica*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Tasso-Ariosto (Winter, 1976), pp. 453-474

other, and the fact that the relationship was modelled after the more openly homosexual characters of Nisus and Euryalus in Virgil's *Aenied*.²⁴⁵ As such, Medoro serves as an effective reminder for the angelic idealism inherent in the feminized male. Later in the poem, Medoro, in all his androgenous perfection, even becomes the love object of a central character, Angelica, whose devotion to the adolescent drives the main character of the poem, Orlando, to madness. Similarly, in one sense each of Titian's paintings discussed in this thesis also present the viewer with the feminized male as an exemplar. The paintings of *David and Goliath* and *Il Bravo*, show examples of how the feminized male can perform the same heroic deeds as their macho counterparts, who feel they need to stage their masculine identity through violence. Similarly, the painting of *Tarquin and Lucretia* reveals that the problems associated with being a feminized male only arise when femininity becomes a shameful discomfort associated with inferiority, something that needs to be concealed and disguised through an act of violence.

In keeping with Titian's use of *ut pictura poesis*, each of the paintings also share the powerful contrast of colour and light for which Titian was renowned. As my analysis has revealed, these works can only be considered poetic constructs, in which Titian created a visual likeness from literary metaphor. Just as Pietro Aretino's ekphrastic use of prose, derived from his vision of Titian's palette, describes the world in purely painterly terms,²⁴⁶ so, too, do Titian's works express a written idea in paint. Exploring the possibilities of just what this written idea could be has remained the objective of this thesis, and with issues of masculinity so obviously at the forefront in Venice's literary

²⁴⁵ Feinstein, 'Ariosto's Parodic Rewriting', p. 18.

²⁴⁶ David Rosand, *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 24.

milieu at the time, we can expect nothing less from a painter whose own painted poetry reflects an understanding of the full potential of poetry to make manifest the subliminal.

Clearly, however, the issue of violence is another common theme. Could violence not also have been the literary metaphor Titian wished to explore? Probably, though I have tried to illustrate how Titian's works address this through his portrayal of the feminized male. As I hope my investigation has shown, in Venice, with its reputation as most serene republic, *La Serenissima*, the advocacy of violence as a means of securing one's masculinity would not have been tolerated lightly. Given the prominence of the feminized male in these works that also share a violent theme, surely there is a correlation between the two ideas. As my work has revealed, if there is any connection at all, it is in the way these works celebrate the feminized male as a peaceable alternative to the violence associated with the performance of masculinity, and a reminder that even the androgynous male is capable of transgression, if he is deceived by the allure of a masculine masquerade. Though instances of androgyny have been cited by many feminists that have celebrated the virile woman, the feminized male has been largely ignored.²⁴⁷ I hope that my research offers an important corrective in an area of study that needs further development.

While there remain many other paintings by Titian that can be read in a similar context, I have chosen the three aforementioned works because they span the length of Titian's career, demonstrating that the artist's consideration of masculinity as a construct was not a fleeting curiosity, but rather extended into the final days of his life. In fact, his lifelong pursuit for truth may be considered characteristic of the long tradition of

²⁴⁷ Jordan, 'Beyond the *Querelle*', p. 297.

scepticism for which Venice is renowned.²⁴⁸ As Edward Muir explains in his book *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance*, for Venetians the Bible or Aristotle or any other ancient text or author no longer provided universal truths applicable to all ages, resulting in a “profound scepticism about both received knowledge and the certainty of any claims to absolute truth.”²⁴⁹ In fact, sceptical readings of Aristotelian philosophy flourished during this period, as did a preoccupation with sexuality and gender roles.²⁵⁰ This would have included Aristotle’s denigratory definition of women as passive vessels whose only purpose was to take orders from men who were naturally superior.²⁵¹ As I have already mentioned in my introduction, the pro-woman argument taken up Titian’s contemporaries, Aretino and Ariosto, has already been well established. As my thesis has demonstrated, this scepticism extended into the realm of masculinity, where works like Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*, Aretino’s *La Cortigiana* and the above mentioned paintings by Titian would have been a revision of the gender ideals that were being created in works like Castiglione’s *Il Cortigiano* or Michelangelo’s *David*. As my discussion of the role of art criticism has also ascertained, the strong momentum created by the treatises on art by critics like Vasari and Dolce proffers the possibility that Titian’s works might have benefitted from such debates. Furthermore, Dolce’s own admiration for the feminized male and his acknowledgement of the contrived nature of Michelangelo’s figures, combined with his detailed praise of the Venetian artist, can be seen reflected in the fellow Venetian artist’s works.

²⁴⁸ Edward Muir, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines and Opera*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 7.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁵¹ Jordan, ‘Beyond the *Querelle*’, p. 297.

The fact that the Venetians and their allies defended religious scepticism as well as sexual liberty (even pederasty) and woman's rights,²⁵² only adds credence to the way Titian's art ruptures "the complacency of the orthodoxy mandating male and masculine superiority,"²⁵³ by challenging the concept of gender and celebrating the feminized male.

In his discussion of the double bind theory, which I refer to in my discussion of the masculinisation of Lucretia, Edward Muir observes a transformation in the violent nature of masculine behaviour among Venetian males, acknowledging that Florentine males, on the other hand, maintained violence as a necessary response.²⁵⁴ Muir also recognizes the difficulties involved in locating an impetus for such a monumental shift in comportment. In conclusion, I would like to offer my own hypothesis. I would like to suggest that Titian's art communicated deliberate examples of the hazards inherent in relying too routinely on the violence of pride and honour associated with constructing a masculine image, especially in his Santo Spirito cycle that would have been so readily available to everyone. By allowing the public to witness firsthand, through his art, the virtues of the feminized male and the degenerate machismo associated with the aggressive individual, with its deleterious effect on society, Titian's art provided exemplars that "opened up the possibility for the kind of social change that took place in sixteenth-century Italy."²⁵⁵

²⁵² Muir, *Culture Wars*, p. 3.

²⁵³ Jordan, 'Beyond the *Querelle*', p. 313.

²⁵⁴ Muir, 'The Double Binds', p. 66.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 72.

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