Gender, Agency and Violence

Gender, Agency and Violence: European Perspectives from Early Modern Times to the Present Day

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

ULRIKE ZITZLSPERGER

Analysis of the link between gender and violence reveals patterns in society throughout history. Women as victims of violence, women as perpetrators and, more recently, men as victims of violence have proved to be fruitful subjects for investigation. "Despite its near universality around the globe", Sally Engle Merry writes, "local manifestations of gender violence are highly variable".[1] It is for good reasons that gender and violence are usually qualified in terms of particular societies, cultures, education, international relations[2] – or agency,[3] here predominantly understood as the ability to make a conscientious change within society or personal lives and the capacity to act decisively.[4]

Gender, Agency and Violence: European Perspectives from Early Modern Times to the Present Day centres on literary, cinematic and artistic male and female perpetrators of violence and their discourses. While the focus is mainly on perpetrators the role of victims unavoidably comes into play – in particular when victims refuse to conform to stereotype. Even though deliberate infliction of violence depends on an individual's or a group's particular agenda, acts of violence are also shaped by social and political systems, cultural perceptions and economic conditions.[5] Nevertheless, there are continuities within European societies over time: in fact, as this volume shows, patterns of violent agency can be translated across cultures, boundaries and times.[6]

If cultural manifestations of gendered violence illuminate power structures, the depiction of female violent agency is particularly interesting in that more often than not violent women are perceived as a threat to society – and, in turn, "scholarly writing has traditionally viewed sex/gender systems as restrictions imposed on women by men".[7] This is not least thanks to the fact that we still tend to associate all things female with passive acceptance and all things male with active engagement. Reactions to male and female violent individuals are therefore preconceived. Furthermore, the depiction of female and male violent agency betrays the existence of certain contemporary social and political rituals that shape our understanding – albeit not always acceptance – of

existing hierarchies. The shock effect of deviant, criminal individuals goes hand in hand with recognition of those who thereby perpetuate power structures. This comes to the fore when societies or whole cultures undergo change and patterns of perception are challenged.

This volume's interdisciplinary and cross-European approach – covering French, German, English and Italian case-studies – illuminates patterns in the arts, literature and film.[8] Gender, agency and violence matter at all times and everywhere; their mediation through the arts, however, responds to historical turning points in the widest sense. In their introduction to *Warlike Women in the German Literary and Cultural Imagination* Colvin and Watanabe-O'Kelly rightly caution that "one cannot impose patterns on history, but one can look for them".[9] Unavoidably, both the violent affirmation of power and major changes in society trigger a surge of cultural responses and the depiction of gendered violence, and therewith issues of social order. The results are frequently presented as an intrinsic part of the progression of a society. While the majority of examples here are cases of gendered violence in fiction, "real" violence tends to inform our understanding of the individual background.

The chronological organisation of the contributions to this volume is intended to highlight recurrent themes and thereby to show development in European thought. Here the starting point is the early modern period when, courtesy of the printing press, cultural developments underwent more rapid changes, and power politics, thanks to the European Reformations, affected the masses. The early modern period not only continues the use of established figures in this context, ideas and symbols with which audiences were familiar but is also rich in addressing concerns about undue use of violence.

Among established figures, one of the most striking images is that of the unruly woman who needs to be tamed by whatever means if the order of society is to be maintained. In contrast to popular labels such as "the whore" the image of the Amazon implies strength and a degree of a somewhat confusing Otherness. Both, though, proved popular long-term images. The biblical figure of Judith is potentially more uneasy: while she decapitates the enemy general Holofernes in an act first of seduction, then of betrayal, she ultimately does so to save her people and thereby earns their respect.[10] Men are less prone to attract gender-specific labels with such dubious connotations.

As regards concerns about the undue use of violence, the Nuremberg-based sixteenth-century shoemaker, writer and poet Hans Sachs (1494–1576) sets an example, since in his writings and with a new awareness noteworthy for the early modern period he eloquently bemoans the victims

of wars, the pain mothers suffer and victims on the battlefields. This is all the more remarkable since early modern societies displayed a greater readiness to use violence in way of expression. By way of warning, Sachs does not shy away from detailing atrocities committed, especially by the Turks who come to represent unheard acts of cruelty that threaten Christianity, and for once Catholics and Protestants alike. As a number of the contributions to this volume show, the boundary between violence seen and violence imagined (in the case of Sachs) is meaningful, not least since both fictional and real men and women acting violently have the potential to serve either as role models or as deterrents. As such, individuals whose exceptional acts of violence are gendered gain cross-cultural influence.

Susan Gaylard (University of Washington, Seattle, USA) analyses the gendering of editorial decisions in sixteenth-century Roman portrait-books. Here women, once powerful, now presumed deviant, increasingly "disrupt" the narrative of would-be male historiography. In the process, the images of women are adapted until their deviancy is finally identifiable with the unacceptable non-European Other. The importance of visual representation aside, early modern violence is closely linked with dramatic performances. Leila Goulahsen (Manchester Metropolitan University, England) analyses the patriarchal discourse about women as evidenced in French and English plays of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Here as elsewhere in this volume the precarious link between the audience of spectacles of pleasure and pain and various degrees of violence on display becomes evident; at the heart of this chapter is the expression of "violent sorrow" on behalf of female characters: suicide, rape and *furor*.

Julia Prest (University of St Andrews, Scotland) proposes reconsideration of the role of Catherine de Médicis. The procedure of ending the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, she suggests, might have been a ballet devised for the wedding between her daughter, the Catholic Marguerite de Valois, and the Protestant Henri de Navarre – staged and carefully choreographed violence, then, to end real, religiously motivated violence. The Bartholomew's Day massacre (1572) nevertheless sealed Catherine de Médicis's reputation as an extraordinarily violent woman.

Violence can, however, turn into a spectacle for a variety of reasons. Philip Robinson (University of Exeter, England) shows how a violent past is instrumentalized for the present by its narrators when the reign of King James I – and therewith the state – is celebrated in a show for the London crowd. The images Anthony Munday's *The Triumphs of Re-United Britannia* (1605) evokes are rich in deeply gendered violence: in fact, the creation of Britannia is only made possible this way. While violence on

stage had beyond doubt – and still has – entertaining qualities, it also served political purposes.[11] Sara Smart (University of Exeter) explores the close link between the assertion of authority, military power and the demonstrative celebration of violence based on the case of the Great Elector of Brandenburg and the seventeenth-century court poetry that promoted his cause.

Christian Jäger (Humboldt University Berlin, Germany) places popular German novels around 1800 within the social and political context of their time and explores how the loss of a traditional, often glamourized aristocratic male agency in the context of the French Revolution translates into stories of "agency lost".

The links between beauty and violence and associations with animals are many, just as the choice of weapons with their implicit phallic potential and a military attire deserve special attention.[12] Emotional frenzy and madness as opposed to male reason are of perpetual literary and artistic concern. Few examples are as poignant as the Penthesilea of Greek myth. In 1808 the German dramatist Heinrich von Kleist published his play *Penthesilea*, which dramatizes the battle between the Amazons and the Greeks. Despite its powerful imagery it held little appeal for his contemporaries. Ricarda Schmidt (University of Exeter) analyses the illustrations based on the play by Kurt Tuch in 1910, by Richard Seewald in 1917 and by Hans Wildermann in 1927. The march of time influences perceptions, and while all three artists consider the love between the queen of the Amazons and the Greek hero Achilles in terms of a war between the sexes, Seewald's interpretation responds also to the effects of the First World War.

If fundamental changes in society necessitate, among other things, reconsideration of the link between gender, agency and violence, it is hardly surprising that quite a number of contributions treat the age of the First World War and Modernism. There seems, for example, to be an immediate link between the aspirations of *avant-gardes* and male agency. Christine Kanz (University of Ghent, Belgium) analyses Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's novel *Mafarka the Futurist* (1909/10) and the role of male procreative powers which seek to make women, albeit in vain, superfluous – a "trend" that, with different impact, had already marked the editorial process of the sixteenth-century Roman portrait-books. In turn Frank Krause (Goldsmiths, University of London, England) shows the so far neglected violent assertion of the female body in German Expressionist literature. Here, the usual perception of a male movement with its domain of war that "deals" with women – whose remit is procreation – is reversed.

The First World War as an event of unheard of mass death and mass victimization disrupted established cultural narratives – not least since in its aftermath the male body and therewith masculinity itself were threatened. Marjorie Gehrhardt (University of Exeter) considers the role of a group of veterans who until recently were often overlooked: facially injured soldiers – or *gueules cassées* as they called themselves in France – are victims of war. However, what is of interest here is not just the violence they endured themselves in the name of politics but their ambiguous role during the interwar years: they were welcomed home as heroes in 1918, but post-war society quickly tired of these (and other) walking reminders of war, and the state, whether France, Germany or Great Britain, did little to support them.[13] There is both in reality and in literature a noteworthy number of soldiers who turn violent themselves. State-endorsed violence and its impact on post-war society is also at the heart of Johann Lughofer's (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia) re-reading of novels by the Austrian writer Joseph Roth. War and espionage deprive Roth's male characters of any sense of humanity and this is channelled into a deeply misogynistic approach towards women. Here as elsewhere in this volume rape is a means to demean an individual woman but also whole communities: the act of brutality serves "incidentally" to dishearten victims and their communities for good.[14]

The last four contributions focus on more recent cinematic and literary treatments. They all prove that violence is consumable, albeit it with varying degrees of comfort for readers and viewers alike. While there is less evidence of established images coming to the fore, here too in effect patterns of depiction betray timeless concerns. The question as to what defines acceptable boundaries of violence and whether violence may serve a purpose is a recurrent theme throughout. Andrew Elliott (University of Lincoln, England) highlights films that present medieval women who act decisively and employ violence with competence. However, he also shows that these women tend to be masked and effective agency is lost the moment their gender comes to the fore. This case raises the question how we assess the past in terms of acts of violence from a current point of view – brutal acts safely placed in medieval, implicitly less civilized, times assume a sense of progression and safe distance that is, of course, wrong.

Esme Nicholson (freelance radio and television producer) focuses on the Austrian director Michael Haneke, whose films are predominantly concerned with violence. *The White Ribbon* (2009) is a case in point and the fact that we are made to assume the perpetrators are children productively challenges the link between gender, agency and violence and what contributes to sustaining violence: Haneke's argument is that

education prepares both victims and perpetrators to accept traditional patterns of violence and agency in the name of best intentions.

The Times quotes Jackie Malton, a former senior police officer who became a TV script-writer in 2011, as saying that it was "not violence itself we desire, rather the emotional impact and aftermath". This is true both of film and of literature.[15] In the article by Alex Standen (independent scholar), sound is – as, for example, in Haneke's film – of implicit significance in that the male voices of authority and assumed integrity in the works of Dacia Maraini tend to employ a seductiveness that allows them to control and brutalize women and children alike. Her article raises the question of collusion in abuse and institutional responses. Arguably, it is the failure of the latter that has contributed to the ever rising popularity of crime novels, thrillers and films that present violent heroes.

The final contribution by the editor of this volume (University of Exeter) continues the exploration of a theme that dominates Haneke's – and the news producer's – work: how much violence are readers and viewers, the all-important audience, ready to accept before they avert their eyes? Present-day male and female literary crime-fighters and the violence they employ appear to "put society right".[16] In the process they translate essentially unacceptable degrees of violence into popular culture while at the same time promoting their individuality: here, attributes such as niceness and beauty no longer matter; in the context of gender, agency and violence assertive action for a cause acquires prime importance.

Violent individuals, be they "heroes" or "heroines", "warriors", "soldiers", "saviours" or "criminals", just like the acts of violence they commit or drive forward, have the potential to become part of the long-term memory and therefore of the make-up of communities. There is a difference, though, between a violent agency that is openly criticized and those acts of violence – filtered through film and literature as conduits of matters of concern – that seemingly go unnoticed, since they happen time and again and are ingrained in a system of beliefs. The impact of war must rank high here; recycling labels and images of gendered violence also proves a powerful vehicle. In this context agency finally becomes a precarious tool of political, social or moral justification.

The majority of the papers in this volume are based on a two-day conference held at the Institute of German and Romance Studies (IGRS) in London in 2010. The event was part of a series of conferences under the umbrella of the then "Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Sexuality and Gender at the University of Exeter" (CISSGE). To simplify accessibility – individual terms and very brief sentences aside – quotations in the main body of the text are from published sources or are translated

into English by the author of the individual article; originals are to be found in the footnotes. Particular thanks must go to Mary and Derek Lewis for their preparation of camera-ready files.

Notes

[1] Sally Engle Merry, *Gender Violence: A Cultural Perspective* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), p. 1.

[2] See for example Jayne Mooney, *Gender, Violence and the Social Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000); *Killing Women. The Visual Culture of Gender and Violence*, ed. Annette Burfoot and Susan Lord (Waterloo/Ontario: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2006); Laura J. Shepherd, *Gender, Violence and Popular Culture. Telling Stories* (Oxford: Routledge, 2012).

[3] Thanks for suggesting the inclusion of "agency" must go to Lisa Downing (University of Birmingham).

[4] See Ellen Messer-Davidow, "Acting Otherwise", in *Provoking Agents. Gender and Agency in Theory and Practice*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner (University of Illinois Press, 1995), pp. 23–50 for a detailed discussion, including a variety of models of agency that come into play.

[5] Apart from (gendered) violence, in current research a strong interest in "evil", "villainy" and the "monstrous" can be observed which also responds to cultural, political and economic frameworks. See, for example *Villains and Villainy. Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media*, ed. Anna Fahraeus and Dikmen Yakali-Çamoğlu (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2001); *Monsters and the Monstrous. Myths and Metaphers of Enduring Evil*, ed. Niall Scott (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2007); *The Ashgate Research Companion to Monsters and Monstrous* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[6] Lois McNay points at the "necessity of contextualizing agency within power relations" to be able to explore matters both of endurance and of transition. Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000), p. 4. Also see *Gender and Change: Agency, Chronology and Periodisation*, ed. Alexandra Shepard and Garthine Walker (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

[7] *Gender Violence. Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Laura L. O'Toole, Jessica R. Schiffman and Margie Edwards (New York and London: New York University Press 2007), p. 6. The anthology of texts focuses mainly, though not exclusively, on the United States.

[8] There appears to be a particularly striking number of studies on violence focusing on Germany. See, for example, *Contemplating Violence. Critical Studies in Modern German Culture*, ed. Stefani Engelstein and Carl Niekerk (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011); Helen Watanabe, *Beauty or Beast? The Woman Warrior in the German Imagination from the Renaissance to the Present* (Oxford: OUP, 2010). See also the three-volume series based on the theme of Women and Death, notably *Women and Death. Representations of Female Victims and Perpetrators in German Culture 1500–2000*, ed. Helen Fronius and Anna Linton

(Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2008); *Warlike Women in the German Literary and Cultural Imagination since 1500*, ed. Sarah Colvin and Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Rochester/NY: Camden House, 2009).

[9] Sarah Colvin, Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Warlike Women*, p. 1.

[10] Judith is, for example, among the common reference points for female writers who contributed to the Reformation and had to argue their cause; among the better known is the Bavarian Argula von Grumbach (1492–1554?).

[11] On the links between nationhood, "the gender of warfare, and the question of political citizenship" see Sonya O. Rose, *What is Gender History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), here chapter 5; Annette F. Timm and Joshua A. Sanborn, *Gender, Sex and the Shaping of Modern Europe: A History from the French Revolution to the Present Day* (New York: Berg, 2007); *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann and John Tosh (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

[12] Of interest is, for example, the association of women with the use of poison: Susanne Kord, *Murderesses in German Writing, 1720–1860: Heroines of Honour* (CUP, 2013), here chapter 6: "The Female Self: Poisoners".

[13] On the role of men during the First World War see Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[14] On the role of rape see for example Adrian Raine, *The Anatomy of Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 2013).

[15] Julie Bindle, "Queens of the Crime Scene", *The Times*, 21 July 2011.

[16] The importance of female crime-fighters was markedly acknowledged in Ellery Queen's 1943 anthology *The Female of the Species: The Great Women Detectives and Criminals* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company).

CHAPTER ONE

VANISHING WOMEN: GENDERING HISTORY IN SIXTEENTH CENTURY PORTRAIT-BOOKS

SUSAN GAYLARD

Abstract

In sixteenth-century Rome, a trend emerged for printed volumes showing ancient coins with short biographies of the people depicted. While early publications included lives of both emperors and empresses, by the 1550s the genre developed into the portrait-book, which broadly excluded women's images and biographies. Scholars have largely ignored the gendering of historiography that emerges in these print volumes – even though the portrait-book eventually developed into a modern genre, the biographical encyclopaedia. This chapter shows that from 1517 to 1557, authors imitated, altered, expanded, and censored the biographies of three empresses notorious for their sexual exploits. Visually, each of these women is beautiful: empresses' portraits were originally made as imperial propaganda, in contrast with the anti-imperial narratives of their lives. Sixteenth-century audiences however increasingly expected print images to correspond with actual facial features, even while tradition held that face reflects character. Authors' responses to these contradictions suggest that the repeated combination of beautiful profile with shocking narrative put into question the physiognomic and exemplary rhetoric that characterized biographies of men. Women in portrait-books thus threatened an emerging historiography that emphasized a male European heroism (synonymous with physical beauty) over the physiognomic "deviance" increasingly identified with the non-European Other.

In 1517 in Rome, a schoolteacher and humanist, Andrea Fulvio, published a book called *Illustrium imagines* (*Images of Illustrious People*).[1] His aim,

he says in the prologue, is to inspire people to imitate the ancients by seeing glory reflected in their faces. Flipping through the book, we see a series of coin-shaped woodcut images of ancient Romans accompanied by short biographies. One of these is a profile of a beautiful Roman matron, with the legend *Caesonia wife of C. Caesar the Emperor* (Fig. 1). The adjacent biography reads: "An exemplar of lust, forever beloved on that account to her husband Caligula; she was exhibited to friends both in battle dress and naked."[2] This one sentence provides the entire narrative, so the moral of the story could be that lust endears a woman to her husband. Even though Caesonia is traditionally a negative exemplar, an example of how not to behave, there are no negative consequences here, and the woman's profile is regular and beautiful by both ancient Roman standards and the standards of sixteenth-century Rome.

Fulvio's publication sparked a new craze for books of illustrated biographies: these initially took the form of numismatic volumes like Fulvio's, which showed a series of coin obverses; from around the middle of the century they evolved into portrait-books, which were no longer tied to the tradition of coin-collecting but still showed a series of portraits, each accompanied by a biography. In addition to drawing on the fashion for coin-collecting, these volumes promoted the Renaissance ideal of exemplarity – the idea that by looking at images of famous individuals, and reading about their lives, people would be inspired to emulate them. According to scholarly consensus, by the end of the sixteenth century, exemplarity was definitively on the wane: my work elsewhere on portrait-books correlates improved reproduction technologies for printed images with the erosion of exemplary rhetoric.[3] Portrait-books, in addition to using the rhetoric of exemplarity, also routinely invoked the popular (if somewhat superficial) belief in physiognomic theory – the idea that a person's character is visible in their face.

Fulvio's volume and those of his immediate imitators focused on Roman emperors and included a large number of women – emperors' wives and mothers. Indeed, one of the earliest European publications to include print portraits was Giacomo Filippo Foresti's *De plurimis claris selectisque mulieribus* (Ferrara: Lorenzo de' Rossi, 1497), a collection of 182 women's biographies accompanied by 172 print images.

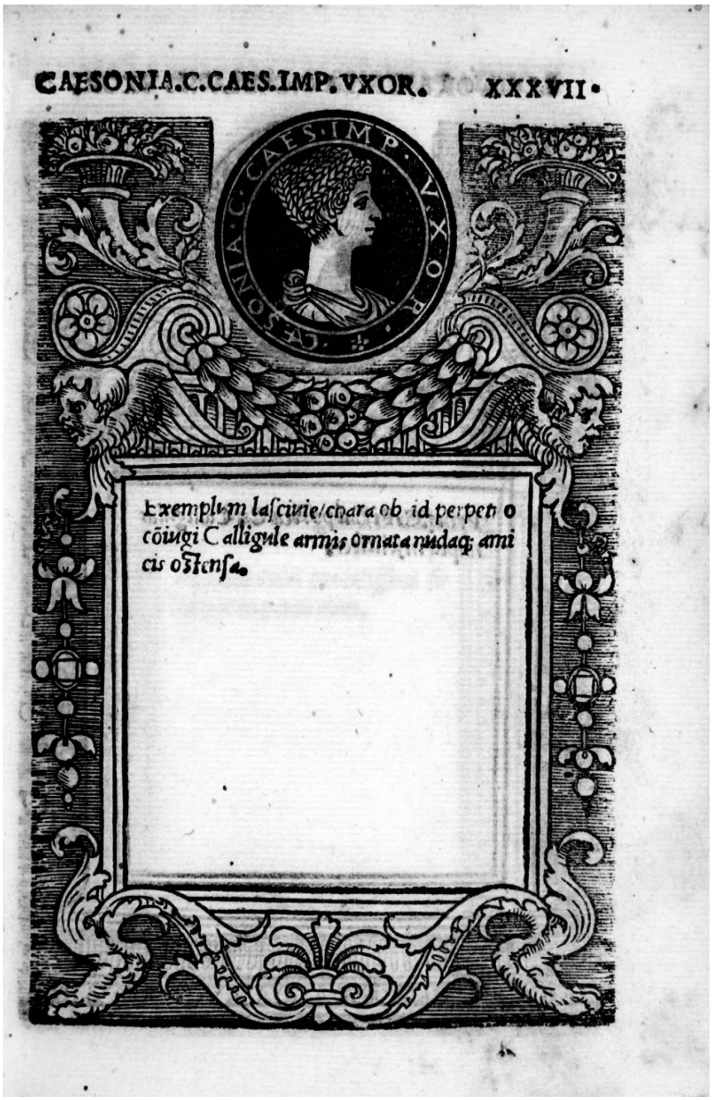


Fig. 1: Caesonia, in Andrea Fulvio, *Illustrium imagines* (Rome, 1517), XXXVIIr
(Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago;
call number Wing ZP 535.M458.)

This large volume provides some background on what a woodcut portrait in a book might represent, before the major sixteenth-century advances in image reproduction: there are only fifty-eight different images in the book, with fully half of the pictures appearing multiple times to represent more than one woman: the "portrait" clearly was not expected to reference specific physical characteristics.

Although Fulvio and his immediate imitators included a substantial proportion of women in their collections, within half a century portrait-books moved away from their early models and excluded women almost entirely, the occasional exception being separate books of women's biographies. The broad shift toward men-only publications is highly significant for the gendering of historiography, as the portrait-book evolved in the 1600s into a genre that still exists today: the biographical encyclopaedia (a collection of biographies, usually without images). Two of the most famous portrait-books are Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (initially published in 1550, and re-edited with portraits, in 1568) and Paolo Giovio's *Elogia* of famous people – publications that dramatically influenced subsequent historiography.[4] Over the course of seven books, Vasari gives only one woman her own biography; Giovio includes the biography of one woman among hundreds of men. The sudden and rapid exclusion of women's biographies is notable considering that, by the mid-sixteenth century, women's place in Italian intellectual circles – although marginal – was thoroughly established: women writers, artists and intellectuals were still unusual in Italy, but very much less so than in the rest of western Europe; Virginia Cox identifies over two hundred women writers in Renaissance Italy, while France, the runner-up, had around thirty in the same period.[5] What is more, women disappeared from portrait-books in around 1555, in precisely the period in which, in Italy, women's writings were being fêted and extensively published.[6]

While scholars have noted the general absence of women from late-sixteenth century volumes, nobody has yet asked why they disappeared: this is a significant lack in the scholarship given that, by the late 1500s, printed portrait-books were a major genre, and printed portraits were much more affordable and more widely available than painted portraits.[7] At the same time that women disappeared, it became possible to reproduce images with far more detail, and there emerged a more precise and historicising approach to Roman coinage, in the wake of Enea Vico's study of coin reverses and discourse on coins, published in 1548 and 1555.[8] Yet the newly systematic study of coins does not explain the general elimination of women from portrait-books for half a century, at the height of the fashion for the new genre: Vico himself published a

collection of coin images of famous Roman women, in 1557, and at the end of the century – at roughly the time when women began to reappear more frequently in portrait-books – Levinus Hulsius included wives of emperors in his numismatic volume *XII primorum Caesarum et LXIIII ipsorum uxorum et parentum*.[9]

The new trend toward accuracy extended to physiognomic mimeticism in print images. Stephen Perkinson has shown that around the mid-sixteenth century, audiences began to expect a genuine physical resemblance between a portrait in a book and the person represented.[10] Indeed, the late sixteenth-century explosion of portraits in print changed the way Europeans looked at each other: Bronwen Wilson has analysed later volumes to correlate emerging discourses of race with the increased ability to recognise facial characteristics in print; by looking at printed pictures of faces, western Europeans began to associate certain kinds of features with specific cultural geographies.[11] This development eventually impacted the discourse of physiognomic theory – the idea that physical appearance reflected character – which was broadly, if superficially, accepted in sixteenth-century Italy.

While much portrait-book scholarship focuses on images, we shall see from the texts that earlier numismatic volumes – before the new trend toward visual and archaeological accuracy took full effect – increasingly censored or diluted biographies of beautiful but deviant women. Although women's disappearance from portrait-books coincides more or less with heightened restrictions on publishing during and after the Council of Trent, censorship in earlier volumes suggests that these women were problematic long before the cultural shifts of the 1550s and 1560s – while their husbands, whose exploits were often far more violent, destructive, and deviant, were not. A few brief case studies will indicate that, while portrait-books in the later part of the century helped promulgate discourses of race, earlier illustrated biographies demonstrated the need for an all-male historiography, or at the very least, an alternative mode of visual representation to the image of a face.[12] Histories of beautiful but deviant women threatened an emerging historiography that claimed scientific precision but invoked traditional exemplary theory and physiognomic theory. Just as writers and publishers progressively identified physiognomic "deviance" with the non-European Other, so, too, they needed to contain the non-conforming or violent woman – by diminishing the force of her exploits, excluding her, or recategorising her as a monster.

Editing women's exploits from Fulvio to Goltzius

To return to our first interesting empress, Caesonia: Andrea Fulvio's earliest imitator, Johann Huttich, based his 1525 *Imperatorum romanorum libellus* to a large extent on copies of Fulvio's images.[13] Huttich was canon of the cathedral of Strasbourg and friend and correspondent of Erasmus: he took Fulvio's project seriously enough to expand and "improve" the narrative of many of the biographies. Huttich's volume was clearly popular, and was reissued and re-edited a number of times; the artist copied the image from Fulvio, but the biography is longer and more detailed:

> Caligula loved Caesonia very constantly and passionately, not for her unremarkable face or her advancing age – she was mother of three children by another man – but for her rampant lasciviousness. He often exhibited her, armed and riding alongside the soldiers, and even showed her naked to friends. It is thought that she gave him a love potion, but this drove him mad. After he was wounded, Caius Caligula died, as did Caesonia herself, stabbed with a sword, and their daughter Julia Drusilla, who was dashed against a wall.[14]

This very brief paraphrase of Suetonius conveys that there is a nasty ending to the tale of rampant lust and public nudity: wife, husband and daughter are all gruesomely killed.[15] The expanded narrative, however, makes for a substantially more interesting, shocking and negative biography than that offered by Andrea Fulvio.

Famous women like Caesonia evidently posed problems for the increasing numbers of authors and publishers who were churning out portrait-books to make money. Jacopo Strada, a trained goldsmith and antiquarian for the wealthy Fugger bankers, produced his *Epitome thesauri antiquitatum* in both Latin and French in 1553, in Lyon.[16] Described by Cunnally as "a mixture of nonsense and serious erudition", the book follows the model of short biographies and unadorned coin images, and censors the women's biographies even while keeping some of Huttich's detail.[17] While Strada's image of Caesonia resembles Huttich's and Fulvio's, the biography differs from that of Huttich in two main respects: although Caesonia was "a woman abandoned to luxury",[18] this is not the reason her husband loved her; and she was thought to have given her husband a love potion that left him unsound of mind and body – but did not kill him. The French translation of Strada's *Epitome thesauri* further dilutes the force of the biography: the empress gives her husband a potion (not a love potion), which was thought to have left him weakened in body

and spirit.[19] Neither version mentions the triple murder; after the emperor's (non-specific) death, Caesonia was killed by a centurion.

Strada's editing of Caesonia's biography is part of a general trend, as we see with Guillaume Roville (also known as Rouille, Rouillé or Rovillio), a publisher in Lyon who had close Italian business and family connections, and was one of the last sixteenth-century publishers to intermingle women's biographies with those of men, in 1553. Roville's *Prontuario delle medaglie* (published simultaneously in French, Italian and Latin, and a few years later in Spanish) offers a close copy of the Caesonia image used by Fulvio and Huttich, but waters down Caesonia's biography considerably.[20] The narrative begins with a rough translation of Huttich's version:

> Caesonia, who neither had a beautiful face nor was of a youthful age, and was already mother of three girls by another man, but who was very well-endowed with lasciviousness and lust, was most ardently and constantly loved by Gaius Caesar Caligula.[21]

The biography mentions Caesonia's public nudity but then paraphrases Suetonius's discussion of Caesonia's daughter, who apparently showed she was her father's child by being a fierce little infant who played roughly with the other children.[22] There is no mention of the love potion, madness or the triple murder.

A similar case of editing emerges with successive biographies of Faustina, the wife of Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor from 161 to 180 CE. Andrea Fulvio offers an image that is labelled as Faustina, but with a biography of her daughter: considering Fulvio's usual accuracy, this substitution more probably represents an editorial decision than an error (LXXIIIIr). Huttich, on the other hand, provides a biography that substantiates his claims for scholarly precision:

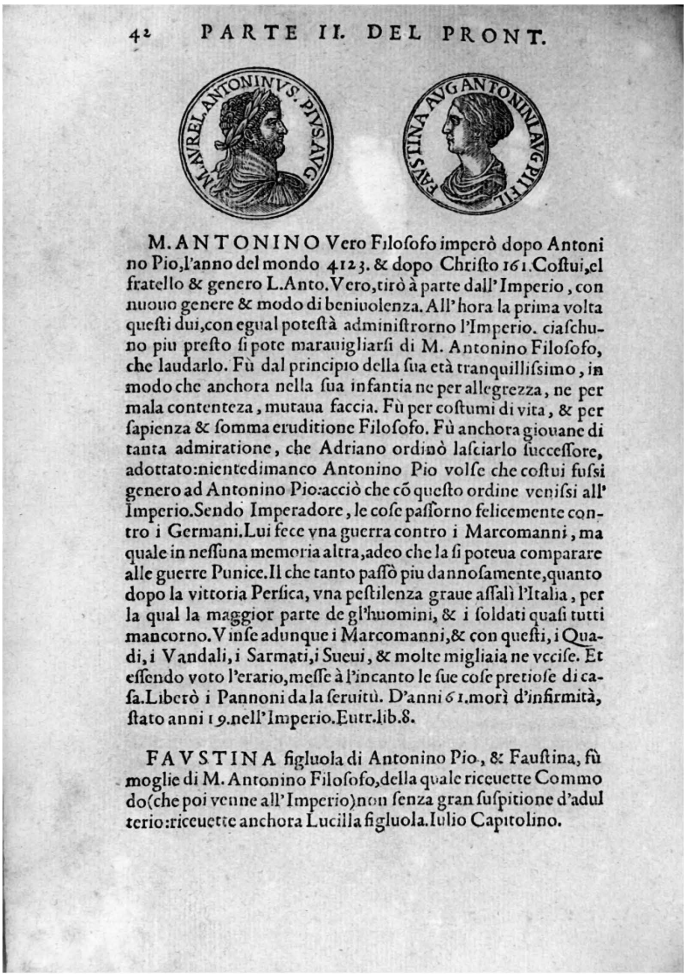
> Faustina, daughter of Antoninus Pius and his wife Faustina, was the spouse and cousin of Marcus. Languishing with excessive love for a gladiator, she soaked in the blood of that man and slept with her husband. She gave birth to two Antoninus boys, Geminus, who died age four, and Commodus; and Lucilla, whom she promised to her brother Lucius Verus and then to Claudius Pompeianus.[23]

The choice of words in the original, "epoto eius cruore", is ambiguous, and the tale is anecdotal: Faustina either drank the man's blood, or she bathed in it. In ancient Rome, the cult of gladiators was rather like today's cult of rock stars or actors, so drinking the man's blood would be one way

of celebrating him – and a man's blood was supposed to make a woman more fertile. In the famously unreliable source text for this story, the *Historia Augusta*, the emperor and empress were advised to use a bath of blood to cure Faustina's infatuation – and the cure was successful. Huttich elides this rather mundane detail in preference for the association of lust with a literal blood-bath, and the echo of the Empusae, mythical creatures who transformed into beautiful women and seduced men before drinking their blood and eating their flesh. In the sixteenth century, medicines based on blood were still commonly supposed to restore health; but the overtones of destructive bloodletting sexuality in the Faustina biography are hard to ignore.[24]

Huttich's choice of the blood-soaking anecdote – rather than the emperor's devotion to Faustina and his defence of her against malicious slander, which appears in the same book of the *Historia Augusta* – suggests that he and his audience were more interested in lurid details than any semblance of "balanced" history (a relative term, especially in relation to the problematic *Historia Augusta*).[25] The fact that Jacopo Strada used the same anecdote suggests that numismatists copied not just the images, but also the texts of earlier books – and so elision of an empress's exploits is evidence of a deliberate editorial choice. In fact, Strada's Faustina is so similar to Huttich's that the beginning of the biography resembles a translation, although Strada's version does make it clear that she first "soaked up" the gladiator's blood and then slept with her husband (81). The French translation interprets this in a vampiric sense: the empress drank the blood of the gladiator (96). Yet the balance of the story (four out of six and a half lines) is fleshed out by a substantial amount of new detail about some of her children, including their eventual careers. The result is that bloodletting and lust are merely an episode within the career of a successful empress. Roville, by contrast, severely curtailed Faustina's biography, giving her three and a half lines beneath an extended biography of her husband (Fig. 2). The biography merely lists her genealogy and mentions that she gave birth to the future emperor Commodus, "not without great suspicion of adultery".[26]

Clearly, writers and editors were subject to contradictory urges, both to provide shocking narratives and to censor such tales. The trajectory of Valeria Messalina's biography, from book to book, illustrates these tensions. The third wife of the emperor Claudius, she lived from around 25 to 48 CE.



42 PARTE II. DEL PRONT.

M. ANTONINO Vero Filoſofo imperò dopo Antoni no Pio, l'anno del mondo 4123. & dopo Chriſto 161. Coſtui, el fratello & genero L. Anto. Vero, tirò à parte dall' Imperio, con nuouo genere & modo di beniuolenza. All' hora la prima volta queſti dui, con egual poteſtà adminiſtrorno l'Imperio. ciaſchu no piu preſto ſi pote marauigliarſi di M. Antonino Filoſofo, che laudarlo. Fù dal principio della ſua età tranquilliſsimo, in modo che anchora nella ſua infantia ne per allegrezza, ne per mala contenteza, mutaua faccia. Fù per coſtumi di vita, & per ſapienza & ſomma eruditione Filoſofo. Fù anchora giouane di tanta admiratione, che Adriano ordinò laſciarlo ſucceſſore, adottato: nientedimanco Antonino Pio volſe che coſtui fuſsi genero ad Antonino Pio: acciò che cõ queſto ordine veniſsi all' Imperio. Sendo Imperadore, le coſe paſſorno felicemente con tro i Germani. Lui fece vna guerra contro i Marcomanni, ma quale in neſſuna memoria altra, adeo che la ſi poteua comparare alle guerre Punice. Il che tanto paſsò piu dannoſamente, quanto dopo la vittoria Perſica, vna peſtilenza graue aſſalì l'Italia, per la qual la maggior parte de gl'huomini, & i ſoldati quaſi tutti mancorno. Vinſe adunque i Marcomanni, & con queſti, i Qua di, i Vandali, i Sarmati, i Sueui, & molte migliaia ne vccíſe. Et eſſendo voto l'erario, meſſe à l'incanto le ſue coſe pretioſe di ca ſa. Liberò i Pannoni da la ſeruitù. D'anni 61. morì d'infirmità, ſtato anni 19. nell' Imperio. Eutr. lib. 8.

FAVSTINA figluola di Antonino Pio, & Fauſtina, fù moglie di M. Antonino Filoſofo, della quale riceuette Commo do (che poi venne all' Imperio) non ſenza gran ſuſpitione d'adul terio: riceuette anchora Lucilla figluola. Iulio Capitolino.

Fig. 2: Faustina, in Guillaume Roville, *Prima [-seconda] parte del prontuario de le medaglie* (Lyon, 1553), II, 42. (Photo courtesy of the Newberry Library, Chicago; call number Wing ZP 539.R745.)

Fulvio's description of Messalina is much longer and more extensive than his elliptical mention of Caesonia, that "exemplar of lust":

> The daughter of Messala Barbatus, who was cousin of Claudius himself, she was prone to similar wantonness with respect to lust and prideful behaviour. Among other disgraceful acts, she was found out to have

> married Gaius Silius, consul elect of the Roman knights, a most handsome man, and to have celebrated these nuptials while Claudius was away in Ostia. By command of Narcissus, a freedman, she was stabbed by a Tribune in the embrace of her mother Lepida.[27]

The rest of the biography discusses her children, so there is no record here of Messalina's being one of history's most famous nymphomaniacs. The text defines the empress entirely in terms of her sexual exploits and offspring, nullifying her political agency: there is no mention of Messalina's attempts to organize murders so as to secure her position, or of her use of sexual favours to consolidate power.[28] Although Johann Huttich's 1525 book in most cases borrowed the image from Fulvio and expanded the narrative, the opposite happened in the case of Messalina: while the image is the same, the biography is severely curtailed, comprising only five lines, mostly about the secret wedding to Silius:

> The marriage with Claudius turned out badly, no doubt since after he had taken as wife Valeria Messalina, daughter of Messala, his own cousin, he put her to death, because he found out – in addition to similar disgraceful things – that she had married Gaius Silius, a most handsome young man.[29]

This phrasing is somewhat ambiguous, so that it is not clear that Messalina committed bigamy in marrying Gaius Silius while already married to Claudius, and the details of her shameful death are elided.

Strada's Latin version follows Fulvio's more ample biography, although Strada's accumulation of ablative absolutes results in a rather more ambiguous history in which it is not clear that she committed bigamy:

> Valeria Messalina, […] was most famous for her sexual immorality. Among other vices, she was married to Gaius Silius, a most handsome Roman, and after the wedding was celebrated, while Claudius was at a retreat in Ostia for the sake of carrying out sacrifices, she was killed by a tribune in her mother's presence at the order of the freedman Narcissus.[30]

Given the clunky Latin of Strada's original, it is not surprising that the French translation of Strada's Messalina is rather garbled. In this case, the empress is not a bigamist, but simply a woman of poor reputation:

> Valeria Messalina […], having a bad reputation for bawdiness, was wife of Claudius. Among her other vices it was found that she had already been married to Gaius Silius, Rome's most beautiful son. After the wedding between her and Claudius was celebrated, although she was staying apart

> in Ostia, the Tribune had her killed in the presence of her mother Lepida, at the command of the libertine Narcissus.[31]

This version shows how an interest in both lurid exploits and censorship combines with textual misunderstandings from volume to volume: there is no clear motivation for Messalina's murder (since she is not guilty of bigamy), and her vices are only mentioned. The shifts in Messalina's biography make it particularly clear that writers like Strada (and their translators) often relied on contemporary rather than classical sources, suggesting that, regardless of their written claims, they were keener on rapid book production and sales than on accuracy.

Contrary to this pattern of editing or misreading, Guillaume Roville's 1553 book offers a very similar image with an expanded narrative, which for the first time seems to solve the competing needs for expanded details and censorship:

> Valeria Messalina, too, was married to Claudius. Claudius found out that while he was away, she had – among other disgraceful and wanton acts – married Gaius Silius, a young man who was most handsome among all the Romans. After finding this out, Claudius ordered that she be killed. Juvenal's sixth Satire tells of this. She entered the bare cell wearing an old cloth, in the wolf-like heat, and with delight welcomed those who entered, and demanded payment from them.[32]

Although in the part that follows the mention of Juvenal's *Satire* seems rather odd, the narrative so far is in basic Italian prose and might be understood by anyone able to read. The story continues, however, with a long quotation in Latin from Juvenal's poem, comprehensible only to the humanistically-educated:

> When his wife realized her husband was asleep, she would leave, with only a single maid as her companion. Preferring a mat to her bedroom in the palace, she had the nerve to put on a nighttime hood, the whore-empress. Like that, with a blonde wig hiding her black hair, she went inside a brothel reeking of ancient blankets to an empty cubicle – her very own. Then she stood there, naked and for sale, with her nipples gilded, under the trade name of "She-Wolf". She welcomed her customers seductively as they came in and asked for their money. She went away, exhausted by the men but not yet satisfied.[33]

This quote leaves out some of Juvenal's more pornographic lines; it also omits the line that suggests that Messalina's son Britannicus was probably illegitimate. Yet these are not mere omissions: Roville took care to

preserve both grammatical sense and the broad outlines of Juvenal's poetry while editing the actual content. The final sentence of the biography returns to Italian prose: "From this woman Claudius had Octavia and Germanicus, whom he shortly called Britannicus."[34] This contradicts the point of the Juvenal passage that Roville has just quoted – that Messalina's children may have been illegitimate because she was a recreational prostitute. By switching to Latin in the middle of the biography, Roville tells some (but not all) of the salacious details of the story without taking responsibility for them, as he quotes an authoritative ancient source. To anyone unfamiliar with Latin or with the Messalina story, the Italian prose would seem a little odd, but the presence of the Latin quote would add seriousness to the narrative, and authority to the book itself. Roville's version thus offers selective censorship: only the humanistically-educated elite would have understood the full biography.

For the three women we have looked at so far, in four books produced in 1517, 1525, and 1553, there is clearly a pattern of the later authors borrowing heavily from the earlier books, for both text and image. The anecdotes concerning the empresses relate closely to their more unusual sexual exploits – showing that salacious detail interested both editors and their readers – but this trend clearly conflicted with the desire to censor or limit scandalous material. Thus, one or the other of the two earlier authors typically offer more detail, while the others substantially curtail or edit the biographies.

We turn now to a volume produced in the new style, with only biographies of men: Hubert Goltzius's large-scale portrait-book of emperors was published in Antwerp in Latin, German, and Italian in 1557, just four years after Strada's and Roville's publications; French and Spanish editions appeared in 1559 and 1560.[35] Goltzius was an accredited artist, whose rhetoric of authenticity and large-scale, full-page colour images earned him a reputation for precision and visual mimeticism (however the reader chose to interpret this) that overshadowed Roville's recent publication. While Roville had minimized the text dedicated to Faustina but still retained her image and kept her as a separate entry beneath her husband, Goltzius took this tactic to its logical conclusion: Faustina appears in the text merely as the wife of Marcus Aurelius, and Caesonia is mentioned only as being killed at the same time as her husband and daughter. Messalina and Agrippina (another murderous woman) appear in passing at the end of Claudius's biography: "And on the same day that he celebrated marriage with Agrippina, he put to death Messalina his wife, and 35 senators, and […] more than 300 nobles."[36] Goltzius thus resisted the tendency to explore the scandalous histories of

these empresses, but in doing so suppressed details that are in fact relevant to the emperor's biography.

Despite touting his own accuracy, Goltzius conflated two contrasting concepts, physiognomic mimeticism and archaeological authenticity. Since ancient coins were made as imperialistic propaganda (and are therefore highly flattering to the emperors depicted), the accurate representation of these coins does not offer, as Goltzius claims: "the living and true images of almost all the emperors, with their highly authentic likeness reproduced with the utmost diligence, taken from the first and ancient casting of coins or medals."[37] What is more, Christian Dekesel has shown that Goltzius's images, far from being archaeologically accurate, were really a reconstructive fantasy drawn from multiple coins and images in previous portrait-books.[38] Goltzius's runaway success therefore suggests that readers gave more credence to images that *seemed* life-like than they had to the earlier woodcuts.

Goltzius's men-only volume, with its reputation for accuracy, triumphed at precisely the moment when women's biographies disappeared from standard portrait-books. For Goltzius, whose project was to show the continuity of the Roman emperors to the present day Holy Roman Emperor, including everyone's wives would have greatly increased the length and the cost of the book. Yet this was only four years after Roville's volume ran from Adam and Eve to present-day public figures of both genders. Certainly, some of the manipulative, violent, and sexually aggressive Roman empresses would not have added prestige to the political project of glorifying the Roman emperors – but some of the men's biographies were scandalous enough to raise serious questions about the legitimacy of the Roman empire, and to undercut the possibility of reading character through images.

Audience and authorial declarations

One might anticipate explaining the increased gendering of portrait-books through their intended audience; yet, although audience expectations shifted over the sixteenth century, most numismatic volumes seem to have had a more mixed readership than one might expect. As we shall see, however, the progressive censoring and editing of women's biographies does correlate with increasingly clear authorial declarations concerning physiognomic theory, exemplarity and historical and pictorial accuracy.

John Cunnally originally tied the prevalence of empresses in Fulvio's 1517 publication to its audience, which Cunnally identified as school-children.[39] This argument makes sense in light of Fulvio's occupation as a

primary school teacher and the simple Latin of the volume, as well as the relatively high literacy rate in Italian cities and the uncertain status of the Italian vernacular in the early part of the century. Perkinson, on the other hand, asserts that Fulvio's choice to write in Latin indicates a learned audience of high social status.[40] Fulvio's own introductory note dwells on reviving both ancient coin images and the classical ideal of exemplarity (a longstanding topos of humanistic pedagogy, applicable to both adults and schoolchildren) yet, clearly, some of the empresses are not ideal exemplars for schoolgirls – although they might have ignited children's interest in ancient history.

While Fulvio may initially have intended his book for the children of the elite, the success of his book among such scholars as Huttich indicates that numismatic volumes rapidly gained more intellectual readers. The proem to Huttich's volume suggests an elite audience by invoking the disingenuous humanist trope of negligent writing: despite his painstaking expansion of Fulvio's text, Huttich claims that it was the publisher, Wolfgang Köpfel, who insisted on printing his random notes. Jacopo Strada's prefatory material identifies his audience as readers anxious to learn about antiquities – presumably the elite – but his poor Latin and garbled French translation suggest that he did not expect a particularly scholarly readership. Like Goltzius, Strada conflates archaeological accuracy with physiognomic mimeticism (Epistola nuncupatoria, n. p.). At the same time, however, he claims that, while his images are more accurate than those of any other publication, some ancient coin images were never struck, and in those cases other (unspecified) evidence has permitted the artist to "recover" the lost portraits (Ad lectorem, n. p.). In other words, Strada's book, like its predecessors, claims truth status for its fictions.

Guillaume Roville explicitly aimed at a broader readership by publishing simultaneously in Latin, French and Italian. His *Prontuario* offers a quick potted history of the world, presumably for rising bureaucrats, wealthy merchants and aristocrats (both men and women) who lacked scholarly training. Roville's initial letter to the reader makes broad claims for historical accuracy, visual mimeticism and physiognomic theory:

> Now these medals, […] have been searched for, […] with the true, personal, and living images of the earliest great people, both men and women: so that in those images, from the face – as from a clear mirror of the mind – by the art of Physiognomy, one can understand who, which, and how great were the people depicted and indicated.[41]